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Laws issued to regulate public health, organ transplantation

Our Correspondent
Muscat

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued two Royal Decrees, one promulgating the Public Health Law and the other regulating transplantation of human organs and tissues.

Royal Decree No 43/2025 promulgates the Public Health Law following presentation to the Council of Oman, while Royal Decree No 44/2025 promulgates the Law Regulating Transfer and Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues, also presented before the Council of Oman.

Article 2 of the latter authorises the Minister of Health to issue the executive regulation and any other necessary regulations within one year of enforcement of the organ transplant law. Existing regulations will continue to apply until then, as long as these do not conflict with the new



It was essential to regulate all aspects related to public health and provide a comprehensive framework of scientific and practical rules

DR HILAL AL SABTI

provisions.

Ministry of Health described the new organ transplant law as a key addition to the legislative framework supporting the sultanate's health system. It aims to address the rising demand for organ transplants as a treatment method for patients suffering from terminal organ failure.

Dr Hilal al Sabti, Minister of Health, said, "The law supports

the work of the National Organ Transplant Programme, guarantees the rights and safety of organ donors and transplant patients, precisely regulates the conditions and procedures for organ donation during life or after death, and defines the legal responsibilities and duties of medical institutions."

On the Public Health Law, he said it was essential to regulate all aspects related to public health and provide a comprehensive framework of scientific and practical rules. The law would serve as a reference for the health system's interaction with various sectors in alignment with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 to deliver more inclusive health services.

Dr Sabti appreciated HM the Sultan's continued support for the health sector, describing it as a major factor in driving efforts to achieve comprehensive and integrated healthcare in Oman.

Technical issues in focus at Iran-US talks in Muscat

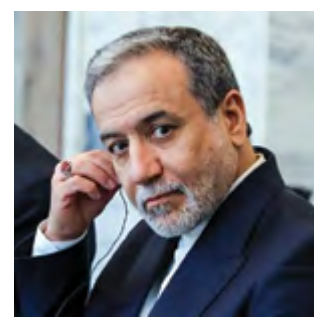
Muscat - The third round of indirect talks between Iran and the United States mediated by Oman came to an end in Muscat on Saturday afternoon.

Iran and the US held in-depth negotiations over Tehran's nuclear programme and lifting of sanctions with "core principles and technical concerns" being the centre of discussions. The two parties agreed to meet again on May 3.

The two delegations were led by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and US President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff. The meeting included discussions between the top negotiators as well as technical experts.

From the Iranian side, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-e Ravanchi, who also took part in the 2015 nuclear talks, led Tehran's expert team.

The US technical team was led by Michael Anton, director of US



Iranian Minister Abbas Araghchi

Secretary of State Marco Rubio's policy planning staff.

Foreign Minister H E Sayyid Badr al Busaidi, who acted as intermediary, like the previous two talks sessions, posted on X: "US-Iran talks today identified a shared aspiration to reach agreement based on mutual respect and enduring commitments. Core principles, objectives and technical concerns were all addressed. Talks will continue next week with a further high-level meeting provisionally scheduled for May 3."

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Municipality plans to turn
Ruwi into commercial hub

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Municipality has awarded the contract for the implementation of the Commercial District Development Project in Ruwi, part of a broader strategy to upgrade commercial neighbourhoods across Muscat governorate.

The project will cover an estimated area of 360,000sqm and is scheduled for completion within 16 months. It will include 6,500sqm of landscaped green spaces, shaded seating areas, and 2,458 new parking slots to improve the traffic flow. Plans also include 101,806sqm of pedestrian walkways, installation of smart infrastructure, and construction of service kiosks and modern restrooms.

The initiative is aligned with Muscat Municipality's broader efforts to enhance the urban landscape, improve the quality of life for residents, and to create a sustainable, human-centric environment serving all sections of the society.

Commenting on the project, Ahmed Mohammed al Humaiddi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, said, "Muscat governorate is witnessing the execution of a series of major development projects that will strengthen its



Muscat governorate is witnessing the execution of a series of major development projects that will strengthen its economic and tourism position, contributing to comprehensive and sustainable development

AHMED MOHAMMED AL HUMAIDI

economic and tourism position, contributing to comprehensive and sustainable development that embodies its ambitious vision." He added that the Ruwi Commercial District Development Project is a key element of the Greater Muscat Structural Plan, a major outcome of the National Urban Development Strategy under Oman Vision 2040,

aimed at balancing economic growth with quality of life.

The project is expected to enhance infrastructure efficiency, raise public service standards, and improve the area's attractiveness for investors. Officials hope it will stimulate commercial activity and create new opportunities for local businesses, accelerating economic development

in the governorate.

Muscat Municipality stated that it remains committed to supporting the national objective of creating a 'sustainable, prosperous, and vibrant Muscat', working closely with stakeholders to provide the necessary services, planning, and infrastructure improvements to achieve the goals outlined under Vision 2040.

MHT to showcase tourism
potential at ATM Dubai

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman will participate in the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2025, which opens on Monday in Dubai, through an official delegation led by H E Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

The Omani delegation will include representatives from 37 tourism companies, institutions, and hotels, reflecting the sultanate's efforts to strengthen its presence in the global travel and tourism sector.

ATM 2025 is expected to gather leading hospitality brands, tourism sector influencers and emerging destinations, showcasing the latest trends shaping the luxury travel industry.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's (MHT's) participation is part of its promotional plan for the year to enhance Oman's profile as a tourist destination and to build strategic partnerships that support the sector's development.

H E Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidi, Undersecretary for Tourism in the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said the event provides a vital platform for Omani companies to meet international partners and explore new partnership opportunities. He added that Oman's participation would focus on adopting



modern global trends, especially in luxury, adventure, and sustainable tourism, to develop competitive tourism products and services.

H E Busaidi noted that Oman's tourism sector has recorded significant growth in recent years, supported by increased investments in infrastructure, hotel facilities and organisation of cultural and natural heritage events.

He said participation in ATM 2025 reflects Oman's commitment to enhancing competitiveness, attracting quality

investments, and achieving the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

The event is expected to feature over 2,800 exhibitors from 161 countries and attract more than 55,000 visitors. It will offer opportunities for business deals and updates on the latest developments in the tourism sector.

Key discussion sessions during the exhibition will address emerging trends, including the influence of new generations on luxury travel services and the creation of new travel experiences.

Spanish study calls for strategic
upgrade of Oman's high-end hotels

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As Oman seeks to enhance its global tourism appeal, a new study by Spain-based travel intelligence platform Mabrian has identified critical opportunities to strengthen the country's luxury and midscale hospitality offerings.

Released ahead of Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2025, the study - Beyond the Stars: Aligning Expectations and Experiences in Middle Eastern Hospitality - suggests that Oman's luxury and upper-upscale hotel sectors require strategic improvements.

Despite a high concentration of 5-star properties, with an average rate of US\$258 per night - among the region's highest - guest satisfaction remains moderate, the study reported. A projected 7.4% year-on-year decline in average prices for these properties over the next six months points to a mismatch between pricing and guest expectations.

Mabrian's findings indicate that Oman must enhance service quality and overall guest experi-

ence in the luxury segment to maintain pricing power and competitiveness.

"Oman's tourism sector is uniquely positioned to harness new growth opportunities in hospitality," said Sonia Huerta, Advisory Director and Senior Vice-President at Mabrian. "By



realigning pricing strategies and elevating the service and experience within its luxury segment, Oman can strengthen its competitive position in the region and appeal to a broader, international market."

The study, covering six key Middle Eastern tourism markets - Oman, United Arab Emirates,

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, and Egypt - draws on real-time data to assess hotel category balance, pricing trends, and satisfaction levels. These countries account for nearly 90% of international tourist arrivals to the region.

Besides focusing on the up-scale segment, Mabrian's report urges Oman to diversify and upgrade its midscale hotel offerings. Enhancing 3- and 4-star accommodation to meet global service standards could broaden Oman's appeal to a wider spectrum of travellers, from regional visitors to long-haul tourists, in line with Vision 2040 goals.

The report outlines key strategies for Oman, including improving the value proposition of luxury hotels, investing in the development of mid- and up-scale properties, and leveraging the sultanate's rich natural and cultural assets to create immersive experiences for international tourists.

"By focusing on improving the value proposition of both luxury and midscale hotels, Oman can continue to strengthen its status as a key regional tourism destination," Huerta added.

3rd Musandam
Carnival boosts
region's tourism,
economy

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The third edition of the Musandam Carnival will conclude on Sunday at Hil Tourist Beach in Bukha, following five days of entertainment, cultural showcases and community activities.

Organised by the Musandam governorate in collaboration with public and private sector entities, the carnival has been a key highlight of the Musandam Winter Season, drawing large crowds to the coastal destination.

The event featured artistic performances, cultural displays and competitions, creating a festive atmosphere against the backdrop of Musandam's sea and mountain landscapes.

Abdullah bin Ahmed al Shehhi, Assistant Head of the Musandam Governor's Office, said the carnival plays an important role in promoting tourism and strengthening the region's cultural appeal.

"This annual event has been designed to engage all segments of society through a diverse range of entertainment and cultural programmes," he added.



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MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR

Celebration of books, culture and creativity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat International Book Fair continues to draw large crowds in its annual celebration of books, reading and culture. Now in its 29th edition, the fair is seen as a vital platform for fostering a love of reading among children and adults, while providing a space for intellectual exchange and cultural dialogue.

Authors, publishers and visitors at the fair described its growing significance in conversations with *Muscat Daily*.

Participating with his 14th publication - titled *We Take a Walk in the Forest* - Omani adventurer and author Khalid Said al Anqudi said the fair represents much more than a marketplace for books. "Book fairs are primarily a celebration of books and writers. This is a unique feature of Oman," he said. "Muscat Book Fair has become a meeting point for intellectuals, writers and thinkers - culture is the foundation that enhances all de-



velopmental achievements, whether economic or social."

Anqudi noted that despite the dominance of digital media, the appeal of printed books remains strong. "We are witnessing a remarkable revival of paper books. Thousands flock to these

fairs with genuine interest, reflecting the enduring appeal of books," he said.

Badriya al Ismaili, a researcher at Cultural Forum, described the fair as "a seasonal and annual celebration for homes, schools and communi-

ties". She emphasised its role in cultivating a reading culture among youngsters. "It's an opportunity for parents to introduce their children to the world of books and instil the habit of reading early on," she added.

Publishers, including Ahmed



Muscat Book Fair has become a meeting point for intellectuals, writers and thinkers - culture is the foundation that enhances all developmental achievements

KHALID SAID AL ANQUDI



generations that value reading and learning."

Visitors have expressed their enthusiasm as well. Attending with his children, Nasser al Rawahi described the fair as "a valuable cultural opportunity".

"Seeing over 600 publishing houses from 35 countries in one place is inspiring. It helps instil a love of reading in our children," he said.

Another visitor, Nasser al Hosni, pointed to the fair's role in cross-cultural engagement. "This exhibition also showcases the importance of other participating cultures. With the wide selection on offer, book fairs today provide multiple sources of knowledge and perspectives," he said.

"With its blend of literary celebration and educational value, Muscat Book Fair continues to stand as a pillar of Oman's vibrant cultural scene - a reminder that the written word remains a powerful force for connection and growth," Hosni added.

Iran FM signs his book 'The Power of Negotiation' at Muscat fair

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Dr Abbas Araghchi, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, signed copies of his book *The Power of Negotiation* at the 29th Muscat International Book Fair on Friday.

The event was attended by H E Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister of Oman, and H E Dr Abdullah Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information and Chairman of the book fair's organising committee.

Translated by Dr Fatemeh Mohammadi Sijani and published by Hashem Publishing House of Beirut, the book contains an introduction and six sections including types of negotiations, traits of negotiators, negotiation skills and stages of negotiations.

During his visit, Araghchi toured several pavilions, including that of North Sharqiyah, guest of honour at this year's fair, which highlights the governorate's cultural and historical heritage.

Araghchi also visited the Ministry of Information's pavilion, where he reviewed digital content created by Oman News Agency, including an AI-powered virtual exhibition and



Translated by Dr Fatemeh Mohammadi Sijani and published by Hashem Publishing House of Beirut, 'The Power of Negotiation' includes types of negotiations, traits of negotiators, negotiation skills and stages of negotiations

archival photographs showcasing the country's historical transformation. Exhibits include photographs predating the 1970s.

At the pavilion of the Direc-

torate General of Electronic Media, Araghchi viewed digital initiatives such as the Ain platform and the Media Portal, which hosts over 65,000 audiovisual materials and 60 audiobooks.

At the Directorate General of Publications and Artistic Works' pavilion, he explored the multilingual book 'The Omani Presence in East Africa' (available in Arabic, English and Swahili), detailing Oman's historical ties with East Africa. The exhibit features a model of the House of Wonders, built during the reign of Sultan Barghash bin Said in 1883.

Araghchi concluded his visit by touring pavilions dedicated to Saudi and Iranian books and literature.

Sharjah Ruler unveils 21-volume series on Portuguese presence in Oman

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed al Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah and UAE Supreme Council Member, visited Muscat International Book Fair - themed 'Cultural Diversity: A Treasure of Civilisations' - on Thursday.

During his visit, Sheikh Qasimi signed copies of his latest historical work - *The Portuguese in the Sea of Oman: Annals of History 1497 CE - 1757 CE* - published by Al Qasimi Publications.

The new series comprises 21 volumes in Arabic and English. Each volume ranges from 400 to 600 pages, with the complete set exceeding 10,500 pages. The work includes 1,138 original documents - letters, reports and manuscripts - sourced from archival centres around the world.

Each volume records events



year by year, supplemented by comprehensive indices, detailed footnotes and references. In addition to official documents, the series features previously unpublished manuscripts authored by Portuguese writers.

Sheikh Qasimi described the series as a major historical record, documenting critical developments in the Sea of Oman over a 260-year period. It cap-

tures the era when Portuguese fleets expanded their presence towards India, chronicling key events and battles of the time.

The series is based on extensive research. Sheikh Qasimi collected Portuguese, Dutch and British manuscripts, which were sorted by year, translated from Old Portuguese into Modern Portuguese, and subsequently into English and Arabic.

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Ministry of Information launches platform for children's education and creativity

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Ministry of Information launched a digital platform called 'Eye for Children' on Thursday at the opening of the 29th Muscat International Book Fair with the objective of enhancing media content for children and supporting their personal and national development.

Targeting the four to 18 age group, the platform offers educational programmes, cultural information, cartoons, audiobooks and audio content. It seeks to promote awareness, preserve Omani culture and values, and help young people engage meaningfully with modern technology.

The launch event was held



under the patronage of H H Sayyid Dr Fahad bin al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University, in the presence of H E Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

Dr Amal bint Mohammed al

Nofliya, Director General of Electronic Media at the ministry, described 'Eye for Children' as "a carefully developed digital experience that combines education and entertainment". She noted that the platform's interactive and accessible design is

intended to appeal to young users and also engage with children with visual and hearing impairments.

The platform allows children to create personal accounts, choose favourite cartoon characters as avatars, download content for offline use, and search and resume programmes. It also includes a section dedicated to content created by children, encouraging young users to share ideas and develop media skills.

With 'Eye for Children', Ministry of Information has taken a step towards providing a safe and culturally rich digital space for the next generation, reinforcing its commitment to nurturing young Omanis in an increasingly digital world.

Oman holds competitive edge through FTA amid US reciprocal tariffs, says OABC

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Amid sweeping US tariff reforms, Oman's longstanding Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States is proving a powerful trade asset. As global exporters brace for higher costs and new barriers to the US market, Oman stands out as a resilient, reliable partner – offering Omani and international firms preferential access to the world's largest economy, the Oman American Business Council (OABC) said.

On April 2, the Trump administration announced reciprocal tariffs on a wide range of imports, aiming to level the playing field for US exporters long burdened by high foreign tariffs. These measures, set to take full effect on July 8, are already reshaping trade routes and prompting companies to reconsider export strategies, OABC noted in a press statement.

'FTA more relevant than ever'
According to OABC, the US-Oman FTA is more relevant than ever in 2025.

'Under the FTA, most Omani goods already enter the US duty-free. Even with the new 10% reciprocal tariff, many Omani products – including minerals, fertilisers, and stones – remain exempt. For items now facing a 10% charge, the FTA still eliminates the original US general tariff under Normal Trade Relations (NTR). That's a key distinction,' OABC stated.

Oman is one of only two GCC nations with a bilateral FTA with the US – the other being Bahrain. This gives Oman a unique position, especially as global trade tightens.

But isn't Oman just like other 10% tariff countries? 'Not at all,' OABC responded.

While countries like Saudi Arabia or the UAE may also face a 10% reciprocal tariff, their exports still incur the original general rate, which often ranges from 5% to 25%. That results in a combined duty of 15%-35% or more.

'Omani exporters, by contrast, avoid that general duty altogether. Even for affected products, the total tariff is typically just 10%. And for goods listed in Annex II of Executive Order



Oman-US FTA joint committee convenes in Muscat

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Joint Committee overseeing the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Oman and the United States convened on Thursday at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to review key aspects of the agreement and explore ways to enhance bilateral trade ties.

The Omani side was led by Pankaj Khimji, Advisor for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation at the ministry, while the US delegation was chaired by H E Ana Escrogima, US Ambassador to Oman.

