

OMAN

دولة عمان

DAILY

Observer

SUNRISE 05:20 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 03:54 AM

DHUHR 12:10 PM

ASR 03:29 PM

MAGHRIB 06:55 PM

ISHA 08:16 PM

STAY HEALTHY DURING EID AL ADHA CELEBRATIONS

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INBRIEF

HIS MAJESTY GREETES PRESIDENT OF ITALY

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Sergio Mattarella of the Italian Republic on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes of success to President Mattarella in achieving aspirations of the people of his country. His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations further progress and growth in all sectors.

OVER 30 KILLED NEAR AID SITE IN GAZA



A mourner reacts during the funeral of Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes in Khan Yunis. — Reuters

GAZA: More than 30 Palestinians were killed and dozens more injured on Sunday in southern Gaza near a humanitarian aid distribution site run by a US company, according to local health officials. Witnesses said the Israeli military had opened fire as Palestinians gathered to collect food. The military denied it had fired towards civilians and the US company running the facility said it had distributed aid without incident. The head of the UN Palestinian refugee agency (UNRWA), Philippe Lazzarini, wrote on X that international medics in Gaza had reported there were “mass casualties including scores of injured & killed among starving civilians due to gunshots”. SEE ALSO P6

Health ministry unveils ad norms for medicines

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

TO ENHANCE PUBLIC HEALTH safeguards and ensure ethical, accurate representation of pharmaceutical products, the Ministry of Health on Sunday issued Ministerial Resolution No 135/2025, which specifies the conditions and procedures for advertising or promoting medicines. The resolution bans advertising or promoting medicines by any entity other than pharmaceutical companies, local agents, or pharmaceutical consulting offices, with the exception of scientific offices, unless they have obtained prior authorisation from the Drug Safety Centre (DSC). To obtain a licence, the medicine must be officially registered and that the advertisement content be consistent with the internal leaflet and the Summary of Drug Properties (SmPC) specifying the target groups for the advertisement.



According to the decision, the advertisement must also adhere to public order and public morals and be free of any content that could harm public health or contain misleading information, exaggerations or insults to other medicines in accordance with the DSC's approved advertising guide. The DSC allows a period

not exceeding 60 days to review and decide on the licence application. Failure to respond within this period shall be considered a rejection of the application. In case of missing documents or information, the applicant will be notified and given 30 days to complete the missing information, otherwise, the application will be cancelled. The applicant may submit a new application 30 days after the date of the rejection decision. The licence term is set at 3 months, renewable with the same conditions. The renewal application must be submitted at least 20 days before the licence expires. The decision allows for the submission of a grievance to the Minister of Health within 60 days of the rejection decision. A decision must be made within 30 days. Failure to decide within this period constitutes a rejection of the grievance. The DSC also has the right to suspend the licence if health risks or the drug's ineffectiveness are identified.

ELECTRICAL GEAR DRIVES GROWTH IN INDUSTRIAL EXPORTS

MUSCAT: Oman's industrial exports witnessed a notable 8.6 per cent increase during the first quarter of 2025, reaching RO 1.618 billion, compared to RO 1.490 billion during the same period in 2024, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Industrial exports accounted for 28 per cent of Oman's total exports. This growth was driven by strong performance across several industrial sectors, most notably the

electrical equipment and machinery manufacturing sector, which recorded exceptional growth of 141 per cent, with its exports rising to RO 128 million compared to RO 53 million in Q1 2024. The metal products sector followed with a 14.1 per cent increase in exports, reaching RO 462 million, fueled by rising international demand for high-quality Omani products. Khalid bin Salim al Qassabi,

Director General of Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), stated that these positive results reflect the strength and diversity of Oman's industrial sector. He emphasised the ministry's ongoing implementation of integrated industrial policies aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of Omani products in regional and global markets while boosting industrial exports. — ONA

Oman Arab Bank Leads the Economic Empowerment Landscape in the Sultanate of Oman and is Crowned with the “Outstanding Commitment to SME Growth and Empowerment” Award

In a remarkable achievement that set the standard for banking expertise in the Sultanate of Oman, Oman Arab Bank's added to its growing record of success, proudly announcing it being the receipt of the “Outstanding Commitment to SME Growth and Empowerment” award — a well-deserved recognition of a deeply rooted strategic vision and clear affirmation of the bank's pivotal role in leading the economic empowerment of entrepreneurs across the Sultanate. This award is not merely a celebratory milestone, but the natural result of an integrated journey of tireless effort, carefully structured plans, and a real investment in Oman's economic future. It reflects years of consistent dedication, culminating in the development of the bank's comprehensive *Tumouhi* ecosystem — the most inclusive banking platform designed to support SMEs on every level: financial, technical, digital, and advisory. Oman Arab Bank has transformed from a financial service provider into an active growth partner in the success stories of thousands of



local companies by offering flexible, customizable financial solutions, including term loans, working capital financing, and a full range of trade facilities tailored to different stages of business development; however, the bank's role has never been limited to financing — it has built a fully integrated digital infrastructure aligned with global standards, including smart payment

solutions such as Soft POS, payment links, full digital banking platforms, and dedicated corporate branches and regional cash centers. Even more, the bank has redefined SME support through structured training and empowerment programs like *Ruwad Al Arabi*, *Women's Leadership Development*, and *Financial Literacy*, as well as through strategic partnerships

with national institutions like the SME Development Authority (Riyada) to organize entrepreneurial competitions and targeted empowerment campaigns across Oman's governorates. Recognizing that many freelance and informal businesses are often overlooked by traditional banking, Oman Arab Bank designed dedicated solutions that accommodate the unique needs of this segment — from street vendors and market traders to taxi drivers and independent service providers — thus driving tangible financial inclusion at the grassroots level. This ground-level presence has helped the bank expand its developmental footprint and reach underserved populations in a practical and meaningful way. Commenting on this achievement, **Sulaiman Al Hinai, Chief Wholesale Banking Officer at Oman Arab Bank**, stated: “This award is a confirmation of what we have committed to from day one — to be a creator of opportunity, not just a responder; a builder of business ecosystems, not just a lender. We believe SMEs are not a complementary sector, but the economic center of gravity and

the axis of national transformation toward sustainable growth.” He added, “We don't just offer banking products — we provide a fully integrated environment of support, guidance, expertise, and networks to help every entrepreneur turn ideas into impact.” With this recognition, Oman Arab Bank once again proves that it is more than a bank — it is a vital developmental force helping reshape Oman's economic landscape and placing SMEs at the heart of the national equation. This aligns directly with Oman Vision 2040's priorities of economic diversification, productivity, youth empowerment, and building a knowledge- and innovation-driven economy. The Bank stands firmly present across every step of the SME journey — from funding to advisory, training to partnership, and digital solutions to on-the-ground support — forging ahead with an unwavering commitment to solidify its position as the number one partner for entrepreneurship in Oman, driven by a national vision, relentless ambition, and limitless potential.

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SHORT TAKES



Gen Al Numani with Vice Admiral George M Wikoff.

