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27 human trafficking cases reported in '24

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) recorded 27 human trafficking cases in 2024, all involving expatriates, and reiterated its commitment to supporting victims with social and psychological assistance.

At a media briefing on Wednesday, the ministry stated that victims are entitled to aid while residing in Oman, with some allowed to work in supervised environments. Efforts are also underway to update laws and regulations related to human trafficking.

MoSD also announced a new programme aimed at supporting the elderly in Muscat, Dhofar and North Batinah. The first phase of the programme will focus on enhancing home care services through three specialised teams, each equipped with two mobile units staffed by a physiotherapist, social worker, occupational specialist and nurse. "It will also ensure that all necessary medical equipment is provided free of charge," said Hamoud bin Mur-



Hamoud bin Murradal al Shabibi

ELDERLY CARE
Currently 8,710 elderly served, including 46 at Social Welfare Home in Rustaq

CHILD PROTECTION
2,973 abuse cases in 2024; 72 children in protection homes

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE
RO11.986mn disbursed in 2024 benefiting 102,167



H E Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar

New programme announced to support the elderly in Muscat, Dhofar and North Batinah. Phase 1 of the programme will focus on enhancing home care services through three specialised teams

dad al Shabibi, the ministry's spokesperson.

Currently, 8,710 elderly individuals and their families receive social support, including 46 residents at the Social Welfare Home in Rustaq. The briefing also addressed the rise in begging, particularly during Ramadan and holidays, with a majority cases involving expatriates. Shabibi

stated that Royal Oman Police is responsible for managing and apprehending offenders.

H E Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, noted that many individuals engaged in begging do so professionally rather than out of genuine need.

The ministry further reported that child protection committees

handled 2,973 cases of child abuse in 2024, with 72 children placed in family protection homes. Additionally, 1,390 calls were received on the psychological and family counselling hotline, and 2,786 individuals accessed direct counselling services.

In the social care sector, MoSD provided various forms of assistance, including cash, in-kind, temporary, emergency, special social support and aid for natural disasters. The total social assistance disbursed in 2024 amounted to RO11.986mn, benefiting 102,167 individuals.

Oman backs stronger Arab League to address regional challenges

Cairo, Egypt - Oman has reaffirmed its support for the Arab League as a 'unifying platform' for Arab nations and called for strengthening its mechanisms to better address regional and international challenges.

H E Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Oman's Ambassador to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to Arab League, made the remarks on the occasion of the regional body's 80th anniversary on Saturday.

He stated that the league's



H E Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi

role is more critical than ever as the Arab world faces major challenges requiring collective action. "Oman remains committed to supporting the league, believing

that Arab solidarity is the only path to stability and development in the region."

On the ongoing discussions about reforming joint Arab action, H E Rahbi stressed that any process of development must be "comprehensive and gradual, with a clear will among member states to ensure its success".

Despite its challenges, he said, the league remains vital in strengthening Arab unity, particularly in addressing security, economic and social concerns.

Oman 52nd in happiness index

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman is ranked 52nd globally and fourth in the Arab world in the 2025 World Happiness Report. Published by University of Oxford's Wellbeing Research Centre, the report marks the United Nations International Day of Happiness on March 20.

In the region, the UAE has secured 21st place surpassing the UK, US and France, and leading the Arab region. The survey, compiled by Gallup, ranks 147 nations based on their average life evaluations over the three preceding years (2022-2024).

Finland retains its top spot for the eighth consecutive year, while Mexico and Costa Rica enter the top ten, with the US ranking 24th.

After Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden and the Netherlands make the top five. Kuwait is ranked 30th globally and second in the Arab world, followed by Saudi Arabia at 32nd globally and third in the Arab world. Bahrain is 59th globally and fifth in the Arab world, while Qatar has not been included in the report.

The report assesses happiness levels based on indicators including GDP per capita, freedom to make life choices, perceptions of corruption, and generosity.



'Rabt' platform launched to enhance local content in govt procurement



Cargo volumes at Omani ports grow 15% to 137mn tonnes



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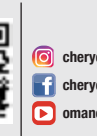
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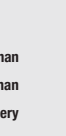
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Traditional markets come alive

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Traditional markets across the sultanate are witnessing a surge in visitors. Souqs in Seeb, Muttrah and Nizwa are bustling with activity, offering a diverse range of goods essential for the holy month.

Muttrah Souq, one of Oman's most iconic markets, is seeing a sharp rise in footfall. A cherished landmark, the souq holds a special place in the hearts of Omanis, with families making it a tradition to visit during Ramadan.

"We're experiencing a significant boom this month," said Khalid al Sharaqi, a shop owner. "The market caters to every Omani family - women shop for abayas, accessories, silver jewellery and shoes, while men look for kummas, mussars and Arabic perfumes. Children's toys are also in high demand."

Seeb Souq is well known for its variety of goods and negotiable prices... The combination of heritage, commerce and a seaside setting makes it a popular market for both locals and tourists during Ramadan

OMAR AL AMRI

The maze of narrow alleys and the fragrance of bukhoor in every corner of the souq add to its quaint charm. Elderly men sit around sharing stories of the market's past over cups of kahwa. "This is what gives the market its soul and unique character," Sharaqi added.

Seeb Souq, one of Oman's oldest markets, has recently undergone renovations but its traditional appeal remains intact. The market is particularly busy after iftar. "Seeb Souq is well known for its variety of goods and negotiable prices," said



Omar al Amri, a local merchant. "It offers everything from Omani handicrafts and silverware to traditional clothes."

Seeb Souq is also a primary market for fresh produce, fish and meat. Overlooking the sea, it provides a scenic shopping experience. "The combination of heritage, commerce and a seaside

setting makes Seeb Souq a popular market for both locals and tourists during Ramadan," Amri noted.

In the heart of Nizwa, the city's historic souq remains a cultural treasure, drawing large crowds throughout Ramadan. Located near the famed Nizwa Fort, the market showcases

Oman's ancient traditions. "Nizwa Souq is a must-visit destination, especially during Ramadan," said Saeed al Nabhani, a local trader.

The market is divided into distinct sections, including heritage areas and dedicated spaces for fresh farm produce. It has a separate market for dates which see

heightened demand as shoppers seek the finest Omani and Gulf varieties for Ramadan feasts. "On Fridays, the market is packed with shoppers from across the sultanate, all coming together to purchase essentials for the holy month," Nabhani added.

As Ramadan progresses,

these traditional markets are a hive of activity with commerce and cultural practices coming together. From the historic alleys of Muttrah to the bustling stalls of Nizwa, the spirit of Ramadan breathes new life into Oman's souqs, preserving traditions while catering to customers' needs.

OCCI's Ramadan Evenings end with focus on local content

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) concluded its Ramadan Evenings for 2025 on Wednesday under the patronage of Sheikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI.

The closing session, titled 'The Economic Importance of Local Content', highlighted the significance of strengthening local content as a pillar for building a sustainable and prosperous economy. Discussions focused on its role in boosting the national economy, supporting small and medium enterprises and introduction of the National Strategy for Local Content Development.

Speaking at the event, Rawas underscored the importance of integrating local goods and services into contracts and tenders. "Enhancing local content strengthens the private sector, attracts investment and improves the overall business environment," he said. "By prioritising local products over imports, we can retain capital within the national economy."

He added that supporting local content across key sectors such as industry, trade, logistics and tourism enhances economic resilience while creating more opportunities for private sector growth and innovation. Rawas further noted that Oman has made great strides in promoting local content through targeted policies and initiatives designed to encourage businesses to rely on domestic resources.

TIPS FOR FITNESS AND FAITH

Best bodyweight exercises for Ramadan

Muscat - Balancing faith and fitness during Ramadan requires careful planning, as years of muscle building and high-intensity endurance training can be impacted by fasting. With limited eating and hydration windows, workouts must be adjusted to prevent muscle loss and maintain strength. Jaison M, gym instructor and fitness expert, shares essential guidelines to help you stay in shape while observing the holy month.

WEEK 4

For those unable to work out after iftar, bodyweight exercises are a great alternative. Focus on the four 'S'es of exercise - strength, stamina, stretching and stability. Squats, lunges and push-ups build strength, while jumping jacks or burpees enhance stamina. Yoga or dynamic stretching can improve flexibility, and balance exercises like single-leg stands promote stability.

Often overlooked, stability training is essential to prevent injuries and maintain overall fitness. Keeping a consistent workout routine with these exercises will help sustain strength and endurance throughout Ramadan. Keep 20 to 30 minutes for the workout sessions without pressing yourself too much.



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) Per set
964/2025/MOH/HQ-77	Provision of Engineering Consultancy Services (Design and Supervision) for Construction National Women and Children Center in Sultan Haitham City at Governorate of Muscat	3/4/2025	30/4/2025	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	• SME: 28.700 • LO: 150

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accept or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

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Platform launched to enhance local content in govt procurement

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has launched a digital platform to enhance local content in government projects, contracts and procurement in a move to strengthen domestic manufacturing and reduce reliance on imports.

The 'Rabt' platform, developed by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, was inaugurated on Thursday by H E Salim al Auli, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

The initiative is expected to boost the visibility of Oman-made products and services in state tenders, supporting national industries and enhancing their competitiveness.

With more than 5,000 industrial products and services listed by over 300 factories and companies operating in Madayn's industrial cities, Rabt provides a centralised database to streamline government procurement.

Sulaiman bin Salem al Jabri, Director of the platform, said its development took more than two years and involved collaboration between multiple government entities and private sector firms.

"The project underwent two main phases. First, we conducted a comprehensive survey of factories and companies within Madayn's industrial cities to assess local products and their raw material composition. The second phase focused on designing and programming the platform in partnership with a specialised firm to ensure efficiency and sustainability," he said.

Companies winning government tenders will be required to prioritise purchasing local products listed in the platform's 'mandatory list', reinforcing government support for national industries, Jabri said. "The system



Its development took more than two years... The system will also allow authorities to track compliance with local content policies and assess their impact on the economy

SULAIMAN BIN SALEM AL JABRI

will also allow authorities to track compliance with local content policies and assess their impact on the economy."

Beyond procurement, Rabt is expected to help analyse supply chains and identify investment opportunities.

New digital service launched to support Omani craftsmen, SMEs



Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has launched the 'Omani Crafts House' platform to showcase, market, and sell modern products from Omani craftsmen and small and medium enterprises

(SMEs).

The platform was unveiled on Thursday under the patronage of H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. It aims to create new business and marketing opportunities for SMEs, allowing them to sell their products without registration fees or transaction

charges.

The platform has been created to help SMEs reach a wider audience, boost sales, and enhance their digital presence. It caters to businesses specialising in handicrafts, personal care and beauty products, perfumes, incense, fashion, accessories, jewellery, and more.

To register, businesses must be officially registered with ASMED, and their products must be locally made, high-quality, and well-packaged.

The platform features a multi-vendor system, giving each business a dedicated control panel to manage inventory, track sales, and access real-time reports.

Ejada enhances public sector performance: H E Baowain

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ejada system has achieved more than 60% of its objectives, obtaining a marked progress in enhancing public sector performance, H E Dr Mahad bin Saeed bin Ali Baowain, Minister of Labour, said.

Speaking at the third session of the Communication Dialogue last week, organised by the Government Communication Centre, H E Baowain highlighted the system's role in improving efficiency and accountability in government agencies. "The Ejada system has seen significant progress. Individual Excellence has been implemented in 67 government agencies, enabling performance



Individual excellence has been implemented in 67 govt agencies... Ejada has achieved more than 60% of its objectives

H E DR MAHAD BAOWAINI

evaluation based on criteria such as operational speed, leadership, and job satisfaction."

The session brought together

government officials, stakeholders, and members of the public to discuss labour and employment policies. H E Baowain also outlined ongoing efforts to enhance employment opportunities in the country.

Launched in 2023, Ejada has been designed to measure institutional performance in government units. It provides a structured framework for assessing progress, improving service quality, and fostering innovation. The system also aims to promote a culture of efficiency and reward outstanding performance in public administration.

H E Baowain informed that the draft Civil Service Law is in the legislative process and is expected to be adopted soon.

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ahli islamic Money Market Fund surpasses RO50mn in assets

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its commitment to achieving significant milestones in the Islamic banking sector, the ahli islamic Money Market Fund has announced that its managed assets have exceeded the RO50mn mark, just one year after its launch.

The fund also achieved an annualised return of 5.1% during the first 12 months of operations, generating a net profit of RO861,417 for 2024. These results reflect the confidence investors have placed in the fund and the appeal of its Sharia-compliant investment strategy.

Hanaa Mohammed al Kharusi, Senior General Manager - Wholesale Banking at ahlibank, said, "At ahlibank, we take pride in the success of the ahli islamic Money Market Fund, which has surpassed RO50mn in assets in its first year. The fund has maintained stability with low volatility, contributing to steady returns, in addition to its commitment to ethical financial practices."

Echoing the sentiment, Noora

Sabah Jawad Sultan, Chairperson - ahli islamic Money Market Fund, said, "At ahli islamic, we take pride in the performance of this exceptional fund, which stands out due to its unique structure. This fund provides an attractive alternative to demand deposit accounts, offering investors high liquidity and a flexible solution for managing their financial allocations in bank deposits. Moreover, the fund focuses on investing in high-credit-rated market instruments, ensuring that investors' funds are exposed to securities of investment-grade quality, thereby enhancing the achievement of optimal risk-adjusted returns, in line with the highest banking standards."

The ahli islamic Money Market Fund is the first of its kind in Oman to comply fully with Sharia principles. It focuses on investing in short-term, low-risk instruments, such as Islamic bank deposits, Islamic bonds (Sukuk) and other permissible assets, with the aim of achieving returns while maintaining a high level of liquidity.

Cargo volumes at Omani ports grow 15% to 137mn tonnes

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Seaports dominate Oman's trade volume, accounting for approximately RO16.5bn worth of goods traded, or 77% of total trade in 2024, covering both exports and imports.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, Muhanna bin Moosa bin Baqer, Director General of Ports at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said that Omani ports play a crucial role in facilitating trade between Oman and countries worldwide. He emphasised that the sultanate's ports are among the most significant enablers of economic diversification.

He highlighted that Omani ports have kept pace with regional and global economic growth due to their strategic location on key international shipping routes.

Baqer noted that Omani ports witnessed a significant rise in cargo volumes last year, handling more than 137mn tonnes - a 15% increase compared to 119mn tonnes in 2023.

He pointed out that bulk cargo volumes at Sohar Port surged by 72%, while cargo handled at both Salalah and Suwaiq Ports increased by 10% each. The Port of Duqm achieved a remarkable 152% rise in cargo handling across all categories - general, liquid, and bulk - reflecting improvements



Bulk cargo volumes at Sohar Port surged by 72%, while cargo handled at both Salalah and Suwaiq Ports increased by 10% each. Port of Duqm achieved a remarkable 152% rise in cargo handling across all categories - general, liquid, and bulk

in operations and growing demand for integrated port services.

He further explained that Omani ports recorded an increase in vessel arrivals in 2024, exceeding 12,000 ships, a 1.5% rise. Container throughput at Salalah and Sohar ports reached approximately 4.2mn TEUs, with Salalah Port handling around 3.3mn TEUs and Sohar Port processing over 942,000 TEUs.

On the development of cruise

tourism, Baqer stated that Sultan Qaboos, Khasab, and Salalah ports received approximately 114 cruise ships carrying over 416,000 tourists in 2024. Additionally, these ports handled more than 4mn heads of livestock.

Regarding port expansion and service upgrades, he explained that the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology signed a concession agreement last year with Asyad Ports to de-

velop, manage, and operate Suwaiq Port. The agreement aims to enhance the port's capacity to accommodate larger vessels and handle all types of cargo to meet growing demand.

The expansion of the container terminal at Salalah Port has also been completed, increasing its capacity to 6.5mn TEUs. The project involved upgrading berths and expanding storage yards to accommodate larger container ships, exceeding 366 metres in length and

carrying more than 14,500 containers, ensuring higher productivity and faster clearance.

Baqer confirmed that the ministry's signing of a framework agreement to invest in the operation, management, and development of marine services and crew changes at Sultan Qaboos Port will enhance commercial activity at this key port, in addition to its primary role as a tourism hub.

He noted that these commercial advantages will position the port as an attractive destination for both commercial and cruise vessels, especially as it undergoes rapid development in collaboration with the Asyad and Omran groups.

Oman Petroleum & Energy Show to focus on energy transition, decarbonisation

Muscat - Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES) 2025, the sultanate's largest and most influential energy event, is set to take place from May 12 to May 14 at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) in Muscat.

Under the theme 'Navigating the Energy Transition through Innovation in Oil and Gas', OPES 2025 will offer unparalleled opportunities to learn about the latest advancements in oil, gas, and energy. The highly anticipated SPE Conference and OPES Talks will bring together industry leaders, policymakers, and energy pioneers from around the world.

The high-level SPE Conference at OPES 2025, hosted by the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE), will feature in-depth technical discussions on the latest advancements in oil, gas, and energy transition strategies. Experts will address enhanced recovery methods, digital transformation, carbon capture, and decarbonisation, providing a crucial knowledge-sharing platform for professionals shaping the future of energy.



