

Indian Ocean bridge, not barrier: Sayyid Badr

Our Correspondent
Muscat

"The Indian Ocean is a bridge, not a barrier, and Oman considers all countries as partners," said H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, at the opening of the 8th Indian Ocean Conference in Muscat on Sunday.

The two-day conference, hosted by Oman's Foreign Ministry in collaboration with India Foundation with support from S Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, has brought together foreign ministers and representatives from 60 countries to discuss opportunities and challenges facing the Indian Ocean region. Discussions will focus on maritime trade, security, renewable energy and technological innovation.

Addressing the gathering, H E



Sayyid Badr stressed that the Indian Ocean is not just a body of water, but rather an artery of economic life, a platform for exchange, and a bridge for communication and friendship. "The ocean was a gateway for our ancestors, and it remains so today," he said, highlighting Oman's maritime history and its

role in fostering trade and cultural exchange.

Emphasising the importance of cooperation, he stated, "We prioritise inclusive dialogue, multilateralism and non-interference. We choose to focus on shared ambitions and view our diversity as a source of strength."

He also stressed the need for

sustainable maritime policies, calling for progress in marine stewardship, freedom of navigation, and addressing climate challenges faced by coastal communities. "Oman's economic vision seeks to balance growth with environmental conservation, especially in the blue economy, port infrastructure and logistics services."

Dr Ram Madhav, President of India Foundation, highlighted the region's economic significance, stating that 70% of global trade passes through the Indian Ocean, which covers an area of 74mn sqkm and is home to 3bn people. However, he warned of challenges including piracy, maritime terrorism, overfishing, human

trafficking and rising sea levels. "These issues require enhanced cooperation and stronger partnerships," he said.

Dr S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India, reinforced the need for collective action. "Our voyage to new horizons is best done as a coordinated flotilla. We are a diverse group,

but what unites us is our shared commitment to the well-being of the Indian Ocean region. Stability and security are essential, but beyond that, we must work together to achieve our ambitions and aspirations," he said.

H E Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Undersecretary for Transport in Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, underlined the importance of Oman hosting the conference, given its strategic location and its growing role in international maritime organisations. He informed that the sultanate is working towards green transportation, sustainable ports and eco-friendly sea lanes.

The conference will see foreign ministers from 27 countries present their perspectives on common security challenges and strategies to strengthen maritime partnerships.

H M HONoured WITH PRINCE NAIIF ARAB SECURITY MEDAL



The Arab Interior Ministers Council has awarded the prestigious Prince Naif Medal for Arab Security of Excellent Class to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. The recognition is a testament to His Majesty's steadfast and wise policies in fostering security and stability across the region.

The award was presented during the 42nd Arab Interior Ministers Council meeting held in Tunisia on Sunday. Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, accepted the honour on behalf of His Majesty the Sultan (ONA)

NCDs cause 80% of deaths in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) account for 80% of deaths in Oman and impose an economic burden of approximately RO1bn annually, according to H E Dr Ahmed bin Salem al Mandhari, Undersecretary for Planning and Health Regulation in Ministry of Health.

Speaking at the release of the first phase of the National Survey

for Non-Communicable Diseases on Sunday, H E Dr Mandhari highlighted the urgent need for data-driven public health strategies to address the growing impact of NCDs. "Oman records more than 6,500 new cases of diabetes each year, over 2,000 new cancer cases, and one in three individuals suffers from hypertension," he said. He added that 66% of the population is classified as overweight or obese, emphasising the need for

stronger prevention, early detection and treatment measures.

Oman Vision 2040 identifies healthcare as a key pillar of sustainable development. In line with this, the government has intensified efforts to combat NCDs through initiatives such as early screening for diabetes, hypertension and kidney diseases, as well as tobacco control policies and campaigns promoting physical activity and healthy eating.

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HOSTING EVENTS TO DRIVE GROWTH

Oman successfully hosted Tour of Oman - 14th edition - once again placing the sultanate in the global spotlight, showcasing its breathtaking landscapes, rich cultural heritage and commitment to sports tourism. As the country continues to establish itself as a premier destination for international events, the conversation has now turned to what's next. What other kinds of events should Oman host and why? Here's what *Muscat Daily* readers said -

Khalid al Sunaidi
Engineer

As Oman continues to rise as a global player in tourism and sports, it's essential we diversify the events we host to attract various demographics. International events such as golf tournaments, sustainability summits and cultural festivals are good opportunities to showcase the diverse beauty and progressive vision of our country. The global spotlight is on Oman and it's the perfect time to host events that appeal to both leisure travellers and business leaders

Amal al Harthy
Writer

Oman's rich history and cultural heritage offer a unique opportunity for us to host global cultural festivals. From the preservation of Omani music and arts to showcasing

our culinary heritage, festivals that celebrate traditional craftsmanship, storytelling and music could create a deeper connection between Oman and the world. These events would not only attract tourists but also establish Oman as a centre for the preservation of Arab culture.

Rahul Kumar
Teacher

Hosting an event like Tour of Oman is just the beginning. I believe Oman could also shine in hosting high-profile international marathons and triathlons, attracting athletes from across the globe to test themselves against the natural beauty of our landscapes. Additionally, Oman could host international sailing regattas in our pristine waters, offering both adventure and luxury tourism experiences.



Sarah al Muqbali
Doctor

Oman is known for its stunning landscapes, so it makes perfect sense to host adventure sports events such as desert marathons, rock climbing competitions or even sandboarding tournaments. Such events could put us on the map for sports tourism while also highlighting our commitment to sustainability by promoting eco-friendly events.

Faisal al Balushi
Cyclist

Tour of Oman has already demonstrated our ability to host top-tier international cycling events, but I believe

Oman can also become a hub for mountain biking competitions, particularly in the rugged terrain of the Al Hajar Mountains. Oman's diverse landscapes offer incredible opportunities for more extreme sports, and bringing these events here would not only attract cyclists but also adventure enthusiasts from around the world.

Khalid Tabook
Environmentalist

Oman is uniquely positioned to host international conferences on sustainability, especially in the areas of renewable energy, conservation and green technologies. With our commitment to environmental protection and sustain-

able development, global leaders and innovators would benefit from gathering here to exchange ideas and solutions. I envision Oman as a leader in the green sector, and hosting such conferences would cement our status as a forward-thinking nation.

Ahmed al Jabri
Investor

Oman's potential for international business conferences and trade fairs is huge. I believe we could host global innovation expos or startup competitions that not only showcase Omani talent but also attract international investors. Events like Oman Innovation Week could bring together en-

trepreneurs, scientists and business leaders from all over the world to collaborate and innovate, boosting our economy while positioning Oman as a hub for innovation.

Hamad al Riyami
Horse rider

Oman's mild climate during the winter months makes it an attractive destination for golf and hosting events like European Tour events or other top-tier golfing competitions such as Pro-Am Golf Tournaments. Oman also has a long tradition of equestrianism, and hosting high-profile events like International Polo Tournaments and horse racing events should come naturally.

? NEXT ON YOUR SAY

As we prepare for Ramadan, how can we enhance positive traditions and eliminate negative habits to make the most of the holy month?

The views stated here are those of the respondents and not endorsed by *Muscat Daily*. If you feel strongly about the issues discussed here, you can email your comments to muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om You can also log on to our Facebook page or tweet us your comments on the issue.

SEND YOUR COMMENTS

Share your comments in not more than 50 words along with your full name and profession before next Sunday, 10am, via WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram or muscatdaily@apexmedia.co.om

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Oman, India launch book on shared history; mark 70 years of diplomatic relations

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman and India further strengthened their historical and cultural ties with the launch of a book - titled *Mandvi to Muscat: Indian Community and the Shared History of India and Oman* - on Sunday.

The book was jointly released by H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and his Indian counterpart Dr S Jaishankar, on the sidelines of the 8th Indian Ocean Conference being held in Muscat.

The book explores the deep-rooted connections between the two nations, tracing centuries of trade, migration and cultural exchange. It highlights the role of the Indian community in Oman and the enduring relation between the two countries, which has evolved from historic maritime links to a modern strategic partnership.

The book launch coincides with the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Oman and India, which was marked by the unveiling of a commemorative logo. The initia-



So glad we could jointly release the logo celebrating the 70th anniversary of our diplomatic relations. Also, jointly released a book - 'Mandvi to Muscat'

DR S JAISHANKAR

tive reflects both nations' commitment to honouring their shared past while fostering future cooperation in trade, investment and energy security.

Following the launch, H E Sayyid Badr posted on X, "A pleasure to welcome dear friend Dr S Jaishankar for the 8th Indian Ocean Conference. We also celebrated 70 years of Oman-India diplomatic relations, a testament to the enduring partnership between our two countries, and launched a commemorative book that chronicles our shared

history and the deep bonds that continue to flourish."

On his part, Jaishankar said that he was delighted to meet H E Sayyid Badr. "So glad we could jointly release the logo celebrating the 70th anniversary of our diplomatic relations. Also, jointly released a book - *Mandvi to Muscat*."

The release of *Mandvi to Muscat* underscores the significance of people-to-people ties in shaping Oman-India relations and serves as a testament to the longstanding bilateral friendship.

CPA launches Ramadan Family Pack of basic food items for the holy month

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has introduced a Ramadan Family Pack programme across all governorates to ensure the availability of essential goods at affordable prices during the holy month of Ramadan.

According to CPA, the family pack includes a number of basic food items, priced at RO9.900. The initiative aims to provide a convenient and affordable shopping option for both locals and residents, particularly those with limited income.

The pack, which contains between 17 to 19 food items, has already been made available in shopping malls across the sultanate, well in advance of Ramadan. The items include rice,



flour, dates, Arabic coffee, cooking oil, sugar, milk powder, oats, semolina, tomato puree, cheese and pasta, among others. These items are intended to meet the weekly needs of families while reducing their burden during this time of increased demand.

CPA added that this initiative is part of its proactive measures to address the needs of citizens during Ramadan. "By offering the Ramadan Family Pack at a nominal price, we are reinforcing our commitment to supporting individuals with limited income dur-

ing this special month," a CPA spokesperson said.

In addition to offering the family pack, the authority is working closely with suppliers and merchants to ensure the availability, safety and reasonable pricing of essential food items. CPA is also monitoring promotional offers to prevent any fraudulent practices or price manipulation, ensuring fairness in pricing of both essential and non-essential goods, including electronics and vehicles.

The Ramadan Family Pack was popular in previous Ramadans due to cost-effectiveness, helping families save money and avoid overspending on unnecessary items. Through this initiative, CPA continues to support Omani families, especially those with tight budgets, during Ramadan.

Bulgarian charter flight arrives in Salalah

Our Correspondent
Salalah

As part of its ongoing efforts to promote tourism, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT) welcomed the first charter flight from Bulgaria to Salalah Airport on Sunday.

In a statement, MHT said this initiative aligns with its strategy to diversify tourism markets. The charter flight carried over 130 tourists, including 30 representatives from Bulgarian tourism agencies.

The purpose of their visit is to explore the local market, familiarise themselves with Dhofar's services, products, facilities and its rich array of tourist and archaeological attractions. The goal is to effectively promote these of-



ferings directly to the Bulgarian market.

The ministry's efforts to boost tourism include promoting adventure, marine and culinary tourism, alongside the country's Unesco-listed archaeological sites. The sultanate has also launched promotional campaigns in Europe and Russia and opened tourism offices in several countries. Expanding into East Asia is a current priority.

The lack of direct flight connectivity to Oman - a pressing challenge - is being actively addressed by the ministry.

To enhance accessibility, Oman has waived tourist visa requirements for citizens of 103 countries and is developing its 12 ports to accommodate the growing influx of visitors.

Dhofar is expected to welcome around 500 charter flights in the 2024-25 season.

NCDs cause 80% of deaths in Oman

Continued from Page 01

"The national survey is a critical step in gathering accurate data to help policymakers and health-care professionals design targeted interventions," Dr Mandhari said.

Dr Jean Jabbour, WHO Representative in Oman, described the rising burden of NCDs as a major challenge to the health-care system and national development. "The WHO STEPS survey methodology will be used to assess key risk factors, including tobacco use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, high blood pressure and obesity," he said.

Findings from Oman's 2017 STEPS survey showed that obesity rates had increased from 54% in 2008 to 67% in 2017. Additionally, 39% of the population was physically inactive. These trends, Dr Jabbour noted, underline the need for urgent action to encourage healthier lifestyles.

The first phase of the national survey, launched on December 29, 2024, focused on updating household lists for random sample selection. The second phase, starting in April and lasting three months, will collect data through health questionnaires and clinical measurements, including height, weight, blood pressure, and blood tests for sugar and cholesterol levels.

By providing accurate, up-to-date information, the survey will support evidence-based policies to reduce NCD-related deaths and illnesses, consolidating Oman's efforts to strengthen public health and improve the well-being of its population.

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Call for social media national framework

Our Correspondent
Muscat

With 78.12% of Omani children using social media and 96% of Omanis having accessed at least one platform in the past three months, concerns are growing over the impact of digital platforms on society.

To address these challenges, the Ministry of Information, in collaboration with the Oman 2040 Vision Implementation Follow-up Unit, held a workshop on Sunday to focus on a roadmap 'Towards a National Framework for Dealing with Social Media'.

H E Mohammed bin Saeed al Balushi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information, stressed the need for a clear national strategy to manage the effects of social media, particularly on youth.

"This initiative seeks to preserve family cohesion, promote responsible upbringing of children, and confront the global



Cyberbullying, harassment, misinformation, and the spread of rumours threaten societal values and safety. Developing a national framework is essential

H E MOHAMMED AL BALUSHI

challenges posed by social media. The goal is to establish clear mechanisms to manage this widespread phenomenon."

H E Balushi highlighted the in-



fluence of social media in modern life. "With instant access to global networks, social media has reshaped how we communicate and interact. However, its rapid growth also presents risks, including isolation, rising mental health issues like depression and anxiety, and smartphone addiction."

H E Balushi noted that ethical concerns such as cyberbullying, harassment, misinformation, and the spread of rumours further threaten societal values and safety.

"Developing a national framework is essential for the protection of youth and future generations," he added.

Dr Amal bint Mohammed al Nofli, Director General of Electronic Media and Head of the Working Group, explained that a team has been formed to assess the current social media landscape, identify challenges, and turn them into opportunities.

"The group aims to balance the negative and positive aspects of social media while educating families and youth on best practices." She added that the team would develop initiatives to promote responsible social media engagement.

Al Azhar bin Hassan al Shaqsi from the Government Communication Center shared key statistics on social media usage in Oman. He revealed that WhatsApp is the most widely used platform, with 99.10% of the population on it. While 53.11% of Omanis reported a positive impact from social media, 10% noted negative effects.

The workshop also explored ways to raise awareness among families and youth on responsible social media use. Key strategies discussed included launching awareness campaigns, combating digital illiteracy, promoting digital citizenship, and incorporating digital ethics and media education into school curricula to encourage safe online behaviour.

60 international institutions join ME scholarship forum in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The capital city of Muscat on Sunday hosted the third ICEF Middle East Scholarship and Partnership Summit, bringing together more than 60 international universities and institutions known for their academic programmes.

Organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation, the two-day forum is focusing on student exchange, research collaboration, and challenges related to scholarships.

Held under the patronage of H H Sayyid Dr Kamil Fahad al Said, Secretary-General in the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, the summit aimed to strengthen academic ties and expand opportunities for students.

H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research, and Innovation, highlighted the importance of the forum in promoting knowledge exchange and enhancing agreements with regional and international institutions. "This summit plays a key role in advancing Oman's transition into a knowledge-based economy by fostering partnerships that support education and research," she said.

Discussions covered global higher education indicators, strategies for developing national capacities, and best practices in scholarships and training. Experts also explored the role of international students in shaping global citizenship, the significance of cultural adaptation, and the importance of Arabic language learning in cross-cultural exchanges.

The forum also showcased successful educational initiatives from Oman and the wider GCC region. It highlighted the role of small and medium enterprises in driving innovation and providing practical training for international students, further strengthening links between academia and industry.