OMAN, US REVIEW RELATIONS

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received in his office on Sunday Vice Admiral George M Wikoff, Commander of the United States Naval Forces Central Command. The US official expressed his appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman’s role in enhancing means of mutual cooperation between the two countries. The two sides also exchanged views on several matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Ambassador of the United States of America to the Sultanate of Oman. Also, Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence received Vice Admiral Wikoff and his accompanying delegation. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and discussed military matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by Brigadier Ahmed bin Ibarim Ambusaidi, Director General of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Defence. It was also attended by the Ambassador of the United States of America to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA



Dr Mohammed al Zaabi with Vice Admiral George M Wikoff.

Sayyid Badr receives credentials of UAE, Senegal envoys

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister received on Sunday a copy of credentials of Shaikh Mohammed bin Maktoum Al Maktoum, Ambassador-designate of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to the Sultanate of Oman.

Sayyid Badr wished the ambassador success in carrying out his duties and the bilateral relations further development and growth. The meeting was attended



by Najeeb Yahya Al Balushi, Head of the Protocols Department at the Foreign Ministry and several officials. Meanwhile, Sayyid Badr



bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister also received a copy of credentials of Ibrahima Seck, Ambassador-designate of the

Republic of Senegal to the Sultanate of Oman. During this meeting, Sayyid Badr wished the ambassador success in carrying out his duties and the bilateral relations further progress and growth.

The meeting was attended by Saleh bin Mohammed al Saqri, Head of the Africa Department and Najeeb bin Yahya al Balushi, Head of the Protocols Department and several other officials from the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

Use of Arabic language across sectors reaffirmed

MUSCAT: The Government Communication Centre clarified that the Council of Ministers has recently directed all units of the State’s administrative apparatus, and other relevant public and private legal entities, institutions, and civil associations, to adhere to the mentioned guidelines.

The clarification comes in response to a formal directive by the Council of Ministers emphasising the importance of upholding Arabic as a key element of national identity and a pillar of Oman’s Vision 2040.

According to a document released by the General-Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, the use of Arabic is now mandatory in several key areas, including naming of public projects such as streets, neighbourhoods, and public spaces must be named in Arabic. A secondary name



The use of Arabic is now mandatory in several key areas, including naming of public projects such as streets, neighbourhoods and public spaces must be named in Arabic.

in another language may be added in parentheses if needed, but priority is given to Arabic terminology. All official business — including meetings, contracts, agreements, circulars, publications and advertisements

— must be conducted and documented in Arabic. The use of other languages is permitted only in urgent cases where public interest is at stake.

Arabic remains the primary language of instruction in

all government and higher education institutions unless otherwise specified by relevant regulations. Medical prescriptions, scientific certificates, legal decisions and commercial contracts must be issued in Arabic. Other languages may be added alongside Arabic for clarity or international purposes.

In addition, the Council urged private sector entities — including telecom companies, banks, utility providers and insurers — to adopt the proper use of Arabic in their public communications and reports.

The Government Communication Centre stressed that these efforts aim to reinforce the Arabic language’s standing in Omani society, highlighting it as one of the core components of the nation’s cultural identity and strategic vision for the future.

OFS showcases Oman’s treasures at Expo 2025 Osaka

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

THE OMANI FILM SOCIETY, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, hosted a film screening as part of the activities celebrating Cultural Diversity Day at Expo 2025 in Osaka, Japan. The OFS showcased the Oman’s treasures on Omani Cultural Diversity Day. Expo 2025 is a World Expo taking place in Osaka from April 13 to October 13, 2025, organised and sanctioned by the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE). Oman’s film screening was conducted in three languages: Arabic, English and Japanese, enhancing communication with international audiences.

Oman’s participation at Expo 2025 aimed to strengthen its position as a global filming destination. Anwar bin Khamis al Ruzaiqi, Vice-Chairman of the Omani Film Society, introduced the “Make Your Film in Oman” project, promoting Oman’s picturesque locations as ideal settings for film-making. The screening included a promotional film showcasing international locations used in Hollywood and Bollywood films, highlighting their counterparts in Oman with its unique geographical



Oman’s participation at Expo 2025 aimed to strengthen its position as a global filming destination.

diversity, including golden sand dunes, green valleys, towering mountains and pristine coastlines.

The screening also discussed Oman’s rich historical and archaeological sites, from castles and forts to ancient cities and Unesco world heritage sites, emphasising their cultural value, which enriches film productions.

“We are proud to present Oman’s cultural and cinematic treasures on a global stage, showcasing

Oman’s exceptional locations and rich heritage. Our participation at Expo Osaka reflects the Omani Film Society’s commitment to strengthening Oman’s position as an international film-making and cultural exchange destination,” said Mohammed bin Abdullah al Ajmi, President of the Omani Film Society.

“We believe that cinema is a powerful bridge connecting cultures and sharing the story of our people and land with the world. Through

initiatives like this, we promote film tourism and creative industries in Oman while empowering young film-makers to share their unique stories and talents globally. We thank all partners and collaborators for contributing to the success of this participation and look forward to further cooperation to advance the Omani film sector,” he added.

During the event, five short documentaries directed by young Omani film-makers were

screened, reflecting the diversity of environments, cultures and human stories in Oman. They include ‘Al Mawarid’ by Mohammed al Ajmi, exploring the Omani Tabseel season as a vibrant cultural and social event, ‘You Will Never Dive Alone’ by Fahad al Maimani, taking viewers on a visual journey into the depths of the Daymaniyat Islands, highlighting the richness of Omani marine life and the importance of conservation, ‘Holding Your Breath,’ directed by Issa al Subhi, telling the moving story of Omani diver Omar al Ghailani, showcasing free diving, perseverance and defiance, ‘Trace,’ directed by Buthaina al Kindi, an emotional journey through memory and nostalgia, reliving features of an ancient Omani village, focusing on belonging and identity and ‘Long Distances,’ directed by Hamad al Qasabi and Ali al Bimani, narrating the story of an Omani runner finding liberation and connection with his homeland.

The participation also featured the Screen Oman platform, targeting production companies, directors and individuals interested in film-making, advertising and marketing. It promotes the diverse locations and terrain of Oman, open studios for filming, and film tourism.

SHORT TAKES



OMANI MISSION PARTICIPATES IN HAJ SYMPOSIUM

JEDDAH: The Omani Haj mission took part in the 49th edition of the Grand Hajj Symposium, organised by the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah in collaboration with the Council of Senior Scholars and King Abdulaziz Foundation. Held under the theme “Capability in Hajj and Contemporary Developments,” the event took place at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Jeddah.

Since its inception in 1397 AH (1977), the symposium has served as a leading knowledge platform, fostering scholarly and intellectual exchange among Islamic scholars and thinkers. It focuses on the religious, cultural, and social dimensions of Hajj, highlights Saudi Arabia’s achievements in serving the guests of the Most Merciful and showcases pioneering projects in the Two Holy Mosques. Additionally, it promotes intellectual dialogue to address challenges facing the Islamic world.