The meeting marked the committee's first session in a decade, signaling a renewed commitment to strengthening strategic economic cooperation between the two nations. Discussions focused on the imple-



mentation of the FTA's provisions, market access for goods, customs issues, and environmental cooperation.

Khimji highlighted the significance of the meeting, especially in light of the recent imposition of a 10% tariff on Omani imports to the US. He emphasised the importance of dialogue in resolving trade dis-

agreements and ensuring mutual benefit under the agreement.

H E Escrogima described the session as a valuable opportunity to bring together specialists and experts to address key issues and reflect on shared aspirations to deepen economic engagement and deliver lasting benefits to citizens of both

countries.

Also participating in the discussions was Khalid Alshuaibi, President of Oman's National Investment Program & Export Development (Nazdaher). He noted the importance of addressing global tariff policies, anti-dumping measures, subsidies, and duties on key exports like aluminum and iron. Al-

shuaibi also underscored the potential for greater private sector involvement in trade-related events hosted in the US.

The meeting reaffirmed the mutual commitment of Oman and the US to a rules-based trading system and to fostering stronger, more resilient economic ties through open and constructive engagement.

14257, the rate stays at zero,' OABC added.

For example, a company exporting shaving products from Oman will face a total tariff of 10%—0% under the FTA, plus the 10% reciprocal charge. The same product from the EU faces

a 4.9% general tariff plus 20% reciprocal – totalling 24.9%. A Vietnamese exporter of brooms now faces 48.8% (2.8% general + 46% reciprocal), while Omani brooms incur just 10%.

'This pricing gap gives a real edge to manufacturers and sup-

pliers in Oman. While others face added costs and uncertainty, Omani exporters benefit from stability and preferential US access,' OABC said.

The US-Oman FTA remains one of the most comprehensive trade deals globally. It offers legal

protections and dispute mechanisms in the US, fair treatment for licensing and investment, streamlined customs, trade transparency, and access to US government procurement – a right shared by only a few countries.

However, some sectors still face hurdles. Metals like aluminium and steel remain under a 25% tariff via Section 232 of US trade law due to national security exemptions – even with the FTA.

OABC added, 'While the new tariffs drive growth for many in-

dustries, there's one exception: Omani companies competing mainly with American manufacturers. US producers face no tariffs and now hold a pricing advantage.'

Manufacturing in Oman

For global firms facing higher US tariffs, Oman is an attractive production base. A company from Asia, Africa, or the EU can shift operations to Oman, add 35% or more local value, and export to the US – often at zero or minimal duty under the FTA.

'But Oman's advantage goes beyond tariffs,' OABC said. 'With stable regulation, competitive energy prices, strategic location,

Oman is one of only two GCC nations with a bilateral FTA with the US – the other being Bahrain. This gives Oman a unique position, especially as global trade tightens

world-class infrastructure, and growing investor incentives, Oman is one of the MENA region's most promising export platforms.'

According to Ali Daud, Chairman of OABC, this is a rare moment when trade policy shifts create real opportunities. He said, "Oman is ready to welcome international manufacturers and support local exporters with access to the US market. The FTA gives us a serious edge, and we encourage companies to take advantage of it – now, while the window is open."

Daud also urged a long-term perspective, saying, "We're urging the Omani government to fund detailed research into which products consistently faced high US tariffs, even under the Biden administration – sectors likely to remain protected even if political leadership in Washington changes. No investor will relocate operations for a temporary advantage. Oman needs to focus on durable sectors where US tariffs are likely to persist, regardless of who's in office three years from now."

Deal signed for Oman's first water treatment membrane manufacturing plant in Rusayl

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Muscat Gases Company, a leading player in the gas and energy sector in the sultanate, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with IonClear, a US-based technology company headquartered in Silicon Valley, California.

Signed under the auspices of Eng Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi, CEO of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), the MoU aims to establish the first-of-its-kind facility in the sultanate in Al Rusayl Industrial City for manufacturing advanced water treatment and desalination membranes.

The plant, which will cover 3,000 sq m area, represents a strategic move that supports Oman's commitment to water security and environmental sustainability.



The plant, which will cover 3,000 sq m area, represents a strategic move that supports Oman's commitment to water security and environmental sustainability

The partnership with IonClear, which is specialised in the production of Reverse Osmosis (RO) and Nanofiltration (NF) membranes, will introduce innovative technologies used in seawater and brackish water desalination.

These membranes are also employed in key sectors such as power plants, chemical industries, and industrial water treatment, thereby enhancing the sultanate's capabilities in this key sector.

The MoU also aims to bring

advanced technology to the Omani market and localise strategic industries that contribute to increasing the In-Country Value, hence aligning with Oman Vision 2040 and generating quality employment opportunities for the Omani youth, while positioning the Sultanate as an ideal investment hub in the field of environmental manufacturing.

This project also comes along the lines of Oman's efforts to achieve carbon neutrality, by supporting clean energy and water industries and investing in advanced environmental solutions.

Oman closes 48th annual meeting of ADFIAP

Muscat – Oman, represented by Development Bank, successfully concluded the 48th Annual Meeting of the Association of Development Financing Institutions in Asia and the Pacific (ADFIAP), held from April 23 to 25, 2025, at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Muscat.

The ADFIAP conference convened under the theme "Economic Gardening and Development Impact" highlighting the critical role of technological and economic empowerment in advancing development financing. Emphasis was placed on economic gardening as a catalyst for economic prosperity and a key driver of support for local enterprises and innovation.

The closing day featured discussions on several vital topics. Key among them was the role of digital transformation in empowering development finance institutions, explored during the "ADFIAPNET Digital Clinic" ses-

sion. Participants also examined methods for measuring the success and developmental impact of economic gardening initiatives, stressing that job creation, enhanced economic resilience, and increased local investment are essential indicators of success.

The sessions further explored the importance of green finance and sustainable banking practices in addressing global sustainability challenges. Pioneering initiatives were showcased, focusing on integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles into financial decision-making.

Discussions also emphasized the importance of building robust entrepreneurial ecosystems through collaboration between academia, the private sector, and government entities. The Special Economic Zone at Duqm was highlighted as a prime model for fostering collaboration and innovation.

Apple to shift all US iPhone assembly to India by 2026

Cupertino, US - In a strategic move driven by escalating trade tensions between the United States and China, Apple is set to transition all production of iPhones intended for the US market to India.

According to GSM Arena, the shift follows ongoing trade policies and tariffs introduced during the administration of former President Donald Trump.

Apple's decision to ramp up its production in India aligns with its broader objective of diversifying manufacturing operations away from China.

With over 60mn iPhones sold annually in the United States alone, the company is aiming to reduce its dependence on Chinese manufacturing and find a more economically sustainable alternative.

This move is not entirely new for Apple. The company's shift towards manufacturing in India began back in 2017, when it partnered with Wistron, a Taiwanese contract manufacturer, to start producing iPhone 6s and iPhone SE models at a factory in Bengaluru, India. The initial motivation was the high import duties on Chinese goods imposed by the US government.

As the trade war between the two countries intensified during Trump's presidency, Apple increasingly looked to move more of its production out of China.

According to GSM Arena, reports from April 2024 indicate that India now manufactures around 14 per cent of all iPhones globally, with analysts predicting this figure could rise to 25% by the end of the year.



The company aims to double production in India to meet demand for iPhones in the US, with the goal of manufacturing over 60mn devices annually by 2026.

The shift in production comes amid the implementation of aggressive tariffs on Chinese goods by the Trump administration.

Even prior to President Trump's second term, Apple was already facing a 20 per cent tariff on smartphones imported from China. However, Apple's decision to scale up production in India is not without its own challenges.

The Indian government has imposed a 26% tariff on products

expand its production footprint across the country.

The factory in Bengaluru, which initially began producing iPhone 6s and iPhone SE models, will now become a central site for manufacturing newer iPhone models aimed at the US market, according to GSM Arena.

With these changes in production strategy, Apple is entering a period of significant uncertainty.

The company is due to report its quarterly earnings next week, and investors and analysts are watching closely to see how the trade situation - alongside Apple's shifting manufacturing strategy - will affect its financial performance.

According to GSM Arena, in 2024 the United States accounted for approximately 28 per cent of Apple's global iPhone shipments, making the US market critical to the company's overall profitability.

ANI

Apple's decision to ramp up its production in India aligns with its broader objective of diversifying manufacturing operations away from China

Although Apple CEO Tim Cook attempted to negotiate exemptions from these tariffs, GSM Arena reports it is unlikely such relief will be granted.

Indeed, imports from China have been hit with a 145% tariff - a significant challenge for companies like Apple that rely heavily on Chinese manufacturing.

arriving from the US, though this has been temporarily suspended for 90 days to allow ongoing negotiations between Washington and New Delhi, as per GSM Arena.

India has emerged as a vital component of Apple's global manufacturing strategy. As part of its shift to India, Apple plans to

Google parent Alphabet posts strong Q1 earnings

Tina Teng

Alphabet, the parent company of Google and YouTube, reported first-quarter earnings that exceeded analysts' expectations, primarily driven by robust performance in its core search advertising business. Meanwhile, Google Cloud - the company's key growth metric - recorded a significant increase in profitability.

Alphabet's ongoing investment in artificial intelligence (AI) underpinned growth across all segments. Chief Executive Sundar Pichai said, "We're pleased with our strong Q1 results, which reflect healthy growth and momentum across the business. Underpinning this growth is our unique full stack approach to AI."

Alphabet's board also approved an additional \$70bn in share buybacks and raised its dividend by 5% to \$0.21 per share.

Alphabet reported total revenue of \$90.2bn, up 12% on the year, surpassing the \$89.12bn expected by analysts. Google's search advertising remained the largest revenue contributor, generating \$50.7bn in the quarter, a 9.8% year-on-year increase.

The company recently launched AI Overviews in Google Search, which summarise results at the top of the page. The feature has gained popularity, attracting 1.5mn users per month and becoming a spotlight in the company's competition with Microsoft's



ChatGPT and other chatbot technologies. However, the rollout has led to reduced traffic for independent websites.

Google Cloud revenue rose 28% year-on-year to \$12.3bn, led by strong growth across Google Cloud Platform (GCP), such as core GCP products, AI infrastructure, and generative AI solutions, according to the earnings report.

A highlight of the results was the division's profitability. Operating income surged more than 200% from a year ago to \$2.18bn in the first quarter. While revenue slightly missed forecasts, the sharp rise in profit suggests Alphabet's heavy AI investments are beginning to yield returns.

Chief Financial Officer Anat Ashkenazi said that demand continued to exceed data centre capacity for a second consecutive quarter. She noted in February that Alphabet expects

to invest \$75bn in capital expenditure this year. Google Cloud remains the world's third-largest cloud provider, trailing Amazon's AWS and Microsoft's Azure.

YouTube advertising revenue reached \$8.93bn, up 10% year-on-year, slightly below analysts' expectations. However, the segment has accelerated in recent quarters, supported by growth in YouTube TV and podcast offerings.

Alphabet's self-driving car unit, Waymo, generated \$450mn in revenue, down 9% from a year earlier. Waymo, a key rival to Tesla's Robotaxi, remained loss-making during the quarter. CFO Ashkenazi commented: "Waymo is continuing to progress in building on its impressive technological achievements to scale rapidly and develop a sustainable business model."

(Source: Euronews.com)

US leads in smartphone market, China dominates production

Istanbul, Turkey - The US-China tech rivalry continues in the smartphone arena, with the United States maintaining its leading position thanks to its well-known brands and technological expertise, while China dominates in production as the world's manufacturing hub.

The vast majority of the global population actively uses smartphones, with the number of devices in use worldwide expected to reach 7.4bn in 2025, according to reports compiled by Anadolu.

Although growth in the smartphone market has slowed in recent years due to longer replacement cycles, it still grew by 1.5% in the first quarter of the year amid ongoing tensions between the US and China, alongside developments in the global economy.

South Korean brand Samsung recorded 60.6mn smartphone shipments in the first quarter, ahead of US-based iPhone maker Apple, which saw 57.9mn units shipped in the same period.

Apple, as the world's most valuable company, generates over 55% of its revenue from iPhones.

Chinese brands Xiaomi, Oppo, and Vivo enjoyed shipments of 41.8mn, 23.5mn, and 22.7mn units respectively.

While the US retains a strong position via Apple, with an approximate market value of \$3tn, China is home to three of the top five smartphone manufacturers.

All of the top five smartphone makers, with the exception of Apple, use US-based Google's Android operating system, highlighting the American advantage over China in the field of software. The US holds a considerable lead in this area, as operating systems generate licensing fees



and revenue from app stores.

Huawei has been working to develop its own mobile operating system after facing numerous restrictions from the US. The ban on installing Android on its devices prompted Huawei to develop its proprietary HarmonyOS.

The vast majority of the global population actively uses smartphones, with the number of devices in use worldwide expected to reach 7.4bn in 2025

The US has imposed major sanctions on many Chinese tech firms, particularly Huawei, citing security concerns - although these sanctions are also widely seen as part of the broader tech rivalry between the two nations.

Another key front in the US-China tech competition is semi-

conductor chips, a critical component in smartphones. Taiwanese company MediaTek leads in global market share for smartphone chips, followed by Apple, Qualcomm, UNISOC, Samsung, and HiSilicon.

US-based firms Apple and Qualcomm together account for 44% of the market, while Chinese companies UNISOC and HiSilicon hold a 17% share, underscoring the US's advantage over China in chipmaking.

The US continues to tighten export controls in an effort to curb China's chip manufacturing capabilities. In response, China has banned the export of gallium and germanium - rare earth elements essential to chip production.

Although the US boasts the most valuable brand, components, and software infrastructure, it remains heavily reliant on China for manufacturing. US-based Apple has long chosen China for production, while Samsung also manufactures a significant portion of its devices in the country.

Anadolu Agency



UNITED GCC FUND



chairman's report

Dear Investors,

We are pleased to present the United GCC Fund's results for the first quarter of 2025. As of 31 March, the Fund delivered a year-to-date return of -0.91%, modestly underperforming its benchmark, the S&P GCC Index of 0.77%. This performance unfolded against a challenging macro backdrop, marked by mixed regional signals and renewed global uncertainty. In recognition of the Fund's 2024 performance, the Board of Directors has recommended a cash dividend of 60 bz to unit holders and is proud to have maintained an uninterrupted dividend record since 2013.

Crude prices were volatile throughout the quarter with Brent traded in the mid-\$70s per barrel early on but corrected sharply in March and April after the announcement of broad-based tariffs and early indications that OPEC+ might raise output. Prices briefly dipped below \$60, their lowest level in more than four years before recovering to roughly \$65, supported by a 90-day tariff pause and updated OPEC+ production guidance. Looking ahead, OPEC+ intends to lift output by 411 kb/d from May, although Iraq, Kazakhstan and others have pledged additional cuts to compensate for prior over production in the past. If fully implemented, these offsets could help steady prices, but much depends on how global demand evolves amid lingering recession risks.

Investor sentiment globally remained fragile as trade tension headlines intensified under President Trump's evolving tariff policy. Although the GCC is not directly targeted, the broader market reaction weighed on regional equities. Kuwait outperformed, gaining almost 10%, whereas Saudi Arabia and several other markets were comparatively subdued, hampered by geopolitical concerns and softer risk appetite.

Amid these dynamics, the GCC real estate sector demonstrated notable resilience. Dubai's property market achieved a record AED 142.7 billion in total sales during Q1 2025, up 30.3% year-on-year, with transaction volumes rising 22.8%.

Regarding tariffs, GCC is relatively insulated since hydrocarbon exports which is the bulk of GCC U.S. trade are largely exempted and tariff exposed non-oil exports accounts for only a small share. However, the key concern for the region continues to be oil-price stability and that oil revenues play a critical role in supporting fiscal budgets across most GCC countries.

Looking forward, we expect near-term volatility to persist however our confidence in the region's long-term prospects remains strong, supported by ongoing economic reforms, resilient oil dynamics, and a clear strategic focus. Our investment approach will be prudent and will look to navigate short-term noise while focusing on quality opportunities across sectors. Despite the short-term market noise, we believe the GCC's strategic advantages and economic transformation will reward patient and long-term investors.

We extend our deepest gratitude to you, our clients, investors, and stakeholders, for your continued trust and support.

Yours sincerely,

Mustafa Ahmed Salman

Chairman - Management Body, UGCC Fund



Unaudited condensed interim statement of Comprehensive Income for the three-month period ended 31st March 2025

	Three months ended 31st Mar 2025	Three months ended 31st Mar 2024
	RO Unaudited	RO Unaudited
Income		
Interest income	2,036	133
Dividend income	174,004	330,394
Fair value change on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	(97,190)	237,240
Realized gain/(loss) on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	(114,444)	289,861
Foreign exchange (loss)/gain	13,538	(2,355)
Other Income	-	-
Net investment income(loss)	(22,056)	855,272
Expenses		
Management fees	(47,880)	(47,235)
Custody and administration fees	(8,379)	(8,266)
General and administrative expenses	(85,725)	(101,344)
	(141,984)	(156,846)
Profit and total comprehensive income/(loss) for the period and increase/(decrease) in net assets attributable to the unit holders	(164,040)	698,427
Profit/(loss) per unit	(0.014)	0.060

Unaudited condensed interim statement of Financial Position at 31st March 2025

	As at 31st March 2025	As at 31st Dec 2024
	RO Unaudited	RO Unaudited
ASSETS		
Cash and cash equivalents	1,049,493	1,001,422
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss	17,932,596	18,302,791
Other receivables	72,578	28,722
Total assets	19,054,667	19,332,935
LIABILITIES		
Payables and accruals	115,191	122,060
Net assets attributable to unitholders	18,939,476	19,210,875
Total liabilities and assets attributable to unitholders	19,054,667	19,332,935
Net assets attributable to the unitholders per unit	1.625	1.640

To get the complete financials kindly contact us on : 24763362
Or email us on : info@usoman.com

For subscription details please contact UGCC Fund Representative @ 24763362 or email info@usoman.com

Symposium on ethical adoption of AI

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), on April 15, organised a virtual symposium to discuss how universities can ethically adopt artificial intelligence.