OPES Talks will once again be part of the 2025 event, serving as a dynamic forum for visionary ideas, industry insights, and future-focused discussions. Global thought leaders, CEOs, and policymakers will address the most pressing energy challenges. The free-to-attend strategic and technical sessions at OPES Talks will explore various topics, including energy transition and decarbonisation, renewable energy development, digital transforma-

tion, and the future of LNG in Oman.

OPES Talks will feature technical papers and insights from key industry leaders across Oman's energy sector, including representatives from both the public and private sectors. Speakers will include experts from the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Petroleum Development Oman, bp, OQEP, Shell Development Oman, Gulf Energy, and OXY, alongside a line-up of

international speakers from the energy sectors across Europe, the US, the MENA region, and Asia.

Ashley Roberts, Managing Director at CONNECT, highlighted the significance of these discussions. He said, "Oman Petroleum & Energy Show's OPES Talks provide a valuable platform for industry professionals to gain insights from experts, expand their knowledge, and earn CPD accreditation - all free to attend.

At OPES 2025, experts will address enhanced oil recovery methods, digital transformation, carbon capture, and decarbonisation, providing a crucial knowledge-sharing platform for professionals shaping the future of energy

OPES is committed to fostering learning and innovation in the energy sector. To take advantage of these talks, visit the OPES website to view the full programme, and please note that seating is strictly on a first-come, first-served basis."

With participation from leading global energy companies, government bodies, and industry experts, OPES 2025 promises to be a game-changing event for Oman's energy sector.

UAE pledges to invest \$1.4tn in US over the next 10 years: WH

Washington, US - The United Arab Emirates has committed to a \$1.4tn investment framework in the United States over the next 10 years, the White House announced on Friday.

"This new framework will significantly expand the UAE's existing investments in the US economy, focusing on AI infrastructure, semiconductors, energy, and American manufacturing," the White House said in a statement.

The announcement followed a meeting between US President Donald Trump and Tahnoon bin Zayed al Nahyan, the UAE's national security advisor, on March 18.

Abu Dhabi-based MGX, BlackRock, Microsoft, and Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP) have invited Nvidia and xAI to join the AI Infrastructure Partnership (AIP), which aims to mobilise up to \$100bn to develop next-generation data centre and energy infrastructure to support US AI ini-

tiatives.

Additionally, UAE investment fund ADQ has announced a \$25bn US-focused venture with its American partner, Energy Capital Partners, to invest in energy infrastructure and data centres.

Several UAE firms have also pledged to support US natural gas production and exports by investing in the NextDecade LNG export facility in Texas.

The two nations have further agreed to establish a \$1.2bn mining partnership to secure supplies of critical minerals.

Aluminium production in the US was also highlighted in the investment framework.

"Emirates Global Aluminium plans to invest in the first new aluminium facility in the United States in 35 years, which would nearly double US domestic aluminium production," the statement said.

Anadolu Agency

GCC insurers' growth prospects could slow in some markets: S&P

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Despite ongoing geopolitical tensions and global trade disputes, S&P Global Ratings forecasts that economic conditions in the GCC region will remain favourable in 2025.

Even though S&P lowered its average Brent oil price assumptions to \$75 from \$80 for 2025 and 2026, it expects stable eco-

nommic growth in the GCC region. This will support further infrastructure developments, population growth, and ongoing insurance demand.

"We expect economic expansion, population growth, and mandatory insurance schemes will increase insurance demand in most GCC countries this year. Overall satisfactory underwriting results and relatively high interest rates will continue to support



earnings," said S&P Global Ratings credit analyst Emir Mujkic.

Yet, 'increasing competition and volatile equity markets could weigh on bottom-line results, S&P said. 'The size and profitability gaps between large and small companies will likely continue to widen.'

'Although we forecast that the credit conditions of highly rated insurers in our portfolio will remain stable, we anticipate that

the credit strength of some smaller and mid-sized insurers could continue to weaken,' the rating agency added.

"This is because ongoing top-line growth, weak earnings, and high operating costs could impair these insurers' capital and solvency buffers," Mr Mujkic said.

Particularly in the United Arab Emirates, the agency also sees a higher risk of regulatory inter-

vention for companies that operate close to or below minimum solvency capital requirements in 2025 and that are unable to restore their capital position.

Average inflation in the GCC region is trending towards 2%, compared with about 4% in 2022. S&P therefore expects that claim cost growth and premium rates for motor and other property/casualty insurers in some markets will moderate.

Europe's economy faces make-or-break moment

Brussels, Belgium – “Europe is now at a turning point,” Markus Beyrer, Director General of the lobby group BusinessEurope, told Euronews business editor Angela Barnes.

“To a certain extent, we will decide for ourselves whether we ... repair the flaws in our system,” Beyrer said.

“If we fail to deliver on time, to truly prioritise competitiveness... investment will continue to leave Europe at light speed,” he added.

The warning from the European business chief comes as EU leaders convene for a summit on Thursday, where defence spending dominates discussions.

However, boosting competitiveness remains high on the EU’s broader agenda, as the bloc seeks to strengthen its economy

by supporting businesses.

To this end, the European Commission presented its “Competitiveness Compass” plan in January, building on the work of senior politician Mario Draghi.

The framework aims to drive innovation by encouraging the adoption of new technologies such as AI, while also outlining a strategy for decarbonisation.

The action plan also seeks to strengthen EU supply chains and reduce dependencies—an increasingly urgent priority as geopolitical tensions escalate.

“We must position ourselves as the world’s stable and reliable continent,” Beyrer told Euronews.

He added that reducing energy costs, improving access to



skilled labour, and cutting regulatory red tape are key priorities for BusinessEurope.

“Europe can only be as strong

as its economy, and this urgently needs attention,” he said.

The eurozone economy grew by 0.9% in 2024, nearly double

the 0.4% recorded in 2023, and higher than a previous estimate of 0.7%. Even so, growth slowed in the final months of 2024 and

If we fail to deliver on time, to truly prioritise competitiveness... investment will continue to leave Europe at light speed

MARKUS BEYRER

at the beginning of this year.

While businesses are benefiting from easing inflation and lower interest rates, forecasts remain uncertain due to unpredictable trade policies from US President Donald Trump.

The White House has already imposed a 25% tariff on all steel

and aluminium imports into the US, while also threatening a 200% tariff on EU-made alcohol.

Additional tariffs on European goods are set to take effect at the start of April, with the EU expected to announce its own countermeasures shortly afterwards.

“EU retaliatory measures and a weaker euro—resulting from lower US demand for European products – could push inflation up by around half a percentage point,” European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde said on Thursday.

Such price pressures could potentially disrupt the ECB’s planned rate cuts, creating further challenges for European businesses and consumers.

(Source: Euronews.com)

Trump says ‘there will be flexibility’ on reciprocal trade tariffs

Washington, US – US President Donald Trump has suggested there will be some leeway when he imposes reciprocal tariffs on April 2, which he calls “the big one” in his plan to reshape US trade relations.

“There will be flexibility,” Trump said in the Oval Office on Friday while discussing the forthcoming like-for-like tariffs.

Trump then referred to the delay in auto tariffs he had granted to the Big Three US automakers.

“People are coming to me and talking about tariffs, and a lot of people are asking me if they could have exceptions,” Trump said, adding, “Once you do that for one, you have to do that for all.”

“I don’t change,” Trump continued, “but the word ‘flexibility’ is an important word.”

Trump’s tariffs are reshaping US trade policy and overhauling decades of free-trade agreements with both allies and rivals.

He is now just over a week away from potentially imposing so-called retaliatory tariffs on all US trade partners. That could happen as soon as April 2, a day Trump has taken to calling “Liberation Day”.

The like-for-like tariffs aim to fulfil a frequent campaign promise and raise revenue as Republicans prepare a tax and spending bill.

Trump on Friday touted his upcoming next round of tariffs, the so-called reciprocal duties that will aim to enact like-for-like duties on US trading partners.

“April 2nd is Liberation Day in America!!! For DECADES we have been ripped off and abused by every nation in the World, both friend and foe. Now it is finally time for the Good Ol’ USA to get some of that MONEY, and



US President Donald Trump

President Donald Trump’s tariffs are reshaping US trade policy and overhauling decades of free-trade agreements with both allies and rivals. Trump is now just over a week away from potentially imposing reciprocal tariffs on all US trade partners

RESPECT, BACK,” he posted on his Truth Social platform.

Trump’s 25% tariff on imports of steel and aluminium from all countries took effect on Wednesday, 12 March.

The EU has responded to those metal duties with counter-tariffs on \$28 billion worth of US goods from April, bringing Trump’s trade war across the Atlantic. However, on Thursday, the EU delayed the implementation of some of those tariffs until mid-April — including a 50% duty on American whiskey, which had prompted Trump to threaten a 200% tariff on European spirits.

Trump’s 25% across-the-board tariffs on Canada and Mexico came into effect on

March 4. Just two days later, Trump confirmed that the US would pause tariffs on goods and services compliant with the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) until April 2. In response to the steel and aluminium tariffs, Canada imposed new duties on approximately \$20bn worth of US goods. The two countries have agreed to new trade talks.

Trump has introduced new blanket tariffs of around 20% on top of existing 10% duties that were put in place during his first term. China has retaliated with duties of up to 15% on US agricultural products, including chicken and pork, which took effect on Monday, March 10.

(Source: Yahoo Finance)

Russia keeps interest rate steady at 21%

Moscow, Russia - The Bank of Russia has kept its key interest rate unchanged at 21% on Friday, in line with market expectations.

In a statement, the bank said, “Current inflationary pressures have decreased but remain high, especially underlying ones.

“Domestic demand growth is still significantly outstripping the capabilities to expand the supply of goods and services.”

WAM

SITUATION VACANT

We are seeking an experienced Pharmaceutical-Grade Warehouse Design Consultant in Muscat to lead the planning, design, and optimization of a state-of-the-art pharmaceutical storage facility as per the GDP and GWP guidelines having area approx. 15000 sq. meter in the capital. The ideal company will have expertise in warehouse layout, regulatory compliance, and efficient logistics to ensure the facility meets industry standards for storage, handling, and distribution of pharmaceutical products.

CONTACT US:
DPHROMAN@YAHOO.COM



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BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 December 2024

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of National Aluminium Products Company SAOG (NAPCO), I present to you the Annual Report containing the audited financial statements for the Year ended 31 December 2024 with an overview of the performance of the Company.

Economic environment
In 2024, the global economy showed resilience with a growth projection of 3.2%. However, the recovery remained uneven with many economies still below pre-pandemic levels. Global headline inflation decreased, but core inflation remained persistent, leading to prolonged higher interest rates. Medium-term growth projections were weak, highlighting the need for structural reforms and careful policy management.

Performance Review
The financial performance of the National Aluminium Company Products Company SAOG (Parent Company) and Novel Aluminium Products Company LLC (Subsidiary Company) collectively represented as a “Group” during the Year 2024 as compared to 2023 is summarized in the table below:

RO 000s				
Summary of Income Statement				
Particulars	Group		Parent	
	2024	2023	2024	2023
Revenue	20,851	25,933	20,747	25,704
Net loss before taxation	(1,464)	(3,302)	(1,435)	(3,363)
Net loss after tax	(1,464)	(3,715)	(1,435)	(3,777)

The Group achieved revenue of RO 20.851 million compared to RO 25.933 million in the previous year, being a 20% decrease. The net loss after tax was (RO 1.468) million compared to a loss of (RO 3.715) million during the previous year, a substantial (RO 2.247) million reduction in loss.

Despite a capacity utilization of 35% and an 8% increase in LME, the Company managed to reduce its losses through cost optimization initiatives and lean management practices.

The Company's financial performance remains affected by severe working capital constraints, significant delays in collections, the high cost of borrowing and delays in restructuring the Company finances.

During Year 2024 an amount of RO 5.9 million short term loan was converted into a long term Loan repayable over 10 Years and negotiations continue with Banks to convert the remaining short-term loans as well. This will reduce pressure for immediate repayments and make financial planning more manageable during difficult times.

Future outlook
The GCC Region is expected to see a 3.6% in GDP growth in 2025, driven by strong non-oil sector expansion and a gradual recovery in oil production. Continued investments in diversification, fiscal prudence, and strategic sectors like tourism and manufacturing will support this growth. Geopolitical stability will be maintained through diplomatic efforts and international cooperation. Overall, the outlook for 2025 is promising, with steady growth and resilience.

The Company is actively exploring various options to restore its capital, improve working capital facilities, and secure raw materials at reasonable costs and favorable credit terms. Management is also committed to developing new markets and expanding its customer base, focusing on high-yield and high-margin opportunities.

Compliance with internal regulations and control system:
The Company is committed to maintaining a high standard of internal regulations and control system commensurate with the size and nature of the operations. A manual of authorities approved by the Board is in place specifying financial authority levels for various day-to-day operations. The system of internal control is monitored regularly by the Board, its Committees, Management, Internal and External auditors to ensure compliance.

Corporate Governance:
The Board and Management maintain a high level of professionalism and integrity in all its operations and stand fully compliant with the code of corporate Governance.

Health, Safety and Environment
In line with our commitment to the safety of our people, HSE continues to receive the highest priority in our organization and daily business activities have been carried out successfully with further improvement in lost time injury (LTI) incident. Since 2023 the Company stands certified with ISO 14001:2015, the international standard for environmental management system, and ISO 45001:2018, the international standard for health and safety at work which adds to our sustainable journey.

Organisation
Your Company has always paid special attention for the recruitment and training of Omani Employees and is committed to progressively attain high level of Organisation at all levels of hierarchy and skill sets within the organization.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
Social responsibility is one of the pillars that contribute to social development and strengthen the relationship between the corporate world and the surrounding society. The Board realizes this important key factor and the General Assembly supported such initiatives albeit in limited capacity under current financial position.

Acknowledgement and Appreciation
On behalf of the Board, I recognize the loyalty, hard work, dedication and commitment of all the Company's employees and Management during difficult times.

The Board extends appreciation to all customers and banks dealing with the company for their continuous support and to the valued Shareholders for their confidence in the Company and its Board of directors.

The Board conveys particular and sincere appreciation for the support extended by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion through its dedicated officials, the Financial Services Authority, Ministerial Economic and

Financial Committee, Muscat Securities Market and other government authorities.

I wish to place on record, personally and on behalf of the Board of Directors and employees, our sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tareq bin Taimour and his wise government for continued support, encouragement, and guidance for our Company and wish His Majesty all success in leading Oman to achieve greater progress and prosperity.

For & on behalf of the Board of Directors
National Aluminium Products Co. S.A.O.G.

Dr. Zakia Hassan Al-Naseeb
Chairperson

Separate and consolidated statement of financial positionas at 31 December 2024				
	Parent Company		Group	
	2024	2023	2024	2023
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	9,951,592	10,327,720	9,953,933	10,331,218
Intangible assets	18,744	41,384	22,509	46,922
Right-of-use assets	901,777	945,234	916,909	945,234
Investment property	390,000	400,000	390,000	400,000
Investment in a subsidiary	31,500	31,500	-	-
Deferred tax asset	188,662	214,794	189,702	215,834
Total non-current assets	<u>11,482,275</u>	<u>11,960,632</u>	<u>11,473,053</u>	<u>11,939,208</u>
Current assets				
Inventories	2,145,565	2,951,717	2,145,565	2,951,717
Trade and other receivables	6,184,061	6,894,057	6,192,893	6,884,256
Cash and bank balances	<u>61,000</u>	<u>35,351</u>	<u>156,359</u>	<u>187,232</u>
Total current assets	<u>8,390,626</u>	<u>9,881,125</u>	<u>8,494,817</u>	<u>10,023,205</u>
Total assets	<u>19,872,901</u>	<u>21,841,757</u>	<u>19,967,870</u>	<u>21,962,413</u>

EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	857,145	857,145	857,145	857,145
Revaluation reserve	1,305,157	1,356,219	1,305,157	1,356,219
Accumulated losses	(6,215,914)	(4,980,091)	(6,225,846)	(4,961,121)
Total capital and reserves	<u>(4,053,612)</u>	<u>(2,766,727)</u>	<u>(4,063,544)</u>	<u>(2,747,757)</u>
Liabilities				
Non-current liabilities				
Term loan	8,439,451	2,620,000	8,439,451	2,620,000
Lease liabilities	1,090,776	1,091,107	1,105,110	1,091,107
Employees' end-of-service benefits	255,498	329,931	256,964	329,931
Total non-current liabilities	<u>9,785,725</u>	<u>4,041,038</u>	<u>9,801,525</u>	<u>4,041,038</u>
Current liabilities				
Trade and other payables	6,053,237	7,052,012	6,142,338	7,153,698
Lease liabilities	70,040	66,781	70,040	66,781
Bank borrowings	8,017,511	13,448,653	8,017,511	13,448,653
Total current liabilities	<u>14,140,788</u>	<u>20,567,446</u>	<u>14,229,889</u>	<u>20,669,132</u>
Total liabilities	<u>23,926,513</u>	<u>24,608,484</u>	<u>24,031,414</u>	<u>24,710,170</u>
Total equity and liabilities	<u>19,872,901</u>	<u>21,841,757</u>	<u>19,967,870</u>	<u>21,962,413</u>

Separate and consolidated statement of profit or loss or other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2024				
	Parent Company		Group	
	Year ended 31December 2024	Year ended 31December 2023	Year ended 31December 2024	Year ended 31December 2023
Revenue	20,747,078	25,704,241	20,851,057	25,933,172
Cost of sales	(19,731,669)	(25,575,781)	(19,744,332)	(25,587,794)
Gross profit	1,015,409	128,460	1,106,725	345,378
Other income	113,814	123,150	121,843	129,025
Allowance for expected credit losses on trade receivables	-	(424,451)	-	(424,451)
General and administrative expenses ²¹	(770,779)	(1,063,192)	(802,221)	(1,094,526)
Selling and distribution expenses	(387,548)	(749,288)	(487,795)	(868,013)
Net change in fair valuation of investment property	(10,000)	(60,000)	(10,000)	(60,000)
Loss from operations	(39,104)	(2,045,321)	(71,448)	(1,972,587)
Finance costs, net	(1,395,862)	(1,318,099)	(1,392,420)	(1,329,610)
Loss before tax for the year	(1,434,966)	(3,363,420)	(1,463,868)	(3,302,197)
Income tax	-	(413,706)	-	(412,666)
Net loss after tax for the year	<u>(1,434,966)</u>	<u>(3,777,126)</u>	<u>(1,463,868)</u>	<u>(3,714,863)</u>
Other comprehensive income				
Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss				
Surplus on revaluation of buildings	174,213	-	174,213	-
Deferred tax impact on revaluation of buildings (26,132)	-	-	(26,132)	-
Other comprehensive income for the year, net of tax	<u>148,081</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>148,081</u>	<u>-</u>
Total comprehensive loss for the year	<u>(1,286,885)</u>	<u>(3,777,126)</u>	<u>(1,315,787)</u>	<u>(3,714,863)</u>
Basic and diluted loss per share	<u>(0.167)</u>	<u>(0.441)</u>	<u>(0.171)</u>	<u>(0.433)</u>

NOTE
Certain comparative figures have been reclassified to confirm to presentation adopted in these financial statements.