The symposium commenced with a special meeting for heads of Hajj affairs offices from various Islamic countries, including the Omani delegation, to discuss coordination and cooperation in serving pilgrims.

The opening session featured welcoming remarks, followed by the first main session, titled “Facilitating the Ritual and Empowering Pilgrims: Saudi Arabia’s Vision in Serving Hajj Performers.” This session highlighted the Kingdom’s efforts in streamlining pilgrims’ journeys — from arrival to departure — providing integrated healthcare, and ensuring their safety through security measures and regulatory permits. It also reviewed infrastructure development projects in Makkah and the holy sites. The second session, “The Concept of Capability in Islam and Its Role in Facilitating Hajj,” discussed topics such as physical and financial capability (istita’ah) and the importance of educating pilgrims on its jurisprudential aspects. — ONA

5-YEAR PLAN’S COMMITTEE HOLDS MEETING

MUSCAT: The Supervisory Committee tasked with drafting the 11th Five-Year Development Plan on Sunday held its third meeting at the Ministry of Economy.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy and Chairman of the Committee. The meeting was aimed to ensure that the 5-year plan’s preparation is proceeding in accordance with the approved timeframes and technical specifications.

This meeting was in pursuance of efforts to formulate a comprehensive development plan that keeps pace with the approaches of Oman Vision 2040 and contributes to sustainable economic and social development in the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting focused on developing a clear-cut, comprehensive five-year plan that aligns with national priorities and responds to the citizens’ aspirations for the forthcoming stage.

The meeting also laid emphasis on the integration of roles of different government departments, sector establishments and civil society institutions — to ensure that the 5-year plan would be effective in meeting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

MINISTER OF INTERIOR HOLDS MEETING WITH GOVERNORS

MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, on Sunday, chaired the Interior Ministry’s first meeting of the year (2025) with governors.

During the meeting, which took place at the general diwan of the ministry, the Interior Minister stressed the importance of keeping pace with His Majesty



Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s vision to combine efforts towards the steady growth of governorates. The meeting also discussed means to assign governors to take steps towards the implementation of the Royal directives on activating Marriage Support Funds in the

governorates. The funds are scheduled to operate in accordance with standards to be issued by the Minister of Interior before the end of June 2025.

The meeting looked into a variety of other topics of common nature, including means of implementing the recommendations of municipal councils.

The voice of Mahmood captivated his audience

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

MAHMOOD OBAID, Oman’s popular actor, writer and director with a voice that captivated the hearts of radio listeners, bade farewell forever on Sunday morning, June 1. He was extremely active on social media, but his last post on Instagram was a voice-over on verses that convey ‘Glory to God’, posted on January 31, 2025. By the afternoon of June 1, family and friends were returning from the funeral in Al Seeb. Many were speechless, finding it difficult to accept that his smile and cheer will never be experienced again.

Mahmood loved making people laugh. There was always something to be cheerful about when Mahmood was around. His voice was distinct and his mind creative.

This is how he was as a child too. He was born in Muttrah, where he chose to live throughout his life.

Murtadha al Lawati, his childhood friend, said, “From his childhood days, Mahmood Obaid was quite social. He showed his leadership qualities when the children used to play football or have gatherings. He was good at talking, and once he joined media, everybody knew the kind of boost he gave to Omani media. He loved Muttrah. His heart was full of love for Oman and its heritage.”

“He lived in Muttrah all his life. I remember as children, we used to look at his grandfather’s house, which was quite big. He knew all the streets of Muttrah, and because



MAHMOOD OBAID

he was a person who would listen to everyone’s issues and problems, he would advise people. I remember him since then. We lost contact as we grew up, but whenever we caught up, he would talk nicely. If you ask around in Muttrah, Mahmood Obaid is a friend to everybody. Even the streets of Muttrah will miss him. He used to talk about hidden parts of Muttrah. It is indeed a big loss because he was a very kind person who was loved,” he added. By 1990, Mahmood had chosen media as his career. Renowned filmmaker Mohammed al Kindi and Mahmood began their careers on the same day. “We were employed by the Ministry of Information on the same day and at the same time. He went to the radio side, and I chose television. He went on to become a writer, actor, and director and later worked in television series. He was a presenter as well. That was the practical side,” pointed out Al Kindi.

“Mahmood was very kind. He was open to other people’s opinions about his programmes and critiquing. He was accessible. I personally had the opportunity to work on his radio series. He was extremely gifted in discovering new talents as writers and directors,” Al Kindi added. When he retired, Mahmood Obaid used to spend time at the Oman Film Society, editing his YouTube series on Muttrah,

which he filmed on his own. “We spent hours together at the Oman Film Society talking about the future of drama and theatre. Then there was a gap, and after a while, I reached out, and he said he was not keeping too well but assured that he would soon meet. He came back and was energetic, and I did not even have to ask him how he was doing. He did not speak of any ailments. But he became silent again, and when inquired, he sent a reply about his ailment,” recollected Al Kindi.

Radio Oman broadcaster Nada al Balushi, who worked with Mahmood on numerous programmes in the last 30 years, said, “We worked on many programmes. He was characterised by an unforgettable spirit, voice, and creativity. Today we lost Mahmood, the person, artist, teacher and friend. We lost him, but his impact remains and his spirit remains alive with what he left in terms of unforgettable moments, attitudes, feelings and deeds.”

Moved by the loss of a voice that everyone identified with, Ibrahim bin Ali al Batashi, wrote: “Today, as we write about him, we are not only mourning him, but also a time when he was a father, when the broadcaster was a friend to the family and when Mahmood was all of Oman... in one voice. Mahmood was not just a broadcaster... he was an Omani chronicle read across the airwaves. Whenever he spoke, you felt the Sultanate of Oman, in all its majesty — its white robe, its carved dagger, and its sublime serenity — stood behind the microphone.”

be’ah showcases waste management

SUHAR: Oman Environmental Services Holding Company “be’ah”, represented by its Healthcare Waste Management Department, participated in a forum titled “Investment in Private Healthcare Sector: Opportunities and Challenges” organised by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry’s Al Batinah North branch.

The company presented a technical working paper titled “Healthcare Waste Management and Sustainability Challenges.” The paper detailed Oman’s healthcare waste management system, highlighting the modern infrastructure developed by “be’ah” to serve this vital sector. It showcased the latest treatment technologies being utilised, including thermal treatment and sterilisation technologies, to ensure

According to 2024 Sustainability Report, the company’s healthcare waste treatment facilities successfully processed more than 4,000 metric tonnes of healthcare waste during 2023.



safe and effective disposal of this specialised waste stream.

According to 2024 Sustainability Report, the company’s healthcare waste treatment facilities successfully processed more than 4,000 metric tonnes of healthcare waste during 2023. This achievement has directly contributed to supporting public health initiatives and environmental

protection efforts. The presentation also emphasised the challenges facing the sector, particularly in light of the rapid expansion of private healthcare services.