H E Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrrouqi

Suhar arena opens as new hub for car drifting and motorsports

Our Correspondent
Suhar

North Batinah governorate officially inaugurated the Suhar arena, a dedicated venue for car drifting, on Friday.

The opening ceremony, held under the patronage of Mohammed al Kindi, the governor of North Batinah, coincided with the conclusion of the second round of the Oman International Drift Championship 2025.

The event drew attention of motorsports enthusiasts, showcasing intense competition among the participants. Suhar



Arena is set to become a premier destination for motorsport fans in Oman, with plans to host a variety of other outdoor public events.

This new facility aims to foster local economic and tourism growth by attracting both domestic and regional visitors. A key objective of the project is to reduce the prevalence of illegal street racing by providing a safe

and legal space for car drifting and motorsports, which will help improve public safety and reduce accidents.

In addition to its recreational purpose, the arena will promote a sports culture in Omani society, especially among youth who have a strong interest in motorsports. The project will also offer training programmes designed to improve safe driving skills and minimise the dangers of reckless driving. Furthermore, it is expected to create new job opportunities in areas such as event organisation, management, and facility maintenance.

Mistal watch retailer marks 50 years of partnership with IWC Schaffhausen

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Mistal, a leading luxury watch retailer in Oman, celebrated 50 years of partnership with Swiss watchmaker IWC Schaffhausen at its showroom in Bariq al Shatti on Sunday.

The event was attended by Hannes Pantli, a senior representative from IWC, who described the long-standing collaboration as a testament to Oman's appreciation for fine timepieces.

To mark the occasion, IWC unveiled a special edition Ingenieur Aqua Green timepiece, limited to just 50 units. Demand was overwhelming, with 48 pieces selling out within two days, underscoring the strong market for luxury watches in the country.

Pantli praised the partnership, saying, "We are delighted to cel-



brate this long-standing relationship. The country of Oman adds to the beauty of our watches, and I have witnessed the evolution of the watch community here. Luxury timepieces are now more accessible and widely appreciated."

Commenting on the growing popularity of digital watches, Pantli remained confident in the enduring appeal of mechanical timepieces. "Digital watches may be trendy and affordable,

but over time, men tend to gravitate towards mechanical watches. They offer a sense of style, heritage, and financial value. A fine timepiece is often the only piece of jewellery a man wears, and it signifies both maturity and elegance."

He also highlighted a tradition in Europe where newlyweds gift luxury watches as timeless symbols of their union, reinforcing the emotional and cultural significance of fine watchmaking.

Municipality completes Green Park and Walkway in S Mabelah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has completed the 'Green Park and Walkway' project in South Mabelah, Seeb, offering residents a new recreational space designed to promote health and well-being.

Spanning 3.45sqkm, the park will serve a large section of the local community, so expect the authorities.

Eng Musa bin Salem al Saqri, Assistant Director General for Technical Affairs at the Directorate General of Muscat Municipality in Seeb, said the project provides "a natural space for physical and recreational activities, enhancing the quality of life and offering a gathering place for families".

One of the largest parks in

Seeb, it stretches from Al Noor Street in the east to the old car market in the west. The park includes a 3,400m sports walkway, a cycling track, pedestrian overpasses, children's play areas, fitness equipment, multi-use sports fields, and a skateboarding zone. It also features seating areas, restaurants, cafés, and designated spaces for mobile food trucks.

Designed with sustainability in mind, the park's green spaces add to its aesthetic appeal while providing a relaxing environment.

Well-lit pathways ensure safety for visitors during evening hours.

The project is part of the municipality's broader vision to develop urban spaces that support healthy lifestyles and modern city living.



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BRIEFS

Saudi Arabia's inflation rate reaches 2% in January

Saudi Arabia's General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) released its Consumer Price Index (CPI) report for January 2025, which showed that Saudi Arabia's annual inflation rate reached 2.0% compared to January 2024.

According to GASTAT, Saudi Arabia's inflation rate is considered the lowest among the G20 countries.

CPI measures the prices paid by consumers for a fixed basket of goods and services consisting of 490 items.

The basket was selected based on the 2018 household income and expenditure survey.

Concerned prices have been collected through points of sale field visits. CPI statistics are released monthly.

GCC countries rank first globally in oil output, reserves, and exports

Our Correspondent
Muscat

GCC countries have secured the top global rankings in key energy indicators, leading the world in crude oil production, crude oil reserves, crude oil exports, and natural gas reserves. Additionally, the region ranks second globally in natural gas exports and third in marketed natural gas production, according to data released by the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-Stat).

The data reveals that in 2023, GCC countries' crude oil production reached approximately 17mn barrels per day (bpd), accounting for 23.2% of global crude oil output. This marks a 6.8% decrease in production compared to 2022.

Crude oil reserves in the GCC countries stood at around 511.9bn barrels in 2023, making up 32.6% of global crude oil reserves. Over the period from 2014 to 2023, these reserves grew at an average annual rate of 0.3%.

Oil exports from the GCC countries totalled approximately 12.4mn bpd in 2023, representing 28.2% of global crude oil exports, despite an 8.2% drop in



exports compared to 2022 figures.

Exports of oil derivatives from the region reached about 1.518bn barrels in 2023, accounting for 13.4% of global oil derivatives exports. This marks a 7.1% increase compared to 2022. The GCC countries ranked second globally

in oil derivatives exports. Oil derivatives imports in 2023 were recorded at 212.3mn barrels, with an average annual growth rate of 0.1%.

Among petroleum derivatives, diesel production saw the highest output in 2023, with 660.4mn barrels produced, fol-

lowed by gasoline at 336.2mn barrels. Kerosene and jet fuel production amounted to 319.4mn barrels, while fuel oil, naphtha, and petroleum gases saw production levels of 263.1mn, 221.6mn, and 103.3mn barrels, respectively.

Gasoline consumption in the

GCC countries reached about 336.6mn barrels in 2023, while diesel consumption totalled 299.7mn barrels. Consumption of other petroleum derivatives varied between 34.8mn and 268.3mn barrels.

Turning to natural gas, the GCC countries' reserves in 2023

GCC countries' oil production reached approximately 17mn barrels per day, accounting for 23.2% of global oil output. Crude oil reserves in the GCC stood at around 511.9bn barrels in 2023, making up 32.6% of global crude oil reserves

totalled approximately 44.195bn cubic metres, representing 21.4% of global natural gas reserves, reflecting a 0.2% increase from the previous year.

Natural gas exports from the region reached 180.9bn cubic metres in 2023, accounting for 13.1% of global exports, with an average annual growth rate of 2.5% between 2014 and 2023.

The production of marketed natural gas in the GCC countries in 2023 was around 464.2bn cubic metres, representing 10.8% of the global total. This marked a 1.4% increase compared to 2022.

Saudi Arabia to invest \$1tn in infrastructure by 2030, minister says

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - Saudi Arabia's Minister of Economy and Planning, Faisal Alibrahim, has stated that the kingdom's non-oil sector is set for substantial growth by 2026, driven by the expansion of key industries.

He also noted that infrastructure investments are expected to reach approximately \$1tn by 2030, supported by clear economic objectives and long-term private-sector strategies.

Speaking at the Public Investment Fund (PIF) Private Sector Forum, Minister Alibrahim emphasised PIF's central role in economic growth by establishing and funding strategic companies.

He highlighted how these initiatives have strengthened government integration and fostered new industries that contribute to



Faisal Alibrahim

economic development.

The minister stressed that PIF's mission extends beyond financial returns, playing a crucial role in advancing the knowledge economy and introducing innovative business models. He also underscored PIF's commitment to developing national talent and

human capital.

On Saudi Vision 2030, Alibrahim highlighted the importance of diversifying the economy and reducing reliance on a single revenue source by strengthening non-oil sectors and boosting high-value exports.

Alpha Data to sell 40% stake in UAE IPO

Abu Dhabi, UAE - Abu Dhabi-based Alpha Data and its subsidiaries, one of the leading digital transformation providers and system integrators in the UAE, announced its intention to proceed with an initial public offering (IPO) and to list its ordinary shares on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX).

According to a press statement, the group plans to offer 400mn shares at a nominal value of AED0.03 per share, representing 40% of the company's issued share capital.

The statement confirmed that all shares being offered are from existing shareholders, namely Bin Hamooda Group and Ibbini Investment Company, which retain the right to adjust the size of the offering and any tranche at any time before the end of the subscription period.

The subscription period will begin on February 20, 2025, and end on February 25, for individual investors in the UAE as well as professional investors.

The offering price will be de-



termined through a book-building process during the subscription period, with the shares expected to begin trading on ADX in March 2025.

Mohamed Omran al Shamsi, Alpha Data's Chairman, stated that the initial public offering will enable the company to build on its successes and further estab-

lish itself as a leading provider in the digital transformation sector.

Fayez Ibbini, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Alpha Data, added, "Since its establishment in 1981, Alpha Data has grown steadily and achieved significant expansion. We now work with over 2,200 institutions, both public and private, and have ex-

panded geographically to include Saudi Arabia and Qatar."

The total issued share capital of Alpha Data, as set in the prospectus for the public offering, is AED30mn, divided into one billion shares, each with a nominal value of AED0.03, all of which are fully paid.

WAM

Oil prices extend 4-week decline, fall below \$75 over Trump policies

London, UK - Oil prices have declined for four consecutive weeks, dropping below \$75 to reach their lowest level in three months, following US President Donald Trump's new policies aimed at increasing fossil fuel production.

Prior to the uncertainty surrounding the new administration's decisions, oil prices had risen to \$81.75, testing their highest level since August 12, 2024, before closing the week starting January 13 at \$79.87.

However, after Trump's inauguration, the price of Brent crude fell 3% during the week of January 20, experiencing its largest drop in ten weeks. This drop was attributed to the signing of multiple executive orders aimed at increasing oil production and reducing prices.

West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude also fell by 3.7%, closing at \$74.38 on the same day. The following week, oil prices continued their downward trend, driven by the Federal Reserve's decision to keep interest rates steady and the US administration's increased threats of tariffs on other countries, including China.

Consequently, Brent crude ended the week starting January 27 with a 1.2% drop, closing at \$76.30, while WTI fell 1.3% to \$73.40.

Following President Trump's February 7 announcement that sanctions would be imposed on international networks due to the facilitation of Iranian crude oil shipments to China, oil prices briefly spiked amid concerns over supply. However, this in-



crease was not enough to prevent prices from closing lower than the previous week.

In the week beginning February 3, amid statements from the

US administration signaling a 'strong dollar' policy and a temporary suspension of tariffs on Canada and Mexico, Brent crude dropped 2.3%, closing at

\$74.53, while WTI fell 3.5%, marking its lowest level in six weeks.

The subsequent week saw oil prices slightly recover due to op-

timism about the Chinese economy, stock market rebounds, and speculation that Venezuela might be Trump's next target. However, the four-week consecutive decline of both Brent and WTI persisted after Trump's meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday, which was viewed as an attempt to resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Thus, in the week starting February 10, Brent crude reached \$77.02, but still ended the week 0.2% lower at \$74.40, marking its lowest point since December 2024. WTI also lost 0.2%, closing at \$70.71.

The recent uptick in oil prices was expected after prolonged low levels and positive economic data from China, alongside Trump's administration's poli-

cies, Homayoun Falakshahi, a senior oil analyst at Kpler, told Anadolu.

However, Falakshahi cautioned that this price increase would not be long-lasting.

"I don't think there's scope for the increase to continue for long, fundamentals remain pretty dull in this market and there's a lot of refinery capacity that will go offline for maintenance in Europe and Asia over the next 3 months, so the physical market will also weigh on prices at some point," he said.

He also noted that prices could rise if OPEC+ delays its planned production increases beyond April, though he remained skeptical about Brent crude easily surpassing the \$80-\$85 per barrel range.

Anadolu Agency

UAE launches ‘Dubai Loop’ to redefine transportation

Dubai, UAE – Omar Sultan Al Olama, the UAE's Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence, Digital Economy, and Remote Work Applications, and Vice Chair of the World Governments Summit 2025 (WGS), along with Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla, last week announced the launch of the “Dubai Loop,” an ambitious project aimed at implementing a fast and seamless transportation system across Dubai’s most densely populated areas.

The announcement was made during a video call at the WGS, where Musk presented his vision for the future of urban mobility. The “Dubai Loop” is part of a broader plan to revolutionise the transport sector, utilising a network of advanced tunnels that will enable passengers to travel swiftly across the city, bypassing traffic congestion.

Musk, who is also the CEO of Boring Company, explained that the project would allow people to move as if they were travelling through a “wormhole” within Dubai, referring to the ability to move instantly between two points without enduring long distances or traffic delays.

He also emphasised the advantages of tunnel systems over alternatives such as flying cars, citing their practicality, safety, and efficiency. Unlike aerial transport, tunnels are shielded from weather conditions and



Dubai announced the ‘Dubai Loop’ in collaboration with Elon Musk’s Boring Company

Dubai Loop Project is part of a broader plan to revolutionise the transport sector, utilising a network of advanced tunnels that will enable passengers to travel swiftly across the city, bypassing traffic congestion

noise, providing a smoother experience for passengers.

During the discussion with Olama, Musk spoke about improving government efficiency, highlighting that the biggest challenge lies in reducing bureaucracy and enhancing the technology used within govern-

ment institutions.

The billionaire tech entrepreneur underscored strong public support for such reforms in the United States, stressing that the main goal is to “reduce the size of government” and “make the government much more accountable to the people.”

He noted that the expansion of laws and regulations has led to excessive restrictions, making nearly everything illegal. He argued that improving government efficiency involves not only cutting costs but also transitioning government employees into higher-value roles in the private

sector, thereby increasing overall productivity and enhancing citizens' living standards.

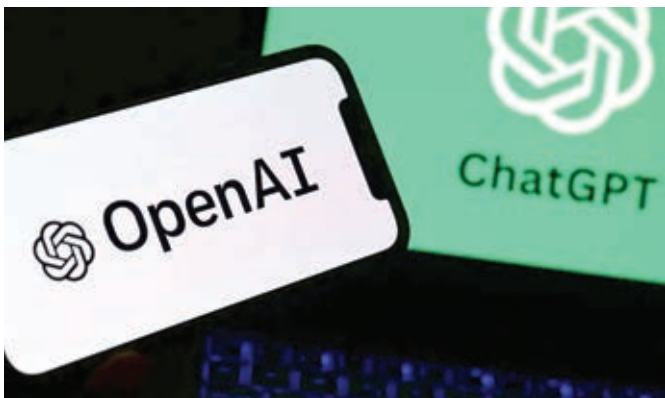
On practical steps to achieve this goal, Musk suggested, “I think we do need to delete entire agencies as opposed to leaving a lot of them behind,” adding, “If we don’t remove the roots of the weed, then it’s easy for the weed to grow back.”

He emphasised that this approach would lay the foundation for long-term economic prosperity, potentially reducing government deficits and significantly lowering inflation.

Musk suggested that the United States could save a trillion dollars by addressing bureaucracy and cutting back on federal agencies and regulations. He also highlighted technological inefficiencies within government systems, noting that many rely on outdated technologies that do not communicate with each other, leading to significant waste of resources and time.

He further spoke about his AI chatbot, “Grok 3,” which is in the final stages of development and is set to be released in about a week or two. “Grok 3 has very powerful reasoning capabilities. In the tests we have conducted so far, Grok 3 is outperforming anything that has been released, that we are aware of, so that’s a good sign,” he added.

WAM



OpenAI rejects Elon Musk-led group’s \$97bn takeover bid

Andrew Kessel

OpenAI, the developer of ChatGPT, rejected a reported \$97.4bn takeover offer from an Elon Musk-led investor group.

OpenAI Chair Bret Taylor posted on Musk-owned X Friday that the ChatGPT developer is “not for sale,” calling the bid “Musk’s latest attempt to disrupt his competition.”

Musk’s artificial intelligence startup xAI, an OpenAI competitor, is reportedly exploring a \$10bn capital raise that could push its valuation to \$75bn.