The complete accounts will be sent to any shareholder who requests them either in Arabic or English as required within 7 days of receipt of the request.

Malabar Gold to open 12 new showrooms in March, expands global retail network

Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the world's 6th largest jewellery retailer, is set to launch 12 new showrooms by the end of March to further strengthen its presence across India.

The latest expansion drive will take the total international showroom count to 391 showrooms across 13 countries, with presence in 19 states across India.

The new showrooms will all be located in India with one at Panvel in Mumbai, Sinhadag Road in Pune, Brahmapur and Soubhagya Nagar in Odisha; Dhanbad in Jharkhand, Hospet, Nagabhavi and Chitradurga in Karnataka; Nandyal, Amalapuram, Machilipatanam in Andhra Pradesh and Varanasi in Utta Pradesh.

Malabar Group has invested over US\$69mn for this expansion phase and has hired 406 employees in various roles this financial year.

Additionally, the brand has plans to launch 60 new showrooms this year, further expanding its global presence. In April, the group is set to inaugurate five new showrooms across the GCC, the UK and Canada, marking its expansion plans in the international market.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds has launched a consumer awareness campaign with prolific actor and brand ambassador NTR Jr. The campaign highlights the brand as a responsible jeweller,



emphasising its commitment to sustainable practices, authentic hallmarked jewellery, and certified natural diamonds.

Commenting on the expansion, M P Ahammad, Chairman, Malabar Group said that the group's expansion plan is aligned

Beyond India, Malabar Group's global presence spans across the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, among others

with its broader vision of extending its global footprint and offering quality-focused, transparent retail practices coupled with a

world-class shopping experience to more people across the world.

"We are deeply committed to ethical business practices and responsible sourcing, which are at the core of our values. As we continue to grow and enter new markets, each showroom opening represents a step closer to realizing our vision of becoming the world's number one jewellery and luxury brand. This global market penetration not only broadens our reach but also strengthens our position as a trusted brand that offers excellence, integrity, and unparalleled

luxury to our customers worldwide."

The new showrooms of the brand will offer a diverse range of traditional and contemporary jewellery collections, coupled with a personalised shopping experience, demonstrating Malabar Gold & Diamonds' dedication to customer service excellence.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds operates ten state-of-the-art factories across India and five international units, ensuring world-class craftsmanship and quality in jewellery manufacturing. Its key facilities in Hyderabad, Jaipur and Bangalore serve as innovation hubs, equipped with the latest technology to create exquisite designs while adhering to the highest standards of legal compliance, quality assurance, and sustainability. Beyond production, the company places a strong emphasis on employee well-being, occupational health, and safety, fostering a work environment that empowers artisans and upholds global best practices.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds is renowned globally for offering an unparalleled jewellery buying experience with convenience and customer-friendly policies along with the 'Malabar Promise' of incomparable quality and service assurance.

Apart from this, the Malabar

Promise also includes transparent pricing, assured lifetime maintenance from any of the showrooms across 13 countries, guaranteed buyback, tested and certified natural diamonds, 100% value on diamond and gold jewellery exchange, 916 hallmarked jewellery, responsible sourcing, fair price policy, and fair labour practices.

Beyond India, Malabar Group's global presence spans across the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Singapore, Malaysia, the USA, the UK, Canada, and Australia. The company employs over 25,000 professionals from 26 countries. Malabar Gold & Diamonds also operates 14 wholesale units across eight countries, 15 jewellery manufacturing units in five countries, design studios, and boasts over 25 exclusive brand and collections, serving more than 15mn satisfied customers from 100 countries.

A cornerstone of Malabar Group's corporate social responsibility initiatives is the 'Hunger Free World' project, which aims to alleviate hunger by providing nutritious meals to the impoverished. Currently, the initiative distributes food packets to 60,000 individuals daily across 81 cities in 17 Indian states.

Additionally, 10,000 food packets are distributed daily to schoolchildren in Zambia, Africa.

Ford Explorer comes with attractive Ramadan benefits

The Ford Explorer is now available with exclusive Ramadan benefits. The benefits include five years/100,000km of free service, a five-year/100,000km manufacturer's warranty, five years/100,000km of roadside assistance, Free Insurance, and one-year free registration.

Customers can also get a chance to win one out of eight iPhone 16 Pro Max in the raffle draw. The offer ends on April 17.

The Ford Explorer redefines the SUV experience, seamlessly blending bold design, cutting-edge technology, advanced safety features and exceptional power for an unmatched driving experience. Whether conquering rugged terrain or navigating city streets, the Explorer's intelligent systems ensure supreme comfort, control and confidence, making it the ultimate companion for families and adventure seekers alike.

The Ford Explorer is powered by a formidable 2.3-litre tur-



bocharged EcoBoost engine, delivering an impressive 300hp and 420Nm of torque. Paired with an all-new 10-speed automatic transmission, the Explorer offers smooth, responsive shifts for an effortlessly dynamic drive.

Its intelligent All-Wheel-Drive (AWD) system, combined with a Terrain Management System featuring seven selectable drive modes, including standard Sand Mode, ensures that the Explorer

is built to tackle any road or off-road challenge with ease. The Ford Explorer has been engineered to elevate every journey with its suite of state-of-the-art technology. A centrally mounted 8-inch digital touchscreen with the intuitive SYNC 3 infotainment system provides seamless access to navigation, entertainment and connectivity features. With available Apple CarPlay integration, drivers can stay con-

nected without distraction.

A wireless charging pad and multiple USB ports, including new type-C outlets, offer ultimate convenience, while the available 980-watt, 12-speaker B&O premium audio system immerses passengers in a superior listening experience.

Safety is at the heart of the Ford Explorer, equipped with Ford Co-Pilot360, an advanced suite of driver-assist technologies designed to enhance protection on the road. Standard features include Pre-Collision Assist with Automatic Emergency Braking, Pedestrian Detection, Forward Collision Warning, Dynamic Brake Support and Blind Spot Information System with Cross-Traffic Alert. The Lane-Keeping System and Auto High-Beam Headlamps add extra layers of reassurance for drivers and passengers alike. For added security, Ford Co-Pilot360 Assist+ offers advanced technologies such as Evasive Steering Assist.

JW Marriott Oman's first to get automated water bottling plant

JW Marriott Hotel Muscat proudly sets a new industry benchmark by becoming the first hotel in Oman to implement a fully automated water bottling plant, reinforcing its commitment to quality, efficiency, and environmental responsibility.

Developed in partnership with Lucerne Waters, a leader in sustainable water solutions, this state-of-the-art initiative ensures superior water purity, operational excellence, and a significant reduction in plastic waste.

The advanced bottling system automates the entire process, from purification to packaging, guaranteeing minimal human intervention while upholding the highest standards of hygiene and efficiency.

Water undergoes a seven-stage filtration process, including UV treatment, ozonation, reverse osmosis, and essential mineral enrichment, ensuring an optimal balance of safety, purity, and taste.

Additionally, a rigorous six-



stage bottle sterilisation process, complemented by a UV tunnel, ensures every bottle meets the highest hygiene standards. Precision batch and expiry date printing further enhance traceability and quality control, giving consumers confidence in every sip.

Beyond delivering premium hydration, this initiative is a milestone in sustainability. By eliminating approximately 730,000 plastic bottles annually, JW Mar-

riott Hotel Muscat prevents an estimated 19,700kg of plastic waste and reduces CO₂ emissions by 49,250kg per year.

Commenting on this achievement, Juliana Salla, General Manager of JW Marriott Hotel Muscat, stated: "At JW Marriott Hotel Muscat, sustainability and innovation are at the heart of everything we do. This cutting-edge bottling plant not only enhances our guest experience but also significantly reduces our environmental impact."

Partnering with Lucerne Waters, Juliana said, allowed the hotel to redefine sustainable hospitality in Oman, ensuring that every sip its guests take is both refreshing and responsible.

With this pioneering step, JW Marriott Hotel Muscat and Lucerne Waters set a new benchmark for eco-conscious hospitality in Oman. Guests are invited to experience a revolutionary approach to hydration, which seamlessly blends luxury, health, and sustainability.

Alizz Islamic's Visa debit card elevate experience

In line with its commitment to enhance and improve customer experience; Alizz Islamic Bank recently rolled out its new Visa debit cards for its retail banking customers.

The new premium offering from Alizz Islamic Bank and Visa comes as part of the bank's recent transformational journey that focuses on 'Personalising every experience through innovative and smart solutions'.

The strategic partnership with Visa card underscores the bank's commitment to providing secure, seamless and globally accepted pay-

ment options for its customers. Through this partnership, Alizz Islamic Bank will offer a range of debit and credit card solutions designed to enhance convenience, security, and financial flexibility.

Customers will soon have access to contactless features, enhanced security features and a worldwide acceptance across the globe, making everyday transaction faster and more efficient.

The overall growth in digital and card-based payments in the sultanate is a clear indication of changing consumer habits.

Lincoln Nautilus now with exclusive Ramadan benefits

Own the luxury Lincoln Nautilus and get exclusive Ramadan benefits, including five years/100,000km service, five years/100,000km warranty, free insurance and one-year registration, all designed to enhance one's ownership experience. The offer ends on April 17, the company informed.

The Lincoln Nautilus commands attention with a bold and refined presence. Its striking design is defined by the signature Lincoln grille, a reimagined rear fascia, an elegant light bar and refreshed light lamps.

The redesigned spoiler enhances its aerodynamic appeal, reinforcing the Nautilus' modern, confident stance. Elevating its visual allure, the Reserve trim de-



buts striking 20" bright machined aluminium wheels with premium-painted pockets, adding a dynamic yet polished touch.

Step inside and the Nautilus transforms every drive into an in-

dulgent escape. Subtle ambient lighting inside and out creates a warm, inviting atmosphere, while acoustic side glass minimises exterior noise, ensuring a peaceful cabin environment. Thoughtfully

engineered to eliminate road vibrations, the interior delivers a remarkably smooth and quiet ride.

The seating experience is equally luxurious, plush, soft-to-the-touch materials are comple-

mented by ventilated, massaging and highly adjustable seats, tailored for ultimate relaxation. Designed with driver comfort in mind, the steering wheel features a refined, sporty grip with an increased rim circumference.

Wrapped in supple Wollsdorf leather and finished with sophisticated European-style stitching, it embodies pure craftsmanship. Positioned ahead of the driver, a 12.3" fully configurable digital instrument cluster offers crisp, real-time information at a glance. Lincoln's innovative approach to design extends to the centre console, which forgoes a traditional shifter in favour of a vertically-oriented Push-Button Shifter seamlessly integrated into the instrument panel.

Outstanding GAD students followed strategic study regime for excellence

With the release of the General Education Diploma results for the first semester of the 2024-25 academic year, a number of students stood out for their impressive achievements, attaining outstanding results and high grades.

Student Muslim al Mahrouqi from Qatada bin al Numan Basic Education School in North Sharqiyah governorate spoke about his achievement of 99.59. "The high grade was my goal from the beginning of the first semester and achieving this grade percentage made me feel the pleasure of accomplishment and pride."

He followed a number of methods in studying, such as: Studying every day as possible, not moving from one lesson to another before understanding it well, staying away from all distractions, and practicing extensively to solve problems in science subjects. He touched upon the process of balancing psychological pressure and preparing for the exam, saying: "I do not occupy myself with thinking about the level of exams, or fear of their difficulty, but rather I am busy studying, and I plan to join an external scholarship in engineering."

Student Aseel al Ajmi from Halima al Saadiya Basic Education School in North Batinah, achieved a grade percentage of 99.59. "Achieving this grade percentage is a culmination of my efforts, an expression of my determination and perseverance, and a feeling of pride and accomplishment. It is a strong motiva-

tion to continue striving to achieve my ambitions and goals in the future.

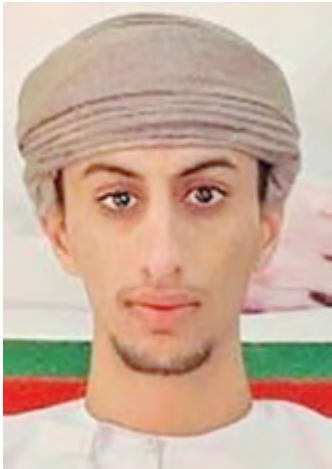
"I have followed several ways of studying, including organising study time, solving previous questions to learn about the final exam, and taking a break and resting played an important role in improving my concentration."

Ghania al Nuamani, Principal of Umm al Dardaa Basic Education School in North Batinah, emphasised that schools and the community are supportive in helping students achieve academic success and personal development.

About her school, she said, it provides a stimulating learning environment that motivates students toward productive learning, while ensuring a diversified teaching methodology and an emphasis on active learning to keep pace with tremendous scientific developments.

"The school also utilises innovative teaching methods and effective electronic applications to help motivate students and enhance their abilities, while considering their characteristics and special needs," she added.

Student Lamis al Balushi, from Umm al Dardaa Basic Education School in North Batinah, reflected back on her preparations, which helped her obtain a grade percentage of 99.59. "Achieving this high-grade percentage for me is the result of continuous effort and dedication to studying. This achievement reflects my commitment to the goals I set for myself, and it is a source of pride



Muslim al Mahrouqi



Ghania al Nuamani



Yahya al Badi



Aisha al Farsi



Mahfouza al Fazari



Lamis al Balushi

The students say they remained focused on their goal and continued studying regularly, organising time, and solving previous year's questions to improve their problem solving skills. Principals spoke about their schools' stimulating learning environment

and honour, and represents an important step towards achieving my future ambitions in my academic and professional fields," she added. "Psychological pressure is a natural part of preparing for exams, but I've learned how to manage it well. I make sure to allocate time for rest and recreation between study periods to ensure I don't feel overwhelmed."

Student Yahya al Badi, from Said bin Sultan Basic Education School in North Batinah, obtained a grade percentage of 99.63. "This percentage reflects my ability to deeply understand the academic subjects, manage time, and organise studies in a systematic manner. It also serves as a start to achieving my future academic and professional ambitions. I advise my colleagues to clearly define their goals and invest their time intelligently by organising time between studying and rest, as well as adequate sleep and recreational activities that help renew mental energy. Do not hesitate to ask for help, whether from teachers or friends. Sharing challenges and difficult points may provide you with innovative solutions and new ways of understanding. Continuity in studying and not procrastinating are the key to success. Every school day is a step towards achieving your academic dream."

Mahfouza al Fazari, Principal of Rabaa al Adawiya School in Muscat governorate, listed the factors that help students work hard and achieve the highest grades. These include setting clear goals and plans based on specific strategies, dividing subjects into small tasks to facilitate gradual completion, preparing review programs for students with the help of a social specialist, and providing a suitable classroom environment that motivates students to learn. "Seriousness and diligence in studying are the two main keys

to achieving academic excellence and reaching educational goals that require academic excellence, as diligence contributes to enhancing a deep understanding of academic subjects and developing analytical skills by setting time and priorities, thus enhancing self-confidence and stimulating innovation and creativity," she added.