The symposium - 'An Introduction to How Universities Can Ethically Adopt Artificial Intelligence' - was held in collaboration with the ICESCO Chair in AI Ethics and the Human Resources Development Committee of the Information Technology Department at the Ibri branch.

The symposium targeted faculty members and students from around the world and was delivered by international expert in governance and digital transformation, Azhar Ziaur Rahman, and moderated by Dr Himlatha Gunasekaran, a lecturer at the Ibri branch.

The event explored key topics such as AI's importance in universities, potential applications, how to implement AI adoption in a phased and ethical manner, and future strategic steps. Discussions underscored that artificial intelligence is no longer a future option but a present reality reshaping higher education at its core.

This transformation requires responsible adoption guided by clear ethical frameworks and



transparent standards.

A total of 158 international participants attended the session, including 141 academic and administrative staff members and 17 students. Survey feedback reflected high engagement and a strong desire among participants

to enhance their skills in this vital field.

One of the main recommendations from the symposium was the need to conduct practical training workshops to prepare faculty and administrative members to use AI tools effi-

ciently and ethically.

As part of continued awareness efforts around AI ethics, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, through its Postgraduate Studies, Research, and Innovation Sector, participated in an interactive workshop

organised during Unesco AI Chair Day, hosted by Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat on April 17.

The workshop was led by Dr Musab al Rawi, Director of the ICESCO Chair, and Dr Preethi Bhaskar from the Ibri branch,

and was attended by several faculty members from the Department of Electrical Engineering.

The workshop, which focused on ethical challenges in integrating AI into education, presented four case studies and developed actionable recommendations.

These included governance policies, mechanisms for bias detection, transparency protocols, and the right to contest AI-driven decisions.

The workshop highlighted the importance of building a hybrid educational environment that maintains human interaction and fosters institutional collaboration to ensure AI is used fairly and responsibly.

A key outcome was the consensus among participants on establishing an AI Ethics Governance Committee at Sultan Qaboos University to serve as a regulatory and ethical body in this domain.

Participants also expressed strong interest in organising more specialized workshops and developing a localized AI ethical framework aligned with Omani laws and global best practices, reflecting a gradual shift toward proactive and responsible AI adoption within Omani universities.

These joint initiatives represent a tangible step toward preparing academic institutions for a tech-driven future and emphasise the need to balance technological progress with ethical and human considerations to ensure a more just and effective educational environment.

70 pilgrims embark on umrah funded by Saud Bahwan charity

A deeply moving spiritual journey unfolded as 70 national pilgrims from Al Noor Association for the Blind set out from Muscat for umrah, carrying with them prayers, hopes and gratitude.

This sacred pilgrimage was made possible through the support of Saud Bahwan Charitable Foundation, which fully sponsored the journey, ensuring that every pilgrim experienced comfort and peace of mind.

The special package, designed by National Travel & Tourism (NTT) covered return airfares, accommodation, food and all essential arrangements for the umrah rituals, allowing the pilgrims to focus solely on their spiritual aspirations.

Since its inception in 2004, the Saud Bahwan Charitable Foundation has been a beacon of compassion and generosity in Oman. As the nation's first char-



itable organisation, it has remained steadfast in its mission to uplift those in need, offering both financial and non-financial assistance to individuals and families facing economic hardships.

The foundation actively engages in various humanitarian initiatives across the country, working independently as well as in collaboration with Ministries and institutions to maximise its positive impact.

This initiative extends beyond

charity. It embodies the foundation's commitment to empowering people with disabilities by fostering inclusion, pride and equal opportunities. Through such meaningful endeavours, Saud Bahwan Charitable Foundation continues to illuminate lives, bringing hope and relief while upholding the values of kindness, generosity and community support.

National Travel & Tourism (NTT) played a pivotal role in or-

chestrating a smooth and enriching experience for the pilgrims.

A spokesperson from NTT shared, "NTT has supported Saud Bahwan Charitable Foundation in making the sacred journey of umrah a reality for members of Al Noor Association for the Blind. More than just a gesture of support, this initiative reaffirms the belief that every individual, regardless of circumstance, deserves the opportunity to fulfil their spiritual aspirations."

Madayn celebrates World Creativity and Innovation Day

In celebration of World Creativity and Innovation Day, recognised by the United Nations to promote a global culture of innovation and creativity, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates 'Madayn' organised a special event to demonstrate its commitment to excellence and institutional innovation.

The event - Your Creativity Makes a Difference - featured two key presentations: 'Role of Industrial Innovation Academy in Advancing the Industrial Sector' by Yahya al Kharoosi, Director of Local Content and Investment Opportunities Development at Industrial Innovation Academy; and 'Promoting a Culture of Institutional Innovation in Government Bodies' by Amal al Wahaibi from Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

A panel discussion titled 'Innovation at Madayn - Opportu-



nities and Challenges' brought together Madayn's senior leaders to explore topics aligned with Oman Vision 2040, focusing on advancing institutional innovation and turning challenges into growth opportunities.

Moderated by Dua al Amairi from Madayn's Excellence and Institutional Transformation Department, the panel featured Salah al Alawi, Director General of Ibri Industrial City; Ali al Mashani, Director General of

Wadi Kabir Industrial City; Zuhair al Zadjali, Director General of Administration Affairs and Human Resources at Madayn; and Ahmed al Hina, Director of Oman Vision 2040 Follow-Up Office at Madayn.

The panelists spotlighted several topics related to institutional innovation aligned with the goals of Oman Vision 2040, including the landscape of industrial innovation in the sultanate in comparison with global benchmarks.

BankDhofar named Oman's fastest growing bank

BankDhofar has been recognised as Oman's Fastest Growing Bank in terms of branch network expansion by *World Business Outlook* magazine.

This prestigious award highlights the bank's commitment to enhancing accessibility and delivering a comprehensive suite of banking services tailored to meet the evolving needs of its diverse customer base.

In the past two years, BankDhofar expanded its footprint by opening over 43 new branches, bringing its total to 131 branches across Oman, including 25 Dhofar Islamic branches. This achievement positions BankDhofar as the second-largest bank in the country in terms of branch network, with state-of-the-art facilities equipped with modern technology to enhance customer experience. BankDhofar continues to cater to a broad customer base, offering specialized bank-



ing solutions for women, youth, minors, children, and high-income groups, particularly Al Riyada and Al Rifaa cardholders. High-net-worth individuals and their families also benefit from exclusive, confidential financial services designed to meet their unique needs. To support long-term financial planning, the bank provides investment and savings solutions, including fixed and recurring deposit accounts.

MG Motor Oman recognised for Marketing Innovation

MG Motor Oman, a division of MHD ACERE, proudly announces its dual victory at the prestigious MG Distributor Conference held in Dubai on April 15.

The brand was honoured with awards for Best Corporate Marketing and Best Customer Experience, solidifying its position as a regional leader in innovation, customer engagement, and brand strategy.

The Best Corporate Marketing award recognised MG Motor Oman's holistic and strategically integrated approach to corporate outreach. The Corporate Programme, a first-of-its-kind, brought the MG brand experience directly into the workplaces of Oman's top companies.

MG Motor Oman built a 360° Corporate Marketing Ecosystem, combining on-ground activations with targeted digital engagement, employee-exclusive benefits, and long-term partnership strategies. By collaborating with large organisations across banking, telecom, oil & gas, and government sectors, MG was able to embed itself within the daily lives



of high-potential working professionals. This multi-pronged strategy not only delivered high-quality leads and boosted test drive volumes, but also established MG as a trusted mobility partner for Oman's workforce, reinforcing the brand's positioning beyond showrooms.

In parallel, the Best Customer Experience award celebrated

MG Oman's consistent focus on personalised service, seamless after-sales support, and customer-centric innovation.

From digital service tracking tools to VIP test drive experiences and rapid response service teams, MG has transformed every touchpoint of the customer journey.

Commenting on this achieve-

ment, Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, said: "These awards are a testament to the power of innovation, agility, and listening to the voice of the customer. At MG Motor Oman, we believe that marketing is not just about visibility - it's about value, connection, and creating experiences that resonate. I'm incredibly proud of our team

for bringing bold ideas to life and for consistently delivering a customer experience that sets us apart in the region."

The accolades reflect MG Motor Oman's commitment to driving growth through meaningful engagement and world-class service - pillars that continue to shape its success story across Oman and the GCC.

Majlis A'Shura takes part in Muscat book fair

In confirmation of its role in enhancing effective community participation and continuing its involvement in national cultural events, the Majlis A'Shura continues to promote its roles and responsibilities through its participation in the 29th edition of the Muscat International Book Fair, which began on April 24, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The Shura's booth reflects its identity and provides a comprehensive knowledge corner that showcases its roles through a variety of publications and interactive screens that detail the legislative work of the council.

The booth features a number of publications that provide up-to-date, comprehensive information reflecting the Shura's work in legislation and oversight, in accordance with the country's Basic Law and the Oman Council Law.

Among the publications displayed is the *Guideline Bag for Members of the Majli A'Shura for the 10th Term*, which serves as a comprehensive source of basic information on the methodology of the council's work in various fields, including a copy of the Basic Law and the Oman Council Law. The booth also features various publications aimed at different audience groups, including the statistical books for the 8th



and the 9th terms of the council's work, a book on the formation of the council's bodies, different issues of the *Shura Magazine*, and a book called *A Journey to Shura* targeted at children.

Additionally, there is a Braille version of a publication detailing the council's work and responsibilities, aimed at the visually impaired.

The fair, which will continue till to May 3, will see the Shura hosting a comprehensive cultural programme designed to create a new space for dialogue with the community and to bring together the council and specialists from other sectors. This programme aims to foster a new culture that

aligns with the provisions of the Oman Council Law and Oman Vision 2040.

It will leverage the diversity of the audience present in a single location and include activities aimed specifically at young people and youth. The cultural programme includes a discussion titled 'Majlis A'Shura: Legislative Roles and Active Community Partnership in National Decision-Making, as well as several sessions of 'Shura Dialogue', which will be held at the council's booth.

These sessions will discuss the council's roles in economic, social, cultural, educational, and public services sectors.

There will also be youth-focused dialogue sessions, such as 'Youth Political Participation: Visions and Aspirations', and a Parliamentary Simulation session. The Shura has also organised a workshop for children as part of the *A Journey to Shura* publication aimed at schoolchildren.

It is worth noting that the Shura's participation in the Muscat International Book Fair, through its booth (2 G8-9 and 2 H8-9), and its diverse cultural activities, aims to raise awareness about the shura's roles and responsibilities.

It also provides an opportunity for organised dialogue between the council and the community.



2nd noncommunicable disease survey begins

H E Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al-Busaidi, Governor of Muscat, sponsored the first Health Forum 2025, organised by the Health Committee in Muttrah, one of the oldest neighbourhoods in Muscat.

The forum was attended by H E Dr Saeed bin Harib al Lamki, Undersecretary for Health Affairs in the Ministry of Health, and a number of officials and concerning stakeholders.

This forum marked the launch of the second stage of the National Noncommunicable Diseases Survey, which targets citizens and residents aged 15 years and older in the Sultanate of Oman.

It identifies the burden of non-communicable diseases, provide a comprehensive database, and enable effective health planning.

The forum reviewed a number of strategies to reduce narcotics and psychotropic substances, the achievements of the first phase of the national survey of non-communicable diseases implemented by the Directorate of Health Services in Muscat Governorate, which concluded with the monitoring and visiting 88% of homes in Muscat Governorate, and discussed working papers regarding the National Competition to Combat Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances and the role of the educational sector to reduce this issue.

Dr Hamad bin Said al Mamari, wali of Muttrah, appreciated the implemented efforts by the Ministry of Health and the health committees in Muscat Governorate. He remembered Mut-

trah's participation in the third edition of the National Competition to Combat Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances and the second position winning of the 'Together We Unite' campaign in Oman.

Dr Yousuf bin Mohammed al Farsi, Director General of Health Services in Muscat governorate, confirmed that the forum is a national event that carries a shared responsibility to promote partnership and integration to improve the health of individuals and society.

He pointed out that the national competition to reduce drugs and substances is a collective stand that embodies national cohesion o face one of the most serious challenges that threaten the present and future of our children.



Sohar Islamic enters into 'strategic alliance' with IIRA

As part of its steadfast commitment to fostering sustainable growth and driving excellence within the Islamic financial landscape, Sohar Islamic, the Islamic banking window of Sohar International, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Islamic International Rating Agency (IIRA).

The collaboration underscores the bank's proactive approach to aligning with global benchmarks in governance, while further enhancing the frameworks that underpin transparency and sharia'a-compliant banking practices. The MoU was signed by Fahad Akbar al Zadjali, Head of Islamic Banking, marking a significant milestone in Sohar Islamic's ongoing journey toward building a future-ready Islamic banking ecosystem.

On this development, Zadjali stated, "Islamic finance continues to gain traction, reflecting a growing appreciation for value-based, principled financial models. In this evolving landscape, it becomes imperative for institutions to ensure that every layer of operations - whether structural, procedural, or strategic - remains anchored in uncompromising integrity, rigorous oversight, and enduring authenticity."

He asserted that at Sohar Islamic, this extends beyond a regulatory imperative; it represents a core ethos that defines who we are and how we operate. Partnering with a distinguished insti-

tution such as IIRA, he explained, represents a deliberate and forward-thinking step.

"Their deep specialisation in analytical ratings and assessments offers a refined perspective that will enhance our internal frameworks, enabling us to deepen stakeholder trust, sharpen performance metrics, and create measurable long-term value."

This collaboration also serves as a platform for knowledge exchange, enabling us to benchmark against best practices and pursue ever-higher standards as we continue to shape the future of Islamic finance, he added.

IIRA plays a vital role in fostering financial stability and stakeholder confidence within Islamic financial institutions. By offering independent ratings, evaluations, and research services tailored to sharia'a-compliant entities, IIRA bridges the gap between market expectations and institutional conduct, reinforcing industry-wide discipline, elevating transparency, and bolstering investor assurance. Sohar Islamic's alignment with IIRA underscores the bank's commitment to enhancing institutional resilience and long-term sustainability. Over the years, the bank has introduced a series of initiatives designed to strengthen its Islamic banking proposition - from product innovation and customer-centricity to the integration of robust governance frameworks.



Muscat Finance (S.A.O.G)

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Board of Directors' Report for the period ended 31st March 2025

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Muscat Finance SAOG, I am pleased to present the Directors' report for the quarter ended March 2025.

Economic Environment Overview

The first quarter of 2025 has seen a continuation of the economic stability observed in 2024, buoyed by stable oil prices, sustained progress under Oman Vision 2040 and Oman's ongoing efforts to diversify its economy and maintain fiscal discipline. Inflation remained benign, with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) recording a year-on-year increase of 0.6% as of December 2024 per CBO's Monthly Statistical bulletin. This low inflation environment reflects the effectiveness of CBO's monetary policies and government fiscal measures, providing a stable backdrop for our operations.

The macroeconomic backdrop remains supportive with broad money supply (M2) increasing by 8.1% to RO 24.9 billion in December 2024, signalling ample liquidity in the financial system, which supports lending and investment activities. Interest rate dynamics have also been favorable. The decline in the overnight Rial Omani domestic inter-bank lending rate to 4.457% in December 2024 from 5.417% a year earlier indicates improved interest rate scenario, fostering a conducive environment for our financing activities.

Key infrastructure projects, including the expansion of Duqm Port and renewable energy initiatives, bolstered investor confidence, positioning Oman as a regional hub for sustainable development. As per IMF forecast, Oman's real GDP growth is expected to exceed 3% in each year from 2025 till 2029. The augurs well for your company's growth prospects.

Global geopolitical uncertainties and tighter global financial conditions necessitate cautious liquidity management. Escalating tensions, including potential tariff and trade wars, could disrupt global supply chains and impact commodity prices, indirectly affecting Oman's export. Such developments may lead to reduced investor confidence globally, posing challenges to economic stability. To mitigate these risks, we are enhancing our risk assessment frameworks and diversifying our lending portfolio to focus on the most resilient segments, ensuring we remain agile in a volatile global landscape.

Overall, Oman's economic environment in Q1 2025 remains stable, with diversification efforts and prudent monetary management creating a solid foundation for growth, despite global uncertainties.

Business Results

Your Company continues its focus on booking high quality business at optimal pricing. Your Company recorded growth in loan disbursement by predominantly expanding its preferred retail segment. As a result of these efforts the Gross Investment in Finance Debtors expanded to RO 134 Million as on March 31, 2025 compared from RO 121 Mn a year earlier. Correspondingly, the Gross Investment in Finance Debtors expanded to RO 100 Million as on March 31, 2025 from RO 91 Million in the preceding year.