OpenAI attorney William Savitt said the offer was “not a bid at all” in a letter to Musk’s lawyer Marc Toberoff Friday, according to a CNBC report. Savitt and Toberoff did not immediately respond to requests for

comment.

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman had addressed the offer earlier this week, posting on X, “no thank you but we will buy twitter for \$9.74bn if you want.”

Musk replied, “Swindler,” and in a post replying to another user added, “Scam Altman.”3

Musk and Altman founded OpenAI together as a nonprofit in 2015. The offer came after Musk sued Altman and OpenAI last year, alleging he and others had breached the company’s founding mission by prioritizing profits over seeking benefits to humanity.

On Wednesday, Musk said he would pull the bid if the nonprofit that controls OpenAI ended its plans to convert to a for-profit firm.

(Source: Investopedia.com)

Eurozone posts marginal GDP growth in Q4 after forecasts of stagnation

Bleanor Butler

In the final three months of 2024, seasonally adjusted GDP increased by 0.1% quarter-on-quarter in the eurozone and by 0.2% in the EU, Eurostat said.

In the prior quarter, GDP grew by 0.4% in both areas.

The new figures are slight improvements on previous estimates, communicated last month, although they’re far below the 0.6% total seen in the US.

Quarterly growth in the eurozone was predicted at 0% in January while EU growth was estimated at 0.1%.

Compared to the final three months of 2023, GDP grew by 0.9% in the eurozone in the final quarter of last year. In the EU, this total came to 1.1%.

These results follow year-on-year growth totals of 0.9% seen in the euro area and 1.0% seen in the EU in the previous quarter.

Particularly strong annual rises in the fourth quarter output



Regional output was slightly better than previously thought, although the eurozone is still hampered by productivity woes

were seen in Poland, Lithuania and Spain, while Austria and Germany recorded the steepest declines.

“The euro-zone economy performed a little better than previously thought in Q4, but growth was still extremely weak and the early signs are that it got off to a slow start to 2025,” Jack Allen-Reynolds, deputy chief eurozone economist at Capital Economics, said.

“The key point is that a 0.1% expansion is hardly something to get excited about,” he continued.

“Both Germany and France experienced contractions in the fourth quarter, while Italy stag-

nated, leaving it up to Spain and other smaller countries to stop the region’s economy from contracting.”

In the same release, Eurostat noted that the number of employed persons increased by 0.1% in both the euro area and the EU in the fourth quarter of 2024, compared with the previous quarter.

In the third quarter of 2024, employment had increased by 0.2% in the euro area and had remained stable in the EU.

Compared with the same quarter of the previous year, employment increased by 0.6% in the euro area and by 0.5% in the EU in the fourth quarter of 2024.

“The flipside of these employment gains is that productivity, measured by GDP per worker, has declined by 1.4% since Q3 2022,” Allen-Reynolds said.

“In turn, this has kept unit labour cost growth and underlying price pressures higher than they would otherwise have been.”

(Source: Euronews.com)

India's natural gas demand to rise 60% by 2030: IEA

Paris, France – India’s natural gas demand is forecast to increase by nearly 60% by 2030, a new IEA report finds, marking a significant shift in the country’s energy landscape and putting India’s projected gas demand on a par with some of the world’s largest consumers.

The report, India Gas Market Report: Outlook to 2030, shows the country’s gas consumption is set to reach 103bn cubic meters (bcm) annually by the end of the decade. Following over a decade of slow growth and periodic declines, India’s natural gas demand increased by more than 10% in both 2023 and 2024, indicating an inflection point.

While total gas consumption in 2023 was only marginally higher than 2011 levels, three key factors are now converging to drive substantial growth: rapid infrastructure expansion, recovering domestic production, and an expected easing of global gas market conditions.

“India’s gas market is entering a new phase of growth, supported by significant infrastructure development and clear policy direction,” said IEA Director of Energy Markets and Security Keisuke Sadamori. “The prospect of higher gas demand in India coincides with an expected wave of new global LNG supply. However, it will require careful planning and market coordination to ensure supply security and to help gas to compete in a price-sensitive market.”

Infrastructure development is playing a crucial role in enabling market growth. Since 2019, India has almost quadrupled its number of compressed natural gas (CNG) stations and more than doubled the number of residential gas connections, while extending its transmis-



IEA analysis shows India’s gas market is at an inflection point as infrastructure expansion and policy support drive unprecedented growth in consumption

sion pipeline network by 40%. By 2030, the number of CNG stations and residential connections is expected to nearly double again, with the gas transmission grid expanding by an additional 50%.

The city gas distribution sector is expected to lead consumption growth in India between now and 2030, supported by rapid CNG infrastructure expansion and competitive pricing against liquid fuels. The heavy industry and manufacturing sectors are expected to add around 15 bcm of demand during this period, while gas use in oil refining is forecast to increase by more than 4 bcm as more refineries connect to the network.

India’s domestic gas production, which met 50% of demand in 2023, is projected to grow gradually, reaching just

under 38 bcm by 2030. This would put it around 8% above 2023 levels. The limited growth in domestic supply means India’s LNG imports will need to more than double to around 65 bcm a year by 2030 to meet rising demand.

India is looking to increase the share of gas in its energy mix and the report identifies potential for even higher growth under an accelerated scenario, where targeted policy measures could push total demand to approximately 120 bcm by 2030 – comparable to the current gas consumption of South America. This scenario would require additional policy support to drive higher utilisation of gas-fired power plants, faster adoption of LNG in heavy-duty transport, and more rapid expansion of city gas infrastructure.

Saudi PIF invests in Masdar Building Materials

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia – Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF) on Thursday announced the acquisition of a 30% stake in Masdar for Building Materials Company (Masdar), a leading local company specialising in the trading and distribution of building materials, by way of subscribing to newly issued shares through a capital increase.

PIF’s investment will enable Masdar to transform its operations through digital technology, enhancing the customer experience, and improving operational efficiency. The investment will also allow the company to expand its operations, build new strategic partnerships, as well as increase the role of local suppliers and businesses in serving the

building materials market.

Ahmad AlGhamdi, Head of Construction and Building Materials – MENA Investments at PIF, saidk “The investment in Masdar will contribute to reinforcing local supply chains by unlocking capabilities in the construction and building components and services sector, one of PIF’s strategic sectors. The investment will also support the development of the building materials distribution network, increase access to value-added services, and accelerate digital

transformation through the adoption of the latest technologies and solutions. The investment also represents another step towards promoting partnerships with the private sector to develop strategic sectors and increase Saudi Arabia’s GDP.”

Faisal al-Muhaidib, Masdar CEO, said, “As a leading building and construction materials company in Saudi Arabia, we look forward to partnering with PIF to play a vital role in supporting the growth and development of the sector by scaling up

our capabilities and meeting current and upcoming demand. The construction and building components and services sector is one of the most important and promising sectors in Saudi Arabia, and PIF’s investment will accelerate and unlock Masdar’s growth, enabling us to scale our capabilities and maintain our leading position by offering products via our exceptional distribution network.”

This investment reinforces PIF’s commitment to supporting the growth of strategic sectors in Saudi Arabia and achieving the goals of Saudi Vision 2030. The construction and building components and services sector is a priority sector due to its significant role in the economy.



Lulu launches Dream Drive 2025

The campaign has been launched to reward valued customers throughout Ramadan

With Ramadan fast approaching, Lulu Oman has launched its Dream Drive Shop and Win 2025 campaign to reward valued customers throughout this period.

The campaign commenced on February 12, giving shoppers a chance to win eight Nissan Pathfinder-S 4WD as grand prizes and several other gifts from Ikon, including smart TVs, cooking ranges, refrigerators, washers and air fryers. The campaign is being held across all outlets of Lulu in the Sultanate.

Customers can participate in the e-raffle when they purchase goods worth RO10 or more in a single receipt at any branch of Lulu in Oman. The system will automatically send a WhatsApp message or SMS once this eligibility criteria of RO10 is billed. Upon receiving the message, customer must click the provided link in the SMS to access the registration portal and fill in the details to participate in the e-raffle draw. Customers can download Lulu APP and check their coupons in the e-bills portal. Eight electronic draws will be held on different dates during the promotion period.

Speaking about the campaign, Shabeer K A, Regional Director of Lulu Hypermarkets - Oman, said that the Lulu group is excited to launch its Dream Drive campaign this Ramadan, through which it seeks to be an active



part of the festivities and also give its valued shoppers a chance to drive home their dream.

"This campaign is one of our several activities to engage with our customers and we are happy to launch it every year. Dream Drive has always been a platform

Customers can participate in the e-raffle when they purchase goods worth RO10 or more in a single receipt at any branch of Lulu in Oman. The system will automatically send a WhatsApp message or SMS

for us to appreciate and thank our customers for their continued support and loyalty. We wish all our customers a blessed month of Ramadan."

Shabeer underscored Lulu's take on Ramadan, which is for it the perfect time to show it grati-

tude to its valued customers, and this campaign is truly a reflection of the spirit of the season.

"We are working round the clock to improve customer experience and to make shopping easy and enjoyable during Ramadan. We are also taking necessary steps to showcase the best mix of products that are relevant for the season at the fairest prices. We encourage our customers to make use of the online delivery services too," he added.

There will also be an exciting range of special deals, promotions and offers for shoppers during Ramadan. Customers can avail special discounts and exclusive offers on all essential commodities, including beverages, frozen foods, fresh produce and other grocery items. Special Ramadan Kits will also be available to make shopping for Ramadan essentials an easy experience for customers. The kits will include essential grocery items, such as milk powder, rice, sugar, instant foods, jellies, ketchup, oil, pulses, pasta, grains, coffee and tea, at the lowest prices.

To redefine their shopping experience, customers can also be part of Lulu's Happiness Loyalty Rewards Program. Through this loyalty programme, members can unlock exclusive deals and discounts, with instant savings, on every purchase as well as gain access to special member prices on selected items.

OOC general assembly confirms election date in April

The General Assembly of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) convened on Sunday at the JW Marriott Hotel and approved the date for the upcoming elections for the 2024-28 electoral cycle, scheduled for April 22 this year.

The meeting was chaired by Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, OOC President, who emphasised that the gathering was part of the preparations for the upcoming elections of OOC Board of Directors. He noted that the meeting focused on two key items that reflect the Board's commitment to upholding integrity and transparency in the electoral process: the approval of the electoral committees and the endorsement of minor amendments to the election regulations to enhance their clarity and effectiveness as a sustainable regulatory framework.

OOO president also underscored the strong collaboration between the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, OOC, sports federations, and various stakeholders.

Al Futtaim IKEA introduces new pop-up store at MoM

Al Futtaim IKEA, the world's leading home furnishing brand, is bringing its signature Scandinavian design, affordability, and smart home solutions even closer to customers with the launch of its brand-new pop-up store at Mall of Muscat.

This innovative retail concept is designed to offer an engaging, immersive experience for shoppers in Al Mabellah and surrounding areas.

Strategically located in one of Muscat's most popular shopping destinations, Al Futtaim IKEA pop-up store offers a carefully curated selection of stylish furniture, home accessories, and space-saving solutions, making it easier than ever for customers to refresh their living spaces with affordable and functional designs. Visitors can explore inspiring room setups, expert styling tips, and smart storage ideas that cater to modern living needs.

"We are excited to introduce Al Futtaim IKEA pop-up store at



Mall of Muscat, providing an interactive and inspiring way for customers to experience IKEA's well-designed and affordable home solutions," said Mohammed al Kurdi, Country Market Manager, Al-Futtaim IKEA Oman. "This initiative reflects our commitment to bringing IKEA closer to the community, offering convenience, inspiration, and innovative solutions that improve everyday life in the sultanate."

In line with Al Futtaim IKEA's

sustainability vision, the pop-up store incorporates energy-efficient lighting and eco-friendly materials, reinforcing the brand's dedication to a better everyday life for people and the planet.

Shoppers can also take advantage of home delivery services and expert home furnishing advice to bring their ideas to life with ease. Al Futtaim invited people to visit the pop-up store and discover a world of stylish, functional, and affordable home.

Toyota Prado promises buyers fun, adventure in every drive

Toyota's reliable Prado has been a popular choice for 4x4 SUV enthusiasts who have always looked forward to making the most of every terrain without a worry. From desert drives to rocky paths to city streets and country sides, the Prado has always stood tall whenever put to the task.

For over seven decades, the Toyota Prado has stood as a symbol of rugged reliability and off-road mastery. Its journey began with the Toyota BJ, a vehicle that made history by conquering Mount Fuji's sixth station at 2,700 metres, an achievement that cemented Toyota's reputation for unparalleled durability.

Today, the all-new Prado continues this legacy, blending legendary Land Cruiser DNA with cutting-edge technology for an exceptional driving experience, both on and off the road.

The latest generation of the Toyota Prado embraces a striking



retro-inspired design, exuding strength and adventure. Beneath its bold exterior, the Prado retains its robust body-on-frame construction while integrating Toyota's advanced GA-F platform enhancing stability, durability and off-road prowess. Whether navigating rocky trails or city streets, the Prado delivers unmatched confidence and control.

Built to thrive in the toughest conditions, the all-new Prado is engineered for both extreme off-roading and refined daily driving. It introduces Electric Power Steering (EPS) for smoother handling, reduced kickback on rough terrain and improved manoeuvrability at all speeds. Under the hood, drivers can choose between a 2.4L Turbo Petrol or a

2.8L Turbo Diesel engine, both mated to an efficient 8-speed automatic transmission delivering power, precision and fuel efficiency in one dynamic package.

Inside, the Prado offers a spacious seven-seat configuration, designed for both practicality and comfort. Its intelligently crafted cabin echoes the strength of a true off-roader.

Sohar International, Sohar Islamic honoured at Al-Bashayer Festival 2025

In recognition of their significant contribution as strategic sponsors, Sohar International and Sohar Islamic were honoured with an award at the 8th Al-Bashayer Festival this year.

This prestigious award celebrates the bank's unwavering support in ensuring the success of the festival. Held at the Bashayer Track in Dakhliya governorate, the festival is a landmark event in Oman's sporting calendar. The event culminated in a grand closing and award ceremony on February 15, under the patronage of H H Sayyid Asaad bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.

Abdul Wahid al Murshidi,

Acting Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, represented the bank at the closing ceremony and received the honorary award. This recognition underscores Sohar International's dedication to preserving Oman's rich cultural heritage while fostering community engagement and economic development.

Commenting on the festival, Murshidi stated, "More than a celebration of heritage and culture, the Al-Bashayer Festival also serves as a catalyst for progress, seamlessly intertwining tradition with opportunity. While the exhilaration of competition captivates audiences, the festival's true impact extends far beyond the racetrack, driving tourism, encouraging talents, and promoting local business growth.



By providing a platform for rural communities to showcase their craftsmanship and skills, it nurtures economic resilience and

fosters a spirit of enterprise. We recognise that sustainable development is built upon such initiatives - ones that create real value,

strengthen community bonds, and contribute to a thriving, inclusive economy. We remain committed to championing platforms

that not only preserve our nation's cultural legacy but also pave the way for a future of shared prosperity."

The final day of the festival delivered a thrilling spectacle as Oman's finest camel racing talents competed for top honours. Drawing participants and spectators from across the GCC, the event reinforced its role as a unifying force, strengthening cultural ties and positioning Oman as a premier destination for regional tourism. Sohar International's involvement, far from being symbolic, was deeply embedded in the festival's objectives - bridging heritage with progress and unlocking new avenues for sustainable growth.

With a heightened focus on youth engagement, the festival

also served as an enabler for emerging talent in media, arts, and culture. By offering young Omanis a platform to exhibit their creativity, the event aligned seamlessly with Sohar International's broader vision of empowering future generations and fostering an ecosystem where talent and enterprise can flourish.

Simultaneously, the festival created economic opportunities for local producers and artisans, further reinforcing the bank's ongoing efforts to champion financial inclusion and stimulate grassroots entrepreneurship.

Sohar International's strategic sponsorship stands as a testament to the bank's commitment to cultivating meaningful partnerships between the public and private sectors.