Dr Batool al Ajmi, Senior Arabic Language Teacher, said: "There are a number of factors that help students work hard and achieve the highest grades, including: self-confidence, constant motivation, and encouragement to progress, setting specific goals for study and learning, organising time, and creating an organized study and review schedule, considering prioritizing subjects according to their difficulty or ease."

Student Aisha al Farsi, from Rabia al Adawiya Basic Education School in Muscat governorate, expressed her joy at obtaining a grade percentage of 99.59. "Achieving this percentage means a lot to me, as I was able to bring joy and happiness to my parents' hearts, and gain their satisfaction. It also increased my self-confidence. The method I adopted in studying is one I started with in the ninth grade, which depends on prior preparation for lessons before classes, studying as they come, and not postponing revising any lesson. I am keen to solve questions in the textbook and the activity book, and constantly practice previous exams to consolidate understanding of the lessons."

Key reasons to own a GMC this Ramadan

In celebration of the holy month of Ramadan, Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Co. LLC, exclusive dealer of GMC in Oman, has launched an exciting campaign offering exclusive benefits and rewards to customers looking to own a GMC.

With the theme 'Unlock Exclusive Ramadan Offers with GMC Today', this limited-time campaign provides nine compelling reasons to drive home a GMC this Ramadan.

This exclusive offer comes packed with incredible benefits, including a grand raffle draw where customers stand a chance to win exciting prizes that include a brand-new GMC Terrain as first prize; and a trip to Paris for couple as the second prize.

In addition, customers can enjoy a host of benefits, making this Ramadan the perfect time to own a GMC with assured gift of an Apple iPad.

The company assures 'peace of mind' with GMC's promised



buyback option; six years unlimited kilometre warranty; a coverage of three years or 60,000km service (whichever comes first); first-year registration and insurance to save on additional costs with complimentary registration and insurance (VAT included) without any hidden costs, and transparent pricing.

Speaking about the campaign, Muhammed Faisal Nawaz, Mar-

keting Manager of GMC Oman, said, "Ramadan is a time of generosity and new beginnings, and at GMC, we are excited to reward our customers with exceptional benefits. With a chance to win a GMC Terrain, an incredible trip to Paris, and exclusive offers on our entire lineup, this campaign is designed to make GMC ownership even more rewarding. "We invite everyone to visit our showrooms and take advan-

tage of these unmatched Ramadan deals before the offer ends."

As part of the campaign, GMC Oman offers attractive financing options with EMIs starting as low as RO134 per month, making premium vehicles more accessible than ever.

GMC Terrain: EMI from RO134
GMC Sierra: EMI from RO221
GMC Acadia: EMI from RO254
GMC Canyon: EMI from RO261

GMC Yukon: EMI from RO300

"At GMC Oman, we believe in offering more than just vehicles - we provide an elevated ownership experience. From premium warranties and service contracts to flexible financing and guaranteed buyback, our Ramadan campaign ensures that every customer enjoys peace of mind, value, and the confidence that comes with driving a GMC," Nawaz further added.

NBO celebrates Mother's Day with iftar, special rewards for customers

The National Bank of Oman (NBO) celebrated Mother's Day by hosting an exclusive iftar event at W Muscat for its highest-spending cardholders and their beloved mothers. The event recognised 12 winners, selected based on their spending using NBO Debit, Credit and Badeel Prepaid Cards; where they were presented with valuable gifts.

Commenting on the celebration, Maha Saud al Raisi, Assistant General Manager and Head of Product, said, "At NBO, we believe in celebrating the moments that matter most to our customers. Mother's Day is a special time to honour the love and sacrifices of mothers, and this campaign was our way of showing appreciation to those who trust us with their banking needs.

"Through initiatives like this, we reinforce our commitment to



rewarding our customers and ensuring that every interaction with NBO is a rewarding experience."

The Mother's Day campaign aimed to reward loyal cardholders while encouraging seamless and secure digital transactions. Through this initiative, NBO reaffirms its commitment to providing exclusive benefits and personalised experiences that bring families together. NBO remains committed to introducing innovative campaigns that enhance customer engagement.

Bank Muscat wins Best Private Bank in Oman Award by The Banker

In recognition of its pioneering role in providing exceptional banking solutions that cater to the diverse needs of customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial service provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was recently awarded the 'Best Private Bank in Oman' by *The Banker*, a renowned global financial and banking institution.

This recognition highlights the professional standards which the bank consistently adheres to, in line with international standards and practices. It also underscores Bank Muscat's effective role in offering the best banking solutions and products to cus-



tomers, in alignment with the Bank's corporate vision 'To serve you better every day'.

"We take pride in the recogni-

tion that the Bank has been honoured with as the best private bank in Oman by *The Banker*. This recognition further under-

scores the bank's leading role in providing a full suite of distinguished banking services and solutions that aim to cater to the

various needs of its valued Private Banking customers. These services include banking and wealth management solutions, backed with an experienced team of relationship managers," said Abdulsahir N al Raisi, General Manager - Personal Banking at Bank Muscat.

"We would like to thank our customers for their continued confidence and support over the years, as we continue to strive to bring the best banking experience to all of them. The Bank will maintain its commitment to offering the best banking services and products to enhance the banking experience for all its cus-

tomers."

Raisi pointed out that Bank Muscat has dedicated Private Banking desks at its head office at Airport Heights, Madinat Sultan Qaboos branch, Azaiba 18th November Street branch, and Suhar mega branch in North Batinah governorate.

"These desks are equipped with the latest technologies to offer an exceptional banking experience to Private Banking customers, aligned with the best banking standards in the sultanate and internationally. Customers enjoy convenience while initiating and completing various transactions, with the support of

dedicated relationship managers who ensure efficient and swift customer service," he added.

He asserted that the bank would continue its commitment to expanding its branch network across the country to serve a wider customer base, thus, meeting their diverse needs.

Bank Muscat offers Private Banking customers a complete suite of banking services and wealth management solutions including Mutual Funds, Fixed Income, Equity, Alternate Investment Products, Real Estate Funds and Portfolio Management services covering most global asset classes.

Japan hosts China, South Korea FMs

Tokyo, Japan - Foreign ministers from Japan, China and South Korea met in Tokyo on Saturday to discuss cooperation on trade, regional security and other issues amid rising geopolitical tensions.

The meeting between the East Asian neighbours - whose relations have historically been fraught with tensions and territorial disputes - comes amid the threat of trade tariffs by US President Donald Trump.

"Given the increasingly severe international situation, I believe we may truly be at a turning point in history," Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya said at the start of the meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and South Korea's top diplomat Cho Tae-yul.

"It has become more important than ever to make efforts to overcome division and confrontation through dialogue and cooperation," Iwaya said.

FMs discuss cooperation

China's Wang Yi pointed out that this year marks the 80th anniversary of the end of World



The three foreign ministers met ahead of a planned summit that would bring the three countries' leaders together

The meeting between the East Asian neighbours - whose relations have been fraught with tensions and territorial disputes - comes amid the threat of trade tariffs by the US

War II, and said that 'only by facing history honestly can we better build the future'.

'Strengthening East Asian cooperation' would allow the three countries to 'jointly resist risks' and promote 'mutual understanding' between their peoples, Wang added.

South Korea's Cho Tae-yul

highlighted that their three-way cooperation could send 'a message of hope for the future to the world'.

In addition to trade, among

the topics due to be addressed on Saturday was the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, a goal that was reaffirmed when the countries' leaders met in Seoul in May - the first such summit in five years.

"The peace and security of the Korean Peninsula are essential conditions for peace and prosperity in East Asia and the

world, and I hope that candid discussion on the North Korean nuclear issue will take place today," Cho said.

The South Korean foreign minister also urged that the military cooperation between North Korea and Russia must stop, adding that North Korea should not be rewarded for its wrongdoings in the course of bringing about the end of the Ukraine war.

He said it is important for Seoul, Tokyo and Beijing to carry out UN sanctions against Pyongyang, faithfully.

Unlike Tokyo and Seoul, China is one of North Korea's main international supporters, providing economic and political support to the largely isolated regime in Pyongyang.

Japan and South Korea are close allies with the US - both nations host thousands of American troops on their territories. All three view China as a threat to regional security.

Planning for 3-way leaders summit

Although China has been the worst affected, all three East Asian nations have felt the impact of tariffs imposed by Trump since he returned to the White House in January.

On Friday, the three foreign ministers met with Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who highlighted the need for 'pragmatic diplomacy'.

The ministers were also due to address climate change, aging populations, cooperation on natural disasters, and Russia's war in Ukraine, among other policy areas.

The diplomats are hoping to be able to set a tripartite leaders' summit by the end of 2025, Japanese public broadcaster NHK said.

Bilateral talks will also be held later on Saturday, including the first 'high-level economic dialogue' between Japan and China in six years.

Japan hopes to be able to restart exports of Japanese seafood to China, which were stopped in 2023 after Japan started releasing wastewater from the damaged Fukushima nuclear power plant into the ocean.

DW

Czech president Pavel reaffirms aid for Ukraine

Istanbul, Turkey - Czech President Petr Pavel reaffirmed his country's unwavering support on Saturday for Ukraine as he visited Kyiv, emphasising continued military assistance, humanitarian aid, and long-term cooperation.

"I am proud of the Czech support for Ukraine," Pavel said in a statement on X, noting that his country has been supplying medical supplies, weapons, and mobile drone jammers, as well as assisting in the preservation of Ukraine's cultural heritage.

He met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and assured him that Czech support would persist despite global shifts.

"I have come to Ukraine to emphasise that, even at a time of dynamic change, Czech support remains, will continue, and that we intend to contribute to the country's post-war reconstruction," Pavel stated.



Czech President Petr Pavel

The two leaders signed a declaration on strategic partnership, in which the Czech Republic pledged to deepen cooperation and support Ukraine's path toward the EU.

Pavel has been a strong advocate of Ukraine since the start of Russia's full-scale 'special military operation', pushing for increased European military

aid and advocating for Kyiv's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Meanwhile, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un assured Russian Security Council Secretary Sergey Shoigu on Friday that Pyongyang will 'invariably' support Moscow's military efforts and strategic interests, according to state media.

During their meeting in Pyongyang, Kim emphasised North Korea's unwavering commitment to backing Russia's actions to defend its sovereignty and security.

The discussions covered security cooperation and regional developments, with both sides reaffirming their shared positions. Kim and Shoigu pledged to strengthen their countries' strategic partnership, particularly in defence and broader bilateral cooperation.

Anadolu Agency

German leader Friedrich Merz is ready for foreign policy challenges

Berlin, Germany - "The whole world is watching Germany these days. We have a task - in the European Union, and in the world - that goes far beyond the borders of our own country and the well-being of our own people." Those were the words of conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader Friedrich Merz in the German Bundestag as he sought to justify taking on massive new debts - a motion that was then approved.

Merz believes the additional funds will be essential for dealing with the security and foreign policy challenges the government will face.

Here is an overview of the most significant challenges:

Transatlantic relations

For ten years, Friedrich Merz was Chairman of the Atlantik-Brücke - a non-partisan organisation for the cultivation of American-German relations.

However, his belief in a close German-American partnership has been badly shaken ever since Donald Trump entered his second term of office. "I am shocked by Donald Trump," Merz said after Trump blamed Ukraine for the war. He said he was appalled by Trump's and Vice President JD Vance's public humiliation of the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, at the White House.

Germany was already in bad standing with Trump while Angela Merkel was Chancellor - not least because of her open refugee policy, which Trump abhors. Although Merz has repeatedly distanced himself politically from Merkel, it is likely that a personal meeting between him and Trump would be difficult.

Ukraine

The likely next German chancellor is already pushing for an additional support package for Ukraine - worth at least €3bn (US\$3.26bn). As Germany's parliament has already agreed to relax the country's 'debt brake', that should not be a problem to allocate. However, if



Donald Trump (left) and Vladimir Putin (right) will make life difficult for Friedrich Merz

US aid was lacking and Europe needed to offset the loss, Germany might face considerably larger sums.

Another issue: delivering long-range Taurus cruise missiles to Ukraine. Merz supports the idea, while the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) always rejected it under the leadership of incumbent German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. It will be interesting to see how the SPD will respond to the controversial issue in its likely future role as junior coalition partner.

The likely next German Chancellor Friedrich Merz's belief in a close German-American partnership has been badly shaken ever since Donald Trump entered his second term of office

Defence cooperation

Merz does not know whether Trump's America will feel bound by NATO's obligation to provide assistance. That is why, on the eve of Germany's federal election, Merz said it was his 'absolute priority' for Europeans to 'truly achieve independence from the US' - as quickly as possible.

Indeed, he is aiming for close cooperation on defence policy between European countries. He wants to talk with nuclear powers France and the UK about nuclear protection for Germany and Europe.

European Union

Merz has accused the current government under SPD Chancellor Olaf Scholz of neglecting

European cooperation. In particular, he feels that Germany's relationships with its closest partners - France and Poland - have suffered.

Merz wants to change that, but it won't be easy. French President Emmanuel Macron is struggling domestically. After many years under the right-wing nationalist Law and Justice party PiS government, Poland once again has a pro-European leadership with former EU Council President Donald Tusk leading the country. However, Germany currently does not

have a close relationship with Paris or Warsaw.

And in other EU countries EU sceptics and right-wing populists are on the rise.

Trade policy

Trump's threats of import tariffs on European goods are seen as imminent. Europe cannot predict what will happen. What is certain is that transatlantic trade is becoming more difficult. And Germany, as an exporting nation, is being hit particularly hard, especially since the German economy has been in recession for the past two years.

The EU is responsible for transatlantic trade: Germany cannot act alone. However, it should press Brussels to ensure that the trade dispute does not

escalate into a trade war - one in which everyone would lose.

China

As a way response to the trade conflict with the US, some politicians in Berlin and Brussels are pushing for strengthening business ties with China again. However, the days when German exporters were doing well in China seem to be a thing of the past. German cars, once export hits in China, are now gathering dust there.

China is producing cheap electric cars and selling them successfully in the EU. In response: the EU is trying to protect its market against Chinese electric cars. As an export-oriented country, Germany is keen to make sure that market restrictions on trade with China do not get out of hand.

Friedrich Merz has positioned himself as a China critic in the past, finding fault with Chancellors Olaf Scholz and previously Angela Merkel for not taking a strong stance towards Beijing.

Middle East conflict

With respect to the war in the Middle East, the German government is in a particularly difficult position: Israel's security is a special concern for every German government. However, German politicians have repeatedly criticised Israel's crackdown on Hamas in the Gaza Strip as disproportionate.

The German government is also caught in a dilemma due to the ICC's arrest warrant against Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu.

DW



Niger: 44 killed in attack on mosque

Bamako, Mali - At least 44 people were killed and 13 injured in a 'deliberate strike against civilians' on Friday in southwestern Niger, Interior Minister Mohamed Toumba said on state television.

The assault in the village of Fonbita in the rural commune of Kokorou happened when militants identified as members of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) stormed a mosque, targeting worshippers.

Toumba said the attack left four of the 13 who were wounded in critical condition. The ministry condemned the assault as a 'cowardly and inhumane act' and

vowed to intensify efforts to combat terrorism in the region.

The Nigerien government declared 72 hours of national mourning beginning Saturday to honour the victims. Flags will fly at half-mast across the country, and public events are expected to be subdued as the nation grieves.

The southwestern region of Niger, particularly areas near the borders with Mali and Burkina Faso, has seen a surge in violence in recent years, with groups like the ISGS exploiting instability to carry out deadly raids on villages and security forces. The attack underscores the security chal-

lenges facing the Sahel nation, despite efforts by the government and international partners to curb the insurgency.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, though the Interior Ministry's attribution to ISGS aligns because of the group's known presence in the region. Authorities have promised a thorough investigation and a robust response to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The latest killings add to a growing toll of civilian casualties in Niger, where communities remain vulnerable to the persistent threat of extremist violence.

Anadolu Agency

5 children killed in airstrikes by Israel on family home in Gaza

Gaza City, Palestine - At least seven Palestinians, including five children, were killed on Saturday in Israeli airstrikes targeting the northern and central Gaza Strip.

Medical officials confirmed to Anadolu that the children lost their lives when Israeli forces bombed the Mashharawi family home in the Al-Tuffah neighbourhood, east of Gaza City.

Two more Palestinians were killed in another Israeli airstrike that targeted the Al-Maghraqa area in central Gaza, according to medical sources.

These attacks are part of an ongoing Israeli offensive that has intensified in recent days.

Meanwhile, another Israeli airstrike hit western Rafah in southern Gaza. Initial reports have not confirmed the casualties from this attack, an Anadolu correspondent reported. Earlier on Saturday, heavy Israeli bombardment targeted homes and agricultural lands in Gaza City.

More than 700 Palestinians have been killed and over 900 injured in a surprise aerial campaign by Israel on Gaza since Tuesday, shattering a ceasefire and prisoner exchange agreement that took hold in January.

Nearly 50,000 Palestinians have been killed, mostly women and children, and more than 112,000 injured in a brutal Israeli military onslaught on Gaza since October 2023.

The International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants last November for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza.



Israel also faces a genocide case at the International Court of Justice for its war on the enclave.