Your Company has recorded a net profit of RO 418K and an operating profit of RO 915K for Q1 2025. The operating profit before working capital changes increased by RO 1,977K in 3M 2025 compared to RO 1,396K in the same period previous year. Part of this was utilized towards investment in liquid debt instruments thereby bolstering the liquidity buffers while generating optimal returns.

The financial results are summarized below:

PARTICULARS	Amount in RO' 000			
	YTD 31st March 2025	YTD 31st March 2024	% change	
Net investment in finance debtors	100,351	91,019	10	
Gross income	2,769	2,261	22	
Total expenses including interest cost	(1,854)	(1,822)	2	
Operating profit	915	439	108	
Net profit after tax	418	127	229	

Sustainable Lending

Your Company published its first ever ESG report in the first quarter of 2025. We recognise our duty to contribute positively to the community and create value for all stakeholders. Your Company reinforced its commitment to sustainable finance in Q1 2025, aligning with Oman's broader economic diversification goals. This focus mirrors the growth-oriented strategies adopted by Your Company which prioritize sustainable practices to drive sectoral development.

With a focus on strengthening core retail business and a selective approach to the corporate segment, your company's prudential credit selection has led to a progressive improvement in the quality of business bookings. This is reflected in a reduction in quick mortality (accounts turning NPA within a year), improving from 1.1%, 0.6%, and 0.3% and 0.2% at end of 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 respectively to remain relatively stable at 0.4% as at the end of Q1 2025. However, Your Company witnessed 31 basis point increase in the cost of risk to 1.98% in view of provisions which in turn helped to improve provision coverage of 72% which is amongst the best in the industry.

Liquidity

In line with its strategy to maintain a diversified funding base with moderate costs, your Company retains a mix of funding from bank lines and corporate deposits.

Your Company has commenced engagement with relevant stakeholders to initiate a bond program, which would be the first in the FLC industry. This will help the company have wider individual participation of bond holders who can benefit from the lucrative rates offered by your company.

Pioneering Digital Excellence for Unparalleled Customer Satisfaction Technology is the backbone of Your Company's mission to deliver exceptional operational efficiency and a seamless customer experience. In Q1 2025, Your Company significantly advanced its digital transformation by investing in state-of-the-art infrastructure, reinforcing our resilience against emerging risks and enhancing service delivery.

As a trailblazer in the industry, Your Company revolutionized lending nearly a decade ago by introducing the first loan origination system in Oman's FLC sector. Building on this legacy, Your Company introduced a cutting-edge loan origination platform in Q1 2025. This next-generation system leverages automation to streamline the entire customer onboarding process, reducing turnaround times, reducing paper consumption and elevating service quality.

Recognizing the centrality of mobile channels in today's customer lifecycle, Your Company is developing an innovative mobile app set to redefine convenience. Incorporating advanced technologies, the app will offer a seamless, end-to-end experience, including loan origination, ensuring customers can access our services anytime, anywhere.

Looking ahead to the remainder of 2025, Your Company anticipates technology will continue to reshape the financial services landscape. It commitment is unwavering: to harness these advancements to deliver secure, efficient, and customer-centric solutions while upholding operational excellence. By staying at the forefront of innovation, Your Company is poised to set new benchmarks in the industry.

Business outlook for the year 2025

Your Company is optimistic about our prospects for 2025, buoyed by Oman's stable economic environment and Your Company's strategic initiatives. The Macroeconomic Stability Report 2024 projects a solid medium-term outlook, with non-hydrocarbon sector growth expected to reduce the nation's dependence on hydrocarbon sector. This diversification aligns with our lending focus on non-oil sectors, positioning us to capitalize on emerging opportunities.

Key priorities include diversifying funding sources, expanding retail loan segment and leveraging technology to optimize service offerings. We anticipate continued growth in our lending portfolio, driven by increased demand from expanding GDP. Our emphasis on sustainable lending and technological innovation will further enhance our competitiveness. However, we remain mindful of challenges such as global economic uncertainties and cybersecurity risks, which we are mitigating through robust risk

management and infrastructure investments.

In conclusion, we are confident that our strategic direction and operational resilience will enable us to achieve our objectives in 2025, contributing to the sustainable development of Oman's economy while delivering value to our stakeholders.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board and the Company, I would like to express our sincere gratitude and best wishes to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq to lead the Sultanate of Oman with his wisdom and vision, towards a path of prosperity.

I would like to thank His Majesty's Government, the Central Bank of Oman, the Financial Services Authority

(previously known as Capital Market Authority "CMA") and other regulatory Authorities for their continued support and guidance. We are grateful to customers for their continued patronage and support, to our bankers for their unwavering trust and support, and to all the shareholders for the confidence reposed in its Board. On behalf of the Board, I would like to express our appreciation to the dedicated management and staff of the Company for their hard work, commitment, and support.

On Behalf of the Board of Directors

Mr. Faisal Mohamed Al Yousef
Chairman
Muscat Finance SAOG

Condensed interim statement of financial position as at 31 March 2025			
	31 March 2025 RO' 000 Un-audited	31 March 2024 RO' 000 Un-audited	31 December 2024 RO' 000 Audited
ASSETS			
Cash and bank balances	613	1,169	2,059
Investment securities	776	359	-
Net investment in finance debtors	100,351	91,019	100,781
Other receivables and prepayments	445	353	365
Deferred tax asset	398	485	398
Property and equipment	2,236	2,258	2,273
Investment property	674	703	681
Statutory deposit	250	250	250
TOTAL ASSETS	105,743	96,596	106,807
EQUITY			
Share capital	30,715	30,715	30,715
Legal reserve	3,209	3,126	3,209
Impairment reserve	3,997	6,265	3,638
Retained earnings	1,052	(1,775)	1,190
Total equity	38,973	38,351	39,052
LIABILITIES			
Short term borrowings	37,525	28,160	32,854
Other liabilities	6,462	5,852	9,038
Corporate deposits	21,446	18,504	24,452
Long term loans	1,337	5,729	1,411
Total liabilities	66,770	58,245	67,755
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	105,743	96,596	106,807
Net assets per share (RO)	0.127	0.125	0.127

Condensed interim statement of profit of loss and other comprehensive income for the period ended 31 March 2025		
	Period ended 31 March 2025 RO' 000 Un-audited	Period ended 31 March 2024 RO' 000 Un-audited
Interest income	2,618	2,082
Interest expense	(1,003)	(903)
Net interest income	1,615	1,179
Other operating income	151	179
	1,766	1,358
Expenses		
Selling, general and administrative expenses	(741)	(863)
Depreciation	(50)	(46)
Director's remuneration and sitting fees	(60)	(10)
	(851)	(919)
Profit before allowance for impairment	915	439
Allowance for impairment	(487)	(312)
Net profit before tax for the Period	418	127
Income tax	-	-
Net profit after tax for the Period	418	127
Total comprehensive income for the Period	418	127
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.0014	0.0004

US: Suspect pleads not guilty to UnitedHealthcare CEO’s murder

Houston, US - The suspect accused of gunning down UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson outside a New York City hotel last December pleaded not guilty in a Manhattan federal court on Friday, according to multiple news outlets.

Luigi Mangione, 26, entered his plea to Judge Margaret Garnett.

He was indicted last week by a federal grand jury on two counts of stalking, one count of murder with a firearm, and a firearms offense for an allegation that he used a silencer on the gun when he shot and killed Thompson outside where the UnitedHealthcare executive was staying for a conference.

Mangione led police on a five-day manhunt until he was arrested at an Altoona, Pennsylvania, McDonald’s restaurant about 300 miles (482.8km) west of New York City.

Prosecutors filed a notice on Thursday seeking the death penalty for Mangione, weeks after US Attorney General Pam Bondi directed them to do so. If convicted, Mangione could be



sentenced to death.

“Mangione presents a future danger because he expressed intent to target an entire industry, and rally political and social opposition to that industry, by engaging in an act of lethal violence,” wrote prosecutors in a filing. “And he took steps to evade law enforcement, flee New York City immediately after the murder, and cross state lines while armed with a privately manufactured firearm and silencer.”

The next court hearing is scheduled for December 5, at which time a trial date is expected to be set.

Mangione is also facing state charges in New York and Pennsylvania, including one count of first-degree murder in furtherance of terrorism, two counts of second-degree murder and several weapons charges. He has already pleaded not guilty to the murder and terrorism charges in New York.

Mangione’s attorneys have asked for his federal case to go to trial first since it carries the possibility of the death penalty.

Anadolu Agency

Funeral of Pope Francis held in Vatican

More than 250,000 people attended the funeral at St Peter’s Square, who were joined by world leaders

Vatican City - The funeral of Pope Francis, attended by over 250,000 people who were joined by world leaders and royals, was held on Saturday in Vatican.

The solemn funeral and moving celebration was presided over by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, who was joined by some 250 cardinals, patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, priests, and consecrated religious people.

According to the Italian and Vatican sources, 160 delegations representing states, royal families, and international organisations, attended the funeral, including US President Donald Trump, former US President Joe Biden, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, French President Emmanuel Macron, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Italian President Sergio Mattarella, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Prince William, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Argentine President Javier Gerardo Milei, Belgian King Philippe and Queen Mathilde, Norwegian Crown Prince Haakon, and Crown Princess Mette-Marit.

The funeral mass concluded at St Peter’s Square with the bells of St Peter’s Basilica tolling to signal the end of the 2 hours and 10 minutes long service.

Large crowds lined up along



The coffin of Pope Francis is carried in front of dignitaries, including US President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron, during the funeral on Saturday

160 delegations representing states, royal families, and international organisations, attended the funeral, including US President Donald Trump, UN chief Antonio Guterres, and EU head Ursula von der Leyen

Rome’s streets to pay their respects to Pope Francis as the white popemobile carrying his coffin made its way across the Vatican flanked by motorbikes on its way to the pope’s final resting

place, a place of his choosing.

Pope Francis’ coffin was transported across the River Tiber to the fifth-century church in Rome, the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore, where bells tolled ahead of the arrival of the pontiff’s body. The Basilica of Saint Mary Major in was a place that the pope visited frequently throughout his 12-year papacy.

The coffin of Pope Francis

passed by the Colosseum, one of the historical sites of the Italian capital.

Earlier as the pallbearers lifted his coffin and took it back into St Peter’s Basilica as per CNN, the crowd - mostly hushed for the two-hour service - burst into applause. The coffin was carried in the open-topped popemobile that the pope used during his 2015 trip to the Philippines.

The Vatican said in a statement: “The competent authority informs us that, while the funeral of Pope Francis has ended, more than 250,000 people are present.” The service concluded with the Canticle of the Blessed Virgin Mary, also known as the Magnificat. “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,” the choir chanted.

Pope Francis’ coffin has been carried through the Holy Door of St Peter’s Basilica for a final time. The bells tolled slowly as the coffin approached the main altar of the basilica. The funeral began on Saturday with an elaborate set of rituals at the square, six days after where Francis made his final public appearance for Easter.

According to an earlier report by the CNN, around 2,00,000 people descended on St Peter’s Square, the Vatican said, to mark the death of Pope Francis - the first Latin American pontiff. Among those are 130 delegations, including world leaders and reigning monarch.

Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, one of the most senior figures in the Catholic Church, conducted the service. The 91-year-old honoured Francis’ ability to lead with ‘an open heart towards everyone’ in his sermon, describing him as a ‘pope among the people’.

In his homily at the funeral the 91-year-old prelate stressed that Pope Francis during his 12-year papacy had been ‘attentive to the signs of the times and what the Holy Spirit was awakening in the Church’.

“Rich in human warmth and deeply sensitive to today’s challenges, Pope Francis truly shared the anxieties, sufferings and hopes of this time,” Cardinal Battista Re said, adding that the late pontiff touched people’s hearts ‘in a direct and immediate way’.

Agencies

US appoints Hanrahan as new top official for Europe

Washington, D.C., US - A business consultant and former member United States Secretary of State Marco Rubio’s Senate staff has been appointed as the US State Department’s top executive for Europe, the department’s website showed on Friday.

Brendan Hanrahan has taken on the role of the senior bureau official for the State Department’s Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR).

Who is Brendan Hanrahan?

According to the website, Hanrahan was an investor at a private American firm and previously worked as a policy adviser for the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship under Rubio.

Hanrahan replaces Louis Bono, a senior foreign service officer who was appointed to the role when US President Donald Trump was elected in January.

Hanrahan’s biography on the department website does not mention whether he has any experience working on foreign policy issues.



“Brendan brings valuable experience from the private sector and the Senate, where he served on the secretary’s staff, making him well poised to lead the bureau through the reorganisation and to successfully advance the Secretary’s agenda throughout Europe and beyond,” news agency Reuters - which first reported the new appointment - cited an internal email from Bono as saying.

Latest change at State

The State Department’s move comes amid Washington’s shifting ties with Europe as Trump steps up pressure on allies over NATO spending. The US president is also floating plans to acquire Greenland and pushing for an end to Russia’s war in Ukraine.

The Trump administration is seeking a massive overhaul of the State Department in a bid to execute the president’s ‘America First’ policy.

Earlier in the week, Rubio announced that the department would slash its staff by 15% and eliminate over 100 bureaus and offices globally.

DW

US: Trump’s attacks test press freedom

Washington, D.C., US - On April 22, courts ruled in favour of the US-based broadcaster Voice of America’s lawsuit against the White House, in a rebuke to President Donald Trump’s targeting of the free press.

From gutting Voice of America (VOA), to barring the Associated Press (AP) from the Oval Office, to threatening to defund publicly-funded media like National Public Radio (NPR), the Trump administration and his allies have had the American press in their crosshairs.

Some of Trump’s attacks on the press started even before he won the White House. Trump sued CBS before the 2024 presidential election for editing an interview with his rival Kamala Harris in way he deemed unfavourable. He also sued a newspaper in Iowa, the Des Moines Register and J Ann Selzer, a pollster, for publishing a survey that showed Harris leading Trump in the presidential race in the state. Those cases are ongoing.

Small wins

But some outlets are fighting back and scoring some wins.

A federal judge ordered the



Trump government to restore VOA’s funding and reinstate the global broadcaster’s employees and contractors. More than 1,000 of them were suspended after the president signed an executive order dismantling VOA’s parent company, the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

A court also sided with the AP in its lawsuit to get access restored after it was banned from the Oval Office over its refusal to refer to the Gulf of Mexico as the ‘Gulf of America’. President Trump has insisted the waterway be referred to as the latter. In an April 8 decision, US district judge Trevor N McFadden ruled that the ban violated the wire service’s

First Amendment rights. The Trump administration said it will appeal the ruling.

Under the US constitution, the First Amendment provides for the protection of fundamental freedoms of religion, speech, press, assembly and petition.

But free speech advocates caution that while these freedoms are outlined in the US constitution, Trump’s crack-down on the free press shows the First Amendment requires active defence.

“No matter how wonderfully protective the First Amendment and Supreme Court decisions upholding the First Amendment are in principle, they are not self-en-

forcing,” said Nadine Strossen, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. “It requires lawyers to advocate to courts to uphold and enforce First Amendment rights and when you have law firms being intimidated from locking horns with the Trump administration, because it can put them out of business, that is very scary.”

President Trump signed a series of executive orders particularly targeting law firms he deemed ‘risks’, mostly to punish them for employing lawyers involved in investigating past cases against Trump himself.

DW

15 Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes on Gaza, including 10 from one family

Gaza City/Ankara - At least 15 Palestinians were killed and several others wounded in Israeli airstrikes across Gaza early on Saturday.

According to medical sources, 10 of the victims were killed when an Israeli airstrike hit a home belonging to the Al-Khour family in the Sabra neighbourhood, south of Gaza City.

Eyewitnesses reported that the house was bombed while residents were inside.

The Civil Defence said in a statement that many individuals remain missing beneath the rubble of the destroyed Al-Khour home, with search and rescue operations ongoing.

Earlier at dawn, three Palestinians were killed and others wounded when another family home in the Al-Shati refugee camp west of Gaza City was targeted.

In the northern Gaza Strip, a medical source confirmed that two more Palestinians were killed in a strike near the Education Roundabout in Beit Lahia, with additional injuries reported.

Meanwhile, Israeli artillery shelled various areas of the Gaza Strip, particularly in the eastern neighbourhoods of Gaza City and western Rafah.



Death toll surges to 51,495

Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least 56 more Palestinians during the last 24 hours, bringing the death toll from Is-

rael's genocidal war since October 2023 to 51,495, the Health Ministry said on Saturday.

A ministry statement said that 108 more injured people were transferred to hospitals in the

last 24 hours, taking the number of injuries to 117,524 in the Israeli onslaught.

"Many victims are still trapped under the rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable

to reach them," it added.

The Israeli army launched a surprise aerial campaign on the Gaza Strip on March 18, killing 2,111 people and injuring 5,483 others despite a ceasefire and

prisoner exchange agreement that took hold in January.

Hamas begins talks in Cairo

Meanwhile, Palestinian group

Hamas announced on Saturday that a leadership delegation from the group has begun meetings with Egyptian officials in Cairo to discuss its vision for ending the Gaza war and a potential prisoner exchange with Israel.

In a statement, Hamas said its vision is based on achieving a

According to medical sources, 10 of the victims were killed when an Israeli airstrike hit a home belonging to the Al-Khour family in the Sabra neighbourhood, south of Gaza City

'comprehensive deal, which includes a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the reconstruction of the enclave'.