British Council hosts MENA UK Study Tour to explore leadership in digital age

Jordan: The British Council successfully concluded the 11th annual MENA UK Study Tour, bringing together influential education leaders and practitioners from across the MENA region. This year's tour continued its legacy of fostering collaboration, exchanging ideas, and addressing critical challenges in education, solidifying its position as a cornerstone of British Council's commitment to global educational excellence.

The theme for this year's tour, "Leading in the Digital Age," focused on equipping leaders with the tools and strategies needed to navigate the evolving educational landscape. Participants explored critical topics such as AI integration in schools, teacher recruitment and retention, and frameworks for self-evaluation, aligning with the urgent need to address the opportunities and challenges posed by digital transformation.

Ameera Manna'a, Director Exams MENA North (Jordan, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Iraq and Libya) at British Council said: "This year's study tour emphasised the power of collaboration in tackling shared educational challenges across the MENA region and beyond. By fostering dialogue around digital transformation, well-being, and leadership, we aim to empower educators to create innovative and inclusive learning environments that prepare students for the future."



Luma Salhab, Director of International Schools at the Islamic Educational College, said: "The

MENA UK Study Tour 2025 was an enlightening experience that offered practical insights into in-

tegrating AI into teaching and improving recruitment and retention strategies. Visiting UK schools and engaging with their staff and students was invaluable, providing a fresh perspec-

tive on best practices that can be adapted to our local context."

May Goussous, Principal of The National Orthodox School, said: "The opportunity to connect with fellow educators and learn directly from UK schools was transformative. The experiences shared by UK institutions highlighted how a strong emphasis on staff well-being and innovative teaching methods can create a thriving educational environment. In addition, we deepened our understanding of how to effectively integrate AI into our schools, paving the way for transformative impacts across various aspects of our work."

Participants engaged in an immersive week-long schedule that included visits to leading UK institutions such as The Perse School, Avanti House Secondary School, and Homerton College, Cambridge. Keynote sessions and panel discussions addressed timely topics like ethical AI usage, strategies for staff retention, and fostering leadership in the digital age. The British Council remains steadfast in its mission to connect educators globally, providing platforms for meaningful dialogue and professional growth. The 11th MENA UK Study Tour underscored the value of shared experiences in addressing educational challenges, enriching curricula, and driving positive change across the MENA region.



ISAM holds KG Sports Day

Indian School Al Maabala (ISAM) celebrated its annual Sports Day on February 13 where the mantra 'True strength is not in winning every game but in never giving up on yourself' truly resonated.

The event showcased not only athletic talent but also teamwork, perseverance, and the values of sportsmanship. The chief guest for the day was Dr Atoom al Khatri, Deputy Director, Human Sciences Curriculum Development of Foreign Languages; and members of the School Management Committee (SMC), along with parents were in attendance to witness this occasion.

The day began at 9.00am with a torch relay, led by 13 pairs

of twin students and a triplet from the Preprimary department. This was followed by the opening remarks of the principal, who warmly welcomed all attendees, including parents, guests, and dignitaries. He emphasized the importance of developing sportsmanship, moral values, and team spirit in students.

Dr Khatri delivered a motivational speech on the significance of maintaining a healthy sports lifestyle. D Vikas Rao Naidu, Convener, SMC felicitated the chief guest by presenting a memento.

A cultural programme stole the show, with students from Class II presenting a 'Flower Drill Display' and students from Class

I performing a synchronized Hula Hoops Drill.

The KG II students dazzled the audience with colourful drills using smiley faces, showcasing their team spirit and coordination. The sports competitions brought out the best in the students, who participated in the races with great enthusiasm and determination. Fun games like 'Queens Quest' and 'Kings Conquer' were organised for the parents, and the kindergarten students had a blast with their games that focused on building essential fundamental movement skills.

The day concluded with a closing ceremony where the winners received their medals.

Wizz Air's gift for couple on Feb 4

Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, the ultra-low-fare national airline of the UAE, celebrated Valentine's Day this year with a special initiative for travelling lovebirds.

Among those travelling on February 14, Wizz Air Abu Dhabi selected a couple travelling from Abu Dhabi to Bucharest and surprised them with special Valentine-themed gift packages, including, sweet treats and exclusive Wizz Air souvenirs during their flight. The campaign aimed to make this Valentine's Day extra special for the couple travelling together on February 14.

This Valentine's Day, Wizz Air Abu Dhabi scheduled 38 flights to 16 destinations across its network. The most in-demand routes on Valentines Day this year were from Abu Dhabi to Yerevan, Alexandria, and Baku which saw the highest bookings among those looking to escape the ordinary and celebrate the day of love above the clouds.

In the UAE, the chosen couple was surprised onboard

their flight from Abu Dhabi to Bucharest.

Alexa Weber, Marketing and Communications Manager at Wizz Air Abu Dhabi, said, "To celebrate this special

We wanted to surprise the lucky couple and make their trip even more memorable as they were on a trip to a getaway in Bucharest

ALEXA WEBER

holiday, we wanted to surprise the lucky couple and make their trip even more memorable before they reached their perfect Valentine's destination. We know that some of our passengers are long-distance couples, and we are happy to be connecting them with our affordable flights every day. We are wishing them an amazing romantic getaway in Bucharest."



OAB, Takaful forge strategic partnership to enhance services

Takaful Oman Insurance, a leading provider of insurance solutions, and Oman Arab Bank, one of Oman's foremost financial institutions, are proud to announce a strategic partnership. This collaboration is set to redefine the financial services landscape by providing customers with enhanced access to innovative, integrated solutions.

This partnership will enable Oman Arab Bank customers to seamlessly access Takaful Oman's comprehensive suite of insurance products through OAB's extensive network of branches and advanced digital platforms. The collaboration reflects both the organisations' commitment to innovation, customer satisfaction, and delivering tailored financial solutions that address the evolving needs of Oman's diverse market.

Neelmani Bhardwaj, CEO of Takaful Oman Insurance, said that this partnership with Oman Arab Bank reflects Takaful's shared commitment to serving the community with exceptional financial and insurance solutions.

"We aim to provide Oman Arab Bank's customers with products that align with their val-

ues while ensuring peace of mind and security for their families and businesses. Together, we aim to build a stronger, more inclusive financial ecosystem."

Juma al Fulaiti, Deputy Head of Retail Banking in Oman Arab Bank, commented, "At Oman Arab Bank, we offer comprehensive financial solutions that empower our customers and contribute to Oman's economic progress. This partnership with Takaful Oman Insurance is a testament to our shared commitment to innovation, quality, and customer-centric services."

Fulaiti further affirmed, "Together, Takaful Oman Insurance and Oman Arab Bank are ready to create a more secure and prosperous future for Oman's individuals and businesses, cementing their positions as leaders in financial services."

The partnership is scheduled to commence in the first quarter of 2025, with plans to roll out various insurance products catering to individual and corporate clients. Both organisations are focused on ensuring a seamless and efficient customer experience by leveraging their combined expertise.

Mandarin Oriental, Muscat's first Ramadan celebration

Mandarin Oriental, Muscat is delighted to welcome guests to enjoy its first Ramadan, paying tribute to the traditions and celebrations in Oman.

At the heart of this joyous occasion is Ali al Farsi, renowned for her design of the property's signature fan. The celebrated Omani artist has envisioned a unique artwork that captures the essence of family bonds, the beauty of Omani culture, and the spirit of Ramadan.

The artwork named Family Traditions, portrays an Omani



family gathered under a serene starlit sky, symbolising the unity and warmth that define the holy month of Ramadan.

A family member holds a fanoos, its golden glow representing guidance and togetherness. In the background, a house silhouette reflects gatherings and shared moments. The artwork celebrates family bonds, Omani culture and Ramadan traditions, inviting viewers to embrace the season's spirit of connection.

For a unique dining experience, Rawya has been inspired

by the Silk Road journey, complemented by a special selection of Omani dishes. Featuring recipes passed down through generations, with fresh seafood sourced from the Omani coastlines, speciality ingredients from the mountains and the historic home of frankincense in the Dhofar region, as well as East African-inspired dishes.

With a range of cold and hot mezze, alongside traditional carving stations where our chefs prepare Arabic grills, sushi and more. The desserts feature traditional

Omani Halwa and more Ramadan delicacies. Throughout the evening, enjoy live Oud music surrounded by family and friends.

For an enchanting Iftar experience, Essenza offers a four-course sharing set menu of authentic Italian cuisine, served with traditional flair and set against the backdrop of the tranquil terrace to provide the perfect seaside view.

Dine under the stars in a memorable beachfront setting and enjoy a magical Suhour experience.

Can China replace US as world leader?

While the US increasingly looks inwards, China is appearing to be getting more involved in global affairs

Munich, Germany - US Vice President J D Vance's participation at this year's Munich Security Conference drew a lot of attention and international focus, particularly from European leaders.

US President Donald Trump's return to the White House has made the leaders of the EU countries quite nervous, and the feeling of uncertainty was quite palpable at the conference. Therefore, all eyes were focused on Vance as to how he would allay those concerns.

If anything, Vance's Munich Security Conference speech on Friday only made matters worse. His sharp criticism of Europe irked many participants, with German Defence Minister Pistorius calling his remarks 'unacceptable'. His comments on the Russia-Ukraine war prompted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to suggest that the 'decades-old relationship between Europe and America is now ending'.

Meanwhile Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who also spoke at the Munich Security Conference, used a more accommodating and reconciliatory tone to address Europeans. He said that his country sees Europe as a partner, not a rival, and offered to play a 'constructive role' in the Ukraine-Russia peace talks.

Wang Yi told German Chancellor Olaf Scholz China was willing to deepen 'all-round co-operation' with Germany as part of positive bilateral efforts to maintain global peace and stability.



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi meets German Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the Munich Security Conference 2025

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who spoke at the Munich Security Conference, used a more accommodating and reconciliatory tone to address Europeans

An opportunity for China

While the US under Trump increasingly looks inwards, with-

drawing from international forums and treaties and threatening to quit NATO, China is appearing to be getting more in-

involved in global affairs.

Does this mean that Beijing could replace Washington as the global arbiter?

"There is no question in my view that as a rising power, China wants to be all it can be," Graham Allison, professor of government at Harvard University and China expert, told DW on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference. "If the US

withdraws from trade agreements, countries that want trade agreements in order to grow economically, for instance China, would fill this vacuum," he added.

Allison underlined that if Trump keeps leaving international institutions, 'China will be a champion. Chinese President Xi Jinping has noticed that there is a lot of opportunity out there,

and if the US plays its hand badly, it makes easier for Beijing to be successful'.

China has been investing heavily in many parts of the world, including Asia and Africa, which has increased its clout in these regions in the past decades. Be it Afghanistan or the Middle East, China has used its influence to mediate conflicts there.

Can Europe and China come closer?

Yao Yang, director of the China Centre for Economic Research at Peking University, told DW that Europe needs to adopt an independent policy towards China, should it want to forge closer ties.

"If the US (under Trump) wants to give more priority to its domestic issues, then Europe should do the same," Yao said. "It should do so for its defence, for its security, and for its foreign policy. There is a huge space for China and Europe to collaborate on." But China's close relationship with Russia could be a hindrance in this regard. Beijing recently welcomed Trump's move to reach out to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to end the war in Ukraine and said it was willing to play its role.

"China wants to present itself as a peacemaker, that it is not in favour of wars, and that it wants to be involved in ending wars," according to Allison.

Yao believes that ending Russia's war in Ukraine is in China's economic interest. "China trades with both Russia and Ukraine. So Beijing would definitely want to push for peace in that region," he underlined.

But for Europe to trust China, it would be crucial that Xi won't support a deal that goes against its own interests. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi tried to assure European leaders in Munich that it can be trusted, and that peace can be achieved in Ukraine if all stakeholders participate in negotiations.

DW



Police arrested a Syrian suspect shortly after the attack

Austria stabbing 'Islamist attack': Interior minister

Vienna, Austria - The perpetrator of a knife attack in the Austrian city of Villach was radicalised online and had links to the so-called 'Islamic State' group, Austria's interior minister said.

The Syrian suspect, who randomly started attacking passersby with a knife on Saturday, was an 'Islamist attacker', Interior Minister Gerhard Karner said on Sunday. The attack left a teenager killed and caused five other injuries.

"It is an Islamist attack with IS connections," Karner told reporters, adding that the suspect was radicalised online 'in a short space of time'.

Interior Minister Karner said on Sunday he felt 'anger about an Islamist attacker who indiscriminately stabbed innocent people here in this city'.

The suspect used a folding knife to target passersby, police said. He was arrested shortly after the attack, when another Syrian, a food delivery driver, stopped him by ramming him with his car.

State governor Peter Kaiser thanked a 42-year-old Syrian man.

"This shows how closely terrorist evil but also human good

can be united in one and the same nationality," he said.

The suspect is an asylum seeker but has a valid residence permit and no criminal record, police said.

Austria's President Alexander Van der Bellen condemned the attack as 'horrific'.

"No words can undo the suffering, the horror, the fear. My thoughts are with the family of the deceased victim and the injured," he said on X.

Carinthia Governor Peter Kaiser of the Social Democrats called for the 'harshest consequences' for this 'unbelievable atrocity'.

Far-right leader Herbert Kickl meanwhile called for a 'rigorous clamp-down on asylum'.

Kickl's Freedom Party (FPÖ) unprecedentedly topped last September's national elections, but announced earlier this week failing to form a government with the runner-up and incumbent conservatives. The parties failed to reach consensus on who would hold sensitive cabinet posts dealing with security.

The Free Syrian Community in Austria also condemned the attack and distanced itself from it in a statement on Facebook.

DW

DR Congo: Guterres urges for dialogue

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Panic swept through Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on Saturday after M23 rebels entered the city in South Kivu province

People were seen fleeing in the morning, the World Food Programme said one of its warehouses was looted, and inmates from the city's main prison were freed.

Later, the streets fell quiet as residents braced for what is to come.

The rebels' self-proclaimed governor of Bukavu, Pierre Bahizi, called for calm.

"We must not leave power in the street," he said on Saturday.

The Congolese government and international observers have



M23 rebels have called for calm after entering Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province

long accused neighbouring Rwanda of backing the M23 rebels. Rwanda denies this.

"We are asking for one thing and cannot accept anything else: the withdrawal of Rwandan troops from Congolese territory," Congolese Prime Minister Judith Suminwa told the Reuters news agency on Saturday.

"We are an independent country and we must protect the

integrity of our territory."

Guterres warns against escalation

The conflict in eastern Congo was a major topic of discussion at the African Union summit in Ethiopia on Saturday.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the summit that escalation must be avoided at all costs and with no military solution.

"The fighting that is raging in South Kivu - as a result of the continuation of the M23 offensive - threatens to push the entire region over the precipice," Guterres said without mentioning Rwanda. He called for 'diplomacy and dialogue'.

DW

Turkey is making fake honey on an alarming scale

Istanbul, Turkey - Turkey is one of the key players in the global honey market. With annual production of 115,000 tonnes of honey, the country is the world's second-largest supplier after China, followed by Ethiopia, Iran and India.

The Turkish honey sector has an annual volume of about €270mn (US\$283.4mn), according to estimates, with Germany and the United States being the biggest importers of honey from Turkey.

Adulterated honey

But the sector faces a crisis because of counterfeit Turkish honey, although the actual extent of counterfeit honey production in the country remains unclear.

Police have confiscated several tonnes of the adulterated product in recent months for a total value of about €25mn.

One raid in the capital Ankara in September 2024 found 8,150



Turkey is the second biggest honey producer in the world

tonnes of glucose, fructose and sugar, along with 100,000 labels for different brands of honey.

Honey is often adulterated with sugar syrup. But if a product contains artificial flavours, colours, sweeteners, glucose, corn syrup or artificial honeycomb, it can't legally be sold as honey. If it is, it's referred to as counterfeit or adulterated honey - which is a violation of labelling

laws.

In the last quarter of 2024, the Turkish ministry of agriculture released lists indicating that 43 producers in Turkey had adulterated honey. Ankara is seen as the centre of this industry; the majority of production facilities are located there. The ministry says two of the manufacturers distribute their products through big supermarket chains.