The paper stressed the importance of strengthening partnerships between public and private sectors to ensure efficient and sustainable management of this hazardous waste category. — ONA

RAM announces new advisory board of global leaders

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) has announced the formation of its newly reconstituted International Advisory Board, comprising a distinguished group of global leaders and renowned experts in leadership, management and innovation. This strategic development marks a major milestone in RAM’s ongoing efforts to elevate executive education and leadership

development. The establishment of the Board reinforces the Academy’s unwavering commitment to excellence, international collaboration and alignment with the national priorities outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, President of The Royal Academy of Management, stated: “We are proud to welcome this outstanding group of global



DR ALI BIN QASSIM AL LAWATI
President of The Royal Academy of Management

thought leaders and experts to RAM’s International Advisory Board. Their diverse insights, extensive experience and international outlook will significantly contribute to shaping RAM’s strategic direction. The board will play a vital role in enriching our programmes, offering forward-looking perspectives on leadership and innovation and strengthening our global

partnerships to enhance the Academy’s international standing.”

He extended his gratitude to the outgoing members of the previous board, acknowledging their, foundational role: “We are deeply grateful to our former Board members for their invaluable contributions. Their vision, insight and dedication played a pivotal role in shaping the Academy’s early direction

and advancing the development of its flagship initiatives and programmes. Their support has helped lay a strong foundation for RAM’s emergence as a national leader in executive education and a beacon of leadership excellence.”

The newly appointed board comprises a distinguished group of professionals with significant global influence and a proven track record of excellence across government and industry.

SPOTLIGHT



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

AS EID AL ADHA approaches, livestock markets across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman are witnessing vibrant activity, as citizens and residents alike are keen to buy sacrificial animals, in keeping with religious rituals.

However, this annual event is not limited to just buying the sacrificial animals. It represents an integrated system that begins with the step of selecting a healthy animals and extends to the stage of preserving the meat and ensuring its safety and quality.

This was emphasised by experts at the Food Safety and Quality Center under the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, as part of their efforts to protect consumer health and promote safe practices during such occasions.

The journey of the sacrificial animal begins with selecting

the right animal, a crucial step to ensure the meat's quality and safety. Experts indicate that a healthy animal is one that appears lively and energetic, with bright, clear eyes free from any discharge or signs of disease. The body should be free of wounds, sores, or swelling, and it should have a balanced proportion of meat to fat, indicating good nutrition. Consumers are advised to avoid animals showing signs of lethargy or sluggishness, as they might carry infectious or parasitic diseases.

Purchasing from certified markets, slaughterhouses, or approved farms is of utmost importance, as animals sold in these places undergo thorough veterinary inspections by the relevant authorities to ensure they are free from diseases that could be transmitted to humans. These procedures ensure that the animal is safe for human consumption, thereby enhancing consumer confidence and

protecting public health.

After selecting the animal comes the second stage: slaughter. Experts emphasise that slaughtering at approved slaughterhouses is not merely a religious observance, but an important step in ensuring meat safety and consumer health. Before slaughter, the animal undergoes a comprehensive veterinary check to confirm it is free from infectious diseases and parasites, reducing the risk of disease transmission to humans. Slaughter is carried out in a clean environment using sterilised tools and in accordance with the highest international health standards, ensuring the meat is free from bacterial or microbial contamination.

Animal waste is also disposed of in safe and sanitary ways that protect the environment and ensure public safety.

If a consumer chooses to slaughter the animal at home or anywhere outside approved

slaughterhouses, they must adhere to proper health procedures in handling the waste. The remains should be placed in a tightly sealed bag before disposal, to prevent unpleasant odours or attract insects and stray animals, as well as to protect the environment from pollution. This step contributes to public health, keeps the place clean, and prevents the spread of diseases or contamination to others.

The sacrificial process is only complete with the third stage: meat preservation after slaughter. Here, the responsibility shifts to the consumer to maintain the quality and safety of the meat. Experts recommend cooling the meat immediately in a cold environment to minimise bacterial growth. It is also advisable to portion the meat appropriately according to intended use, whether for immediate cooking or storage. If the meat is to be consumed within a few days, it should be kept refrigerated at

a low temperature. For longer-term storage, freezing is the best option, provided the meat is frozen immediately after cutting and in the proper manner while avoiding refreezing after thawing to maintain its quality and safety.

Experts at the National Center for Food Safety and Quality stress that following these procedures step by step reflects consumer awareness and their commitment to the health and safety of their family. It also ensures that Eid Al Adha is celebrated in a safe and healthy atmosphere, free from health risks that may arise from neglecting these important details.

With continued government efforts to monitor markets and slaughterhouses and ensure their adherence to health regulations, consumer awareness remains the most critical factor in successfully completing this system, ensuring that everyone can enjoy this great religious occasion without any health issues.

SHORT TAKES



Participants will vie for financial awards, with prizes awarded for Best Feature Film, Best Short Film and Best Documentary. — ONA

GULF FILM FESTIVAL SUBMISSIONS OPEN

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth has announced the opening of submissions for the upcoming Gulf Film Festival, scheduled to take place in Muscat from November 16 to 19.

The event will be organised in collaboration with the Secretariat-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and aligns with the festival’s regulatory framework established by the GCC Secretariat-General, as part of the implementation of the GCC Cultural Strategy 2020-2030. The ministry has extended an invitation to all Omani film-makers to submit their works and compete across the festival’s various categories, including feature films, short films and documentaries. Participants will vie for financial awards, with prizes awarded for Best Feature Film, Best Short Film, and Best Documentary, in addition to other awards such as Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Best Original Score and Best Actor and Actress. — ONA

NO INJURIES IN AL MUDHAIBI FIRE

MUSCAT: Firefighting teams from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) in Al Sharqiyah North responded swiftly to a fire that broke out in a commercial establishment in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi on Sunday.

According to a statement issued by the authority, the fire was successfully brought under control with no injuries reported. The CDAA has not disclosed the cause of the fire, but an investigation is underway.

The authority urged commercial property owners to adhere to fire safety guidelines and ensure the proper maintenance of electrical systems and fire extinguishing equipment.

Collaboration to strengthen student entrepreneurship

MUSCAT: Knowledge Oman and Muscat College have embarked on an impactful collaboration through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), reinforcing their shared commitment to educational and community development. This strategic partnership was initiated by the Research Centre at Muscat College and formalised during a dedicated meeting held at the college campus.

The MoU was signed by Dr Araby Madbouly, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs at Muscat College, and Tariq al Barwani, Founder of Knowledge Oman, in the presence of Abdullah al Farsi, Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs, Balqees al Hassani, President of Knowledge Oman, along with representatives from both organisations. The collaboration aims to foster innovation, research and impactful community initiatives.

Dr Araby expressed his enthusiasm for the renewed partnership, stating, “This MoU reaffirms our shared vision to contribute meaningfully to Oman’s knowledge economy and Oman Vision 2040. Together, we aim to nurture a generation of responsible and innovative leaders.”