Destruction of hospital condemned
The Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza on Friday strongly condemned the Israeli army's destruction of the Turkish-Palestinian Friendship Hospital in Gaza, which was built by Turkey and operated by local authorities as a cancer treatment centre.

In a statement, the ministry described Israel's detonation of the hospital building, located in central Gaza, as a 'heinous crime' committed by the Israeli army after using it 'as a headquarters for its forces throughout its occupation of the so-called Netzarim Corridor' area to separate Gaza's north from its south.

"The Ministry affirms that this criminal behaviour by the occupier is consistent with the systematic destruction of the healthcare system and is part of

the ongoing genocide," the statement added.

Since the beginning of the genocide in Gaza on October 7, 2023, the Israeli military has systematically targeted Gaza's health care system - bombing and besieging hospitals, ordering evacuations, and blocking medical supplies, particularly in northern Gaza - all possible violations of international law.

Pro-Palestine rallies
Pro-Palestine rallies were staged

on Friday in Jordan, Morocco and Mauritania against the resumption of the Israeli genocidal war against the Gaza Strip.

In Amman, Jordan's capital, hundreds took to the streets in a demonstration to voice solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza who endure deadly attacks.

Speeches demanded that the international community urgently act and stop Israel's war crimes in Gaza, according to Anadolu.

Jordanian parliamentarian Ahmed Al-Regeb, who joined the

demonstration, urged his government to sever ties with Israel and cancel a peace agreement.

In Morocco, thousands participated in rallies in cities across the Kingdom.

According to an Anadolu correspondent, the solidarity rallies were organised after Friday prayers in several cities, including the northern cities of Meknes, Al-Hoceima, Tetouan and Fez, in the western cities of Casablanca and El-Jadida, and the eastern cities of Taza, Oujda and Taourirt.

Israel says it struck military bases in Syria

Jerusalem - The Israeli army announced late on Friday that it carried out airstrikes on strategic military assets in central Syria.

"Shortly ago, the Israeli army conducted strikes targeting strategic military capabilities that were still present in Syrian army bases in Palmyra and the T-4 airbase," the military said in a statement, without providing details.

The army also shared a video of the attack on its official page on X. There was no immediate response from Syrian authorities.

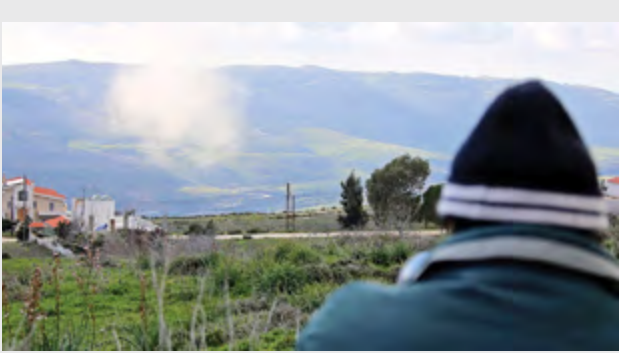
Israel has been carrying out near-daily airstrikes in Syria for months, resulting in civilian casualties and the destruction of military sites, equipment and ammunition belonging to the Syrian army.

Despite repeated violations of Syrian sovereignty, the new Syrian administration, led by President Ahmad Al-Sharaa, has not posed a direct threat to Tel Aviv.

On December 8, 2024, Syrian factions took control of the country, ending 61 years of Baath Party rule and 53 years of the Assad family governance.

Since 1967, Israel has occupied most of the Golan Heights, and following the collapse of the Bashar Assad regime, took control of the Syrian buffer zone, declaring null a 1974 disengagement agreement between the two sides.

Anadolu Agency



Israeli airstrikes target southern Lebanon towns

Beirut, Lebanon - Several towns in southern Lebanon were targeted by Israeli airstrikes on Saturday following the launch of rockets from Lebanon toward northern Israel.

The Lebanese National News Agency NNA confirmed that the northwestern area of the town of Yahmour al-Shakif in the Nabatieh region was hit by intermittent Israeli artillery fire.

The strikes also targeted the outskirts of the towns of Arnoun and Kfar Tibnit.

NNA further noted that the Israeli military fired artillery shells at the town of Khiam, while a rocket hit the town of Houla.

Israeli forces also launched machine gun fire toward areas along the border, including Houla, Markaba, and Kfar Kila.

This escalation came after the Israeli military vowed to respond 'forcefully' to rocket fire from Lebanon directed at northern Israel earlier on Saturday.

Earlier in the day, Israel's

military claimed it had intercepted three rockets, which it said had been fired from Lebanon towards the Israeli settlement of Metula in northern Israel. The rocket fire from Lebanon marks the first such incident since the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon went into effect.

A fragile ceasefire had also been in place in Lebanon since November, ending months of cross-border warfare between Israel and the Lebanese resistance group Hezbollah, that escalated into a full-scale conflict in September.

Lebanese authorities reported nearly 1,100 Israeli violations of the ceasefire, which killed at least 85 people and injured more than 280.

Under the ceasefire deal, Israel was supposed to fully withdraw from southern Lebanon by January 26, but the deadline was extended to February 18 after Israel refused to comply. It still maintains a military presence at five border outposts.

Anadolu Agency

Yemeni Houthi group reports 3rd attack on Israel's Ben Gurion Airport within 48 hours

Sanaa, Yemen - The Yemeni Houthi group reported on Saturday that it had targeted Israel's Ben Gurion Airport with a hypersonic missile for the third time in 48 hours.

In a statement, the Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Saree said: "In support of the oppressed Palestinian people and their brave resistance, our missile forces successfully targeted Ben Gurion Airport in occupied Jaffa with a hypersonic Palestine 2 missile." He noted that this attack was 'the third in 48 hours and successfully achieved its target'.

This marks the fifth time a missile has been launched from Yemen toward Israel since the ceasefire agreement on January 19, which Israel later violated.

Saree also warned all airlines



that 'Ben Gurion Airport is no longer safe for air traffic and will remain so until the aggression on Gaza stops and the blockade is lifted'. "As part of our response to the American aggression on our country, and for the sixth consec-

utive day, the Air Force carried out a military operation targeting several warships accompanying the USS Harry Truman aircraft carrier with multiple drones," he added. On Friday evening, the Israeli army announced that it had

intercepted a missile launched from Yemen before it entered Israeli airspace, marking the second such incident in 24 hours.

Last week, US President Donald Trump said he had ordered a 'decisive and powerful' attack

against the Houthis.

In response, the group said on Thursday that Trump's threats 'will not deter them from supporting Gaza', as they resumed launching missile and drone attacks on Israel and ships in the Red Sea.

This comes alongside Israel's renewed assault on Gaza since early Tuesday. By Thursday evening, American airstrikes on Yemen had killed 79 people and injured over 100 others, including women and children, according to Houthi statements.

The Houthi group has been attacking Israeli-linked ships passing through the Red and Arabian seas, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and the Gulf of Aden with missiles and drones since late 2023.

Anadolu Agency

Israeli outposts proliferate in the West Bank

Bardala, West Bank - Jihad Suleiman Al-Sawafta, 46, has lived on his farm in the occupied West Bank village of Bardala his entire life. But when Israeli settlers showed up in December, Al-Sawafta said his land, and his livelihood, shrank to a fraction of its former self.

"The settlers brought another settler here and placed him in our area. The Israelis built a road that separates us from grazing and agricultural areas, and the settlers don't allow us to farm on them," he told CNN.

"They crowded the area. They took thousands of dunams (1,000 square metres) from Bardala and its grazing lands," he



said, referring to his Palestinian town in the northern part of the West Bank. He added that the Jordan Valley, a fertile strip of

land long considered the West Bank's breadbasket, had been 'largely emptied' of its Palestinian residents.

Israeli forces were overseeing the paving of a new road during CNN's visit in late January. Al-Sawafta said the military maintains a 24-hour presence, providing security for settlers, making it dangerous for him to cross and tend the crops he planted in nearby fields.

Responding to a request for comment about the situation in Bardala, the Israeli military told CNN that the status of the outpost had not changed, and that the new road was intended for security forces, paved in accordance with a military order.

"Palestinians living in the area were not harmed during the work," the Israel Defence Forces

(IDF) said.

Herding outposts like the one set up on Al-Sawafta's land are often established by Israeli settlers on hilltops with a few caravans and sometimes livestock to mark their claim. Monitoring groups say they are notorious for swallowing up vast swathes of land and prohibiting Palestinian residents from moving freely. The outposts are illegal under both Israeli and international law, and the state is not allowed to finance or build on them. The number of Israeli herding outposts has dramatically increased since Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition took power in 2022.

CNN

2024 becomes deadliest year on record for migrants: UN agency

Geneva, Switzerland - At least 8,938 people lost their lives on migration routes in 2024, making it the deadliest year on record, according to new data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) released on Friday.

The toll surpasses the previous record of 8,747 deaths in 2023, continuing a five-year trend of increasing fatalities, the agency said in a statement.

"The tragedy of the growing number of migrant deaths worldwide is both unacceptable and preventable. Behind every number is a human being, someone for whom the loss is devastating," IOM Deputy Director General for Operations Ugochi Daniels said.

"The increase in deaths across so many regions in the world shows why we need an international, holistic response that can prevent further tragic



Migrants return from Mexico's northern border with US following closure

loss of life."

IOM data showed that 2024 was the deadliest year in multiple regions, with 2,778 deaths in Asia, 2,242 in Africa, and 233 in Europe.

The Mediterranean Sea accounted for 2,452 fatalities, underscoring the urgent need for adequate search and rescue systems as well as the need for safe and regular migration routes as alternatives to this risky journey.

In the Americas, at least 1,233 people perished, including a record 341 deaths in the Caribbean and 174 in the Darien Gap.

Violence remained a significant cause of migrant deaths, according to the data, with nearly 600 lives lost in South and Southeast Asia alone.

However, the true toll is likely higher, as many deaths go undocumented due to a lack of official sources. "The rise in

deaths is terrible in and of itself, but the fact that thousands remain unidentified each year is even more tragic," said Julia Black, who is the coordinator of IOM's missing migrants project.

"Beyond the despair and unresolved questions faced by families who have lost a loved one, the lack of more complete data on risks faced by migrants hinders lifesaving responses."

Anadolu Agency

Trump revokes security clearances

US President Trump ordered the revocation of security clearances of several political rivals, including Kamala Harris and Hillary Clinton



In a late-night memo on Friday, Trump directed all federal agencies to immediately strip access to classified information for over a dozen individuals

Washington, D.C., US - US President Donald Trump has ordered the revocation of security clearances of several high-profile political rivals, including former Vice President Kamala Harris and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

In a late-night memo on Friday, Trump directed all federal agencies to immediately strip access to classified information for over a dozen individuals.

"I have determined that it is no longer in the national interest for the following individuals to access classified information," Trump said in the directive. "I hereby direct every executive department and agency head to take all additional action as necessary and consistent with exist-

ing law to revoke any active security clearances."

This latest move follows Trump's February decision to rescind former President Joe Biden's security clearance and bar him from receiving daily intelligence briefings.

The revocations also target former Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney and former Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger, both Republi-

cans who served on the House committee investigating the January 6 attack.

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard had previously confirmed the cancellation of security clearances for Biden-era officials, including former Secretary of State Antony Blinken and former National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan.

The order also applies to legal

figures such as New York Attorney General Letitia James and Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, both of whom led legal efforts against Trump.

In a separate memo, Trump expanded his crackdown to include law firms involved in lawsuits against his administration.

He tasked Attorney General Pam Bondi with reviewing legal organisations that, in his opin-

ion, engaged in 'frivolous' litigation or obstructed key policy initiatives.

Legal status of 532,000 revoked

The legal status of 532,000 Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans living in the US under former President Joe Biden's sponsorship process was revoked on Friday by the

Department of Homeland Security (DHS), according to reports.

More than half a million people from those countries were welcomed to the US after October 2022 through Biden's two-year programme called CHNV, which allowed them to obtain legal permits to live and work, as long as they had financial sponsors.

But the new order signed by DHS chief Kristi Noem ends that programme and all of the temporary residents will lose their legal status April 24 and will be mandated to go back to their respective home countries.

The revocation of their tem-

tries where there is war or political instability to legally enter the US and temporarily live.

All parolees under the CHNV programme must now depart the US before their parole termination date at the end of April because they will no longer have legal status to stay. If they decide to stay illegally, they could be deported if they are caught by immigration officials.

"Parole is inherently temporary, and parole alone is not an underlying basis for obtaining any immigration status," DHS officials said in a statement.

Immigration activists and lawyers have filed a federal law-

This latest move follows Trump's February decision to rescind former President Joe Biden's security clearance and bar him from receiving daily intelligence briefings

Glaciers could disappear by end of century

Istanbul, Turkey - Rapid glacier melt could lead to their disappearance by the end of the 21st century, endangering water sources, agriculture, and biodiversity for millions, according to a new UNESCO report.

Five of the last six years have seen the fastest glacier retreat, with 2022-2024 marking the largest three-year loss of glacier mass ever recorded.

At current melt rates, many glaciers in regions such as Western Canada, the US, Scandinavia, Central Europe, the Caucasus, New Zealand, and the Tropics are expected to disappear by the end of the 21st century.



According to global observations, glaciers - excluding the continental ice sheets of Greenland and Antarctica - have lost over 9,000bn tonnes of ice since records started in 1975.

"This is equivalent to a huge

ice block of the size of Germany with a thickness of 25 metres (82 feet)," said Michael Zemp, director of the World Glacier Monitoring Service.

Retreating glaciers and reduced snowfall in mountain re-

gions, driven by the climate crisis, are expected to affect two-thirds of global irrigated agriculture.

As high mountain regions, known as the world's water towers, store water in glaciers that support hundreds of millions downstream, glacier depletion threatens water supplies and increases natural hazards like floods, especially during the hottest and driest periods.

The report stresses the need for climate adaptation funding and private sector involvement to protect mountain regions' water, agriculture, and energy infrastructure.

Anadolu Agency



Columbia University was a flashpoint in protests during which students demanded an end to Israel's war on Gaza

Columbia University caves to Trump for federal funding

Washington, D.C., US - Columbia University agreed on Friday to a series of new policies demanded by the Trump administration as it seeks to restore hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding that was halted over the school's handling of pro-Palestinian campus protests.

The changes include a sweeping overhaul of the school's campus protest policies, as well as a new review of Columbia's Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies Department, the Center for Palestine Studies and the Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, among others, according to a memo published on the university's website.

It also agreed to ban masks that are being worn 'for the purpose of concealing one's identity',

and is now prohibiting protests inside university buildings. Three-dozen university police officers will be given authority to arrest or remove individuals from campus 'when appropriate'.

Columbia was a flashpoint in protests that began in 2024 and ran through the school year as students demanded an end to Israel's war on the besieged Gaza Strip, and for their institutions to divest from the country. The student-led demonstrations at Columbia quickly became a model for scholars on campuses nationwide as student encampments spread rapidly.

President Donald Trump on March 7 cancelled US\$400mn in federal grants and contracts for Columbia for its handling of the anti-war demonstrations, which

the administration has claimed are inherently antisemitic - charges steadfastly rejected by protesters and organisers.

Katrina Armstrong, Columbia's interim president, said the memo sent to government agencies outlining her new restrictions, policies and reviews 'outlines the substantive work we've been doing over the last academic year to advance our mission, ensure uninterrupted academic activities, and make every student, faculty, and staff member safe and welcome on our campus.'

"In the spirit of great American universities, we expect Columbians to engage in robust debate and discussion about our way forward," she said.