Damage to Turkey's image

The industry is alarmed. Producers fear that Turkey's reputation on the international market will suffer significant damage or has already been harmed. They are calling for state intervention, stricter regulations and deterrent penalties for producers of counterfeit honey.

Ziya Sahin, the president of

the Turkish Beekeepers' Association, holds the Ministry of Agriculture responsible. He wants to see more inspections and higher penalties.

"The problem is the lack of regulation. Our beekeepers are angry, and they ask why we're not doing something to stop it. But we have no authority to inspect," Sahin told DW. "I'm not even allowed to ask street sellers whether their honey is real or not."

A meeting of the International Federation of Beekeepers' Associations is due to be held in Turkey this year. Sahin says they are in close contact with their international partners.

"As in other parts of the world, there is counterfeit honey in Turkey. We can't deny that. But we don't want Turkey to be known as a paradise for fake honey. We won't accept that," Sahin insisted.

DW

Rubio arrives in Israel, along with heavy bombs



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio is in Israel for talks with that country's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu

Jerusalem - US Secretary of State Marco Rubio is in Israel for talks with that country's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, as a fragile ceasefire continues to hold in the Gaza Strip between Israeli forces and the Palestinian group Hamas.

During his visit, his first official trip to the region, Rubio is likely to discuss a plan by US President Donald Trump to take over Gaza, relocate all its residents and turn the Palestinian enclave into a 'Riviera of the Middle East'.

The proposal, while seen favourably by Netanyahu, has met with vehement opposition from Arab leaders and Palestinians and caused widespread outrage in the international community. Rubio's visit also comes as Israel and Hamas face an imminent deadline in early March to negotiate the next phase of the ceasefire, which last week came close to collapse.

Netanyahu has indicated that he is ready to resume the war after the first ceasefire stage, despite domestic pressure to bring about the return of the remaining Israeli hostages abducted during the Hamas-led attacks on southern Israel on October 7, 2023,

that triggered the current Gaza conflict.

He has, however, offered Hamas a chance to surrender and send its top leaders into exile - a proposal so far rejected by the group, which is classified as a terrorist organization by Israel, the

During his first official trip to the region, Rubio is likely to discuss a plan by Trump to take over Gaza and relocate all its residents

United States and the European Union, among others.

After visiting Israel, Rubio plans to travel to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Israel receives bombs shipment

Meanwhile, Israel's Defence Ministry said on Sunday it had taken delivery of a shipment of 2,000-pound (900kg) bombs from the United States after US

President Donald Trump lifted a suspension on their export imposed by his predecessor Joe Biden. The MK-84 bombs are unguided munitions with a large blast radius that are capable of piercing thick concrete and metal.

"A shipment of heavy aerial bombs recently released by the US government was received and unloaded overnight in Israel," a statement from the ministry said.

"The munitions shipment that arrived in Israel, released by the Trump administration, represents a significant asset for the air force and the IDF and serves as further evidence of the strong alliance between Israel and the United States," Defence Minister Israel Katz said in the statement.

Although the Biden administration initially sent thousands of 2,000-pound bombs to Israel after the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas, it imposed the block on their export in May last year amid fears of their destructive impact in densely populated areas of the Gaza Strip.

Three killed in Rafa

Three Palestinian police officers were killed on Sunday by Israeli

shelling in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip despite a ceasefire agreement, according to official Palestinian sources.

In a statement, the Gaza Interior Ministry announced the casualties, noting that the officers were deployed to secure the entry of humanitarian aid in the Al-Shawka area, east of Rafah, when they were targeted.

The ministry strongly condemned the attack and called on 'mediators and the international community to pressure the (Israeli) occupation to halt its targeting of the police force, which is a civilian body responsible for maintaining public security and organising daily affairs'.

The Palestinian police officers were deployed to secure the entry of humanitarian aid into the besieged enclave as part of the ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel.

Palestinian officials have complained that Israel is failing to abide by the part of the agreement to let in more humanitarian aid. The Israeli army, for its part, claimed that the attack targeted Palestinian fighters approaching its forces in the area.

Agencies



Damascus International Airport was severely damaged during the country's 13-year civil war

Turkey begins work to restore Damascus Airport

Ankara, Turkey - Turkey has sent a 25-member technical team to Syria to begin work on restoring Damascus International Airport, which was severely damaged during the country's 13-year civil war, the country's transportation and infrastructure minister said on Sunday.

In a written statement, Abdulkadir Uraloglu said the Turkish team, made up of personnel from the State Airports Directorate, is working to make the airport operational again.

On February 7, the team entered Syria safely through the Cilvegözü Border Gate in Reyhanlı in the southern Turkish province of Hatay.

"To ensure safe flight operations at Damascus International Airport and in Syrian airspace, we have sent 113 vehicles, de-

vices, and systems in six trucks," he said. "Our team will also complete the training of airport personnel."

According to Uraloglu, to improve airport security, Turkey has provided 10 X-ray machines, four explosive trace detectors, 10 walk-through metal detectors, and eight handheld metal detectors. "Our teams, working in coordination with Syrian officials, have completed the installation of most of these devices," he said. "Efforts to improve security levels continue, and reports are being prepared to address remaining deficiencies."

So far, six X-ray machines and five walk-through metal detectors have been installed, with work continuing on the remaining security equipment and repairs to existing devices, he added.

Strengthening fire safety

Turkey has also provided two domestically produced Volkan Lion 8x8 combined aircraft rescue and firefighting vehicles and various firefighting equipment to improve emergency response at the airport, Uraloglu said.

"These vehicles will modernise the existing fleet and enhance the airport's fire safety classification," he said. "Syrian personnel have received training on the new equipment, and our teams are working to bring firefighting operations up to international standards."

"Turkey will continue our cooperation to strengthen the aviation infrastructure of our friendly and brotherly country, Syria," he added.

Anadolu Agency

Israeli army chief set to visit US

Istanbul, Turkey - Israeli Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi is set to travel to Washington on Sunday for talks with US military officials, the army said.

A military statement said Halevi will meet with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Commander of the US Central Command (CENTCOM), and other senior officials to discuss key strategic and operational issues.

Halevi 'will take the opportunity to express his gratitude

to his counterparts for their support, commitment, and personal ties', the statement said.

The three-day visit comes a few weeks before Halevi steps down.

Last month, the army chief of staff said he would resign as of March 6.

Meanwhile, Palestinian medics and rescue teams retrieved six more bodies from the rubble in the Gaza Strip over the last 24 hours, pushing the overall death toll from Is-

rael's genocidal war since October 2023 up to 48,271, the Health Ministry said on Sunday. A ministry statement said that five injured people were also admitted to hospitals, bringing the number of injured in the Israeli onslaught to 111,693.

"Many victims are still trapped under the rubble and on the roads, with rescuers unable to reach them," the ministry said.

Anadolu Agency

Gaza ceasefire deal 'historic mistake': Israel's Ben-Gvir

Istanbul, Turkey - Former Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday, calling a Gaza ceasefire deal a 'historic mistake'.

Speaking to the local radio 103FM, the far-right politician said that Netanyahu's actions were undermining Israel's military achievements in the war on Gaza.

The continuation of this deal is 'a historic mistake that will set us back', said Ben-Gvir, who leads the far-right Otzma Yehudit Party. "The deal prevents Israel from achieving a total victory, and every passing day proves that my opposition to the agreement was justified," he claimed.

Ben-Gvir, who resigned from Netanyahu's government last month in opposition to the ceasefire deal, claimed that Hamas fighters had regained power and control in Gaza. "The amount of aid we give them...it enables them to rule," he said. "Hamas regained control (in the Gaza Strip) because of this reckless deal."

The extremist minister also



Ben-Gvir had resigned from Netanyahu's government last month

took aim at far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, dismissing his claim that Israel had dismantled Hamas.

"I heard him say that we have taken Hamas apart, but unfortunately, the reality on the ground says otherwise," Ben-Gvir said.

Meanwhile, Israeli army troops raided the West Bank city of Nablus early on Sunday as tension continued to spike across the occupied territory, according to witnesses. Witnesses said an Israeli special force stormed the old town in Nablus and besieged a house in the area amid gunfire.

No details about the occu-

pants of the house were yet available. The raid came amid rising tensions in the northern West Bank, where the Israeli army has launched military operations that have killed at least 55 people and displaced thousands since January 21.

Tension has been running high across the occupied West Bank, where at least 915 Palestinians have been killed and nearly 7,000 others injured in attacks by the Israeli army and illegal settlers since the start of the Gaza war on October 7, 2023, according to the Health Ministry.

Anadolu Agency

Gaza: Israel rejects entry of mobile homes

Istanbul, Turkey - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has refused to approve the entry of mobile homes and heavy equipment into the Gaza Strip despite a ceasefire agreement, Israeli media said on Sunday.

The Israeli public broadcaster KAN, citing an unnamed Israeli source, said Netanyahu rejected access to heavy machinery to clear the rubble of destroyed buildings in the enclave.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have been left homeless after Israel's deadly onslaught that has killed more than 48,200 people, mostly women and children, and left Gaza in ruins.

Gaza's government media office confirmed that mobile homes and heavy machinery have not been allowed into the enclave.

"Israel's failure to uphold its obligations under the agreement and the humanitarian protocol poses a significant challenge to mediators, who must exert more pressure on the occupation to ensure that these commitments are honoured," Ismail al-Thawabtah, who heads the media office, told Anadolu.

"The Israeli occupation is still stalling the entry of essential



Gaza's government media office said that mobile homes and heavy machinery have not been allowed into the enclave

equipment into the enclave, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis," he added.

"To date, no mobile homes (caravans) or heavy machinery necessary for the reconstruction of infrastructure destroyed by Israel have reached the Gaza Strip," Thawabtah said.

He appealed to the international community to 'apply real pressure on Israel to force compliance with the terms of the agreement'.

Palestinian resistance group Hamas released three Israeli cap-

tives on Saturday after receiving guarantees from mediators about removing obstacles to the entry of mobile homes for displaced civilians and heavy equipment needed for clearing rubble.

Local Palestinian authorities have accused Israel of violating the humanitarian protocol of the Gaza ceasefire deal by denying access to relief materials, including tents and caravans for displaced civilians in Gaza.

Nineteen Israeli captives and five Thai workers have been released in exchange for 1,135

Palestinian prisoners under the first phase of the Gaza agreement, which took effect on January 19.

Netanyahu said on Saturday that the release of another three Israeli captives in Gaza was made possible by US President Donald Trump's 'clear and direct' statements.

In a statement, Netanyahu's office said Hamas had attempted to breach the ceasefire agreement, 'creating a false crisis with baseless allegations'.

Anadolu Agency

Illegal trade decimates Indian pangolin population in Pakistan

Karachi, Pakistan - The population of the Indian pangolin has drastically plummeted in Pakistan due to a variety of factors, mainly poaching, illegal trade, habitat loss, retaliatory killings and climate change.

The Indian pangolin (Manis crassicaudata) is the only pangolin species found in the South Asian country, which is classified as endangered on the red list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

with a declining population trend.

On the eve of World Pangolin Day, observed on the third Saturday in February, the World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan (WWF-Pakistan) called for urgent steps to save the declining population of the endangered species.

In Pakistan, particularly in the northeastern Potohar region, the species has disappeared from 80% of its former range, the



The Indian pangolin is the only pangolin species found in Pakistan

WWF said on Friday in a statement. While exact population estimates are challenging to determine, the overall population has drastically declined. According to the IUCN, other population models predict that the global Indian pangolin population may decrease by approximately 50% in the next 20 years.

Karachi, the country's commercial capital, is the hub of illegal trade of the species,

according to WWF.

Several cases of confiscation of pangolin scales and body parts have been reported in the city. Studies indicate that Pakistan is a transit route for the international smuggling of pangolin scales, primarily to China and Southeast Asia.

To save the pangolin population, WWF-Pakistan proposed penalties for poaching and illegal trade should be increased. Speaking about the signifi-

cance of the species, Muhammad Jamshed Iqbal Chaudhry, senior manager of research and conservation, WWF-Pakistan, said proposed reforestation projects and protection of pangolin habitats in key regions like the Potohar Plateau, Margalla Hills, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

"Scientific studies to assess pangolin population trends and distribution in Pakistan should be conducted," he added.

Anadolu Agency

India: Stampede kills at least 18 at train station

New Delhi, India - At least 18 people were killed and over 10 were injured in a stampede at a railway station in India's capital, New Delhi, late on Saturday as crowds rushed to catch trains to the world's largest religious congregation, the Maha Kumbh Mela.

Delhi's caretaker chief minister Atishi, who uses only one name, was the first official to confirm the death toll. She said the bodies had been taken to the capital's Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Narain Hospital in the capital. Mostly women and children were among the dead.

The incident occurred at about 8pm local time (1430 GMT) on two platforms as passengers were waiting to board trains to Prayagraj city, a temporary township created for the festival.

Authorities had reported 15 deaths before the revised toll.

"I can confirm 15 deaths at the hospital. They don't have any open injury. Most (likely died from) hypoxia or maybe some blunt injury but that would only be confirmed after an autopsy," Dr Ritu Saxena, deputy medical superintendent of Lok Nayak Hospital in New Delhi told AFP news agency earlier on Sunday.

Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said in a post on social media that he was 'extremely pained by the loss of lives due to stampede' at the New Delhi railway station.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that he was 'distressed' by the stampede. "I pray that the injured have a speedy recovery. The authorities are assisting all those who have been affected by this stampede," he wrote on X.

Railway Minister Ashwini



Passengers shove their way through a train window at New Delhi Railway Station following a stampede, in New Delhi on Saturday (ANI)

This incident once again highlights the failure of the Railways and the insensitivity of the government. The government should ensure that no one has to lose their life due to mismanagement and negligence

RAHUL GANDHI

Vaishnav said that an investigation has been ordered to find out what led to the stampede.

Opposition blames 'mismanagement'

Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the opposition in the lower house of India's parliament, deemed the incident a 'failure' on the part of the railways.

"The news of several people dying and many getting injured

due to stampede at New Delhi Railway Station is extremely sad and distressing," he said on X.

"This incident once again highlights the failure of the Railways and the insensitivity of the government," Gandhi said.

He added that better arrangements should have been made at the station, given the large number of devotees going to the Maha Kumbh Mela.

"The government and the ad-

ministration should ensure that no one has to lose their life due to mismanagement and negligence," the Congress party senior leader said.

At least 30 people were killed in a stampede during the six-week festival last month after tens of millions of Hindus gathered to bathe in sacred river waters.

According to Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Railway, KPS Malhotra, the incident occurred when a large number of passengers gathered on platform no. 14, where the Prayagraj Express was stationed. Additionally, delays in the departures of the Swatantrata Senani Express and Bhubaneswar Rajdhani led to further congestion at platforms 12, 13, and 14.

An eyewitness described the chaos, stating that the crowd came from both sides after an announcement about a train platform change, leading to the stampede. "There was no one to control the crowd... It was announced that the train coming on platform number 12 would now arrive on platform number 16. So, the crowd came from both sides, and a stampede occurred... some people were taken to the hospital..." he said.

Another eyewitness recounted the horror, saying that the crowd was beyond control. People from the administration and even NDRF personnel were there, but when the crowd exceeded the limit, it was impossible to manage them.

Agencies

Canada rejects Trump proposal to reintegrate Russia into G7

Munich, Germany - Canada on Saturday rejected US President Donald Trump's proposal to reinstate Russia in the G7, with Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly saying this will not happen.

"I'm telling the position of Canada, no way this will happen," Joly said, following a G7 meeting on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Germany.

Her remarks came amid ongoing discussions about Russia's role on the global stage, with Trump proposing its reintegration into the G7 and saying expelling Moscow 'was a mistake'.

However, Joly stressed that the G7's stance is unified and resolute, particularly in light of Russia's 'illegal invasion' of Ukraine.

Russia was part of the group of industrialised nations, previously called the G8, until its exclusion after it annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

Joly reaffirmed that the G7 continues to support Ukraine, which has been under attack by Russia since its full-scale war began over three years ago.