The movement added that its delegation will also discuss 'the impact of Israel's starvation policy in Gaza and stress the urgent need to deliver humanitarian aid, including food and medicine, to the territory'.

Anadolu Agency

At least 4 killed, nearly 600 injured in massive explosion at port in Iran

Tehran, Iran - At least four people have died and nearly 600 others injured in a massive explosion that ripped through the Shahid Rajaei Port in southern Iran on Saturday, officials said.

In a televised interview with the state broadcaster, Babak Mahmoudi, head of the Relief and Rescue Organization, confirmed the initial toll from the explosion.

He said emergency personnel were immediately dispatched to the scene to transfer the injured to medical centres, and firefighting teams are working to extinguish the blaze.

The number of injured has been steadily rising. The National Emergency Organization in its latest update said at least 560 people have been injured and transferred to nearby hospitals. President Masoud Pezeshkian, in a statement on X, expressed sorrow and sympathy with the vic-



tims and issued an order to investigate the causes of the incident.

He said Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni had been dispatched to the region as his special representative 'to conduct a thorough investigation into

the dimensions of the incident, ensure necessary coordination, and attend to the condition of the injured'. Earlier, Momeni instructed the provincial authorities in Hormozgan to submit a preliminary report on the incident,

his office said in a statement.

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Aref also held separate phone calls with the governor of Hormozgan province and head of the Red Crescent Society.

Anadolu Agency

Syrian FM tells UN Security Council that Assad era is over

Hamilton, Canada - Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani addressed the UN Security Council for the first time on Friday and declared the end of the Assad regime.

He urged the international community to support the 'new Syria'. 'I have the honour to address you on this historic day, the day when right before this statement, the flag representing the new Syria, the Syria of freedom and dignity, was raised on the flagpole of the United Nations alongside 193 of our partners in the international community,' said Shaibani.

Describing the former Bashar Assad regime as responsible for 'decades' of atrocities, he said: "The country plunged into darkness, and citizens were killed, tortured and systematically disappeared. Chemical weapons have been used. Millions have



Asaad al-Shaibani

been displaced, and generations have been broken under the weight of pain and loss."

Shaibani said Syria was open to the world, allowing access to international institutions and planning the creation of a Transitional Justice Commission. "Aircrafts are now dropping flowers instead of barrel bombs," he said. He urged the lifting of sanc-

tions, and stated that the penalties 'forced Syria to play the role of an aid dependent country rather than being a partner in global economic growth,' He argued that the sanctions enabled 'illicit networks' to thrive.

Shaibani also condemned Israeli airstrikes on Syrian territory as 'a direct threat to regional stability'. He asked the Council to pressure Israel to implement the 1974 disengagement agreement.

"Let us seize this defining moment," he said, adding that 'Syrians are ready to reshape the future of their country'.

Israel has mounted a massive air campaign against Syrian military sites since the downfall of the Assad regime in December.

The Israeli army occupied the demilitarised zone in the Golan Heights in early December, violating a 1974 Disengagement Agreement with Syria.

Why is Germany's future chancellor, Friedrich Merz, so unpopular?

Berlin, Germany - If all goes to plan, Friedrich Merz will become the Federal Republic's 10th chancellor on May 6. The two remaining hurdles appear to be formalities: On Monday, his conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) will convene for a special party conference to approve the coalition contract with the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD). Then, a few days later, the SPD's members - some grumbling notwithstanding - are expected to approve the alliance in a vote, with the results announced on April 30.

But Merz won't have long to enjoy the congratulations. Even though he won the national election in late February, the 69-year-old's personal popularity seems to be on a permanent slide: According to an April poll by research institute Forsa for Stern magazine, just 21% of respondents consider Merz

trustworthy - nine percentage points lower than in August, and down three points from January.

The same poll found that only 40% of respondents consider the incoming chancellor a strong leader, and 27% think Merz 'knows what moves people', both of which represent nine-point falls since January. On the plus side - indeed, the only leadership criteria in which Merz scored a majority in the survey - about 60% of respondents believe that Merz 'speaks understandably'.

A not-so-grand coalition

It's no shock that Merz isn't exactly the most popular chancellor-in-waiting Germany has ever seen. But Ursula Münch, the director of the Tutzing Academy for Political Education in Bavaria, told DW that it's not all his fault. "The circumstances



Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader Friedrich Merz

are very different than they used to be," Münch said. "We have a government that has a relatively small proportion of support among voters."

Merz has not picked the most fortunate moment in history: In traditional political parlance, a coalition of the CDU/CSU and SPD is called a 'grand coalition', because for many decades these two parties represented an overwhelm-

ing majority of Germany's voters (sometimes well over 80%). In the fragmented landscape of 2025, in which parties have splintered and splintered again over the past 20 years, the two big centrist parties can only claim to represent 45% of voters, going by the February election results.

Merz's trust issues

There are two obvious reasons

why the perception of Merz's trustworthiness might have fallen in the past few months. In January, Merz broke his own word when he became the first CDU leader to pass a motion through

(US\$1.14tn) in new loans, something he had expressly ruled out throughout the election campaign.

Unsurprisingly, many of his voters felt betrayed. In a 'Polit-

Even though Friedrich Merz won the national election in late February, the 69-year-old's personal popularity seems to be on a permanent slide

the Bundestag with the support of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), whole factions of which are deemed by intelligence agencies to be a threat to Germany's democratic order.

For CDU supporters, however, that seemed like a less egregious U-turn than the one Merz performed a few weeks later: In March, the party leader agreed a debt brake reform with the SPD and the Greens that paved the way for €1tn

barometer' poll carried out by public broadcaster ZDF at the time, some 73% of Germans agreed that he had deceived voters - including some 44% of CDU/CSU supporters.

Unpopular among women

Merz has problems that go much further back than his recent U-turns. Surveys have shown that he is particularly unpopular among women. A Forsa

survey from March 2024 found that only 9% of women aged 18 to 29 saw Merz as their preferred chancellor candidate.

The incoming chancellor has been dogged with accusations of misogyny. In 1997, as is often brought up, he was one of the Bundestag members who voted against recognising rape within marriage as a crime. In October last year, he was criticised for rejecting the idea of gender-balanced Cabinets, and this reputation was not helped by a photo released in February showing that the main negotiators of the CDU/CSU bloc were all middle-aged men.

Merz is also unpopular in eastern Germany, where he regularly polled behind both the AfD's Alice Weidel and the SPD's Olaf Scholz in the run-up to the election - partly, it seems, because of his belligerent attitude toward Russia. DW

Open to neutral investigation on Kashmir attack, says Pakistan PM

Shehbaz Sharif made the remarks while addressing a military parade in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Islamabad/New Delhi - Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Saturday that Islamabad is open to a 'neutral' investigation on Tuesday's attack by unidentified gunmen in the Indian-administered Kashmir that killed 26 people, local broadcaster Geo News reported.

Sharif made the remarks while addressing a military parade during a ceremony at the Pakistan Military Academy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Sharif expressed concern over India's 'baseless allegations' following the Pahalgam incident, stating that the accusations were made 'without credible investigation or verifiable evidence'.

"Pakistan is open to participating in any neutral, transparent probe on Pahalgam attack," Sharif said as the tensions between the two nuclear neighbours rose following the attack.

The prime minister also issued a stern warning against any attempts to stop or divert Pakistan's water share under the Indus Waters Treaty, emphasising that water is a 'vital, national interest'. "I must mention that



Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also highlighted Pakistan's role in global counterterrorism efforts

The prime minister also issued a stern warning against any attempt to stop or divert Pakistan's water share under the Indus Waters Treaty, emphasising that water is a 'vital, national interest'

water is a vital, national interest of Pakistan - a lifeline for our 240mn people. Let there be no doubt at all, that its availability would be safeguarded at all costs and under all circumstances," Sharif said.

Recalling the 2019 Pulwama crisis, Sharif said Pakistan had

demonstrated its military capability through a 'measured yet resolute' response, and remains fully prepared to defend its sovereignty.

Despite the strong stance, Sharif reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to international norms and peaceful cooperation. "We

are a responsible state that believes in dialogue, but we will not compromise on our core interests," he said.

Highlighting Pakistan's role in global counterterrorism efforts, Sharif noted that the country had suffered over 90,000 casualties and economic losses exceeding US\$600bn. "We have condemned terrorism in all its forms and will not allow misrepresentation of our stance," he said.

New Delhi described the incident as a 'terror attack' with 'cross-border' links, blaming Pakistan for supporting it.

Islamabad, however, dis-

tanced itself from the attack, saying it was 'concerned' and extended condolences to the victims' families.

New Delhi later unilaterally suspended the decades-old Indus Waters Treaty, under which the two neighbours regulate the water share of six rivers in the Indus Basin.

Pakistan responded harshly on Thursday, saying there is no provision for unilaterally suspending the water-sharing agreement, which was mediated by the World Bank and signed in September 1960, warning that any attempt by India to divert or

stop water to Pakistan would be considered an 'act of war'.

The two sides also suspended visas for each other's citizens and expelled army advisors, while Islamabad closed its airspace to Indian airlines.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has assured the country that the terrorists responsible for this attack, along with those who conspired to commit it, will face punishment beyond their imagination. The Prime Minister asserted that the time has come to eliminate the remaining strongholds of terrorism and that the willpower of 140 crore Indians will now break the backbone of the perpetrators of terror.

Meanwhile, a nationwide shutdown strike was held across Pakistan on Saturday to protest India's suspension of the water treaty with Islamabad.

Supported by several traders and business associations, the strike call was issued by Jamaat-e-Islami, a major mainstream religio-political party. The call received an effective response in the country's commercial capital Karachi, where major markets, along with business and shopping centres remained closed.

Footage aired by multiple local broadcasters showed markets, bazaars, and shopping centres remained closed in the capital Islamabad, as well as in Rawalpindi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Peshawar, and many other areas. Small markets and shops, including pharmacies in several localities, however, remained open.

Agencies

India: Kailash Manasarovar Yatra all set to resume

New Delhi, India - The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Saturday that the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra 2025 is scheduled to take place between June and August, marking the resumption of the revered pilgrimage after a three-year suspension due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Applications for participation are now open on the official website (kmy.gov.in), with selection to be carried out through a fair, computer-generated, random, and gender-balanced process.

This year, the Yatra will accommodate five batches of 50 pilgrims each travelling through Uttarakhand's Lipulekh Pass and 10 batches of 50 pilgrims each crossing through Sikkim's Nathu La Pass. Since 2015, the entire application and selection procedure has been fully computerised, eliminating the need for applicants to send letters or faxes.

Instead, the feedback options available on the portal can be utilised for inquiries, observations, and suggestions. The MEA has emphasised that the digital system ensures transparency and efficiency throughout the selection process. The pilgrimage is set to officially resume on June 30, 2025.

ANI

UN paying close attention to India, Pakistan situation: Official

Washington, D.C., US - The UN is paying 'very close attention' to the situation between India and Pakistan, spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Friday.

"Obviously, we continue to follow the situation with very deep concern," Dujarric told reporters. He reiterated condemnation of an attack on Tuesday in Jammu and Kashmir.

"We again urge both the governments of India and the Government of Pakistan to exercise maximum restraint to ensure the situation does not deteriorate further," said Dujarric.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has issued a strong condemnation of the terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir.

In a press statement released on Friday, the Council's President, Jerome Bonnafont of France, expressed deep solidarity with the victims' families and the governments of India and Nepal, while also wishing a swift recovery for the injured. The attack, described as a 'reprehensible act of terrorism', has drawn global outrage, with the UNSC emphasising the urgent need to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The Council reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms remains one of the gravest threats to global peace and security. The statement highlighted the indiscriminate nature of such violence, stressing that no ideology or motive justifies the targeting of innocent civilians. The UNSC's unified stance reflects growing international concern over escalating



Stephane Dujarric

terrorist activities in conflict-prone regions, with Jammu and Kashmir remaining a focal point of instability.

Emphasising accountability, the UNSC called for decisive action against those responsible - including perpetrators, organisers, financiers, and sponsors of the attack. The statement urged all nations to cooperate under international law and existing Security Council resolutions to ensure justice is served.

This includes sharing intelligence, extraditing suspects, and cutting off financial support to terrorist networks. The Council's demand for accountability aligns with broader counter-terrorism efforts, reinforcing the principle that impunity for such crimes cannot be tolerated.

The statement also reiterated that terrorism is unjustifiable under any circumstances, regardless of political, ideological, or religious motivations.

Agencies

India's civil aviation issues advisory to airlines

New Delhi, India - After the closure of Pakistan airspace for Indian carriers, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Saturday issued a set of advisory guidelines to airlines to ensure effective passenger handling.

A copy of the guidelines accessed by ANI states: "Due to recent developments involving international airspace closures and overflight restrictions, airline operations have been impacted by the significant rerouting of international and regional flights."

"Increased block times compared to scheduled durations. Possibility of technical halts enroute for operational or fuel requirements," it said.

"In light of the above, all airline operators are directed to im-



plement the following passenger-handling measures to ensure transparency, compliance, and passenger welfare that include pre-flight passenger communication. Airlines shall ensure that all passengers are proactively informed about the change in routing due to airspace restrictions. Revised

total expected travel time (departure to arrival). The possibility of a technical stop at an intermediate airport."

"Clarify that the stop is operational in nature. Passengers will generally remain onboard during such stops. This information must be communicated at check-in, boarding gates, and,

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation's advisory came after the closure of Pakistan airspace for Indian carriers

where feasible, through SMS/email alerts," it reads.

Airlines must ensure that catering uplift is revised based on the actual expected block time, including technical halt. This includes adequate meals and beverages for the full duration. Additional hydration and dry snacks. Special meals as per manifest requests.

Operators shall ensure medical kits and first-aid resources onboard are sufficient for extended operations. Validate that alternate or technical halt airports have emergency medical support and ground ambulance availability, if required. Brief cabin crew on managing passenger fatigue, discomfort, or medical incidents.

The operators shall prepare customer service and support readiness, including briefing the call centre and reservations teams on likely delays and schedule disruptions. Establish processes for managing missed onward connections and delay-related assistance. Prepare for compensatory action in case of delays beyond thresholds.

ANI

Agencies issue list of 14 active local terrorists in J&K

New Delhi, India - Amid heightened security concerns following the recent terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam, intelligence agencies have compiled a list of 14 local terrorists actively operating in the Union Territory.

According to sources, these individuals, aged between 20 to 40 years, are actively aiding foreign terrorists by providing logistical and ground-level support.

The identified operatives are reportedly affiliated with three major terror outfits: Hizbul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). Among them, three are associated with Hizbul Mujahideen, eight with LeT, and three with JeM.

Sources revealed the names of these individuals as: Adil Rehman Dentoo (21), Asif Ahmed Sheikh (28), Ahsan Ahmed Sheikh (23),



A tourist who returned from Pahalgam, J&K breaks down on being received at home in Akola, Maharashtra, on Saturday (ANI)

Haris Nazir (20), Aamir Nazir Wani (20), Yawar Ahmed Bhat, Asif Ahmed Khanday (24), Naseer Ahmed Wani (21), Shahid Ahmed Kutay (27), Aamir

Ahmed Dar, Adnan Safi Dar, Zubair Ahmed Wani (39), Haroon Rashid Ganai (32) and Zakir Ahmed Ganie (29).

Dentoo joined LeT in 2021 and

is actively working as the Sopore district commander of the banned outfit. Asif Ahmed Sheikh, a terrorist of JeM, is the district commander of Awanipora and has been continuously involved in terrorist activities since 2022. Ahsan Ahmed Sheikh is active in Pulwama as an LeT terrorist and has been involved in terrorist activities continuously since 2023. Haris Nazir is terrorist from Pulwama and active in LeT since 2023 while Aamir Nazir Wani is also an active terrorist in Pulwama linked to JeM since 2024. Yawar Ahmed Bhat is also completely active in Pulwama and is associated with JeM since 2024.