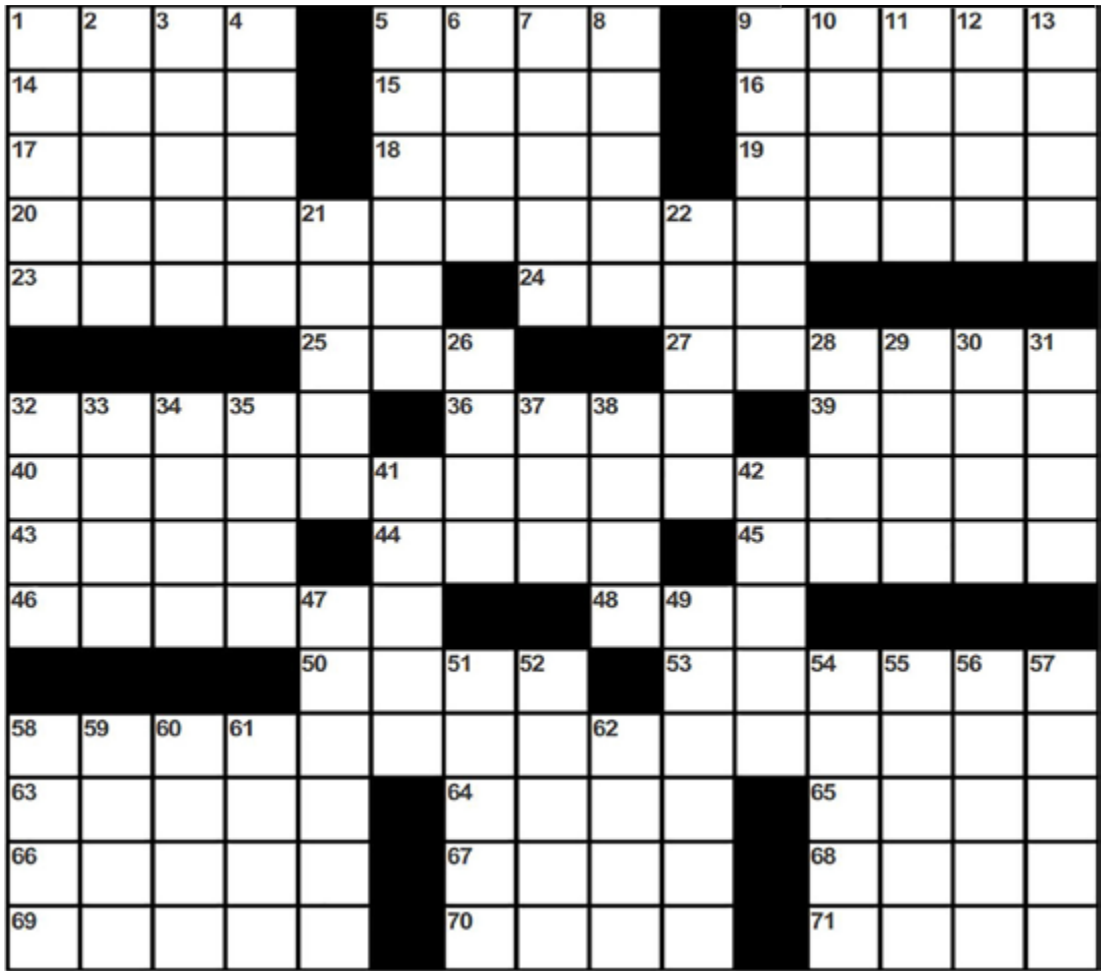
Anadolu Agency



SPRING EQUINOX IN MEXICO

A man attends an event to welcome the Spring Equinox at the Pyramid of the Sun in the archaeological zone of Teotihuacan, Mexico, on Friday. Every Spring Equinox, people gather to 'gather energy' (Xinhua)

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Forest growth
- 5) "Little Women" character
- 9) Automaton
- 14) Seed covering
- 15) Fish deceiver
- 16) Cause to be red-faced
- 17) Raise one's hackles
- 18) Face-to-face exam
- 19) Fancy home
- 20) CIA undertaking
- 23) Show annoyance with, in a way
- 24) Like a bug in a rug
- 25) Fiddle stick?
- 27) Foursome
- 32) Cancel, as a space trip
- 36) Part of a yard
- 39) Blarney Stone land
- 40) Movies are shown here
- 43) Bang-up
- 44) Abominable snowman
- 45) Dental filling
- 46) Ready to bloom
- 48) Impede (with "down")
- 50) Small glass container
- 53) Queasiness
- 58) Participate in hide-and-seek
- 63) Beautify

- 64) Cotton seed removers
- 65) One in line for the family fortune
- 66) Business leader
- 67) Poker pot starter
- 68) Taro root
- 69) Representative
- 70) They're big among the glitterati
- 71) Whiskey choicester of myth
- DOWN**
- 1) Chagall, Connelly and Anthony
- 2) Constellation with a belt
- 3) Forest trees of a region
- 4) Sheep counter's quest
- 5) Drunk, in slang
- 6) Buck abroad
- 7) Snarcs
- 8) Troy beauty
- 9) Wreak havoc on
- 10) Words written in passing?
- 11) Island near Java
- 12) Home of the Nobel Prize
- 13) Comparative word
- 21) Talmud expert
- 22) The Babe and Buzzi
- 26) Take for a bride
- 28) Beach bird

- 29) Cambodian currency
- 30) Length x width, for a rectangle
- 31) Contradict
- 32) Attempt
- 33) Confucius' dynasty (Var.)
- 34) Tear violently
- 35) Like garage sale goods
- 37) After-tax number
- 38) Baby holder
- 41) Kingdom of Croesus
- 42) Humidor item
- 47) In equal amounts
- 49) Unwelcome obligations
- 51) Sign of an untreated pool
- 52) Covering up the truth
- 54) One who puts you in your place
- 55) Poorly maintained, as a hotel
- 56) Skip over syllables
- 57) Dos that get picked out
- 58) Rough it on vacation
- 59) Sensory input
- 60) Cape Canaveral cancellation
- 61) Heart of the matter
- 62) Savvy about

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

You don't usually travel much unless it's for business, but at the moment you'll be all too happy to hop on a train, bus, or plane with anywhere but your current location in mind. Yes, you definitely need a change of scenery. The good news is that you know it, you can afford it, and you'll be on your way soon. And how about inviting a travel companion along to help take the edge off?



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You've been playing for days, and you've enjoyed every minute of it, but now it's time to settle down a bit. Not that that you'll mind, just this once. Your energy stores are low, and you're in the mood to chill out and regroup. Yes, really. Even perpetually impetuous people like you occasionally need to rest. It's okay. There's no shame in it.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

After the behavior you've been exhibiting recently, your dear ones have absolutely no idea what to expect from you, which is just the way you like it. So today, just for a change, you'll do a rapid about-face and suddenly become quite concerned with duties, responsibilities, and meticulous attention to details. That'll teach them to think they have you all figured out!



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

01. The exterior of which real Boston pub was used in the TV programme "Cheers" in the 1980s?
- A. Welcome Stranger
 - B. Cheers
 - C. Bull & Finch
 - D. Sam Malone's

02. Which song-writing duo wrote hit songs under the pseudonyms Ann Orson and Carte Blanche?
- A. Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein
 - B. Elton John and Bernie Taupin
 - C. George and Ira Gershwin
 - D. W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan

03. In the phrase which might be represented by the abbreviation "a w f a g's b", what does the "b" stand for?
- A. Breakfast
 - B. Bridle
 - C. Buccaneer
 - D. Behind

Answers: 1. C 2. B 3. B



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Someone you've been close to for years has just done something wonderful for you, but you may not know about it for quite some time. Since you're as perceptive as anyone could possibly be, however, you'll have an inkling, which gives you the perfect opportunity to leave a thoughtful gift on their doorstep or return the favor from behind the scenes.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

Don't pack up that certain someone's clothes just yet. Sure, they've been irritating, and no, you don't have to take it. But if you give them a second chance, you might be pleasantly surprised. You two have history, that's apparent. So why not put some of it to use? Think of the good times, and allow those memories to convince you that it's worth being patient. Just one more time.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

Those unforeseen obstacles are still on the menu. But if you can successfully navigate your way through today (which might be tricky, especially if a dear one's jealousy or resentfulness rears its ugly little head) and tomorrow (when you'll be working while you'd much rather be playing), you'll be golden. Oh, just grin and bear it. Let the others be as cranky as they like. You don't have to encourage them.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You've never been tough to talk into traveling, and today won't be any different. It will be just right, in fact, because you're feeling more than a little bit like breaking out of a rut, and you know exactly how to do it. Sweden? Egypt? Who knows? Don't decide until you absolutely have to. Get as much information as you can, and then choose the place that's most tantalizing.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Remember how jealousy and resentment made getting through that one day easier said than done? Well, here we go again. It might not be the same person or circumstances, but something about today's events will seem quite familiar. At this point, however, you know exactly what to do: don't feed any energy into the situation and it will go away. If that doesn't work, be more direct. Say goodbye, and say it like you mean it.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

A little bit of worrying about money is a healthy thing, but there's no sense in obsessing about it. Better yet, it's not necessary. You've been keeping a careful eye on things for some time now, and it's probably been paying off, literally. Besides, everyone spends a little more than they should. And isn't there someone you'll be spending time with over the next few days you'd like to spoil just a tad?



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

Still putting your nose to the grindstone? Still forgetting about what you love best? Your partner, your friends, and socializing, for example? Well, it's time to stop that right now. Your loved ones will no doubt remind you of that tonight. Don't be too upset if they give you a good talking to. They have your own best interest at heart and maybe just a little selfishness on their part because they miss you.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

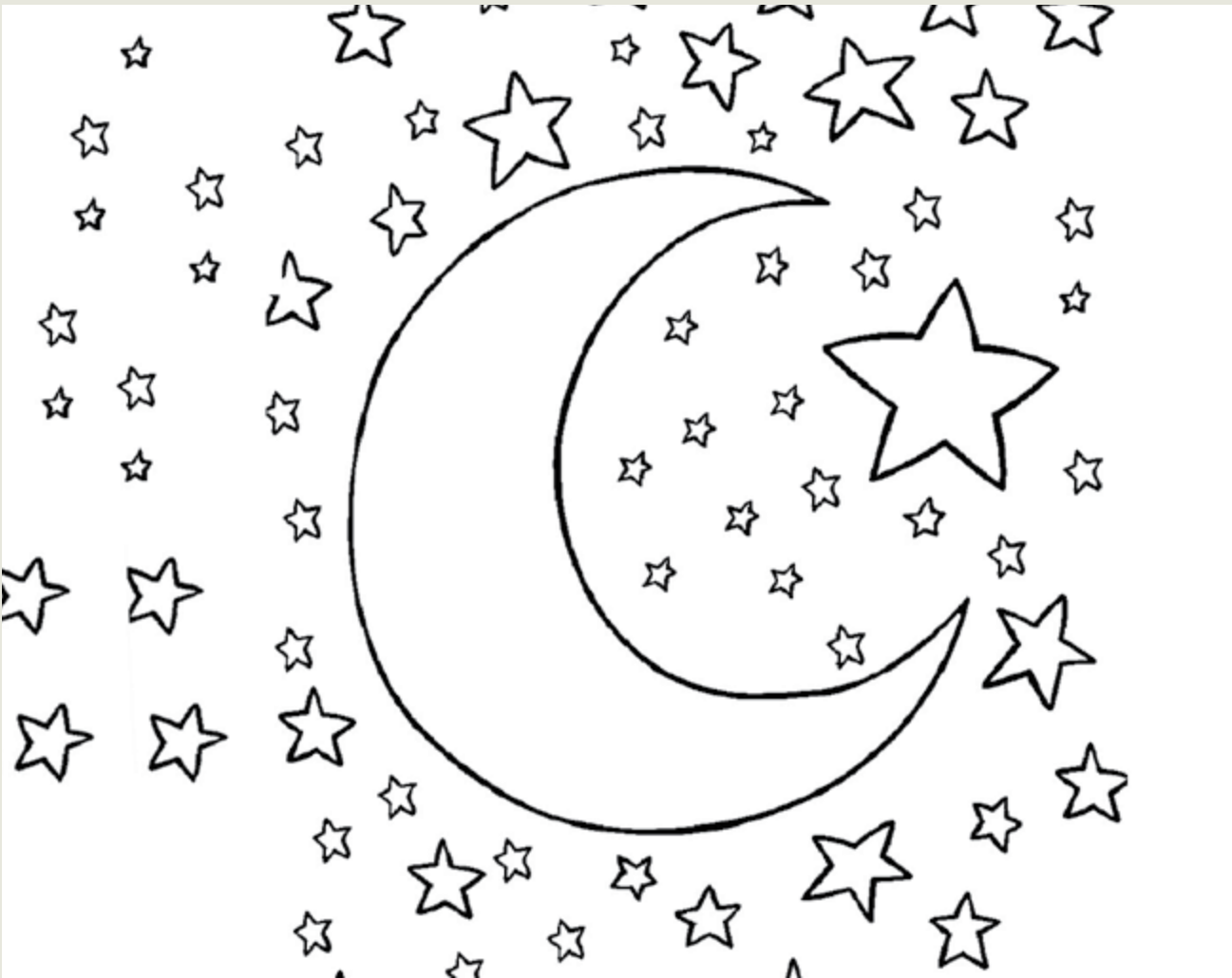
Oh boy, here we go. That innocent little flirtation you were just starting to enjoy? Forget about enjoying it. A certain someone who absolutely adores you will make it abundantly clear that this isn't quite what they had in mind when you two talked about it. Of course, you're a big fan of monogamy, so it's not as if you were thinking of acting on this, but fun is fun. At least, it was.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

On the one hand, you're still willing to be patient. On the other, you're feeling a bit like Vesuvius on a bad day. Whether you explode or not is one thing, but it's definitely time to let them know exactly how much fire you can spout. That little-known secret about you is one that you might want to share now: you have one heck of a temper. It doesn't show up much, but when it does? Stand back.

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

E	E	D	I
G	A	D	I
B	N	M	N
O	Y	O	D

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

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

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

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

Former heavyweight champ George Foreman, aged 76, dies

Houston, US - American **George Foreman**, one of the great second acts in sports, who reclaimed the heavyweight boxing title at age 45 and became a celebrated product pitchman, died on Friday at age 76.

“With profound sorrow, we announce the passing of our beloved George Edward Foreman Sr. who peacefully departed on March 21, 2025

surrounded by loved ones,” his family said in an Instagram post.

An intimidating, thunderous puncher who lost his first title to Muhammad Ali in their famous “Rumble in the Jungle” in 1974, “Big George” was a more round, jovial figure when he knocked out Michael Moorer for his second crown two decades later.

Foreman’s comeback and the

fortune he made selling fat-wicking electric cooking grills made him an icon of self-improvement and success for the Baby Boom generation.

Born in Marshall, Texas, on Jan. 10, 1949, Foreman’s family soon moved to Houston where he and his six siblings were raised by a single mother. Growing up poor in the segregated American South, Foreman

dropped out of junior high school and used his size and fists in street robberies.

“George’s journey from the streets of Fifth Ward to boxing and business success was an inspiration,”

Houston Mayor John Whitmire said in a statement.

“He never forgot where he came from ... Houston will forever be proud to call George Foreman one of our own.”

The Job Corps, part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “Great Society” re-

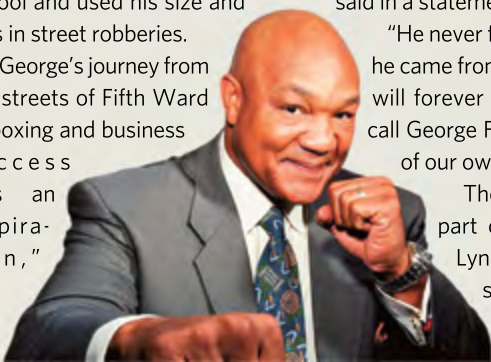
forms, “rescued me from the gutter,” Foreman later wrote.

Through the program, 16-year-old Foreman moved out of Texas and was encouraged to channel his rage and growing bulk into boxing.

At age 19 and in his 25th amateur fight, Foreman captured the heavyweight boxing gold medal at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. Turning pro, he

won 37 straight matches on his way to face reigning champion Joe Frazier in Kingston, Jamaica, winning by technical knockout in round two.

Foreman defended the belt twice more before meeting Ali in Kinshasa, Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in one of the most celebrated boxing matches in history.



MYLES-STONE MAN

Lewis-Skelly scores on debut to give Tuchel a winning England start

London, England - England debutant Myles Lewis-Skelly got new coach Thomas Tuchel’s reign up and running as the 18-year-old scored the first goal in a 2-0 home victory against Albania in their World Cup qualifying Group K opener on Friday.

The Arsenal left back, who along with Newcastle United’s Dan Burn was handed a first cap in Tuchel’s maiden game in charge, slotted home in the 20th minute at a packed Wembley.

There was much for Tuchel to ponder in a far from fluent display and it took England until the 77th minute to make the points safe when captain Harry Kane’s precise finish ensured his side began their path to next year’s finals with a win.

Burn came close to making it a dream night for the debutants in the first half when he headed against the crossbar.

Tuchel’s England team are back in action at Wembley on Monday when they host Latvia in their second qualifier while Albania host group outsiders Andorra.

Lewis-Skelly only made his first Premier League start in December but his rapid progress caught the eye of Tuchel and he was given his chance as England set off on their latest quest to win their first trophy since 1966.

It took him only 20 minutes to repay the faith as Jude Bellingham turned on the edge of the area and slid a pass through for Lewis-Skelly to shoot low past Thomas Strakosha.

“Amazing player. Amazing personality. He came into camp and showed straight away that



England’s Myles Lewis-Skelly scores against Albania in their World Cup qualifying Group K opener on Friday

“Amazing player. Amazing personality. He (Myles Lewis-Skelly) came into camp and showed straight away that it’s normal to fall in love with him. It is well deserved

THOMAS TUCHEL

it’s normal to fall in love with him. It is well deserved,” Tuchel said, although he was less pleased with other aspects of the display.

“Second half, I felt we were too slow and in general not enough runs off the ball to get behind the line.”

Lewis-Skelly became the

youngest player to score on his senior England debut, taking the record away from Marcus Rashford who was also 18 when he scored against Australia in 2016.

Tuchel had sprung something of a surprise by recalling Rashford to the squad and then giving him his first England appearance for a

year but he was a largely peripheral figure and was substituted in the second half.

England racked up 437 passes in the first half -- the most recorded by data analysts Opta in any first half of any match -- although the vast majority of them were in front of a deeply-packed Albania defence.