"We believe that it is fundamental to use the sanctions as a way to put more pressure on Russia.

"We need to make sure that ultimately, Ukrainians... are able to get just comprehensive and long-lasting peace," she said.

In addition to supporting Ukraine, Joly addressed Russia's increasing dependence on China, North Korea, and Iran to sustain its war effort.

"We also discussed the provision to Russia of dual-use assistance by China and of military



We need to make sure that ultimately, Ukrainians... are able to get just comprehensive and long-lasting peace

MELANIE JOLY

assistance by DPRK and Iran. And we condemn all the supporting these nations' aid to Moscow.

Regarding the peace talks for Ukraine, she said: "We need to make sure that the peace... is able to unite us."

She stressed that any peace deal must ensure long-term stability and avoid dividing the international community.

She confirmed that the G7 collectively agreed on the necessity of having Ukraine and European allies at the table. "Yes, we did," she said. Joly also announced that G7 will hold a meeting in Canada in Charlevoix, Quebec, on March 12-14.

Anadolu Agency

SNOW SCENERY IN LHASA



An aerial drone photo taken on Sunday shows the snow scenery in Lhasa, southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region (Xinhua)

Musk-led DOGE cancels \$21mn fund for 'voter turnout in India'

Washington, D.C., US - The US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by Elon Musk has announced cancelling a US\$21mn funding intended for 'voter turnout in India' on Saturday. In a post on X, the official DOGE handle listed the number of spendings by the US taxpayer that have been cancelled, including 'US\$21mn intended for voter turnout in India'.

"US taxpayer dollars were going to be spent on the following items, all of which have been cancelled," the Musk led department announced.

BJP's Amit Malviya took to his X to react to the announcement. "US\$21mn for voter turnout? This definitely is external interference in India's electoral process. Who gains from this? Not the ruling party for sure!" his post read.

Other funding cancelled for the department included, US\$10mn



Indian PM Narendra Modi met Elon Musk on Thursday in Washington, D.C.

for 'Mozambique voluntary medical male circumcision'. "US\$486mn to the 'Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening', including US\$22mn for an 'inclusive and participatory political process' in Moldova and US\$21mn for voter turnout in India," DOGE said.

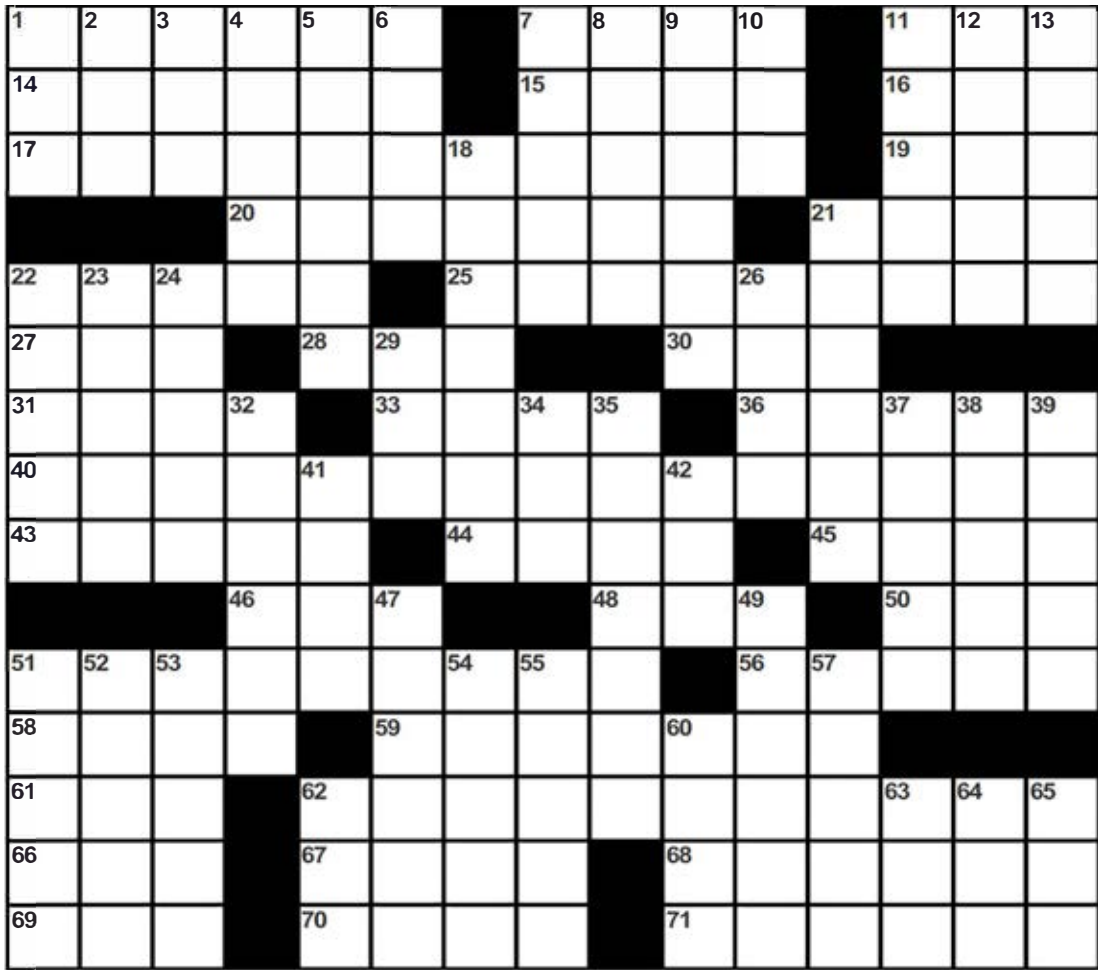
US\$29mn intended for 'strengthening the political land-

scape in Bangladesh' and US\$39mn for 'fiscal federalism' and 'biodiversity conservation' in Nepal was also cancelled.

Similarly, US\$1.5mn for 'voter confidence' in Liberia, US\$14mn for 'social cohesion' in Mali and US\$2.5mn for 'inclusive democracies in Southern Africa' were also cancelled by DOGE.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1) Not quite spherical
 - 7) St. Louis landmark
 - 11) English channel
 - 14) One who dips out water
 - 15) Word hidden in each of the theme entries
 - 16) "... we having fun yet?"
 - 17) Where those in debt go
 - 19) It can be deadly or mortal
 - 20) Gist
 - 21) Atomizer output
 - 22) Keep entertained
 - 25) Outstanding hockey feats
 - 27) _ Cruces, N.M.
 - 28) Coloring substance
 - 30) Min. divided by 60
 - 31) Burden of proof
 - 33) Brewer's equipment
 - 36) Guardhouses
 - 40) Secret teller's lead-in
 - 43) Meet away from prying eyes
 - 44) Alluring
 - 45) Leave slack-jawed
 - 46) Director Burton
 - 48) Disobeyed a zoo sign?
 - 50) "Andy Capp" cartoon-

- ist Smythe
 - 51) Show disrupter, possibly
 - 56) Pindar's last stanza, e.g.
 - 58) Cheese choice
 - 59) Tutor again
 - 61) Banned insecticide
 - 62) Nature personified
 - 66) Step in the right direction?
 - 67) Not in port
 - 68) Error
 - 69) McMahon and Harris
 - 70) Fork-tailed beach bird
 - 71) Does a slow burn
- DOWN**
- 1) _Wan Kenobi
 - 2) Blackout
 - 3) On, as a lamp
 - 4) Succulent healing plants
 - 5) Taunted
 - 6) Blows it
 - 7) Circus site
 - 8) Change in response to a stimulus
 - 9) Some editorial inserts
 - 10) 168 in a wk.
 - 11) Kind of cable?
 - 12) Lively
 - 13) Currency units
 - 18) Tries again

- 21) Some new breweries
- 22) Floating high in the sky
- 23) English country home
- 24) Exorbitant interest
- 26) Civil War side, briefly
- 29) Thou
- 32) Modus operandi
- 34) "Get it?"
- 35) Exempt, in a way
- 3 7) Foreword, for short
- 38) Stuck together
- 39) "The Playboy of the Western World" author
- 41) Auditory
- 42) White bread alternative
- 47) Down in the dumps
- 49) Trickery
- 51) Overhanging rock
- 52) Used a calculator
- 53) "Soap" family
- 54) Basic length measure
- 55) "... Frame"
- 57) Part of a cycle
- 60) Weaponry
- 62) "Welcome" site
- 63) _Victor
- 64) "The Rum_ Tugger" (song from "Cats")
- 65) "For_ ajolly ..."

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
Sometime today, the urge to connect with someone on a very deep level could cross your mind, and your heart. You already have someone in mind, but the Universe may have other plans for you. Stay open to new possibilities and don't turn down any offers to be introduced to someone new. You never know. This time might just be different.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
You're very close to your colleagues and neighbors. These people, and your friends, often feel like extended family to you. So when someone calls you and sounds rather plaintive, don't hesitate to use all your intellectual wiles to get the story out of them. They obviously need to talk or they wouldn't have contacted you. But some people have trouble accepting help even when they need it.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Stay on the straight and narrow today. Just because you see a shortcut it doesn't mean you should take it. Today is all about keeping your head down, working hard, and playing by the rules. Even though you've seen other people get ahead by cutting deals and cutting corners, don't get the wrong idea. Cheaters never prosper. The guilt alone will add so much stress to your life that any gains you make will be meaningless.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. Which polemical and lastingly influential book about writing and freedom was published in England in 1644 at the height of the English Civil War by a scholar and philosopher later known and celebrated more for poetry?
A. Oronoko
B. Some Thoughts Concerning Education
C. Leviathan
D. Areopagitica

02. Which is an official spoken language of China?
A. Pashto
B. Mandarin
C. Tamil
D. Messapian

03. Who choreographed (and directed) the 1972 film "Cabaret"?
A. Martha Graham
B. Jerome Robbins
C. Bob Fosse
D. Merce Cunningham

Answers: 1. D 2. B 3. C



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
You've done nothing but work, worry, and take care of business for days, so why not give yourself a night off? You've certainly had an array of offers, and some of them were quite appealing. Stop trying to resist and pick the one that most strikes your fancy. You know what they say about all work and no play? That applies to all worry and no play too. It's time to chill out.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
You want to socialize, but you probably don't have the energy to get dressed and go out. Find a happy medium. Order up a pizza, pull out some games, and invite some friends over for an impromptu party. It's the perfect evening to have some people over to your place. And when have you ever had to talk anyone into coming over? There's no doubt that your home is considered the gang's clubhouse.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
It's a misconception that in order to really know what's going on you have to be right in the middle of the action. What really gives you accurate insight is an outsider's perspective. Only then can you see things from all angles and understand the motives behind everyone's actions. Today, don't push to be a part of it all. Ride things out and observe.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
It doesn't take much to talk you into a change of scenery. So if someone suggests a trip to you, you'll have your schedule out and your boss on the phone in record time. And if there's a certain someone out there you'd like to spend some time alone with, the kind of time that doesn't involve a workplace, movie theater, or television set, this would also be the perfect time to plan it.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
The good news is that all your plans are coming together nicely now, and everything is humming along without a hitch. The bad news is that with less to keep you busy, you have a greater weakness for distraction. The frivolous stuff will catch your eye and could keep you from staying on your toes. It's important to integrate entertainment and fun into your life, but you also need to maintain balance. Have fun, but stay alert.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
Exactly how long have you been trying to help someone curtail their bad habits? Can you remember? Keep in mind you've been working so diligently on that project that it's also been a while since you've allowed yourself to have any fun. You've been trying as hard, and in some cases harder, than they have. Your job now is to cut them loose. And don't worry. They'll manage just fine.



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
In this new push of yours to take more control over your future, don't forget that a big part of being industrious is calling on other people to help you. While you shouldn't depend on others to do things for you, there's nothing wrong with reaching out and using your connections. After all, if you don't use it, you lose it. Call in a few favors, and be sure to make it clear that you know how to show the proper amount of gratitude.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Someone's looking for an intriguing influence or inspiration, and given your stature in the group, you fit the bill perfectly. A surge of confident energy hits you, and it helps you realize how much influence you truly have. Important people are paying attention to you now, and you might not be noticing how many questions they're suddenly asking. There are plans in the works and your name keeps popping up.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
You're definitely hardworking, that's for sure. No matter what you're asked to do, you'll find the energy and time to get it done. Don't let anyone's jealousy stop you from accomplishing what you've set out to do either. It's not your fault you know how to prioritize, organize, and finish things, and all the while grab the attention of the higher-ups.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

C	R	E	G
A	I	L	O
C	U	E	A
H	A	T	R

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

SOLUTION
20-25 words: Excellent,
15-20 words: Very good,
10-15 words: Good,
5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

			6	2		5	9	
1	9						6	
8		6			9	3		
		2		6				7
9			3	4	2			8
5				7		9		
		8	1			7		6
	4						8	9
	1	9		8	6			

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

5	3	2	9	8	4	6	1	7
6	8	1	7	5	2	3	4	9
9	4	7	3	6	1	8	5	2
3	2	6	1	7	8	4	9	5
8	5	9	2	4	3	1	7	6
7	1	4	3	9	6	5	2	8
4	7	1	7	1	4	7	1	4
2	9	8	4	3	7	6	1	5
1	6	5	8	2	9	7	3	4



Man United winger Diallo to miss rest of season with ankle injury

Manchester, England - Manchester United winger Amad Diallo could miss the remainder of the Premier League season after suffering an ankle ligament injury in training.

The 22-year-old from the Ivory Coast has nine goals and seven assists and has been a bright spot for United in an otherwise poor season with Ruben Amorim's team languishing 13th in the league table ahead of Sunday's game against Tottenham Hotspur.

Diallo, who signed a new five-year contract last month, will be reassessed but is expected to miss at least the next several weeks.

"Extremely disappointed to be writing this message in such a crucial time of the season," Diallo wrote in an Instagram post. "Unfortunately I will be out for some time with an injury. I will come back stronger than ever!! Time to support the boys from the outside. Still loads to play for."

REDS SURVIVE BIG SCARE



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah celebrates after scoring from the penalty spot

Liverpool beat Wolves to restore seven-point lead at top of Premier League table

Liverpool, England - Liverpool extended their lead on top of the Premier League to seven points with a trickier-than-expected 2-1 win over lowly Wolverhampton Wanderers on Sunday courtesy of goals from Luis Diaz and Mohamed Salah.

The Reds looked to be cruising at 2-0 after Diaz bundled in on 15 minutes and won a penalty later in the half for strike partner Salah to convert with ease - a 23rd league goal for the league's

two above the drop zone.

Although Liverpool were far from their best, especially in a nervy second half, victory was a huge relief after a week of unusual slip-ups including an FA Cup defeat by second-tier Plymouth and a last-gasp equaliser for Everton against them in the league.

"We'd love to dominate for the full 90 minutes but it is the Premier League and Wolves can punish you and create dangerous moments against you. It says a lot we kept fighting and kept going and got the three points," said Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk.

In the first half, the Reds looked comfortable after Diaz slotted home when Toti Gomes' attempted clearance dropped kindly for him.

The speedy Colombian was then brought down by Wolves goalkeeper Jose Sa for Salah to do what he always does - score easily from the spot - in the 37th minute.

Cunha was by far Wolves' best player and had put a free kick just over before his glorious effort from outside the box had the away fans dreaming of a comeback.

"We just managed to dig deep," Liverpool defender Andy Robertson said. "The second half was a slog ... everyone gets nervous. But it's a massive win for us and another game down."

We'd love to dominate for the full 90 minutes but it is the Premier League and Wolves can punish you. It says a lot we kept fighting and kept going and got the three points

VIRGIL VAN DIJK, LIVERPOOL

leading marksman.

But Wolves, fighting for their lives near the bottom of the table, gave them a few frights and punished Liverpool for a sloppy second half when Matheus Cunha curled a low shot brilliantly past Alisson in the 67th minute.

In an edgy finale at a relatively subdued Anfield, Arne Slot's men held on for the win, taking them to 60 points and still on track for the Premier League title with nearest rivals Arsenal on 53. Both teams have 13 games left.