Asif Ahmed Khanday is terrorist from Shopian district in Jammu and Kashmir and he joined Hizbul Mujahideen in July 2015, and is currently an active

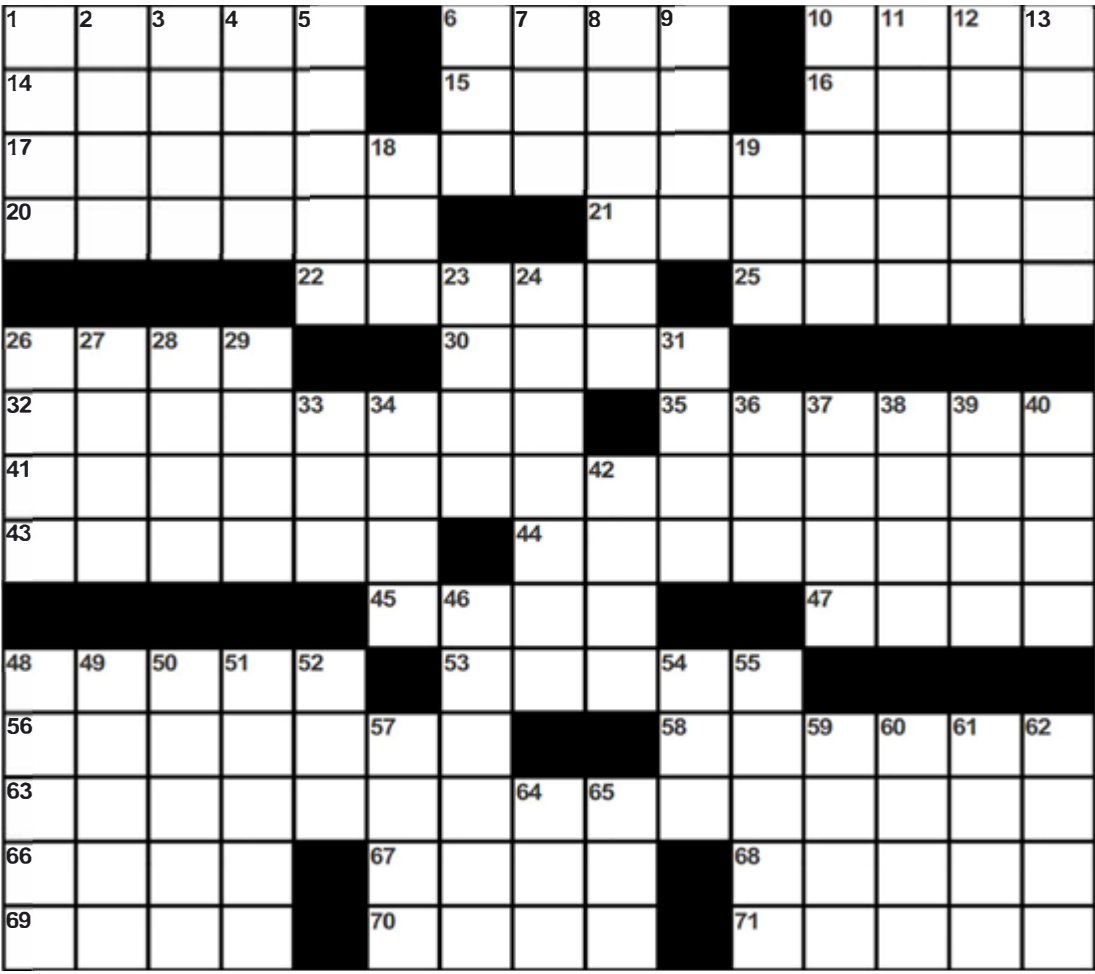
member of the terror group aiding terrorists. Naseer Ahmed Wani is also actively involved in terrorist activities in Shopian since 2019 as an active member of LeT significantly aiding terrorists. Shahid Ahmed Kutay, another active terrorist in Shopian, is linked with LeT and its proxy group The Resistance Front (TRF) since 2023.

Aamir Ahmed Dar, also active in Shopian since 2023, is working with LeT and play a major role as an aide to foreign terrorists. Adnan Safi Dar, who is another active terrorist from Shopian district, is working jointly for LeT and TRF since 2024.

Zubair Ahmed Wani alias Abu Ubaida alias Usman, is the Chief Operational Commander of Hizbul Mujahideen in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir.

ANI

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1) Luxurious country dwelling
6) "Touched by an Angel" star Downey
10) Having wings
14) Dodge
15) Some small batteries
16) South American nation
17) Shortened weapon
20) Went after
21) College course out-lines
22) Even a trey beats it
25) "Blowin' in the Wind" singer Bob
26) Autumnal birthstone
30) Verbal feistiness
32) Backslides
35) Freetown currency units
41) Gulf Coast fish
43) Bone-related
44) Electric-motor part
45) Volcanic output
4 7) Chilly powder?
48) '70s dance ha! I
53) Computer language
56) "1984" location
58) Motley, as an army
63) Became important to the police
66) Paving block
71) Strauss of pants fame

68) "Hammerin' Hank" of baseball
69) Winged god of love
70) Genesis locale
71) Like Santa Claus
DOWN
1) Ming valuable
2) Three-time French Open champ Lend!
3) Rock-bottom prices
4) In_ of (rather than)
5) Tacked on
6) Churchill's "so few" (Abbr.)
7) Clumsy guy
8) Holy Communion celebrations
9) Covered with soot
10) In a fitting way
11) Permitted by law
12) Caribbean cruise stop
13) Encounter with the law
18) "To a" work
19) Like an octogenarian
23) Like auction merchandise
24) Source of tapioca
26) Approximately
27) Invigorates (with "up")
28) What little things mean?
29) "Better_ than never"
31) In baseball, it's grand

33) Bake sale sponsor, sometimes
34) Be a successful pitcher?
36) Airport listing, for short
37) Doggie-bag contents
38) Sentence necessity
39) Money of the Continent
40) Beef dish
42) Important times in history
46) Degraded
48) Seek water, in a way
49) More frosty and slippery
50) Brief brawl
51) Tilts to a side
52) _ in a million
54) Keogh plan relative
55) Source of chocolate
57) Land in the ocean
59) Snatch
60) It can wear on you while traveling
61) "Famous" cookie maker
62) Chromosome constituent
64) Time before anything
65) Loud noise

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE

ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19
You know you can't just keep running in high gear all day long. Eventually you've got to downshift. Maybe it's time for you to find a hill and just coast for a while. You've been pushing yourself at the highest possible speed, but that's not as vital as you think, and it's working against you now. Try to find someone else to take the wheel for a while as you take time to appreciate the beautiful countryside as you drive by.

LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22
The time is ripe for you to develop a shiny new interest with the potential to redefine your life.Today's energy deals you a winning hand when it comes to changing things that aren't working, and you've practically got a blank check for new construction. Forcing things just doesn't work, though, so try to let events unroll naturally. It should all end up much better than any scenario you try to make happen.

SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21
Today feels something like a dress rehearsal. If things are chaotic, don't panic. That just means things should be smooth on opening night! If lots of excitement, problems, and muddled situations are presenting themselves, thank your social energy and make the most of all these opportunities. It's a training ground to help you learn how to cope when your ship finally does come in.

TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20
Avoid the temptation to give in to fretting or even despair. It sounds too simple (almost silly, really), but a persistently upbeat attitude really helps you get through it all, especially since you're likely feeling somewhat more sensitive than usual. Every problem has an answer as long as you approach it with a sense of hope. Stay open to all suggestions that come your way.

VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22
Love is always a tricky business, especially since it takes away all sense of perspective very quickly. It's important to forgive and forget, but it's just as important to notice reoccurring patterns and unhealthy interactions. Long-term partnerships are especially affected, so keep your eyes peeled if you've been with the same person for quite a while. Tackle issues as soon as they arise instead of just sitting and fuming.

CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19
Your peers may see adversity, but you see something that can help you stay focused. With that kind of attitude, how can you go wrong? You've got what it takes to regain control of your vehicle and get back on the right track. The work may be arduous, but all you need to do is believe in yourself to get where you're going. All the time and effort will not go to waste. A big payoff is in store, and soon!

GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21
You can take advantage of today's new possibilities if you understand the necessity of taking care of details right now. Tackle those seemingly trivial tasks one at a time, and you should be finished with plenty of time to spare. Not only that, as you start crossing items off your to-do list, you can appreciate them all the more and find new ways to build on them even further.

LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22
Some murky emotional boundaries are even harder to see today unless you insist on clarity. Don't just go into a tailspin and indulge in delirious emotional excess. Instead, acknowledge your feelings while maintaining an awareness that those feelings can change. Observe the rise and fall of your biggest emotions, and the boundaries should quickly become crystal clear. In the end, mean what you say and say what you mean.

AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18
You've made quite an impression on all the right people with your creative powers, but this is not the time to stop and rest, no matter how large a splash you think you've made. Instead, engage in a little risky business and offer a proposal that makes the most of your creative abilities. It should benefit your people quite a bit while moving you into a position where you can make a difference while satisfying your artistic urges.

CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22
If you're working today, try not to get too emotionally involved. You are not your job! A more detached, observant approach should help, especially when it comes to office politics or a coworker's hurt feelings. You don't have to be uncaring. Just make sure to rely on your rational side. You're totally capable of making an objective decision when your expertise is required. The right people appreciate your cool head.

SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21
Aggressive energies are coming your way, and they are likely to push you to act on some big changes you've been talking about for a while. Commit sooner rather than later, and you should see more progress than you expected. Don't forget to pay back an old debt or acknowledge your gratitude in some way. This improves your karma immeasurably and should let the people in your life know how loyal and steadfast you are.

PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20
You just can't take no for an answer right now, and you're willing to go to nearly any lengths to get the feedback you know you need. Fortunately, you can throw out the "take no prisoners" approach. It just isn't necessary at this time. Your admirable determination combined with almost unfair levels of charm on your side pretty much ensures that you get your way.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

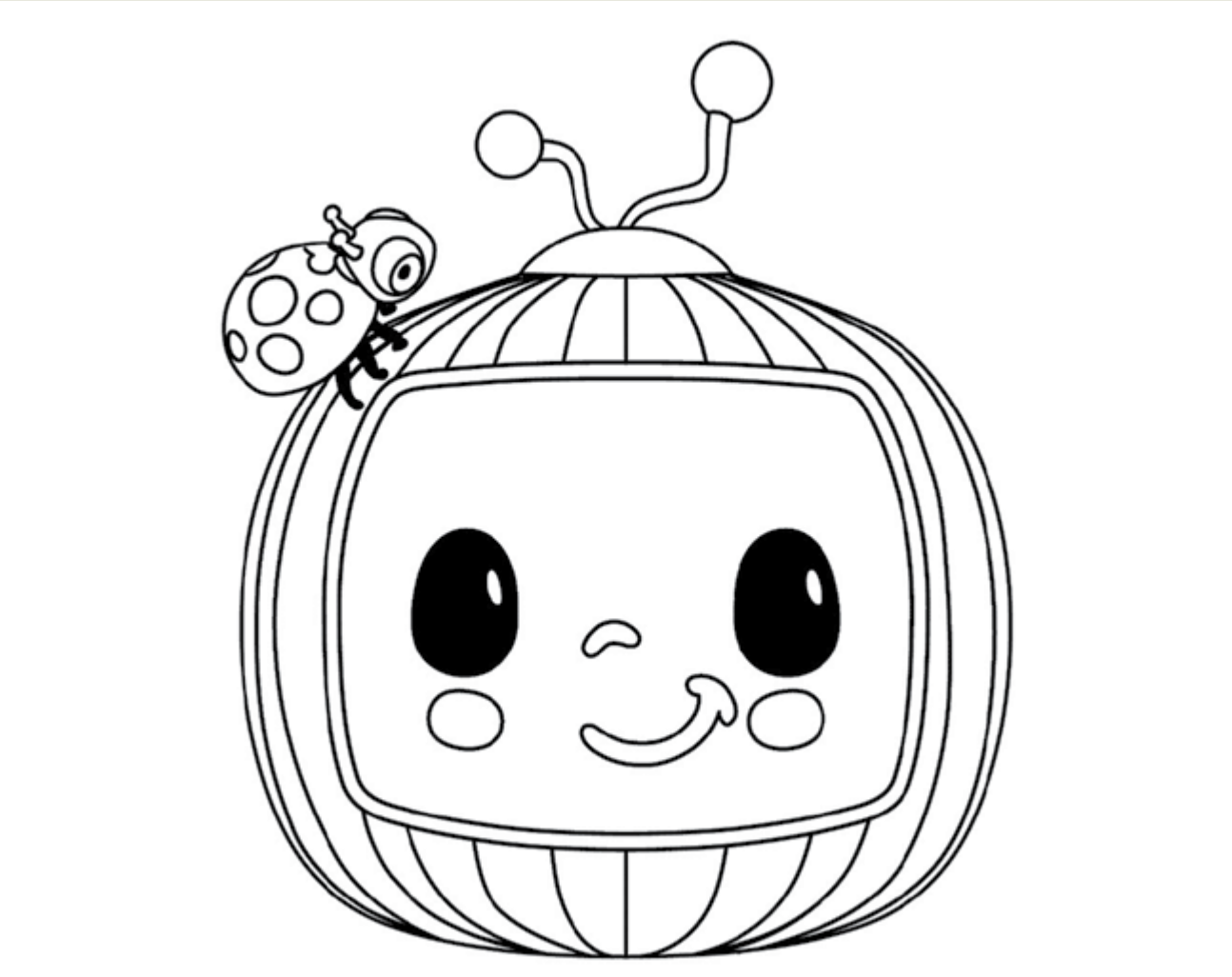
01. Which pioneer of molecular gastronomy is also the founder and proprietor of 3-Michelin-star restaurant "The Fat Duck" in Berkshire, England?
A. Jamie Oliver
B. Alain Ducasse
C. Anne-Sophie Pic
D. Heston Blumenthal

02. George Harrison was deported from which city where the early Beatles had long term engagements, because of his youth?
A. Rotterdam
B. Hamburg
C. Berlin
D. Paris

03. Which of these Mexican cities is close to the Caribbean Sea?
A. Chilapa
B. Punta Gorda
C. Monterrey
D. Acapulco

Answers: 1.D 2.B 3.B

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

L	T	E	P
D	R	I	I
L	N	A	A
E	S	G	I

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 a four 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

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

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

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



Chelsea's Nicolas Jackson celebrates his goal

Chelsea scrape past Everton to return to Champions League places

London, England - Chelsea climbed back into contention for next season's Champions League with a 1-0 home win over Everton in the Premier League on Saturday thanks to a fine first-half strike by Nicolas Jackson.

The Senegal striker, fed by Enzo Fernandez, drove low into the bottom corner past a diving Jordan Pickford in the 27th minute for his first goal in four months.

The result lifted Enzo Maresca's Chelsea to fourth in the table on 60 points, one point behind Manchester City who are in FA Cup action this weekend. Everton are 13th.

The home side should have had more but were thwarted by a stubborn defence and Pickford, who kept out a series of shots, notably from Noni Madueke.

BLUE WAVES UNLEASHED

Al Hilal crush Gwangju to storm into Asian Champions League semis

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia - Al Hilal powered into the semifinals of the Asian Champions League Elite in Jeddah on Friday as Jorge Jesus's Saudi Pro League side demolished South Korea's Gwangju 7-0 to move closer to a record-extending fifth continental title.

Goals from Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, Marcos Leonardo and Salem al Dawsari inside the first 33 minutes sent the four-time champions on their way, with Aleksandar Mitrovic, Malcom, Nasser al Dawsari and Abdullah al Hamddan on target after the interval.

"The players who played today were under a lot of pressure but they played at their usual level," said Jesus. "Without their commitment we wouldn't achieve what we achieved today. We are on the right path."

The result at a raucous King Abdullah Sports City Stadium means Al Hilal will take on the winners of Saturday's quarterfinal between fellow Saudi Pro League side Al Ahli and Thailand's Buriram United.

Al Hilal, continental champions in 1991, 2000, 2019 and 2021 and runners-up on five other occasions, were several levels above the K-League side, who are appearing in the competition for



Al Hilal's Salem al Dawsari celebrates with Aleksandar Mitrovic after scoring against Gwangju in the quarterfinals of the Asian Champions League Elite in Jeddah on Friday

the first time. Milinkovic-Savic gave the Saudi side the perfect start in the sixth minute, the midfielder peeling away from his marker to meet Salem Al-Dawsari's corner with a glancing header that beat Kim Kyeong-in from the edge of the six-yard box.

Goalkeeper Yassine Bounou denied the Koreans the opportunity to strike back almost immediately when he blocked Jasir Asani's attempt after the Albanian winger had been played in behind the Al Hilal defence.

Gwangju were to rue that miss in the 25th minute when Leonardo doubled Al Hilal's lead, the Brazilian beating Kim low and at his near post when he met Malcom's cutback with a first-time strike.

Eight minutes later Salem Al Dawsari effectively killed the game after racing on to Leonardo's ball from deep inside the Al Hilal half, outpacing the Gwangju defence before calmly sliding his shot to Kim's right.

Mitrovic hit the fourth goal 10 minutes into the second half, making no mistake as he slotted in Milinkovic-Savic's bobbling

cross from the right with a first-time finish.

Malcom beat Kim with 11 minutes remaining and substitute Nasser Al Dawsari's deflected strike gave Al Hilal their sixth goal five minutes later. Al Hamddan's unstoppable right-foot shot in the 88th minute completed Gwangju's humiliation.

The latter stages of the re-

The players who played today were under a lot of pressure but they played at their usual level

JORGE JESUS

Liverpool a point away from title, but Slot stays calm

Liverpool, England - Liverpool only need a point at home against struggling Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday to seal a 20th English top-flight title but manager Arne Slot cautioned that there would be no early celebrations from his players until the fulltime whistle.

Following second-placed Arsenal's 2-2 draw with Crystal Palace in midweek, Liverpool can win the Premier League by reaching 80 points from 34 matches in Slot's first season in charge since succeeding Jurgen Klopp last year.

"It's a big responsibility," Slot told reporters on Friday. "We are aware that the last time this club won the league was during COVID time (in 2020), so everybody is looking forward to Sunday. But we know there's still a job to do."

"It's a nice game to look forward to but also a responsibility we have for Sunday. Enjoying is what you do after the referee has blown his whistle (for fulltime)."

The 46-year-old Dutchman has shattered expectations in his first season as Klopp's replacement, with Liverpool losing just twice in the league and leading Arsenal by 12 points with a game in hand.

"I've said many times, when you come in, you just look at how things are looking around you and then you

work with your players to create a playing style, which we already knew we wouldn't change too much," Slot said.

"You walk through the doors here or at Anfield, you know this club has to win trophies. That doesn't change when I walked through that door."