The partnership emphasises a stronger commitment to community development, with a particular focus on empowering students in entrepreneurship. As part of the collaboration, both institutions will work together to build a structured support system to foster the students’ entrepreneurial skills through equipping students with the necessary guidance and exposure to build sustainable and socially impactful business ventures.

Al Barwani said, “Knowledge Oman remains

MAJOR DRUG HAUL IN QURAYAT: ONE PERSON APPREHENDED

MUSCAT: Coast Guard Police Command, in coordination with the Directorate-General for Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, has apprehended a Pakistani national in the Wilayat of Qurayat.

Authorities confirmed that the individual was found in possession of more than 90 kilogrammes of narcotic substances, including crystal meth, marijuana, hashish and large quantities of psychotropic pills.



The seized substances were reportedly intended for distribution and trade within the Sultanate of Oman, raising serious concerns about cross-border drug smuggling activities.

Authorities stated that legal procedures are currently underway as investigations continue. The Royal Oman Police reiterated its commitment to fighting drug-related crimes and urged the public to report any suspicious activities.

Renewed visual identity to empower entrepreneurship

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

IN ORDER to empower the entrepreneurship sector, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) has launched its new visual identity, with the support of Shaikh Suba’a bin Hamdan al Saadi, Secretary-General of the Secretariat-General of National Celebrations.

The Authority has emerged as an entity with the goal of supporting and developing the sector, contributing to the achievement of Oman Vision 2040 which aims for a sustainable, knowledge-based and innovation-driven economy.

Recognising this pivotal role, a modern corporate visual identity was developed to reflect the Authority’s vision, mission and core values, portraying it as a supportive and enabling entity for small and medium enterprises and entrepreneurs in the Sultanate of Oman.

Halima al Zari, Chairperson of ASMED, stated, “We are pleased to launch the new visual identity. This is a testament to the Royal directives to make small and medium enterprises the foundation of the Omani economy. We will continue on this path in collaboration with our partners, embarking on a new journey of giving, belonging and

“We are pleased to launch the new visual identity. This is a testament to the Royal directives to make small and medium enterprises the foundation of the Omani economy. We will continue on this path in collaboration with our partners, embarking on a new journey of giving, belonging and innovation to support entrepreneurs for a prosperous economic future in the Sultanate of Oman and to achieve Oman Vision 2040.”

HALIMA AL ZARI



A modern corporate visual identity was developed to reflect the ASMED’s vision, mission and core values.

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It is common for organisations to update their visual identity, with 75 per cent of companies redesigning their brand since 2020 in response to rapid changes in the market and public behaviour.

The Authority’s visual identity change was necessary to keep up with the fast-paced transformations in the business environment, improve communication with

all sectors of the public, enhance digital interaction and support expansion and growth.

The Authority mentioned that the identity development process involved a collaborative approach, including research and analysis of global and regional experiences, workshops and seminars, defining the strategy through vision, mission, values, and brand personality, as well as creative design elements such as logo design, colour and font selection and visual identity development.



The MoU was signed by Dr Araby Madbouly, Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs at Muscat College, and Tariq al Barwani, Founder of Knowledge Oman, in the presence of Abdullah al Farsi, Assistant Dean for Administrative and Financial Affairs, Balqees al Hassani, President of Knowledge Oman.

committed to national development through education and innovation. We are proud to continue this journey with Muscat College and look forward to enabling more students to create real-world impact.”

The partnership symbolises a deeper collaboration that not only fosters academic and research excellence but also promotes youth empowerment, innovation and community engagement across the Sultanate of Oman.

Under the terms of the agreement, Knowledge Oman will form a dedicated team of experts to coach students, offering mentorship and startup guidance. The initiative is designed to accelerate the development of student-led startups and stimulate an entrepreneurial mindset among the youth.

TENDER NOTICE



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
335/2025/MAFWR/HQ-39	Supply and activate a firewall for HQ building 2	Tuesday 20/5/2025	Tuesday 10/6/2025	Sunday 29/6/2025	Specialized companies registered with Excellent, First Second, Third, Fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
344/2025/MAFWR/HQ-40	General Maintenance of Fishery Harbours in Saham and Al Khabora	Monday 26/5/2025	Sunday 15/6/2025	Sunday 6/7/2025	SMEs companies registered with Fourth grade	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
347/2025/MAFWR/HQ-41	Supply of Diagnostic materials for the Central Laboratory of Health for 2025	Monday 26/5/2025	Sunday 15/6/2025	Sunday 6/7/2025	Specialized companies registered with Excellent, First Second, Third, Fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.

- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.

- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.

- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@gstb.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Supporters of presidential candidate Lee Jae-myung hold placards as they attend a political rally, in Seoul. — AFP

S KOREA CANDIDATES HOLD CAMPAIGNS AHEAD OF VOTE

SEOUL: South Korea’s leading candidates held major campaign events on Sunday, two days out from a snap election triggered by the former president’s removal after his disastrous declaration of martial law. The June 3 election is set to cap months of political turmoil sparked by Yoon Suk Yeol’s brief suspension of civilian rule in December, for which he was impeached and removed from office.

All major polls have put liberal Lee Jae-myung well ahead in the presidential race, with the latest Gallup survey showing 49 per cent of respondents viewed him as the best candidate. Kim Moon-Soo, from the conservative People Power Party (PPP) trailed Lee on 35 per cent. The 60-year-old Lee began his rally in his hometown of Andong, 240 kilometres southeast of Seoul, telling his supporters he would seek to weaken the concentration of development in the capital region and boost areas away from Seoul. “We should not simply seek a regional equal development strategy but rather provide more incentives for non-Seoul regions to support them more,” said Lee, wearing a bulletproof vest. — AFP

IRAQ CONDEMNS ‘REPEATED ATTACKS’ ON LEBANON



Iraqi PM Mohammed al-Sudani welcomes Lebanese President Joseph Aoun in Baghdad. — Reuters

BAGHDAD: Iraq’s Prime Minister Mohammed al-Sudani on Sunday condemned Israeli attacks on Lebanon as he hosted Lebanese President Joseph Aoun, on his first visit to Baghdad since taking office. Israel has continued to strike Lebanon despite a November ceasefire that ended more than a year of conflict with Lebanese group Hezbollah. Lebanese authorities reported on Sunday the third deadly Israeli raid on the country’s south in four days.

In a joint press conference with Aoun, Sudani denounced “repeated Israeli attacks against Lebanon’s sovereignty” which he said were in “violation of international law”. The Iraqi prime minister called to “fully implement” a UN Security Council resolution that ended a 2006 war between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah and served as the basis for the latest truce, which went into effect on November 27. Sudani also said he discussed with the visiting Lebanese president “shared opportunities in various sectors” including energy, telecommunications and commerce. Aoun expressed his gratitude for “all the support and donations” Iraq has given Lebanon. Aoun also met with his Iraqi counterpart Abdel Latif Rashid. — AFP

CHINA SLAMS HEGSETH OF REMARKS AT SECURITY FORUM

BEIJING: China has protested to the United States against “vilifying” remarks made by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, the foreign ministry said on Sunday, while accusing it of deliberately ignoring calls for peace from regional nations. China has objected to Hegseth calling it a threat in the Indo-Pacific, the ministry added, describing his comments at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on Saturday as “deplorable”.