Wolves are 17th on 19 points,

We knew it, says Guardiola as Marmoush announces himself with hat-trick

Manchester, England - Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola said newcomer Omar Marmoush's hat-trick on Saturday did not surprise him after the dazzling season the 26-year-old striker had been having in the Bundesliga.

While all the pre-game talk had been about City's Erling Haaland and Newcastle United's Alexander Isak, two of the league's most scintillating goalscorers, Marmoush stole the show, bagging the first hat-trick of his career in City's 4-0 Premier League thrashing of the Newcastle United.

"We knew it," Guardiola said of the striker signed last month from Eintracht Frankfurt for 59 million pounds (\$74.25 million).

"So in Germany, in Frankfurt, he makes a good number. Against Orient (City's 2-1 FA Cup win last Saturday), had three clear chances, could not score. So we knew sooner or



Manchester City's Omar Marmoush scores against Newcastle United on Saturday

later, the dynamic in the group was good and the performance was good, he could show what he is. Hopefully he can handle the compliments."

Even more impressive was the fact that the Egyptian bagged

his hat-trick in 13 first-half minutes, making his mark in England after scoring 15 Bundesliga goals already this season, to sit second behind Bayern Munich's Harry Kane in the German scoring chart.

Asked how Marmoush so seamlessly hit the ground running at City, Guardiola said: "Listen, it's simple, the answer. When you play good, everyone adapts quickly.

"When (the team doesn't)

play good, you need time. It's a guy who likes to attack space to help to create. But when we play in the way we played today, everyone is better."

Marmoush said his first goal in the 19th minute, a lob over the head of the onrushing Martin Dubravka, was his favourite.

"Looking at the replay (of the first goal), I was celebrating and feeling extremely happy," said Marmoush, who tucked the match ball under his arm after the final whistle.

"Thank God for scoring the hat-trick and that we won. That's the most important thing."

City keeper Ederson made history with that goal. His long chipped pass to Marmoush gave him more assists - six - than any other goalkeeper in Premier League in history.

"We need the pass, we need the movement, we need many things, and today we have it," Guardiola said.



Everton's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates his goal against Crystal Palace

Alcaraz's late strike hands Everton victory against Crystal Palace

London, England - Everton's Premier League revival under manager David Moyes continued on Saturday as they beat Crystal Palace 2-1 at Selhurst Park thanks to a late winner from January loan signing Carlos Alcaraz.

Moyes' side overcame any fatigue from their dramatic draw with Liverpool on Wednesday and were able to profit twice from some poor Palace defending, with striker Beto bagging his second goal in as many games.

The win pushed Everton up two places to 13th in the table and marked Moyes' fourth win in six league games since returning as manager in early January. They are now equal with Palace on 30 points.

"I think Wednesday took so much out of us, today we were sort of fighting," Moyes said. "It took a really resilient performance to make sure we didn't concede a second goal"

mance to make sure we didn't concede a second goal."

It was another poor home performance for Palace who, despite finding some form in

recent months, have still only won two of their league matches at Selhurst Park all season.

"It's a very disappointing result," said Palace manager Oliver Glasner. "Now it's again up to us to learn from it and improve."

Palace were the better side

Ruiz winner helps unbeaten PSG edge Toulouse

Toulouse, France - Fabian Ruiz's second-half strike secured a 1-0 win for Paris St Germain at Toulouse on Saturday, extending the visitors' unbeaten run as well as their lead at the top of Ligue 1.

The Parisians, who have not lost in the league all season, top the table with 56 points from 22 games, 10 clear of second-placed Olympique de Marseille, while Toulouse are 10th on 27.

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Lee Kang-In, Desire Doue and Lucas Hernandez all had chances to break the deadlock in the first half as Toulouse struggled to find their rhythm.

The visitors finally found the



Paris St Germain's Fabian Ruiz celebrates his goal against Toulouse

net seven minutes after the break when Willian Pacheco's header hit the crossbar and the rebound fell to Fabian Ruiz, who slotted home from close range.

"On the wings, it was hard to find space. We wanted to keep possession, we had chances and in the end one goal was enough," said Ruiz. "No matter where I am playing, what I want is to keep competing and do my best," he added.

PSG had several chances to extend their lead, going closest when Bradley Barcola's shot was brilliantly saved by substitute goalkeeper Kjetil Haug after Guillaume Restes was forced off

through injury late in the first half.

The hosts struggled to create any real opportunities, but held firm at the back to deny PSG another goal.

"I always want more. I think the team was competitive and we played a very interesting match," PSG boss Luis Enrique said.

PSG are the fourth French top flight team to avoid defeat in their first 22 matches, but Luis Enrique said going the season unbeaten was not among their targets.

"The objective is to win the league, if we can achieve that, it's perfect. There is no objective to remain undefeated," he said.



Bayern Leverkusen winger Jeremie Frimpong's header crashes onto the bar in the match against Bayern Munich on Saturday

RELENTLESS YET GOALLESS

Bayern survive Leverkusen attack to share points in top-of-table clash

Leverkusen, Germany - Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich had to survive some relentless pressing from champions Bayer Leverkusen to escape with a 0-0 draw in their top-of-the-table clash on Saturday and maintain their eight-point advantage at the summit.

Leverkusen, in second place and desperate to cut Bayern's lead, completely outplayed the visitors in the first half, with their high-pressing game wreaking havoc in the Bayern defence.

Despite playing without a centre forward, having surprisingly left both Victor Boniface and Patrik Schick on the bench, Xabi Alonso's team looked far sharper than Bayern, who had travelled to

Glasgow midweek for a 2-1 win over Celtic in their Champions League playoff first leg.

They twice hit the woodwork through Jeremie Frimpong and Nathan Tella, with

derliga since 1992 when stat collection started, that Bayern were without a shot on goal for an entire first half.

It was much of the same after the break, with Leverkusen

defence to keep the hosts at bay.

Bayern's Manuel Neuer, making his 550th appearance for the club across all competitions, came to the rescue in stoppage time, blocking Amine Adli's point-blank shot before Wirtz fired wide on the rebound.

"We have the feeling that we played a fantastic game," Alonso told a press conference. "The way we have played is our best game against Bayern this year, even last year."

"We have done almost everything right but we missed the goal. We created enough chances. A fantastic performance. The other part is the result with which we are not that

The way we have played is our best game against Bayern this year, even last year. We've done almost everything right but missed the goal

XABI ALONSO

Florian Wirtz, who tried his luck from 50 metres out with a looping shot, orchestrated almost every attack that kept Bayern pinned in their own half.

It was the first time in the Bun-

pressing high, coming close again with a Tella header in the 66th, and the Bavarians, who did not have a single effort towards goal for more than 70 minutes, working overtime in

happy. But that's football.

"There are still a lot of points to be played," Alonso said, when asked whether the title race had been largely decided after his team failed to cut Bayern's lead. "We are still in all three competitions."

Leverkusen, who also had a golden chance in second half stoppage-time through Amine Adli, are in second place, eight points behind Bayern.

"Today they earned the right to have the ball. They pressed really well," said Bayern coach Vincent Kompany. "So we had to defend. I have to give a massive compliment to my team."

Bayern, who were in action in midweek with a 2-1 win over Celtic in the Champions League playoff first leg in Glasgow, did not have an effort towards the Leverkusen goal for more than 70 minutes, despite having netted 65 goals in 21 league games prior to Saturday.

"This for us is a point that we can take home and focus on the next game," Kompany said. "Today they earned the right to put us under pressure. They did everything right. We will definitely learn from this game."

Sorloth equaliser rescues 10-men Atletico against Celta Vigo

Madrid, Spain - Atletico Madrid wasted a golden opportunity to go top in LaLiga as they were held to a 1-1 draw at home by visitors Celta Vigo on Saturday.

Atletico played almost the entire game a man short after midfielder Pablo Barrios was shown a straight red card for a reckless studs-up tackle on Pablo Duran in the fourth minute.

The red card was Barrios' second in less than a month, as he was sent off for an almost identical challenge on Jeremie Frimpong early in Atletico's 2-1 Champions League win over Bayer Leverkusen three weeks ago.

Substitute Iago Aspas fired home a 68th-minute penalty after Robin Le Normand had fouled Borja Iglesias inside the box but forward Alexander Sorloth came off the bench to finish off a counter attack in the 81st minute and rescue a valuable point for the home side.

Real top the standings with 51 points after being held to a 1-1 draw at Osasuna earlier on Saturday, one point ahead of Atletico in second. With a game in hand, Barcelona are third on 48 points and will face Rayo Vallecano on Monday.

"When you are down to 10 men so early it's very difficult," Atletico's Koke told DAZN. "The team tried every-

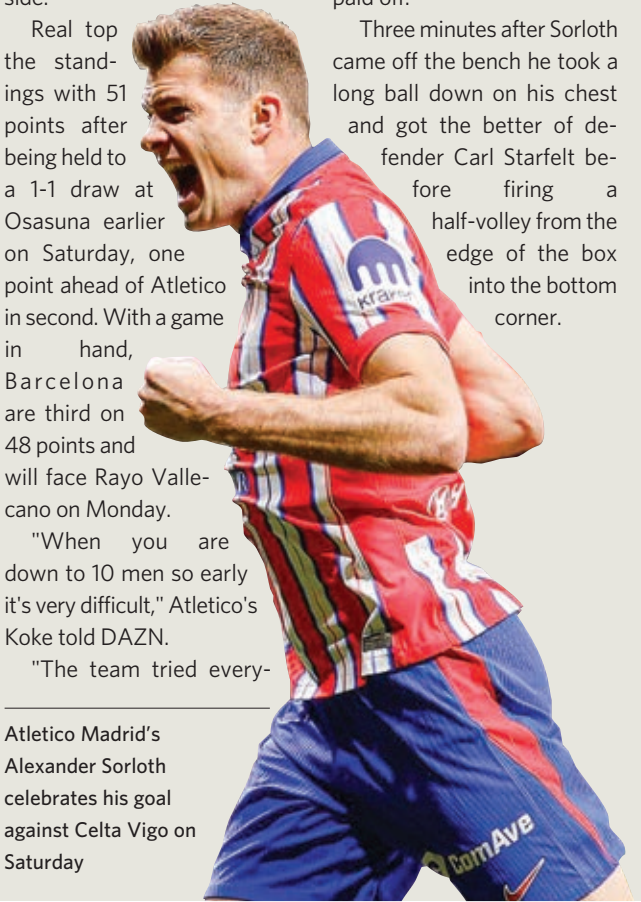
thing, we defended well, knew how to endure suffering. Sure, we wanted to take advantage of Real's draw with a win here, but we'll take the point. It isn't that bad as we're still in the fight for the title."

Despite being reduced to 10 men and Celta dominating possession, Atletico looked the more dangerous of the two sides with Giuliano Simeone and Julian Alvarez wasting great chances on counter attacks.

Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak was inspired between the posts denying efforts by Fernando Lopez and Duran as Celta were livelier after the break, but there was little he could do to deny Aspas' bullet strike into the top corner from the spot, after Le Normand had stamped on Iglesias's foot in the 68th minute.

Manager Diego Simeone made three substitutions in an attempt to give Atletico the spark they were missing and it paid off.

Three minutes after Sorloth came off the bench he took a long ball down on his chest and got the better of defender Carl Starfelt before firing a half-volley from the edge of the box into the bottom corner.



Atletico Madrid's Alexander Sorloth celebrates his goal against Celta Vigo on Saturday



Lazio peg back leaders Napoli with late draw

Lazio's Boulaye Dia celebrates his goal against Napoli

Rome, Italy - A last-gasp goal by substitute Boulaye Dia earned Lazio a 2-2 draw against visitors Napoli on Saturday, with Antonio Conte's Serie A leaders now at risk of being knocked off top spot later this weekend.

Napoli, on 56 points, are two points above second-placed Inter Milan, who can move top when they visit Juventus, in fifth, on Sunday.

Napoli extended their unbeaten league run to 10 games, but the 2023 champions have now drawn the last three, failing to win three games in a row for the first time this season.

They have also not won any of their last five games against Lazio in Serie A.

Lazio, who eliminated Napoli

in the Coppa Italia last 16 in early December before securing a 1-0 league win in Naples three days later, are fourth with 46 points.

In a fast-paced encounter, Gustav Isaksen put Lazio in front after six minutes with an excellent shot from distance.

The Denmark forward collected a clearance and fired home a powerful strike that went in after brushing the underside of the crossbar.

Giacomo Raspadori equalised for Napoli seven minutes later, firing the ball through the legs of Lazio keeper Ivan Provedel after a Romelu Lukaku pass.

That was Napoli's only shot on goal in the first half.

Their second and final shot on target in the game came after the

break when Lukaku's low attempt from the edge of the box was denied by Provedel.

Napoli took the lead in the 64th minute after Lazio defender Adam Marusic put the ball into his own goal, and Lazio midfielder Mattia Zaccagni responded by finding the net with a stunning overhead kick three minutes later but his effort was ruled out for offside.

However, Dia levelled for the hosts in the 87th, sending a low shot into the far corner.

Lazio, who finished top of the Europa League standings, winning all but two games, next travel to lowly Venezia in Serie A on Feb. 22, before visiting Inter in Coppa Italia quarter-finals on Feb. 25.



Santiago Gimenez

Gimenez goal hands wasteful Milan win against Verona

Milan, Italy - A wasteful AC Milan breathed a sigh of relief as they secured a narrow 1-0 Serie A win at home against Hellas Verona on Saturday, courtesy of a late Santiago Gimenez goal.

The gloom that had set in at the San Siro lifted in the 75th minute when Gimenez headed home after a ball into the box was cleverly directed into his path by Rafael Leao.

The result put Milan in seventh place with 41 points, five behind Lazio in fourth. Verona are 15th.

Milan dominated possession and created chances in the first half, but could not open the scoring against a defensive Verona, leading to growing frustration among both supporters and players.

Ancelotti angry with referee's decisions as Real held at Osasuna

Pamplona, Spain - Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti were left fuming over several referee decisions in their 1-1 draw at Osasuna on Saturday that extended their winless LaLiga run to three games.

The Italian boss criticised the VAR for not intervening in three possible penalties for what he thought were fouls on Vinicius Jr and Jude Bellingham and a handball inside the box by Alejandro Catena.

Already left annoyed after Bellingham was shown a straight red by Jose Munuera Montero in the first-half, Ancelotti was further angered early in the second half when the referee awarded Osasuna a penalty after he was called by the VAR to review Eduardo Camavinga's stomp on Ante Budimir's foot inside Real's box. Croatian striker Budimir duly scored from the spot to cancel out Kylian Mbappe's first-half opener.

"I believe there were things that have happened in these last three games that everyone has seen and I don't want to add more, because I'm looking forward to being on the bench in the next game," Ancelotti told a press conference on Saturday.

"The referee booked me after I told him that there was a handball in Osasuna's penalty area



Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham was shown a straight red for dissent

and that he should have gone and check it on the VAR... They must have turned on the VAR later..."

Ancelotti also complained about the red card shown to Bellingham in the 39th minute, arguing that the English midfielder had not insulted the referee during one of the many arguments Real Madrid players

had with the official during the game.

Ancelotti's frustration adds more fuel to Real's clashes with refereeing, after the club complained against the Spanish league's match officials earlier in February.

Real earned a point to stay on top of LaLiga in what is shaping up to be a tight title race.

OMAN WIN THRILLER

Hosts beat Namibia by two wickets to go second in World Cup League 2 standings

Muscat - Oman avenged their earlier defeat to Namibia in the ongoing ICC Men's Cricket World Cup League 2 tri-series with a tense two-wicket victory at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat on Sunday.

The win, secured in a low-scoring contest dominated by spinners, propelled Oman to second place in the standings with 18 points from 15 matches, trailing leaders USA (20 from 15), while Canada sits third with 16 points from 12 games.

Namibia's decision to bat first backfired as they were left reeling at 19/4 within the first 10 overs. Oman's spinners exploited the conditions brilliantly, with left-arm orthodox bowler Shakeel Ahmed leading the charge once again. Continuing his fine form, he picked up 4/25, adding

to his four-wicket haul in the previous game against the USA.