"The good thing is that most managers work here for a long time, so you have a lot of chances to win something. You are aware of that but that is not the first thing that you think about when you walk through this door."

Slot dismissed questions about whether the Premier League was weaker than in past seasons, with former champions Manchester City and Manchester United both having poor campaigns.

"Everyone can have their own opinion," he said. "The nice thing in life is that you can share your opinion with everyone. It's difficult (to judge), I've only been here a year. I can only tell you what I've experienced. It's never been so exciting for a top four, top five finish. All the years before it was quite clear who would get the top four or five positions."

"In my opinion, it's a really difficult league, that's what I experienced over here. It's really hard to win a game of football, but maybe that tells you something about us."

Tottenham's Son out of Liverpool game

London, England - Tottenham Hotspur are still without Son Heung-min for the trip to face Premier League leaders Liverpool, but hope to have their captain back for their upcoming Europa League semi-final, manager Ange Postecoglou said on Friday.

South Korean forward Son has missed Tottenham's last three games with a foot injury, and Postecoglou said he is the only injury concern ahead of Sunday's game at Anfield. Spurs host Bodo/Glimt on Thursday in the first leg of their semi-final tie.

"He's improving, which is positive, but not for Sunday. We'll see (for Thursday)," Postecoglou told reporters.

"It was the first time he got out on the grass today and it's definitely better than what it was."

"It's a foot element, so because it's weight-bearing, you need to give him a bit of rest and time off it."

Liverpool can secure the league title with a draw against Spurs, and while Postecoglou's



Son Heung-min

focus is on the Europa League where his side can salvage a disappointing season with a trophy, he wants his team to put in a good performance at Anfield.

"We want to go there and compete well against a very good side. It's not about getting through unscathed, you want to get through having played well

against a top team," Postecoglou said.

"Irrespective of what's on the horizon, that's still of primary importance to us."

Spurs have lost 18 league games this season to leave them 16th in the standings on 37 points and well off the pace for a European spot next season,

near good enough but we also know there's an unbelievable opportunity on the horizon," the manager said.

"That's where the focus is and that's where the focus should be for a club that hasn't had a lot of success recently."

"Collectively, if we give ourselves every opportunity to progress to a final then hopefully the momentum we gain from that will give us a chance to do something special."

Postecoglou was a Liverpool

He's improving, which is positive, but not for Sunday. We'll see (for Thursday). It was the first time he got out on the grass today and it's definitely better than what it was

ANGE POSTECOGLOU

but Europa League success would not only secure some silverware, but Champions League football.

"We're well aware our league form and position is nowhere

supporter as a boy, but that will be far from his mind on Sunday.

"I'm almost a 60-year-old adult, I've gone past my boyhood crushes. It's got no impact whatsoever," he said.

Man City aim for FA Cup glory as Guardiola plots comeback

Manchester, England - Winning the FA Cup would not be enough to put Manchester City back on their pedestal after the Premier League champions fell by the wayside this season but it would be a nice way to wrap up their domestic campaign, manager Pep Guardiola said on Friday.

City fell behind title rivals Liverpool and Arsenal earlier this season having suffered nine defeats - more losses than in their previous two campaigns combined - while they were knocked out of the Champions League in the knockout phase playoffs.

A six-times league winner as City boss, Guardiola has not had a trophyless campaign since his first year at the club and he expects the team will get back to their best next season.

"The FA Cup win does not give you the certainty to come back to what we were. That is a title, it's a number. Obviously it would be nice to finish in that way, to take a little break before we go to

the (Club) World Cup," Guardiola told reporters.

"But I will not change... It can happen to all the teams in the world, not just Manchester City. It surprised me in the mid-season, eight years to arrive at that stage. Now we are third in the table."

"There are reasons why we dropped, maybe unexpectedly, too

much. I have the feeling that next season will be better. We will compete better. We will be more who we are."

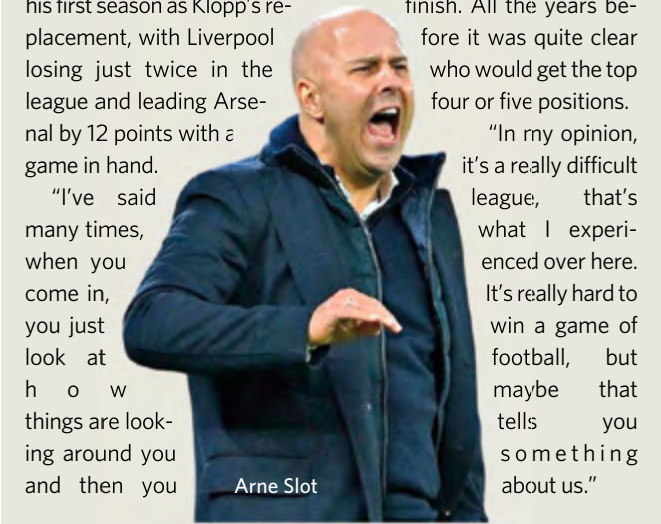
City play Nottingham Forest in the second semifinal on Sunday at Wembley and Guardiola is targeting a third straight final appearance where they would face either Crystal Palace or Aston Villa. However, Nuno Espirito Santo's team also in a top-five battle with City in the league as they seek to secure a Champions League spot and a first FA Cup final in 34 years.

"It would be good to make a

third (final), but we have a serious and tough, tough rival," Guardiola said. "The Nottingham Forest people and fans, it is a long time since they've played the semi-final of the FA Cup, but for many years we have been there in the competition."

"He (Espirito Santo) has been incredible, qualifying for Europa League with Wolves and now with Nottingham Forest. He has done a really good job."

Guardiola said goalkeeper Ederson was back in training but did not reveal if the Brazilian would return in goal.



Arne Slot

Oman’s Development Squad to play Bahrain in historic T20 series

Muscat - With youth cricket steadily gaining momentum across the Sultanate, Oman’s Development Squad has taken centre stage this week in a historic bilateral T20 series against the visiting Bahrain national team.

The three-match contest, which got underway on Friday, April 25, at the Oman Cricket Academy Grounds in Al Amerat, marks the first official series between two GCC nations featuring all-national players—an unprecedented milestone for the region’s cricketing landscape.

Led by experienced all-rounder Sufyan Mehmood, the Omani Development Team represents the country’s growing pool of homegrown talent. The

series is more than just a competitive fixture—it’s a celebration of national representation and regional camaraderie.

“It’s an absolute honour to lead this talented group of Omani nationals,” said Mehmood ahead of the opener. “Many of these players have been involved in the sport for several years, and their commitment and hunger for growth is truly inspiring. We’ve been working hard for nearly an entire season, preparing ourselves for key opportunities ahead—particularly global multi-sport events like the Asian Games, which is a major milestone for us,” he added.

Mehmood, who has been a member of national senior team,



Oman’s Development Squad players during a practice session

said: “This bilateral series against the Bahraini Nationals is not just another contest—it’s a historic moment. It marks the first-ever official series between two GCC nations featuring all-national players, and that is a proud occasion for both countries and for cricket in the region. Our preparations have been intense and focused, and I can genuinely see a lot of promise in this squad. The energy, the talent, and the passion among the boys is exactly what you want as a captain. We’re looking forward to putting in our best efforts, competing with pride, and hopefully bringing home a memorable series win for Oman.”

Two of the three games were

played on the weekend with the final match on April 28 at 2pm—all taking place on the pristine Turf 1 at Oman Cricket Academy.

Oman Development Team: Sufyan Mehmood (Captain), Waheed Khalid Al Balushi, Issa Abdulrahim Al Balushi, Shoaib Ismail Al Balushi, Mohammed Ali Akbar Al Balushi, Majid Hussein Al Balushi, Rashad Mohammed Al Balushi, Sameer Othman Al Balushi, Ahmed Mukhtar Al Zadjali, Faris Khalid Al Balushi, Arif Majeed Al Balushi, Abbas Abdulaziz Al Balushi, Muzaffar Nasir Hasan Shiralkar, Waleed Rahim Baksh Al Balushi. Coach: Prasanth Chandran, manager: Said Haidar Al Balushi.

INVINCIBLES NO MORE

Goalkeeper Bulka stars as Nice end champions PSG’s unbeaten league run

Paris, France - Paris St Germain’s hopes of becoming the first side to complete a Ligue 1 season unbeaten came crashing down at the Parc des Princes on Friday when Nice handed them their first defeat of the league campaign, winning 3-1 to boost their own Champions League ambitions.

Having already secured the title earlier this month, PSG still top the Ligue 1 standings on 78 points, while Nice move up to fourth on 54.

The home side dominated the opening half-hour and created chance after chance but it was the visitors who took the lead through Morgan Sanson as he marked his first start of the season by applying a clinical first-time finish to Badredine Bouanani’s through-ball in the 35th minute.

The lead lasted just six minutes as Fabian Ruiz scored with a sumptuous half-volley to level but any thoughts the PSG fans might have had of their side going on to dominate were extinguished 22 seconds into the second half when Sanson scored his second, volleying the ball into the net from close range.

Having scored from their only two shots on target up to that point, the visitors went 3-1 up when Youssouf Ndayishimiye headed home a free kick in the



Goalkeeper Marcin Bulka was in inspired form for Nice and made 12 saves to stop the PSG onslaught

Having already secured the title earlier this month, PSG top the Ligue 1 standings on 78 points, while Nice move up to fourth on 54

70th minute.

PSG, who face Premier League side Arsenal away in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal on Tuesday, enjoyed 75% of possession and managed to create twice as many goal-scoring opportunities but they were left frustrated by their own wayward finishing and some inspired goalkeeping from Marcin Bulka.

With the clock ticking past 90 minutes and seven minutes added on for stoppages, Bulka pulled off a superb reflex save to deny Goncalo Ramos and he followed up with another top-drawer stop of Vitinha’s shot from the edge of the box.

PSG coach Luis Enrique said before the game that he would be content to lose to Nice if it meant making the Champions League final, and he was sanguine after his side’s 30-game unbeaten run in the league came to an end.

Real accuse referees of having ‘hostility and animosity’

Seville, Spain - Preparations for the Copa del Rey final were thrown into turmoil on Friday when Real Madrid accused the match referees of having “animosity and hostility” towards them and called on the Spanish FA to take action.

Real had boycotted pre-match activities ahead of Saturday’s final against Barcelona after the match referee gave an emotional press conference in which he called out the club for criticising him on their in-house TV channel.

A club source said that the decision to pull out of their pre-match obligations was taken due to Real’s “unprecedented astonishment” at the press conference given by referee Ricardo de Burgos Bengoetxea earlier on Friday. The referee had broken down in tears while responding to a critical video put out by RMTV.

The source said Real saw the press conference as “a clear conflict of interest” and, while they had not asked the Spanish FA (RFEF) to replace the officials, they believed the refereeing team should be changed.

Real issued a statement later on Friday in which they defended RMTV as “protected by freedom of expression” and said the match referees had a “clear and manifest animosity and hostility... against Real Madrid”.

“In view of the seriousness of what has happened, Real Madrid hope that those in charge of the RFEF and the Refereeing Committee will act accordingly, adopting the corresponding measures in defence of the prestige of the institutions they represent,” the club added.

RFEF president Rafael Louzan told reporters that he would not comment on Real’s statement nor on whether they would change the final’s referees, calling “for calm, responsibility and common sense” from all parts.

The video, released on Thursday, showed what RMTV said was a series of errors made by De Burgos throughout his career.

WRC drivers reach agreement with FIA on swearing

World championship rally drivers have resolved a dispute with the sport’s governing body over when they can swear during a competition.

The World Rally Drivers Alliance (WoRDA) had protested after Hyundai’s Adrien Fourniaux was fined 10,000 euros (\$11,375.00), with a further 20,000 suspended, for swearing in a television interview during Rally Sweden in February.

They stayed silent, or spoke only in their own languages, in stage-end interviews at last month’s Kenya Safari Rally.

Retired eight-times world champion co-driver Julien Ingrassia, representing WoRDA, told the [www.dirtfish.com](#) website that a compromise had been reached ahead of

this weekend’s round in the Canary Islands.

“The rally will now be divided into two zones: one is a controlled zone, one is an uncontrolled zone,” the Frenchman, who raced alongside compatriot Sebastien Ogier, explained.

“The latter is based around heat-of-the-moment areas such as stage ends, onboard cars during the stages or on road sections. Controlled sections are, for example, the media zones and the post-event FIA press conferences.

“We’re really pleased to find a solution. As was the case in Formula One, adjustments were needed to take into consideration some of the unique aspects of our discipline.”

Mamelodi Sundowns stun Al Ahly, to meet Pyramids in African Champions League final

Cairo, Egypt - A last-gasp own goal gave Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa an upset result over holders Al Ahly on Friday and a place against another Egyptian club, Pyramids, in next month’s African Champions League final.

Al Ahly defender Yasser Ibrahim turned the ball into his own net in stoppage time at the end of a semi-final second-leg tie in Cairo to see Sundowns eliminate the Egyptian giants on the away goals rule after a 1-1 draw.

Later in the Egyptian capital, Pyramids twice came from behind to beat Orlando Pirates of South Africa 3-2 with Fiston Mayele scoring twice for the home side.

Pyramids will play in their first Champions League final when they take on Sundowns in the first leg in Pretoria on May 24 and the return in Cairo on June 1.

The first legs of both semi-finals last weekend ended goalless, handing a major advantage to the two Egyptians clubs who were hosting the return matches.

Al Ahly were aiming for a sixth



Mamelodi Sundowns players celebrate after their match against Al Ahly on Friday

successive final and looked to be on their way after Taher Mohamed slammed home a stunning effort from the right in the 24th minute at a near-capacity Cairo International Stadium.

Ahly needed only to hold on to their lead to ensure yet another final appearance but Sundowns forced several half-chances in the

second half and threw on extra attackers in the closing stages to try to rescue a result.

Their equaliser, however, was fortuitous as the ball struck unsighted defender Ibrahim on the back of his leg in a goalmouth melee and rolled into the net to send Sundowns through to their third final appearance.

Compatriots Pirates, who were winners in 1995 and runners-up in 2013, went ahead in the 40th minute at the Air Defence Stadium when Pyramids failed to clear a free kick and the ball fell for 20-year-old Relebohile Mofokeng to hammer home a right-footed half volley.



Ricardo de Burgos Bengoetxea

Hyderabad revive campaign

Harshal, Kamindu lead Sunrisers to their first win against Super Kings in Chennai

Chennai, India - A three-pronged performance from Kamindu Mendis and Harshal Patel's use of the middle of the pitch led Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) to win their first-ever match against Chennai Super Kings (CSK) in Chennai, a win SRH will hope revives a faltering campaign.

Dewald Brevis, on his CSK debut, and Ayush Mhatre, the youngest CSK player ever in only his second innings, threatened to inject some freshness into a stale CSK campaign, but the 154 they took CSK to was not enough to avoid their fourth loss at home in IPL 2025 even though they did give SRH a scare on the dry pitch.

In the kind of slugfest you expect of lowly-placed sides on a tricky surface, the batters overcame the conditions only in small pockets despite heavy dew for considerable duration of the game.

Brevis looked every bit the player that earned the nickname 'Baby AB', but his threatening innings was cut short on 42 off 25 balls by arguably the catch of this IPL by Kamindu, who had earlier wowed us again with his ambidextrous spin. CSK mounted a spirited defence, but Kamindu calmed SRH with his unbeaten 32 off 22 to see them home.



Harshal Patel of Sunrisers Hyderabad took four wickets for 28 runs to restrict Chennai Super Kings to a modest 154

Dewald Brevis, on his CSK debut, and Ayush Mhatre, threatened to inject some freshness into a stale CSK campaign, but the 154 they took CSK to was not enough to avoid their fourth loss at home in IPL 2025

Despite a first-ball wicket for Mohammed Shami, the 17-year-old Mhatre continued to display his quality through good intent and efficient hitting through the off side. He hit six fours in the first four overs to take CSK to 37 for 1, but now SRH began to dig the ball in and started to make both him and Sam Curran hit into the leg side.

Harshal was the bowler to kickstart the plan. Mhatre nearly holed out to deep midwicket before Curran actually did so. In the next over, Mhatre drilled Pat Cummins straight into the lap of mid-off. At 50 for 3, CSK edged past only their fourth powerplay of 50 or more in nine games.

Brought in in place of Rachin Ravindra, Brevis immediately

looked a notch above the other batters in the match. Even as the placeholder No. 4 Ravindra Jadeja struggled to get any fluency, Brevis took down Kamindu, who had bowled the first two overs for no boundaries and took the wicket of Jadeja. On a dry pitch with enough grip in it, Kamindu made no mistake but Brevis still hit three sixes in his one over, the 12th. He then cut a slower bouncer from Harshal for a six off extra cover.

This is when Brevis looked to hit a second six off Harshal. The ball was in the slot too. He got a good part of it but not quite the elevation. Kamindu, however, was too far in off the long-off fence, so it looked like he would

TODAY'S MATCHES

MATCH 45

2 PM



MUMBAI INDIANS VS LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

MATCH 46

6 PM



DELHI CAPITALS VS ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE

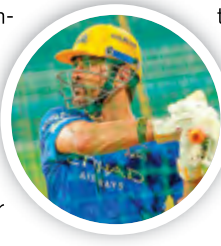


Priyansh Arya of Punjab Kings celebrates reaching his 50 against Kolkata Knight Riders. Arya's 69 off 35 balls, along with Prabhsimran Singh's 49-ball 83 helped Punjab score 201 for 4 in their 20 overs

Not a justifiable score, says Dhoni as Chennai lose again

Chennai, India - Chennai Super Kings (CSK) captain MS Dhoni felt his side had been "short by 15-20 runs" after they were bowled out for 154 on their way to a five-wicket loss against Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) on Friday. It was CSK's seventh defeat in nine games in IPL 2025, and their first-ever home defeat to SRH.