Hegseth deliberately ignored the

call for peace and development by countries in the region and instead touted the Cold War mentality for bloc confrontation, vilified China with defamatory allegations, and falsely called China a ‘threat’,” the ministry said on its website. “The United States has deployed offensive weaponry in the South China Sea and kept stoking flames and creating tensions in the Asia-Pacific, which are turning the region into a powder keg,” it added.

China’s defence ministry also

weighed in, saying the US is “accustomed to using” the forum to “stoke disputes, sow discord and seek selfish interests”. “China’s armed forces will work with other countries in the region to oppose hegemonism harming the Asia-Pacific region,” ministry spokesperson Zhang Xiaogang said.

Hegseth had urged allies in the Indo-Pacific region to spend more on defence after warning of the “real and potentially imminent” threat from China. — Reuters

Gaza rescuers say Israeli fire kills 31 near aid site

GAZA’S civil defence agency said Israeli gunfire killed at least 31 Palestinians near a US-backed aid distribution site on Sunday, with the group in charge of the new delivery mechanism denying any incident. Israel has faced growing condemnation over the humanitarian crisis in the war-ravaged Gaza Strip, where the United Nations has warned the entire population faces famine after no aid had been allowed to enter for more than two months. Israel has recently eased its blockade and introduced a revamped aid mechanism in cooperation with a newly formed US-backed organisation, bypassing the longstanding UN-led system.



People inspect the damage at the site of an Israeli strike, in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

The organisation, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), says it has distributed millions of meals since operations began last week, but the rollout has been marked by chaotic scenes at the limited number of distribution centres, as well as reports of casualties from Israeli fire nearby. Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal said that “31 people were killed and more than 176 injured... after Israeli gunfire targeted thousands of civilians near the American aid centre in Rafah”, in southern Gaza.

Images showed Palestinians transporting bodies on donkey carts near the aid point as others carried away boxes and bags of supplies under the early-morning sun. Abdullah Barbakh, a 58-year-old Palestinian man, described “chaos, screaming and overcrowding” at

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), says it has distributed millions of meals since operations began last week, but the rollout has been marked by chaotic scenes at the limited number of distribution centres, as well as reports of casualties from Israeli fire nearby

the site. “The army opened fire from drones and tanks,” he said. “I don’t understand why they call people to the aid centres and then open fire on them.”

Near another GHF aid centre in central Gaza, images showed rescuers evacuating injured people. Bassal reported one dead and dozens wounded there, also blaming Israeli fire. The Israeli military said it was “unaware of injuries” caused by its fire at the Rafah aid centre, while a GHF spokesperson said the reports were “untrue and fabricated”. “All aid was distributed today without incident,” the spokesperson said.

Sameh Hamuda, a 33-year-old displaced from northern Gaza, said that he had walked from Gaza City — more than 25 kilometres away — and spent the night with relatives in a tent near Rafah before heading

to the aid centre around 5:00 am to wait among a crowd of people. “Suddenly quadcopter drones opened fire on the people, and tanks started shooting heavily. Several people were killed right in front of me,” he said. “I ran and survived. Death follows you as long as you’re in Gaza.”

Only limited amounts of aid have entered Gaza since Israel eased its total blockade that began in March. On Friday a spokesman for the UN humanitarian agency called Gaza “the hungriest place on earth”. GHF, which employs contracted US security, said on Sunday that it had distributed more than 4.7 million meals’ worth of food so far. The United Nations and major aid groups have refused to cooperate with the organisation, saying it contravened basic humanitarian principles. — AFP



EX-PM ACCUSED OF SYSTEMATIC ATTACK

DHAKA: Fugitive former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina orchestrated a “systematic attack” that amounted to crimes against humanity in her attempt to crush the uprising that toppled her government, Bangladeshi prosecutors said at the opening of her trial on Sunday.

Bangladesh’s International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) is prosecuting former senior figures connected to Hasina’s ousted government and her now-banned party, the Awami League. “Upon scrutinising the evidence, we reached the conclusion that it was a coordinated, widespread and systematic attack,” ICT chief prosecutor Mohammad Tajul Islam said. — AFP

INTENSIFIED STRIKES

Drones hit paramilitary sites in west Sudan



Three drone strikes have hit key paramilitary positions in western Sudan, witnesses said, as fighting between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces escalates in the war-torn region. The strikes in Nyala, the South Darfur state capital, targeted a hotel and a medical unit in the city centre and RSF-held positions on the eastern outskirts, residents said. A cargo plane was also reportedly fired on while landing at Nyala airport. — AFP

SEARCH OPERATION

Death toll in Indonesian rockfall rises to 18



The death toll from a rockfall at a limestone quarry on Indonesia’s Java island rose to 18, with another seven people still missing. “Today, we retrieved one more body, which brings the total death toll to 18 people, while seven more people are still missing,” local military chief Mukhammad Yusron said. “We suspect the missing victims have already died.” Rescuers have deployed excavators and rescue dogs to search for the remaining victims. — AFP

NON-STOP RAIN

Floods, landslides hit India’s northeast



Flash floods and landslides after torrential monsoon rain over the last two days killed at least 30 people in India’s northeast, officials said on Sunday. A red alert warning was issued for several districts in the region. The Indian army said that it had saved hundreds “in a massive rescue operation” across Manipur state. “People have been shifted to safer places”, the army said on Saturday. “Food, water and essential medicines were provided.” — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Migrants arrive at Dover harbour after being rescued while attempting to cross the English Channel, in Dover. — Reuters

OVER 1,100 MIGRANTS
CROSSED CHANNEL:
UK GOVT DATA

LONDON: Some 1,194 migrants arrived in the UK after crossing the Channel in small boats on Saturday, a record for this year according to government data. It brings the overall number of migrant crossings this year to 14,808, an unprecedented figure despite several measures in place by the French and UK governments to curb the crossings.

The latest crossings, which UK Defence Secretary John Healey described as “shocking”, fall short of the all-time record of 1,300 migrants arriving on small boats in a day in September 2022. But they will still prove a headache for UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who has been at pains to toughen his rhetoric on irregular immigration amid pressure from the far right to slash migrant numbers.