Jay Odedra set the tone early, trapping Zane Green (6) lbw before dismissing JP Kotze (1) soon after. Shakeel then dismantled the middle order, bowling Jan Frylinck (9) and later returning to clean up tail-ender Jan-Izak de Villiers (1).

Namibia captain Gerhard Erasmus (15 off 43) and Jan Nicol Loftie-Eaton (30 off 54) briefly revived the innings with a 35-run fifth-wicket stand, but Aamir Kaleem (2/16) broke the partnership by dismissing Erasmus.

From 54/5, Namibia continued to lose wickets at regular intervals.

Siddharth Bukkapatnam (1/26) and leg-spinner Samay Shrivastava (1/4) ensured that all ten wickets fell to spin, as



Oman players celebrate the fall of a Namibian wicket

Namibia were bundled out for just 96 in 33.1 overs.

Chasing a modest 97, Oman started confidently with a 42-run opening partnership between skipper Jatinder Singh (14 off 25 balls) and Aamir Kaleem (21 off

33). The pair looked in control until Erasmus (5/34) broke the stand by removing Kaleem in the 10th over.

Four balls later, Bernard Scholtz (2/31) dismissed Jatinder, triggering a collapse that saw

Oman slump from 42/1 to 87/8. Erasmus ran through the middle order with a brilliant spell, trapping Hammad Mirza (4) lbw, and removing Sufyan Mehmood (0) with Wasim Ali sent back for 10 by Scholtz.

Vinayak Shukla (18 off 19) played a crucial hand, striking a boundary and a six to ease the pressure before falling to JJ Smit in the 19th over—the only wicket to fall to pace in the match.

With Oman still needing 16

runs, Erasmus struck twice in quick succession, dismissing Shakeel Ahmed (6) and Jay Odedra to leave the hosts on the brink at 87/8. However, Hashir Dafedar (5* off 19) and Siddharth Bukkapatnam (4* off 2) held their nerve, guiding Oman home in 22.4 overs. Dafedar struck a crucial boundary with six needed, and four byes sealed the win for the hosts.

Kaleem was named the player of the match for his all-round performance.

Oman now take on the USA in the concluding game of the tri-series on Tuesday. A win for Duleep Mendis' men, who defeated the USA by seven wickets last Wednesday, will propel them to the top of the table.

BRIEF SCORES: Namibia 96 all out in 33.1 overs (Jan Nicol Loftie-Eaton 30, Gerhard Erasmus 15; Shakeel Ahmed 4/25, Aamir Kaleem 2/16, Jay Odedra 2/24) lost to Oman 100/8 in 22.4 overs (Aamir Kaleem 21, Vinayak Shukla 18; Gerhard Erasmus 5/34, Bernard Scholtz 2/31).

Anisimova wins Qatar Open title

Doha, Qatar - Amanda Anisimova claimed her first WTA 1000 title when she beat Jelena Ostapenko 6-4 6-3 in the final of the Qatar Open on Saturday which will see the American break into the top 20 for the first time in her career.

Ranked 41 in the world, Anisimova also became the lowest-ranked player to win the tournament as she beat six top-40 opponents en route to her third singles title.

The American was ranked as low as 359 in 2023 when she took a break from the game due to burnout as it took a toll on her mental health but the 23-year-old has been on the rise since her comeback and is set to move up to 18th in the rankings.

Anisimova is only the second American to win the title, following in the footsteps of Monica Seles in 2002, while Ostapenko has now finished runner-up in Doha for a second time having



Amanda Anisimova celebrates with the Qatar Open trophy on Saturday

also lost in the 2016 final.

"There's been a lot of hard work, a lot of tears and a lot of good moments," Anisimova said.

"With tennis you kind of experience it all but that's also why I love it. There have been a lot of

challenges the last few weeks. I'm very proud of myself and happy with how I've dealt with them."

After a spot of rain briefly paused play in the opening set, Anisimova broke first to lead 3-2 but that only fired up Ostapenko

as she won nine straight points to go 4-3 up. But Anisimova regained her advantage, using her backhand to good effect and broke Ostapenko again before she served out the set as the Latvian dropped a set for the first time in the tournament.

Ostapenko had the opportunity to go 2-0 up in the second but failed to convert break points and as she took out her frustrations at her team, Anisimova duly broke early to take a 2-1 lead and leave her opponent fuming during the changeover.

Ostapenko then asked a member of her team to leave her box after which she won the next seven points but she lost her momentum after another rain delay which lasted 25 minutes as Anisimova went 5-3 up.

With Ostapenko serving to stay in the match, Anisimova had two championship points and she sealed the title on her second with a devastating backhand.

Serbia's Medjedovic stuns Medvedev in Marseille

Marseille, France - Serbian Hamad Medjedovic had little trouble handling No. 1-seed Daniil Medvedev of Russia, capturing a 6-3, 6-2 upset on Saturday in the semifinals of the Open 13 Provence in Marseille, France.

Medjedovic had zero wins against top-10 opponents before downing Medvedev, who sits at eighth in the world rankings. It took only 72 minutes for the 21-year-old to pull off the stunning victory, in which he collected seven aces and saved 3 of 5 break points.

France's Ugo Humbert, the No. 2 seed, will collide with Medjedovic in the final.

Humbert put together a straight-set win of his own, taking 29 of 35 first-serve points en route to a 6-4, 6-4 victory



Hamad Medjedovic

over Zizou Bergs of Belgium.

At the Argentina Open in Buenos Aires, fifth-seeded Argentine Francisco Cerundolo coasted to a 6-2, 6-4 win over Spaniard Pedro Martinez in the semifinal.

Cerundolo had eight aces while Martinez had zero, with the former also saving all seven break points he faced.

Joao Fonseca of Brazil is also headed to the final after prevailing 7-6 (3), 5-7, 6-1 against Serbia's Laslo Djere. It was tied 1-1 in the third set before Djere completely collapsed.

At Delray Beach Open, No. 7-seed Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia wasn't bothered by a hostile environment and came away with a 7-6 (3), 6-3 upset of third-seeded American Alex Michelsen in semifinal action in Delray Beach, Fla.

Kecmanovic was down 5-4 in the first set but managed to rally back. He then raced out to a 3-0 lead in the second set to put Michelsen to bed.

Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, the No. 8 seed, ousted Italy's Matteo Arnaldi, the No. 4 seed, 6-4, 6-4 in the other semifinal.

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Fire and ice

BOCCA NUOVA

It's a story of fire and ice in Sicily as lava spews from a snowy Mount Etna. An explosive eruption of lava is emerging from a fracture at the base of the Bocca Nuova crater, cutting the side of the volcano in two. Lava and ash emissions from the volcano increased on Monday evening, primarily from the summit craters

Europe's most active volcano has been putting on a stunning lava show but what does it mean for travellers?

Mount Etna, the tallest and most active volcano in Europe, is currently erupting, leaving travellers bound for the Italian island of Sicily worried.

The latest eruption began on 11 February, sending a plume of ash and lava into the air visible from miles around. The eruption is from the volcano's south-east crater, called Bocca Nuova, meaning 'new mouth'. A 3km river of lava is flowing out of the crater.

During previous eruptions, nearby towns have been covered in black volcanic ash however this eruption has caused minimal disruption.

Catania airport stands at the foot of Mount Etna, giving departing and arriving passengers a spectacular view of the volcano.

Catania-Fontanarossa Airport, also known as Vincenzo Bellini Airport, on the island's east coast, is Sicily's most popular airport with international tourists.

On 12 February, part of Catania airport was closed due to reduced visibility from the ash. However, the airport has not been closed since and flights are currently operating as normal.

Despite this, the airport's management has advised passengers to check their flight status with their airline before leaving home.

You can check airline's apps or websites for the most up to date information, as well as their social media channels. Also keep an eye on the email account with which you made the booking as your airline or booking platform may contact you to advise you of changes.

In case Catania airport flights are disrupted again, airlines are required to offer you another flight or a refund is a flight is cancelled or delayed by more than three hours. However, this is only when they could have prevented the disruption. In the case of a volcanic eruption, it is not their fault.

But in most cases airlines will still endeavour to get passengers to their final destination. It's always wise to have travel insurance as you may be able to claim back for unexpected expenses.

Is it safe to travel to Sicily when Mount Etna is erupting? Yes, it is still safe to travel to Sicily, even when Mount Etna is erupting.

Local authorities and residents are used to dealing with Mount Etna eruptions. For the last five years, it has been erupting multiple times every year. Despite this, tourism to Sicily has only been on the rise.

Where is Mount Etna and is it dangerous?

Mount Etna is on the east coast of the Italian island of Sicily. It is Europe's most active volcano. Although Mt Etna erupts frequently, lava has not reached nearby towns since the 1800s.

Etna more than 200 craters and when one of these does erupt, black volcanic ash lands in the city of Catania, as its foot, and the many surrounding towns and villages. This is inconvenient to residents but usually not a problem for visitors.

Even during an eruption, there are many hiking trails and paths that are still safe, though it is a legal requirement to go up with a qualified mountain guide.

Courtesy: euronews.com



What is Bocca Nuova?

Bocca Nuova (New Mouth) is the westernmost summit crater of Etna volcano. It formed in 1968 as a small pit crater on the summit crater cone. It gradually increased in size and depth over the years. The last major eruption from Bocca Nuova occurred in 1999, when lava filled the crater and overspilled onto the western flank of Mt. Etna.

The new eruption of Etna began on the evening of February 8 from a fracture that opened at the base of the Bocca Nuova Crater and more precisely between this crater and the neighbour South East. From this new vent, without particular signs of 'agitation', a fairly liquid and fast lava flow has come out that is stretching on the western side of the volcano. Judging from the few photos that were taken from Bronte and Belpasso, it seems really close to the piedmont towns, but fortunately it is only a photographic perspective... The danger is far away.

Mount Etna,





2025 BERLINALE



Tilda Swinton received the Honorary Golden Bear, recognising her lifetime achievement.

The Berlin International Film Festival kicked off on February 13 with a new Tom Tykwer drama and a tribute to Tilda Swinton, as well as Timothee Chalamet among many other red carpet stars

BEAR HUG



A scene from 'Yunan,' by Ameer Fakher Eldin



Robert Pattinson confronts his double in Bong Joon Ho's 'Mickey 17'

The 75th Berlin International Film Festival, which runs from February 13-23, began with the world premiere of *The Light*, by Tom Tykwer.

The German filmmaker behind *Run Lola Run* (1998) and the series *Babylon Berlin* returns with a drama starring Lars Eidinger and Nicolette Krebitz. It depicts a middle-class family whose routine is upturned when a housekeeper from Syria enters their lives.

During the opening event, Tilda Swinton received the Honorary Golden Bear, recognising her lifetime achievement. The Scottish actor has attended the Berlinale many times over the years, whether as jury president in 2009 or to accompany her films — 26 of which have been featured at the film festival.

Edward Berger spoke in her honor at the ceremony. The Oscar-nominated director of *Conclave* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* is currently working on a Netflix production starring Swinton, titled *The Ballad of a Small Player*.

The competition's international jury were also introduced at the opening gala. US director Todd Haynes (*Carol*, *I'm Not There*) presided over the international jury. His fellow jurors were Chinese star Fan Bingbing, German filmmaker and actor Maria Schrader, Moroccan-French director Nabil Ayouch, German costume designer Bina Daigeler, Argentine filmmaker Rodrigo Moreno and US critic and podcast host Amy Nicholson.

The seven-member jury have selected this year's Golden and Silver Bear winners, which will be awarded on February 22.

While the entire public program features nearly 250 films presented across different sections, the main competition comprises 19 films, with 26 countries

represented through those works.

Former Berlinale winners returning to the competition include Romanian filmmaker Radu Jude, presenting *Kontinental '25*. He won the Golden Bear in 2021 with *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*. Korean director Hong Sang-soo, who has collected several Silver Bears over the past few years, returns with *What Does that Nature Say to You*.

Two Chinese films are making their world debuts within the competition: *Girls on Wire*, directed by Vivian Qu, and *Living the Land*, directed by Huo Meng.

There is only one documentary in the main competition, *Timestamp*, by Kateryna Gornostai. It provides insight into Ukraine's school life following Russia's full-scale invasion of the country.

Stars expected to descend

Competition films that will bring celebrities to Berlin include Richard Linklater's *Blue Moon*, starring Ethan Hawke, Margaret Qualley and Andrew Scott. The US filmmaker won a Silver Bear for best director for both *Before Sunrise* (1995) and *Boyhood* (2014).

If I Had Legs I'd Kick You, by Mary Bronstein, stars Rose Byrne and A\$AP Rocky. *The Ice Tower*, directed by Lucile Hadzihalilovic, features French star Marion Cotillard. As the lead actress in Michel Franco's *Dreams*, Jessica Chastain is also expected in Berlin.

The Berlinale Special is another film festival section that promises star power and red carpet galas. Bong Joon Ho, the award-winning filmmaker of *Parasite*, will be in Berlin for the German

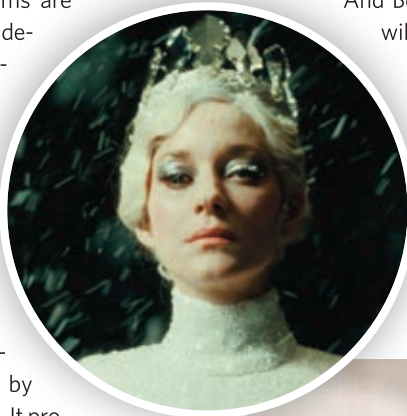
premiere of his new sci-fi black comedy, *Mickey 17*, starring Robert Pattinson.

Timothee Chalamet is also expected at the festival to celebrate the opening of *A Complete Unknown*, in which he portrays Bob Dylan.

The festival will be welcoming Euphoria star Jacob Elordi, who will be accompanying Justin Kurzel's TV series, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. And Benedict Cumberbatch will be in Berlin too, for the European premiere of *The Thing with Feathers*.

Marion Cotillard in 'The Ice

Marion Cotillard in 'The Ice Tower'



The Berlinale's new director, Tricia Tuttle, posing with a freshly created Golden Bear trophy

Tower Marion Cotillard in 'The Ice

Beyond the glitzy red carpet events, the festival is also putting the spotlight on different current and historical events.

With the film festival taking place 80 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, screenings of Claude Lanzmann's monumental *Shoah* (1985) is part of the special programme, as well as a new documentary revisiting the groundbreaking work that revolutionised the representation of the Holocaust in cinema, titled *All I Had Was Nothingness*, by Guillaume Ribot.

My Undesirable Friends: Part I - Last Air in Moscow is a documentary about intellectuals being driven in to exile under Russia's current regime. *Das Deutsche Volk* revisits the racist shootings in Hanau in 2020. And *A Letter to*

David is a cinematic letter to Hamas hostage David Cunio, who is still detained in Gaza.

Compared to Cannes and Venice, Berlin has always been considered the most political of Europe's major film festivals.

"People often ask us if we are a political festival. And yes, while I'd say we are a social festival, politics is in our DNA. Berlin is a city steeped in history. We do not shy away from this," said festival director Tricia Tuttle, ahead of this year's event, the first edition under her leadership.

Last year, criticism of Israel's policies during the awards' ceremony — in particular by the Israeli and Palestinian directors of the documentary *No Other Land* — had led to accusations of anti-semitism by some German politicians.

With the festival being largely publicly funded, Tuttle is now facing the challenge of satisfying the requirements of German lawmakers, all while allowing artists to express themselves freely.

The US-born curator said at the presentation of the programme that "lots of filmmakers from Arab countries have approached us over the last weeks, just to make sure the festival is a space for open dialogue and discourse."

"It was a challenge, let's be honest. But this year has been really challenging. It's been challenging for every festival. We're living in a world that's very divisive and divided and [in which] discourse is not always friendly and open," she said, adding that the process of putting together the programme with the festival team was nevertheless "really joyous and pleasurable, and a real privilege."

Beyond the political debates, one of Tuttle's missions is to revitalise the Berlin festival through a modern and invigorating program.