CSK were at one stage poised for a better total, but lost their last six wickets for 40 runs after



MS Dhoni

they were 114 for 4 in the 13th over.

"I think we kept losing wickets and another thing is I felt, in the first innings, the wicket was slightly better, and 155 [154] is not a justifiable score because it wasn't turning a lot," Dhoni said at the post-match presentation. "Yes, after the eighth, ninth, [or] tenth over, it became slightly two-paced when it comes to the fast bowlers. But nothing that was out of the ordinary."

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SISTINE CHAPEL

The Sistine Chapel in Rome closes its doors to visitors from tomorrow (April 28) to make preparations for the conclave to elect the next pope. This 15th century architectural marvel features Michelangelo's ceiling frescoes and 'The Last Judgment', painted on the altar wall 60 years after the chapel's construction

Artistic WONDER

The Sistine Chapel will close to the public starting on Monday (28 April) as the Vatican prepares to host the conclave to elect the next pope. The gathering of cardinals, which will take place between 6 and 11 May, follows the death of Pope Francis on Easter Monday.

The Vatican announced the closure in a note circulated on 24 April. It said the chapel, which has hosted papal elections for close to 150 years, would remain shut but did not specify for how long.

During the conclave, Swiss Guards will seal the chapel and bar entry to outsiders. Electors will take an oath of secrecy and vote repeatedly until a papal candidate achieves a two-thirds majority. The successful result will be signalled by the emission of white smoke from the chapel's chimney.

Built between 1473 and 1481, the Sistine Chapel is visited by around five million people a year. It is most renowned for Michelangelo's ceiling frescoes and The Last Judgment, painted on the altar wall 60 years after the chapel's construction. The fresco depicts more than 300 figures, with the blessed ascending to heaven and the damned dragged into hell - some ferried by Charon, the boatman of Greek mythology.

Several other Vatican sites have also been closed in the wake of Francis's death. Access to the Vatican Gardens and the Necropolis of the Via Triumphalis, a Roman burial ground unearthed in 2003, was suspended on Thursday.

Further closures began yesterday (the day of the pope's funeral held at St Peter's Square) before Francis's body is transferred to the Basilica of Saint Mary Major. The Vatican Museums and the museums complex at Castel Gandolfo, in a papal residence 30km from Rome, will also remain shut 'in mourning', the Museums Directorate announced. Castel Sant'Angelo - a former imperial mausoleum and papal fortress built by Emperor Hadrian beginning in AD135 - will also remain closed.

Renaissance frescoes

Sistine Chapel, the papal chapel in the Vatican Palace that was erected in 1473-81 by the architect Giovanni dei Dolci for Pope Sixtus IV (hence its name), is famous for its Renaissance frescoes by Michelangelo.

The Sistine Chapel is a rectangular brick building with six arched windows on each of the two main (or side) walls and a barrel-vaulted ceiling. The chapel's exterior is drab and unadorned, but its interior walls and ceiling are decorated with frescoes by many Florentine Renaissance masters.

The frescoes on the side walls of the chapel were painted from 1481 to 1483. On the north wall are six frescoes depicting events from the life of Christ as painted by Perugino, Pinturicchio, Sandro Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, and Cosimo Rosselli. On the south wall are six other frescoes depicting events from the life of Moses by Perugino, Pinturicchio, Botticelli, Domenico and Benedetto Ghirlandaio, Rosselli, Luca Signorelli, and Bartolomeo della Gatta.



Above these works, smaller frescoes between the windows depict various popes. For great ceremonial occasions the lowest portions of the side walls were covered with a series of tapestries depicting events from the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. These were designed by Raphael and woven in 1515-19 at Brussels.

The most important artworks in the chapel are the frescoes by Michelangelo on the ceiling and on the west wall

behind the altar. The frescoes on the ceiling, collectively known as the Sistine Ceiling, were commissioned by Pope Julius II in 1508 and were painted by Michelangelo in the years from 1508 to 1512. They depict incidents and personages from the Old Testament.

The Last Judgment fresco on the west wall was painted by Michelangelo for Pope Paul III in the period from 1534 to 1541. These two gigantic frescoes are among the greatest achievements

of Western painting. A 10-year-long cleaning and restoration of the Sistine Ceiling completed in 1989 removed several centuries' accumulation of dirt, smoke, and varnish. Cleaning and restoration of The Last Judgment was completed in 1994.

Greatest artist of all time

Michelangelo was considered the greatest living artist in his lifetime, and ever since then he has been held to be

one of the greatest artists of all time. A number of his works in painting, sculpture, and architecture rank among the most famous in existence. Although the frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel are probably the best known of his works, the artist thought of himself primarily as a sculptor.

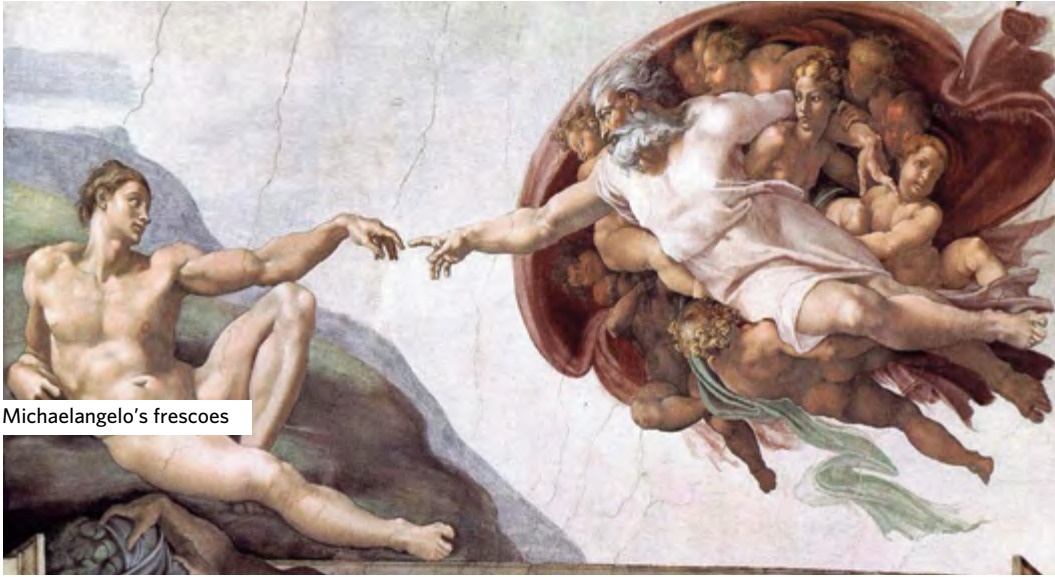
Michelangelo's practice of several arts, however, was not unusual in his time, when all of them were thought of as based on design, or drawing. Michelangelo worked in marble sculpture all his life and in the other arts only during certain periods. The high regard for the Sistine ceiling is partly a reflection of the greater attention paid to painting in the 20th century and partly, too, because many of the artist's works in other media remain unfinished.

A side effect of Michelangelo's fame in his lifetime was that his career was more fully documented than that of any artist of the time or earlier. He was the first Western artist whose biography was published while he was alive - in fact, there were two rival biographies.

The first was the final chapter in the series of artists' lives (1550) by the painter and architect Giorgio Vasari. It was the only chapter on a living artist and explicitly presented Michelangelo's works as the culminating perfection of art, surpassing the efforts of all those before him. Despite such an encomium, Michelangelo was not entirely pleased and arranged for his assistant Ascanio Condivi to write a brief separate book (1553); probably based on the artist's own spoken comments, this account shows him as he wished to appear.

After Michelangelo's death, Vasari in a second edition (1568) offered a rebuttal. While scholars have often preferred the authority of Condivi, Vasari's lively writing, the importance of his book as a whole, and its frequent reprinting in many languages have made it the most usual basis of popular ideas on Michelangelo and other Renaissance artists.

Michelangelo's fame also led to the preservation of countless mementos, including hundreds of letters, sketches, and poems, again more than of any contemporary. Yet despite the enormous benefit that has accrued from all this, in controversial matters often only Michelangelo's argument is known. (Courtesy: britannica.com)



Michaelangelo's frescoes



WORLD'S OLDEST TREE

Gran Abuelo

CAN THE WORLD'S OLDEST TREE SURVIVE 'PROGRESS'? A PROPOSED NEW HIGHWAY NOW POSES A THREAT

In the depths of a Chilean rainforest stands the 'Gran Abuelo,' an approximately 5,400-year-old tree fighting for survival. A highway project now threatens its existence — and the ecosystem around it.

Empires have risen and fallen, languages have been born and forgotten — but this tree stood the test of time — the 5,400-year-old Gran Abuelo, or great grandfather, in Spanish.

Jonathan Barichivich, a renowned Chilean scientist working in France, grew up in the temperate rainforest now protected in Alerce Costero National Park. His grandfather, Anibal, discovered the Gran Abuelo tree in 1972 while working as a park ranger. That moment, he says, changed the course of his family's history — and the tree's.

"I took my first steps in this forest with my grandfather. He taught me the names of the plants before I could even read," Barichivich recalled. "The memories of my childhood are fuel for my scientific passion."

Now, Barichivich and his mother, along with a team of researchers, are unlocking the secrets stored in the Gran Abuelo and other trees — information that could shape how we understand and fight climate change.

Record-keeper of climate patterns

The alerce trees in this forest, also known as Patagonian cypress, or Fitzroya cupressoides, don't just grow older than many other trees. The species is also one of the most climate-sensitive trees in the world. Each ring inside its trunk is a yearly weather record. Studying their rings allows researchers to reconstruct climate patterns stretching back thousands of years — data unmatched by any other species in the region.

"They are like encyclopedias," said Rocio Urrutia, a Chilean scientist who has studied these trees for decades. Her research has helped reconstruct temperature records going back 5,680



years. To determine a tree's age, scientists frequently use a tool called an increment borer to extract a part of the trunk and count the number of rings that have formed over the years. However, many old trees have long lost the core of their trunk, so scientists have to rely on both, the rings they can see as well as statistical models that project the total number of rings, to come up with a range for the tree's age.

The scientists also measure how much carbon the forest absorbs and emits. The more the tree grows, the thicker the space will be between each tree ring. And more growth means more carbon capture.

"Forests absorb about one-third of our carbon emissions," Barichivich explained. But will that also be the case as the planet continues to grow hotter?

Understanding how trees grow under different weather patterns tells us how much carbon they absorb — which is essential for predicting whether forests can continue to slow

tional park. Officials argued the road would connect cities and boost tourism in the region. However, some say this is just smoke and mirrors.

"Connectivity is not the real reason," Barichivich said, adding that there is another existing road nearby. But this proposed new road would link "directly to the port of Corral — used by one of Latin America's largest pulp exporters."

The real goal seems to be opening access to timber, many locals say.

Alerce trees are highly valuable due to their durable high-quality, straight-growing wood.

Researchers like Urrutia warn that the road will increase the risk of wildfires. She said that over 90% of fires in the region start near roads.

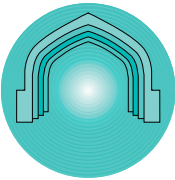
This is a global phenomenon. In the Amazon, nearly 75% of fires start within five kilometers of a road, and in the US, 96% start within 800m.

"The Alerce is an endangered species," Urrutia said. "Every individual tree counts. A major fire could wipe out the last populations."

Their findings — clear, urgent, and backed by years of data — were distilled into a single report, published as a letter. But, "it wasn't just a letter," Urrutia said. "It was years of research, fieldwork, and community engagement."

It struck a chord across the global scientific community, prompting researchers around the world to speak out. Combined with pressure from local residents, it was enough to make the government back off — for now.

For Barichivich, it was also deeply personal. "My mother has been walking into this forest every week for years, collecting data. Her work will become the longest continuous dataset of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, providing valuable data for scientists around the world. It's having an impact we could never have imagined." DW



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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2025



Economy

Oman has achieved a remarkable improvement in its economic fundamentals. The fiscal and external positions have strengthened significantly, as nonhydrocarbon growth was picking up. The incertitude due to new tariff regulations is triggering geopolitical tensions, inflation, decline in crude oil prices, supply chain disruptions, higher interest rates and uncertainty over how the situation is going to evolve. The impact on the Omani economy due to the tariff regulations is expected to be minimum though the decline in the crude prices would impact the

budgeted revenue stream.

The economy has demonstrated resilience in withstanding shocks according to the Macroeconomic Stability Report recently issued by CBO. The medium-term outlook for the Omani economy remains positive, with expectations that economic activities will continue to recover and grow, in line with national priorities. The 2025 outlook for Oman looks cautiously optimistic with the support of steady reforms and diversification efforts.

Financial Highlights

For the first quarter ending 31st March 2025, the company earned a total revenue of RO 3,945K against total revenue of RO 4,107K for the comparative period last year. The company's profit after tax and ECL provision is RO 919K for the period as compared to RO 899K for the same period last year, showing an increase of 2.22%. The company's Loan Book as of 31st March 2025 stands at RO 135 million. The total ECL and reserve interest on Instalment Finance receivables stands at RO 14.93 million as of 31st March 2025.

Concerns

The global economy continues to face the ongoing threat of oil price fluctuations, supply chain disruptions, geopolitical tensions, disruptions in global trade, and extreme climatic events. The Banking sector continues to face challenges caused by global macroeconomic trends, lackluster loan growth, declining asset quality etc. Expected delinquencies due to reduced cash flow at the borrower's level may reduce the net margins resulting in dilution of the NPA coverage.

Prognosis

We continue to foresee a challenging period ahead tempered with optimism. The company is well capitalized with a healthy capital adequacy of 32.28% (including the Compulsorily Convertible Bonus Stock Bonds), has robust liquidity buffer in the form of liquid deposits with commercial banks which are being leveraged for effective treasury management. With a healthy capital structure, strong net worth, clean loan book, robust liquidity, lowest NPLs and

high NPA coverage, the company is confident of posting satisfactory numbers. The Oman Vision 2040 aims to transform the economy gradually shifting the base away from oil and the planned strategies are expected to significantly influence the nation's financial health.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the company and the Board of Directors, I would like to express my deep gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for his vision and leadership, which is taking the Sultanate on the new path of development and prosperity. We are grateful to the Central Bank of Oman, Financial Services Authority and other regulatory authorities for their guidance and support. We thank our shareholders, bankers, dealers and customers for their continued trust, confidence, and support. We acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the management and staff of the company.

Khalid Said Salim Al Wahaibi
Chairman

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD 1 JANUARY 2025 TO 31 MARCH 2025

	Amount In RO '000	
	1 Quarter ended 31 March 2025	1 Quarter ended 31 March 2024
Interest income on finance lease, working capital finance and other advances	2,616	2,637
Finance Income	1,091	1,051
Total Instalment finance and finance income	3,707	3,688
Interest Expense	(1,560)	(1,639)
Net Instalment finance and finance income	2,147	2,049
Other income	238	419
Administration & operational costs	(1,296)	(1,332)
Provision for expected credit loss, net	(8)	(78)
Profit before Taxation	1,081	1,058
Provision for taxation	(162)	(159)
Net Profit	919	899

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT

	Amount In RO '000	
	31 March 2025	31 March 2024
Assets		
Gross Instalment Finance Receivables	134,701	135,718
Less: Provision for ECL of instalment finance receivables	14,930	13,691
Net Instalment Finance Receivables	119,771	122,027
Deposit with CBO	250	250
Deposits with Commercial Banks	84,627	84,627
Cash & Bank balances	1,085	3,347
Land and Buildings	623	663
Other assets	1,165	1,004
Total Assets	207,521	211,918
Liabilities		
Deposit	3,014	3,216
Bank borrowings	118,772	121,700
Trade Creditors & Other liabilities	14,163	16,273
Unsecured Compulsorily Convertible Bonus Bonds	2,684	4,112
Proposed Unsecured Non Convertible Redeemable Bonus Bonds	1,577	-
Unsecured Non Convertible Redeemable Bonus Bonds	2,998	2,998
Total Liabilities	143,208	148,299
Equity		
Share Capital	31,542	30,767
Legal Reserve	10,514	10,256
Share Premium	1,382	987
Cashflow hedge reserve	94	-
Special Reserve for Non Performing Assets	4,998	4,998
Retained Earnings	15,783	16,611
Total Equity	64,313	63,619
Total Liabilities & Equity	207,521	211,918

Contingent Liability of RO.79K (2024 - RO Nil) is outstanding as of 31st March 2025 towards Bankguarantees As approved by the regulatory authorities the unsecured compulsorily convertible bonds are treated as part of the networth, accordingly the networth of the company for computing all regulatory limits is RO 66,997 K (2024: RO.67,731 K)

Note : The complete report is available with the Muscat Stock Exchange. The Complete financial statements of the company together with the financial statements of any subsidiary company required to file financial statements would be available to any shareholders or interested party on request in Arabic or English within seven days as of the date of request.

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