Burn, who five days earlier at Wembley scored Newcastle’s opening goal in their historic League Cup final win over Liverpool, had virtually nothing to do in the first half.

However, his heart was momentarily in his mouth as from a

rare Albania attack, his clearing header spun the ball up into the air and landed on the top of the crossbar. He then almost emulated Lewis-Skelly when he headed a Declan Rice corner against the woodwork while Kane was denied an almost certain goal with a superb block by Albania’s Berat Djimsiti.

Albania asked more questions of England’s defence after the break and their thousands of fans raised the decibel levels as they made some dangerous incursions forward, although they failed to force Jordan Pickford into a meaningful save.



Declan Rice with Myles Lewis-Skelly

England’s Rice all praise for ‘fearless’ Lewis-Skelly

London, England - Myles Lewis-Skelly has already made himself an asset for England and has a long career ahead of him, midfielder Declan Rice said after the 18-year-old left back became the youngest player to score on his senior debut for the national team on Friday.

Lewis-Skelly opened the scoring for England in the 20th minute of their 2-0 victory over Albania in their World Cup qualifying Group K opener at Wembley.

A product of the Arsenal academy, Lewis-Skelly earned his first England call-up after impressing in his breakthrough season at the North London club.

“Week-on-week he’s shown how good he is, and the fearlessness he has in his performance,” Rice told British media of his Arsenal teammate.

“That’s on him - how much you want it and how much you want to keep going. He needs to be hungry every day. He needs to keep being himself around the training ground at Arsenal, around England, and keep pushing himself.

“He’s an asset for us now. He’s 18 years old and has got a

long career in the game if he keeps doing good things.

“He didn’t even know he was going to be starting until today and I just knew he was going to have a good performance, because he has that belief in himself.”

He (Lewis-Skelly) is an asset for us now. He’s 18 years old and has got a long career in the game if he keeps doing good things

DECLAN RICE

New England manager Thomas Tuchel was also delighted with the youngster’s debut.

“He is full of confidence and very full of humour and such an open and mature character,” the German said.

“Everything you see on the pitch you see off the pitch ... He does it with a natural confidence and this is how he plays football,” added Tuchel.

Argentina played a complete match, says Scaloni after victory against Uruguay

Montevideo, Uruguay - Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said their 1-0 victory over Uruguay in Friday’s World Cup qualifier in Montevideo showed the depth of their squad after Lautaro Martinez, Lionel Messi and Paulo Dybala all missed out due to injury.

The match was headed for a draw until a 67th-minute strike from 23-year-old Thiago Almada. The winger, who is on loan at Lyon from Botafogo, fired in a 25-yard strike to stun the home crowd.

“When one player is missing, another comes in,” said coach Lionel Scaloni. “How can I not be satisfied, not just for the result but for how they gave it their all.

The satisfaction comes from the fact that the team played a complete match.”

Uruguay beat Argentina 2-0 in Buenos Aires in last November’s reverse fixture, and had come into Friday’s game five points behind them in second place. Argentina avenged that defeat as Almada, 23, fired beyond the dive of Uruguay goalkeeper Sergio Rochet and into the top corner.

Nicolas Gonzalez was sent off deep into stoppage time for a high challenge but Argentina held on to go six points clear of Ecuador, who beat Venezuela 2-1 with former West Ham and Everton forward Enner Valencia scoring both goals.



Lionel Scaloni

Knee injury rules Italy’s Calafiori out of Germany return game in Nations League

Rome, Italy - Italy defender Riccardo Calafiori will miss the second leg of their Nations League quarter-final against Germany after suffering a knee injury in the first game, the Italian football association (FIGC) said on Friday.

Calafiori had to leave the pitch in added time towards the end of Italy’s 2-1 defeat to Germany at the San Siro on Thursday after slipping while changing direction and required treatment on his knee.

“Riccardo Calafiori, who underwent tests this morning for the sprain-contusion trauma to his left knee sustained during the match against Germany, has been deemed unavailable for the return match scheduled for Sunday and will return to his home club,” an FIGC statement said.

Italy are already without



Riccardo Calafiori injured his knee in the Nations League quarterfinal first-leg match against Germany

striker Mateo Retegui, who withdrew through injury on the eve of the first leg, as they head to Dortmund for Sunday’s second leg.

Calafiori, who joined Arsenal from Bologna in July, has had a

Italy are already without Mateo Retegui, who withdrew through injury on the eve of the first leg, as they head to Dortmund for second leg

number of injuries this season including a similar knee injury, which have forced the 22-year-old to miss nine Premier League games. Arsenal’s next game is against Fulham on April 1.

Alisson to return to Liverpool

Brazil goalkeeper Alisson, who was forced off the field after a

clash of heads during Thursday’s 2-1 win over Colombia in a World Cup qualifier, has left the national team and will return to his club Liverpool, the Premier League side said on Friday.

Alisson and Colombia defender Davinson Sanchez both collapsed after clashing heads during the second half. Medical staff rushed onto the pitch to treat them, before both players were substituted.

Media reports said Alisson, 32, was taken off as a precaution after feeling dizzy following the injury.

“Alisson is travelling back to Merseyside and will undergo assessment from the Reds’ medical staff,” Liverpool said in a statement.

Alisson later played down fears of a serious injury.

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC

Salah stars as Egypt in control of World Cup qualification campaign

Cape Town, South Africa - Captain Mohamed Salah scored for Egypt as they eased to a 2-0 victory over Ethiopia in their 2026 World Cup qualifier on Friday, but 2022 semi-finalists Morocco needed a late winner from Bilal El Khannouss to defeat unfancied Niger.

Zizo bagged Egypt's second goal as they opened up a commanding five point lead in Group A at the halfway point of the qualification campaign.

Burkina Faso earlier defeated Djibouti 4-1 to move into second in the pool.

The top team in each of the nine groups earns a place at the finals in the United States, Mexico and Canada, while the four best runners-up enter an arduous inter-continental playoff campaign for one further berth.

Morocco had the luxury of playing their 'away' clash with Niger at home in Oujda with their opponents having no suitable stadiums to host international matches. But they needed an equaliser on the hour-mark from Ismael Saibari, and then a winner two minutes into stoppage time from El Khannouss to claim victory and lead Group E by six points from second-placed Niger.

Relebohile Mofokeng and Jayden Adams both scored their first international goals as South Africa were made to toil for a 2-0 home win over neighbours



Egypt's Mohamed Salah scores against Ethiopia in their World Cup qualifier on Friday

Morocco needed an equaliser on the hour-mark from Ismael Saibari, and then a winner two minutes into stoppage time from El Khannouss to claim victory and lead Group E by six points from second-placed Niger

Lesotho as they went top of Group C.

South Africa travel to neutral Abidjan to play second-placed Benin on Tuesday where coach Hugo Broos' side could potentially open up a sizeable lead in the pool.

Nigeria claimed a first win of the qualification campaign at the fifth attempt with a 2-0 success over Rwanda in Kigali. Victor Osimhen scored a brace to take Nigeria to six points, four behind South Africa.

Ghana, who failed to qualify for the Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco later this year, moved top of their qualification pool with a 5-0 hammering of Chad in Accra.

Antoine Semenyo, Inaki Williams, Jordan Ayew, Mohammed Salisu and Ernest Nuamah all scored for the home side, who lead Madagascar in Group I by two points.

Ivory Coast took over at the top of their pool as they claimed a narrow 1-0 win over Burundi in a game played in Morocco. Evann Guessand scored his first goal for the Ivorians to settle the contest.

Mohamed Amoura netted a brace as Algeria won 3-1 in Botswana to move top of Group G on goal difference from Mozambique. Amine Gouiri scored the opener for the visitors.

Guinea were held to a goalless draw by minnows Somalia in neutral Abidjan in a blow to their chances.

FIFA kicks Mexico's Leon out of Club World Cup over rule breach

Zurich, Switzerland - Club Leon will be removed from the Club World Cup in the United States later this year as it and another Mexican club in the tournament, CF Pachuca, failed to meet criteria on multi-club ownership, world soccer's governing body said on Friday.

Both Leon and Pachuca are owned by Grupo Pachuca. Leon had qualified after winning the Concacaf Champions Cup in 2023 while Pachuca won the competition last year.

However, Costa Rican side Liga Deportiva Alajuelense filed a complaint with FIFA in November based on the "eligibility principles" of the competition, requesting the right to participate in the Club World Cup.

Disciplinary proceedings were opened by FIFA against both Mexican clubs and the chairman of the FIFA Disciplinary Committee referred the case to the FIFA Appeal Committee.

"After having evaluated all evidence on file, the chairman of the FIFA Appeal Committee has decided that CF Pachuca and Club Leon failed to meet the criteria on multi-club ownership," FIFA said in a statement. "...FIFA has determined that Club Leon will be removed from the competition, with the club to be admitted as a replacement to be announced in due course."



Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton celebrates after winning the Chinese Grand Prix sprint

Hamilton shines in China sprint for his first Ferrari win

Shanghai, China - Lewis Hamilton celebrated his first win for Ferrari on Saturday, answering his critics by leading the Chinese Grand Prix sprint from start to finish in only his second race for the Italian Formula One team.

The seven-time world champion, starting from a surprise pole position, managed his tyres superbly to take the chequered flag 6.889 seconds clear of McLaren's Oscar Piastri.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen finished third in the 100km race ahead of teammate George Russell.

Meanwhile, McLaren's Oscar Piastri seized the first proper pole position of his Formula One career at the Chinese Grand Prix on Saturday with the fastest lap yet around the Shanghai International Circuit.



David Goffin hits a return to Carlos Alcaraz

Goffin stuns Alcaraz in Miami Open

Miami, US - Carlos Alcaraz fell 5-7 6-4 6-3 to Belgian David Goffin in the Miami Open second round on Friday while Novak Djokovic tied Rafa Nadal for most ATP Masters 1000 match wins and Russia's Mirra Andreeva took another step toward a 'Sunshine Double'.

Goffin led the second seed by a break in each of the three sets and secured the victory on his second match point when a sliding Alcaraz was unable to retrieve a forehand the Belgian ripped into the corner.

Up next for Goffin is Brandon Nakashima, a 6-4 4-6 6-3 winner over Roberto Carballes Baena.

Six-times champion Djokovic made his long-awaited Miami Open return and defeated Australian Rinky Hijikata 6-0 7-6(1) to reach the third round.

It marked Djokovic's first Miami appearance since 2019 and the Serbian fourth seed's vic-

tory was his 410th ATP Masters 1000 match win, tying him with Rafa Nadal atop the all-time list.

"I wanted to make a statement to myself and to others, as well, that I'm still able to play on a high level," Djokovic told reporters.

"I lost (my last) two tournaments in my first rounds, so I really was eager to get the win in the first match in Miami Open."

It was all one-way traffic in the opening set as Djokovic showcased his superior shotmaking from the baseline along with a lethal service game to make a perfect start and needed just 27 minutes to wrap up the opening set.

But Hijikata refused to back down and his confidence grew during a tightly-contested second set where neither player could manage a break but Djokovic took over in the tiebreak where he won the final six points.

Run storm looms as IPL begins

New Delhi, India - Bowlers have been allowed to use saliva to shine the ball in the Indian Premier League but the batters are salivating at the prospect of breaching the 300-mark when the world's richest Twenty20 league got under way on Saturday.

Lifting the saliva ban, a Covid-19 legacy, will allow the fast bowlers to try and generate some reverse swing in a format which treats them as cannon fodder.

But the continuation of the Impact Player rule, which allows teams to play an extra batter substituting a bowler in a match, will ensure it will rain fours and sixes across 13 venues over the next two months.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's 263-5 against Pune Warriors stood as the league's highest total for a decade but that 2013 mark was bettered four times in last year's IPL - three times by Sunrisers Hyderabad alone.

Hyderabad's 287-3 against Bengaluru is the new benchmark but Nathan Leamon, a strategy consultant with defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders, is among those who believe 300 is achievable.

"We have already seen a huge escalation in scores over the last two years," the former England lead analyst told ESPNcricinfo.

"It would be naive to think that we have got to the fullest extent of that - of teams learning how to

take advantage of the new laws.

"You have seen several games where 260 has been scored, which never used to happen. You have seen several games where teams score 100 in the power-play ... So something has changed."

RCB, who faced Kolkata in Saturday's IPL opener at Eden Gardens, are likely to be involved when the 300-mark is breached given the traditionally flat pitch and small boundaries in Bengaluru.

RCB's Rajat Patidar is one of five new captains in the 18th edition of the tournament, which will culminate with the May 25 final in Kolkata.

Ajinkya Rahane has been ap-

pointed Kolkata captain after the departure of Shreyas Iyer, who will spearhead Punjab Kings' bid to win their maiden IPL title.

All-rounder Axar Patel will lead Delhi Capitals after the franchise released stumper-batter Rishabh Pant, who will skipper Lucknow Super Giants.

Sunday's double header includes a mouth-watering clash between Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings, the IPL's most successful teams with five titles each.

While there are no overwhelming favourites this year, South Africa great AB de Villiers backed his former club RCB to shed their under-achiever's tag.



Virat Kohli scored an unbeaten 59 while his opening partner Phil Salt hit a smashing 56 off 31 balls as Royal Challengers Bengaluru defeated Kolkata Knight Riders by seven wickets. Earlier, Krunal Pandya's 3 for 29 and Josh Hazlewood's double strikes helped Bengaluru restrict Kolkata to 174/8.

'WE STAYED FOCUSED'

Coach Jaber pleased with Oman's fighting spirit in 1-1 draw against South Korea

Goyang, South Korea - Oman head coach Rasheed Jaber praised his team's determination after they secured a hard-earned point against South Korea in their AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to 26 Group B tie at Goyang Stadium on Thursday.

Ali al Busaidi came to Oman's rescue, scoring with 10 minutes left to cancel out Hwang Hee Chan's first-half goal as Jaber's charges kept their hopes of earning automatic qualification alive.

"It was a very tough match. We knew we were playing against one of the best teams in the group. They have top quality players who can change the game at any moment and make the difference. But we stayed focused and concentrated on our defence," said Jaber.

"In the first half, they scored from one mistake. In the second half, we capitalised and got the equaliser. It was a tough battle. I know that coming here and getting a point - or even a win - is never easy because they have the fans and the players who can do so much in a match. But we are happy with the result. It's a good outcome to take a point from this game."

South Korea started cautiously and were content to move the



Oman's Ali al Busaidi celebrates with teammates after scoring against South Korea at Goyang Stadium on Thursday



In the second half, we capitalised and got the equaliser. It was a tough battle. I know that coming here and getting a point is never easy. But we are happy with the result

RASHEED JABER

ball around, with Hwang's spirited run towards goal in the 16th minute blocked by defender Khalid al Braiki outside the box.

Both sides had no shots at goal in the first 30 minutes, with the Koreans seeing their build-ups snuffed out by the Omani defence before the 18-yard box.

South Korea, however, deservedly took the lead in the 41st minute when Lee Kang-in, who had come on three minutes earlier, sent a beautiful pass to Hwang, who controlled the ball with his first touch and coolly drilled it into the bottom right corner past a helpless Ibrahim Mukhaini.

They had a chance to double their advantage when they were

awarded a free-kick right outside the box five minutes into time added on at the end of the first half, but captain Son Heung-min sent his shot straight into Ibrahim's arms.

South Korea upped the tempo after the break, with Ibrahim pulling off a save from Oh Sehun's downward header from the edge of the six-yard box in the 49th minute.

At the other end, Oman's run at their opponents' goals lacked the finishing touch until the 80th minute, when Muhsen al Ghasani's one-two with Al Busaidi saw the latter send a stinging shot from the edge of the box past a rooted Jo Hyeon-woo to level the score.

South Korea will bounce back, says Son



Son Heung-min

Goyang, South Korea - Son Heung-min said he "let my teammates down" after South Korea were forced to settle for a 1-1 draw with Oman in their AFC Asian Qualifiers - Road to 26 Group B tie on Thursday.

The draw meant South Korea missed a chance to take a big step towards the FIFA World Cup 2026 in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Oman equalised with 10 minutes remaining as South Korea's lead was cut to three points ahead of both Jordan and Iraq, with only the top two teams qualifying automatically.

"I feel like I let my teammates down today," captain Son told reporters after the game. "But this is not the only match we're going to play to-

gether. "We have been able to create some positive situations to come this far. We should try to learn from this match and take the next step."

"A match like this can teach us a lesson. We have to take whatever positives we can from this."

South Korea head coach Hong Myung-bo was also disappointed that his side had to settle for a second successive draw, having also been held by Palestine.

"It was our least convincing performance since entering the final qualifying round. Of course, there were challenges due to new player combinations on the field, but even from the start of the first half, we struggled," said Hong.

Big win against Vietnam signals Oman's title ambitions, says Al Thawani

Pattaya, Thailand - Head coach Talib Hilal al Thawani hailed the performance of his Oman side after their emphatic 7-1 win over Vietnam in their opening AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup Thailand 2025 Group D tie on Friday at the Jomtien Beach Arena.