Starmer unveiled tough new immigration policies this month that include doubling the length of time before migrants can qualify for settlement in the country and new powers to deport foreign criminals. Separate legislation to tackle irregular immigration, called the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, is currently going through parliament. — AFP

HOSPITAL FIRE IN GERMANY KILLS 3



An overnight blaze that broke out in a room in a hospital’s geriatric ward in Hamburg, Germany, killed three people and injured about 50 others, police said on Sunday. The three casualties were aged between 84 and 87 years old, while three others were between life and death, authorities said. The fire in the Marienkrankenhaus facility began around midnight and threatened to spread to the first floor. The firefighters managed to bring the fire under control before it could spread to other patients’ Hamburg police is investigating the cause of the blaze. — AFP

MEXICANS
ELECT THEIR
JUDGES UNDER
SHADOW OF
ORGANIZED
CRIME

MEXICO CITY: Mexico holds unprecedented elections on Sunday allowing voters to choose their judges at all levels, in a country where drug cartels and other vested interests regularly seek to alter the course of justice.

The government says the reform making Mexico the world’s only country to select all of its judges and magistrates by popular vote is needed to tackle deep-rooted corruption and impunity. But there are concerns that the judiciary

will be politicized and that it will become easier for criminals to influence the courts with threats and bribery.

Judicial elections also “entail a risk that the electorate will not choose candidates based on their merit,” the independent expert said. The run-up to the vote has not been accompanied by the kind of violence that often targets politicians in Mexico.

But cartels are likely trying to influence the outcome in the

shadows, said Luis Carlos Ugalde, a consultant and former head of Mexico’s electoral commission.

“It is logical that organized criminal groups would have approached judges and candidates who are important to them,” Ugalde, general director of Integralia Consultores, told a roundtable hosted by the Inter-American Dialogue.

The new system allowed greater scrutiny of aspiring judges, Ramos argued. — AFP

Seven killed by bridge
blasts in Russian regions

AT least seven people were killed and 69 injured when two bridges were blown up in separate Russian regions bordering Ukraine ahead of planned peace talks aimed at ending the three-year-old war in Ukraine, Russian officials said on Sunday. A highway bridge over a railway in the Bryansk region was blown up at 10:50 pm on Saturday night just as a passenger train carrying 388 passengers to Moscow was passing underneath, Russian investigators said. Just four hours later, a railway bridge over a highway was blown up in the neighbouring Kursk region showering the road with parts of a freight train, the investigators said.

Russia’s Investigative Committee, which probes serious crimes, linked the incidents and said explicitly that both bridges were blown up. In the Bryansk region, social media pictures and videos showed passengers trying to climb out of smashed carriages in the dark. Part of the passenger train was shown crushed under a collapsed road bridge and wrecked carriages lay beside the lines. “The bridge was blown up while the Klimovo-Moscow train was passing through with 388 passengers on board,” Alexander Bogomaz, the region’s governor, told Russian television.

The Russian regions bordering Ukraine have been subject to frequent attacks by Ukraine since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Both sides accuse the other of targeting civilians, and both deny such accusations. There was no immediate comment from Ukraine on the incidents, which took place just a day before the United States wants Russia and Ukraine to sit down to direct talks in Istanbul to discuss a possible end to a war which, according to Washington, has killed and injured at least 1.2 million people.

Ukraine’s HUR military intelligence agency said on Sunday that an explosion had derailed a Russian military train hauling cargo and fuel trucks near the settlement of Yakymivka, in a Russian-controlled part of Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia region. The agency did not claim responsibility or attribute the explosion to anyone, though Ukraine has in the past claimed a series of attacks deep into



Specialists of emergency services work at the scene, in the Bryansk region, Russia. — Reuters

Russia.

Russian politicians lined up to blame Ukraine, saying it was clearly sabotage aimed at derailing the peace talks which the United States has demanded. “This is definitely the work of the Ukrainian special services,” the chairman of the defence committee of the lower house of the Russian parliament, Andrei Kartapolov, told the SHOT Telegram channel. “All this is aimed at toughening the position of the Russian Federation and stoking aggression before the negotiations. And also to intimidate people. But they won’t succeed.”

US President Donald Trump has demanded the sides make peace and he has threatened to walk away if they do not - potentially pushing responsibility for supporting Ukraine onto the shoulders of European powers.

But as politicians talk of peace negotiations, the war is heating up, with swarms of drones launched by both Russia and Ukraine and Russian troops advancing at key points along the front in eastern Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Ukraine attacked Russian

nuclear-capable long-range bombers at a military base in Siberia on Sunday, the first such attack so far from the front lines more than 4,300 km away, according to pro-Russian bloggers. Unverified video and pictures posted on social media showed Russian strategic bombers - whose purpose is to drop nuclear bombs on distance targets - on fire at the Belaya air base north of Irkutsk.

A Ukrainian intelligence official said that Ukraine’s domestic security agency, the SBU, conducted a large drone attack on over 40 Russian military aircraft. The Ukrainian source, speaking on condition of anonymity to Reuters in Kyiv, said the struck aircraft included Tu-95 and Tu-22 strategic bombers, which Russia uses to fire long-range missiles at Ukraine.

Igor Kobzev, the governor of Irkutsk, said that there had been a drone attack on a military unit near the village of Sredny in the Usolsky district, but did not mention strategic aviation. In video that he posted on Telegram, drones could be heard flying overhead and a giant plume of smoke rising into the sky. — Reuters

Poland votes in tight race between pro-EU and nationalist visions

WARSAW: Poland was voting on Sunday in a tight presidential election that will determine whether the country cements its place in the mainstream of the European Union or turns toward Donald Trump-style nationalism.

Both Rafal Trzaskowski of ruling centrists Civic Coalition (KO) and his rival Karol Nawrocki, backed by nationalists Law and Justice (PiS), are hoping to mobilize their supporters and clinch the race. Trzaskowski had a narrow lead in pre-election opinion polls, but the difference was within the margin of error.

The electoral commission says it hopes final results will be announced on Monday morning or early afternoon.

Parliament holds most power in Poland, but the president can veto legislation, so the vote is being watched closely in neighbouring Ukraine, as well as in Russia, the U.S.

and across the EU. Both candidates agree on the need to spend heavily on defence, as US President Trump is demanding from Europe, and to continue supporting Ukraine in its fight against Russia’s three-year-old attack.

But while Trzaskowski sees Ukraine’s future membership of Nato as essential for Poland’s security, Nawrocki has recently said he would not ratify it as president as this could draw the alliance into a war with Russia.

Trzaskowski says strong relations with both Brussels and Washington are essential for Poland’s security, but Nawrocki, who met Trump in the White House in May, prioritises relations with the United States. Turnout stood at 24.8% at noon, the head of the electoral commission, Sylwester Marciniak, told reporters on Sunday.

That compared with 24.7% at the same stage of voting in the second



Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski, the presidential candidate of the Civic Coalition, attends “Patriotic March”, in Warsaw. — Reuters

round of the presidential election in 2020, when final turnout was at 68.2%. “The most important thing is foreign policy,” said IT specialist Robert Kepczynski, 53, who was voting in Warsaw.

“We can’t look both ways, to the

US and the EU - and looking only to the U.S. for help is short-sighted.”

If Nawrocki wins, he is likely to follow a similar path to outgoing President Andrzej Duda, a PiS ally who has used his veto power to block the government’s

efforts to undo the previous PiS administration’s judicial reforms, which the EU says undermined the independence of the courts. Coming around a year and a half since Prime Minister Donald Tusk took office, the vote provides the toughest test yet of support for his broad coalition government, with Nawrocki presenting the ballot as a referendum on its actions.