A buoyant Hilal declared that the end goal was not just to earn a ticket to the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in May, but to once

again be crowned continental champions. "We prepared a lot for this tournament, and we are here with the ambition of reclaiming the title we won a decade ago," said Hilal. "Starting our journey with three points is fantastic as the boys executed the plan effectively."

The 2023 semi-finalists took part in an extensive preparatory camp ahead of the competition,



Oman coach Talib Hilal al Thawani congratulates his players

and Hilal is hopeful that his charges will continue to keep their performance up in their next game against Malaysia.

"We have prepared very well for this tournament, and the team has good potential with an ideal balance of talented youngsters and senior, more experienced players," explained the 50-year-old. "We respect all the teams, but we have faith in our own

squad. We have entered the competition with our eyes on the main prize, and we are doing everything we can to recreate the memories from 2015."

Vietnam's Mai Van Duc will have his hands full as his side gears up to take on inaugural champions Bahrain, who narrowly edged Malaysia 4-3 on Friday.

"I think we tried our very best.

We were facing a former champion, which is always a difficult task in an opening game, and I also feel we were a little out of luck," said Van Duc. "The next game is very important, and we have to ensure there is no lapse in judgment or concentration. There is room for improvement, both tactically and technically, which we will try to address, and hopefully, things will go our way."

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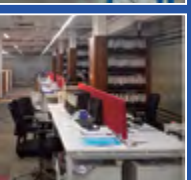
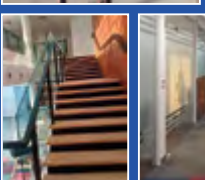
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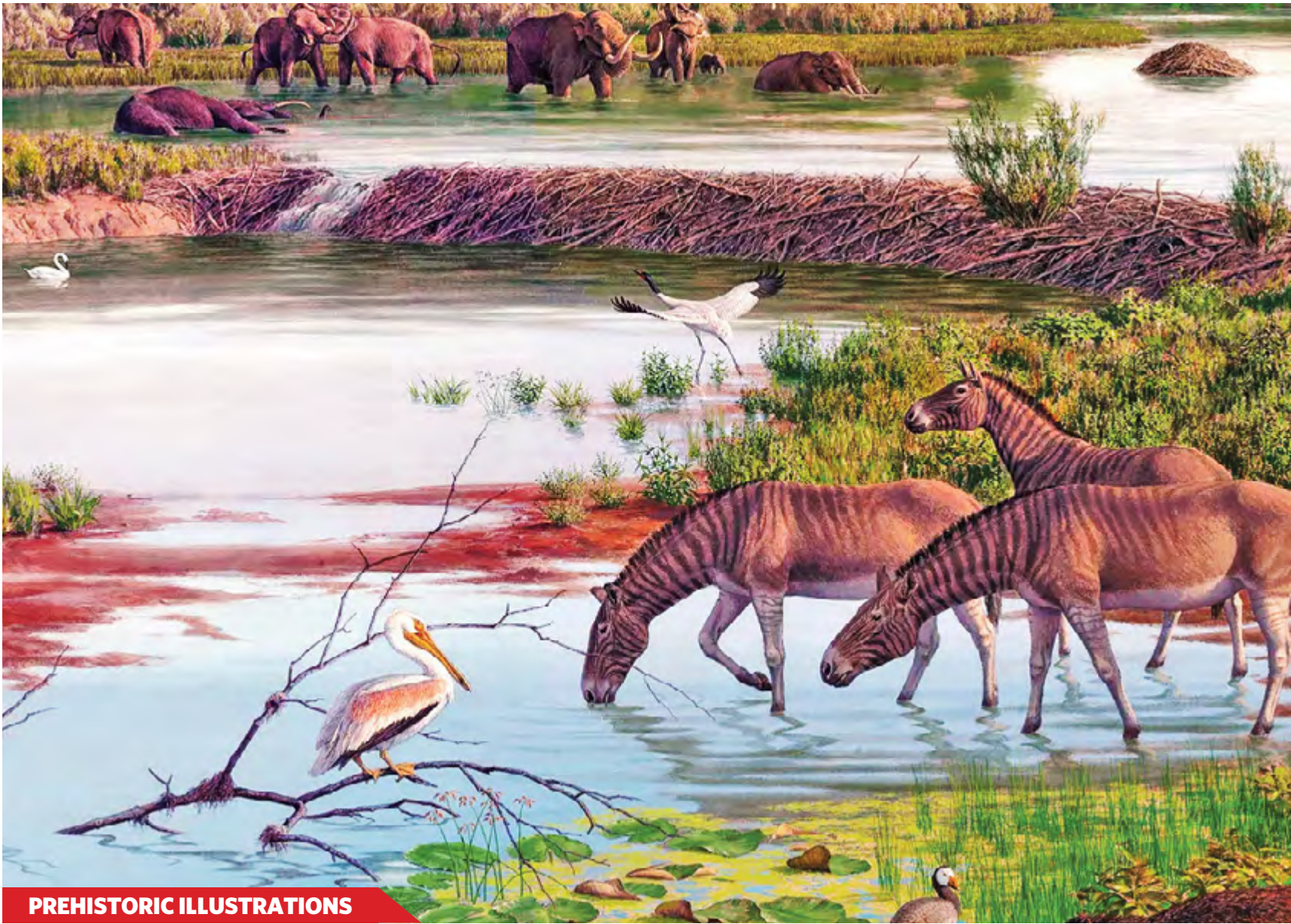


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PREHISTORIC ILLUSTRATIONS

When you open the cover of Jay Matternes' Paleoartist and Wildlife Painter, the title page painting might seem somewhat strange...

Gathered around the edge of a lake are striped horses, like zebras but more svelte. A pelican sits before them just above some lily pads, as if the scene could be from somewhere in East Africa today. But the elephants cavorting in the water in the background don't look right for African elephants.

The heads of the pachyderms are low and rounded, their tusks bearing a peculiar curve to them, and their ears are too small. The beasts are mastodons, the key clue that the scene is not from a time we know but from the Pliocene, more than three million years ago, in what's now Idaho.

The piece is a slice of ancient time that is so lovingly detailed it seems familiar, a magic that artist Jay Matternes has brought to paleo and wildlife art through a long and storied career.

Written with author Richard Milner and paleoanthropologist Ian Tattersall, the book is presented as a long-overdue highlight reel of Matternes' stellar work.

"Although his name was unknown to the general public, Jay's work has entranced and educated millions who grew up with his six murals of mammal evolution at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History and his paintings at the American Museum of Natural History in New York," Milner says, adding that Matternes' paintings have repeatedly appeared in publications such as National Geographic, Scientific American, Science and others.

Matternes has the credentials to be mentioned in the same breath as paleo and wildlife artists who left their mark on the discipline like Charles R Knight and Zdenek Burian. Matternes' skill at restoring the lives of fossil humans was especially informed by his close attention to modern primates and other animals. From drawing the gorillas being studied by Dian Fossey in Rwanda to artistically fleshing out prehistoric mammals from

Brush with the past

A new book highlights the beautiful work of Jay Matternes, an accomplished paleoartist who drew everything from mammoths to early humans

bone to muscle to life appearance, Matternes has captured everything from real-life moments to scenarios we are millions of years too late to see. The book got its start back in 1989. At the time, paleoanthropologist Ian Tattersall and designer Willard Whitson commissioned Matternes to paint primate evolution murals for the American Museum of Natural History. Discussions led to the possibility of a book about how understanding of prehistoric life has changed through Mat-

'40s, Matternes would draw and sketch for hours on end. Movies, newspaper photos and local settings fuelled his imagination, the book recounts, but a key inspiration was Knight, well-known for wildlife art and paleo pieces done for various museums. A 1946 visit to the Bronx Zoo and New York's American Museum of Natural History were particularly formative, Matternes recalls, nudging him to become a professional wildlife artist rather than follow in his father's footsteps in medicine. The decision would lead to some of the most detailed and evocative wildlife art ever composed.

Organised by concept rather than chronology, Milner's book highlights Matternes' enduring classics alongside lesser-known pieces and behind-the-canvas sketches. Being able to observe dissections of gorillas, orangutans and other animals from zoos, for example, gave Matternes an excellent grounding as a comparative anatomist who is able to build out the look of a creature from the bones to the skin.

In 1958, while still in the Army, Matternes did some freelance artistic work for the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. The museum's paleontology staff had been planning for a major renovation, part of which would involve multiple murals of well-known communities of prehistoric mammals. Smithsonian curator C Lewis Gazin invited Matternes to apply for the project, and he took the job. But Matternes drew from such detailed anatomical knowl-



Jay Matternes

ternes' paintings.

The effort led him to get in touch with editor Richard Milner, who'd already published a book on Matternes' childhood idol Charles R Knight. "I was delighted when Richard accepted," Matternes says. Eventually, the book morphed into more of a biographical collection of the artist's phenomenal career.

From the time he was a child in a military family stationed in the Philippines before moving to other bases in the 1930s and

edge that he sometimes frustrated the scientists he was working with.

While working on art of the 50-million-year-old fossil mammal Uintatherium - a four-legged herbivore about the size of a rhino with saber teeth and three pairs of knobby horns on its head - Matternes restored the mammal with upright, pillar-like limbs instead of sprawling ones like the fossil mount in the museum. "Damn it, Matternes, it would

decades of work illustrating early humans directly from their fossilised remains and the places they were found.

Matternes' reputation was so unparalleled that in 1997 he was called to exclusively illustrate the early human Ardipithecus ramidus.

"When I jumped at the chance, paleoanthropologist Tim White immediately swore me to secrecy, a security measure against academic piracy im-



be much better if you made your paintings correspond to the skeletal mounts in the hall, rather than require expensive repositioning of the skeletons to match your paintings," the researcher reportedly griped, but of course Matternes' interpretation of the bones was correct.

Of all his subjects, however, Matternes is probably best known for his illustrations of fossil humans. In the mid-1960s, Time-Life Books commissioned Matternes to create illustrations for a volume by anthropologist F Clark Howell called Early Man. No one had seen depictions of early humans as realistic as Matternes' before, and it began

posed on all of the 47 anthropologists, anatomists and geologists who joined the project," Matternes says.

He worked on the art for 12 years, studying the anatomy of a human that still had some potent hallmarks of earlier ape ancestry, until the art and scientific descriptions were published in 2009. Despite there not being funding for an artist in the grant budget, Matternes did this work for free.

Collecting the art for the book was a task in itself. "More than a thousand pieces had to be gathered, organised, digitised," Milner says.

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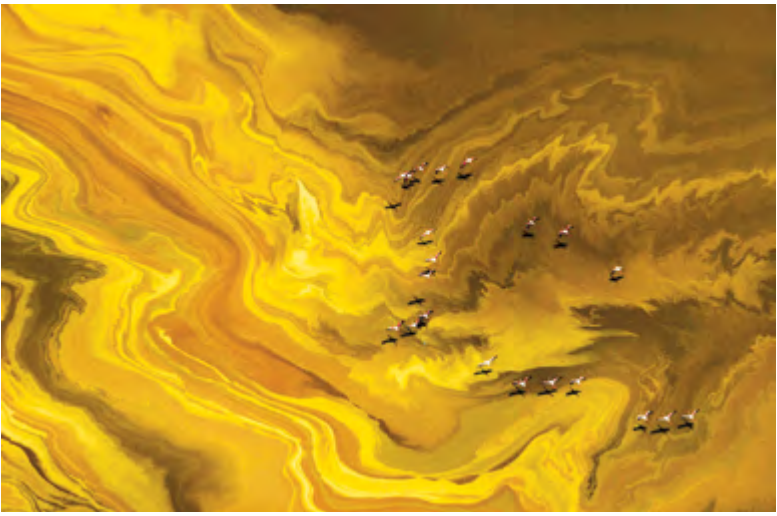
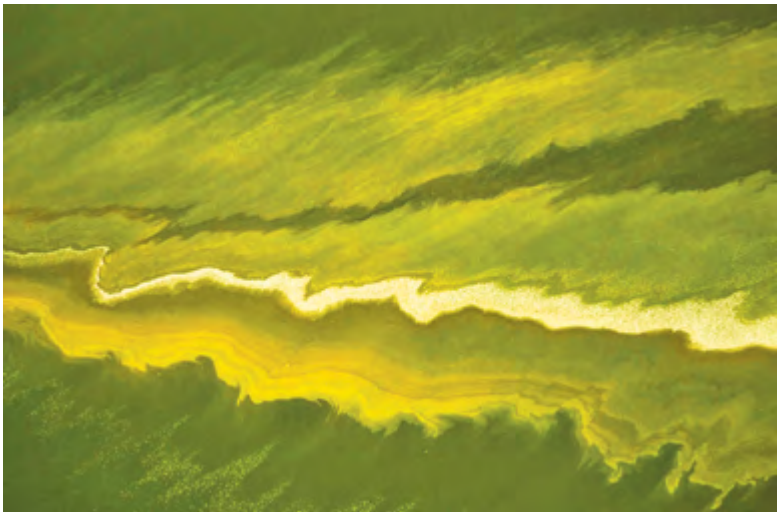
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LAKE MAGADI

JON MCCORMACK,
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THE PATTERNS
OF KENYA'S LAKE
MAGADI DURING
DIFFERENT
SEASONS TO
CREATE HIS OWN
COLLECTION OF
NATURE'S
ABSTRACTS

Psychedelic dream

Nestled north of Kenya's southern border, immediately adjacent to Tanzania, lies a truly extraordinary sight. Despite its appearance from ground level (where you would think there's nothing to see), the colours and textures from the aerial view of Lake Magadi resemble a visual wonderland — something like a psychedelic dream.

The entire lakebed is covered in soda, a common ingredient in glass, paper, soap, and household detergents. This chemical also causes the algae to display vibrant and surreal hues, a phenomenon understood by



chemists and admired by photographers.

Throughout the day, the wind pushes the coloured water in different directions, creating unique patterns that resemble everything from spirals to abstract art. Photographing these patterns takes some planning;

there are limited accommodation options (such as Lantorre Lodge), and a helicopter is necessary for aerial shots.

Drones aren't allowed due to the close proximity of an airstrip. Even if you were able to get permission, drones are impractical because of the winds at the alti-

tude you would be flying. "I found the ideal elevation to be 2500 feet (600 feet above the lake) to get enough perspective to find patterns and organise them into a photograph," says Jon McCormack, a conservation and natural history photographer from Northern California

Magical patterns

Staying at Lake Magadi means there's a chance to experience something magical if you have a chopper handy. A quick 15-minute flight puts you over the lake, where you can look for patterns. Using a 100-400mm zoom lens with a polariser and a

shutter speed of 1/1250 sec is a winning combination. The helicopter has no doors, so it's best to avoid bringing anything that could fall out. Take only one camera, leave lens hoods and caps behind, and make sure you have a large, empty memory card in your camera; changing cards in the air is not possible.

As you fly over the lake (early afternoon is usually best), you'll come across various patterns that invite questions of composition. What do you want to show your viewers? In my experience, the images fall into three categories - aerial landscapes, abstracts, and flamingos.

It can be challenging to differentiate between aerial landscapes and abstracts at times. My arbitrary opinion is that aerial landscapes include some form of land in the image. I prefer to focus on the areas where land meets water, particularly along the edges of the lake. The snaking patterns of streams are ideal places to look for design elements. The brilliant colours of the lake water create striking contrasts, both with the land and the dried salt deposits.

Abstract challenges

My true photographic passion at Lake Magadi is the abstracts. I remove all identifiable elements

from the image to leave the viewer unaware of the scale and, sometimes, even the subject. Instead of looking to other photographers for composition inspiration, my muses are renowned abstract painters like Mark Rothko, Lee Krasner, and Yves Klein.

Although abstract shots may seem to be abundant at first, locating them can be a challenge — taking the time to critically compose the image is crucial. It takes a while for the puzzle pieces to come together, so stay with it. I often discover unexpected elements in my photographs, from blocks of colour to faces hidden in the swirls.

One of the key factors in photographing abstracts is paying close attention to the edges of the frame; the placement of lines and noticing what is in the corners can significantly impact the overall composition. To account for this, I tend to shoot a bit wider than what I think the eventual composition will be. This gives me more flexibility in post-production to crop and rotate the image to get exactly what I want.

Flamingos, a contact sport

The lesser flamingos (the smallest species of flamingos) are a true highlight of Lake Magadi. Together with the population at neighbouring Lake Natron, there are approximately 2.5 million birds in the area. The combination of the numerous white flocks against the backdrop of the lake's colours and patterns makes for magical photographic opportunities. Be warned, however; the challenge of trying to frame a flock of birds from a moving helicopter over the lake can feel more like a contact sport than an artistic endeavour!

I noticed, unseasonal rains had altered the soda concentration in the water, resulting in unusual colours and patterns. Additionally, the rain had brought in an abundance of flamingos, meaning the birds were the main subject of the image instead of merely an accent. Though this was initially frustrating, it pushed me creatively, allowing me to get other photographer's images out of my head and come up with my own unique shots.

With its beautiful colours, intricate patterns, and graceful flamingos, Lake Magadi has been a highlight of my 30-year journey as a nature photographer. It felt like a final exam of sorts - a technical challenge requiring abstract compositions and quick captures of giant flocks of birds within a limited time. But it was so much more than that.



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