In 2023, huge queues outside polling stations in large cities forced some to stay open later than planned.

Analysts said that high participation by younger, liberal, urban Poles was crucial in securing a majority for Tusk. Trzaskowski is hoping that such scenes will be repeated on Sunday. “Encourage everyone, so that as many Poles as possible vote in the presidential election,” he told a rally in Wloclawek, central Poland, on Friday. — Reuters

OPINION

Reading aloud remains an effective learning strategy



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

WE have all been there as school children — pacing the room and reading out aloud from whichever textbook was most difficult. Whether formulae, definitions or poetry, reading out aloud was always part of preparation for exams.

It turns out, there is a science behind this. Just the act of forming words and saying them aloud substantially increases retention. This is called the ‘production effect’ — reading in order to remember. This is easily proved in the way that we remember songs because we sing them, or we remember nursery rhymes because we recited them in junior classes. Even actors apparently remember their words because they practice them aloud, not silently in one corner.

Historically, reading out aloud was the only way to convey information. Almost 4,000 years ago in Syria and Iraq, ‘to read’ meant ‘to cry’ or ‘to listen’. Using the word ‘to see’ to refer to reading came much later.

Behaviour scientists also suggest that reading aloud creates social bonds. That

is why it is important for parents to read aloud to their children — it creates a bond right from infancy while also maintaining a memory of closeness and sharing. While we know this of children, we tend to overlook the importance of such bonding in adults. This is why sharing readings through book clubs or any other avenue adds to companionship and camaraderie. As Sam Duncan, an educator, notes, “When someone is reading out loud to you, you feel a bit like you’ve been given a gift of their time, of their attention, of their voice.” According to research on the impact of reading out aloud, Colin MacLeod, a psychologist at the University of Waterloo, showed that people always remember texts better if they read them out loud: “It’s beneficial throughout the age range,” he says.

Reading out loud can help children, but it also helps the elderly in substantial ways. Studies on adults with early onset of dementia have shown that listening to stories, news or any other text helps them retain the material more successfully, perhaps because they can draw on their

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own experiences and imagination to make connections and improve memory.

Finally, reading out aloud is simply fun. Think of the many times we want to share a joke, or now, a meme, and wish someone would be there in the room with us. It also takes us back to listening to stories sitting around an adult in the family, sometimes in the dark, with ghost stories circulating in the group. This is a mode that audiobooks have caught on — reading with emotion and relevant diction, it transports us into another world.

Research suggests that we all read out aloud more than we actually realise. Whether it is a prayer we make out of habit, an e-mail which needs a considered response, or a word that needs accurate translation, we are always reading out aloud, even to ourselves.

In an age when reading itself is being challenged by many other distractions, reading out aloud needs to be encouraged by teachers, parents and anyone who values critical thought and the sheer magical sounds of the written word.

Nawrocki: Nationalist historian vying for Polish presidency

ANNA MARIA JAKUBEK

Karol Nawrocki, a nationalist historian who has written about the criminal underworld, heads into Sunday’s presidential run-off tied with his opponent, pro-EU Warsaw mayor Rafal Trzaskowski.

Nawrocki has been endorsed by the right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party, which governed Poland from 2015 to 2023. The party is closely allied with outgoing President Andrzej Duda — who has publicly backed Nawrocki — and is a long-standing rival of the ruling Civic Coalition. Nawrocki campaigned under the slogan “Poland first, Poles first”. While he has pledged to continue Poland’s support for neighbouring Ukraine against Russia’s war, he has denounced the benefits given to war refugees. In May, he claimed Ukraine “has not shown gratitude for what Poles have done” and accused President Volodymyr Zelensky of “insolence”. He opposes Ukraine’s bid to join Nato.

Nawrocki is an admirer of Donald Trump and has said Poland should focus on shaping and leading Europe’s relations with the US president.

Nawrocki met Trump at the White House in May and claimed Trump had told him: “You will win”. Some lawmakers from the governing coalition have accused Trump of election interference. While wooing voters ahead of the razor-edge run-off, Nawrocki signed an eight-point pledge prepared by far-right leader Slawomir Mentzen. He served as the director of the World War II museum in Gdansk from 2017 to 2021. Since then, he has led the Institute of National Remembrance, which investigates Nazi and communist-era crimes. His research focuses on Poland’s anti-communist opposition, organised crime during the communist era and sports history. Last year, Russia added Nawrocki to its wanted list for his alleged efforts to remove Soviet-era monuments in Poland. Nawrocki said he obtained a gun licence and firearm after winding up in Russia’s crosshairs. Nawrocki has written several books, including one under a pen name that landed him in an unusual controversy.

In 2018, he secretly published a book about the communist-era gangster Nikodem Skotarczak using the pseudonym Tadeusz Batyr.

That same year, a blurred and voice-altered “Batyr” appeared on state television claiming Nawrocki had inspired the book. Nawrocki later wrote on social media that Batyr had sought his advice and “thanked me with an interesting book, which I recommend”. But local media recently uncovered that Batyr and Nawrocki were one and the same. One TikTok user said: “Maybe they’ll substitute Batyr for Nawrocki in the runoff. In any case, the one backs the other. That’s two votes already.” Political opponents seized on the revelation. — AFP

Musk’s legacy is disease, starvation and death

THERE is an Elon Musk post on X, his social media platform, that should define his legacy. “We spent the weekend feeding USAID into the wood chipper,” he wrote on February 3. He could have “gone to some great parties. Did that instead.” Musk’s absurd scheme to save the government a trillion dollars by slashing “waste, fraud and abuse” has been a failure. DOGE claims it’s saved \$175 billion, but experts believe the real number is significantly lower. Meanwhile, according to the Partnership for Public Service, which studies the federal workforce, DOGE’s attacks on government personnel — its firings, re-hirings, use of paid administrative leave and all the associated lack of productivity — could cost the government upward of \$135 billion this fiscal year, even before the price of defending DOGE’s actions in court. Musk’s rampage through the bureaucracy may not have created any savings at all, and if it did, they were negligible.

Now, Musk’s Washington adventure is coming to an end, with the disillusioned billionaire announcing that he’s leaving government behind. “It sure is an uphill battle trying to improve things in DC, to say the least,” he told The Washington Post.

There is one place, however, where Musk, with the help of his minions, achieved his goals. He did indeed shred USAID. Though a rump operation is now operating inside the State Department, the administration says that it has terminated more than 80 per cent of USAID grants. Brooke Nichols, an associate professor of global health at Boston University, has estimated that these cuts have already resulted in about 300,000 deaths, most of them of children, and will most likely lead to significantly more by the end of the year. That is what Musk’s foray into politics accomplished.

White House officials deny that



MICHELLE GOLDBERG

The writer is a columnist for the New York Times

DOGE claims it’s saved \$175 billion, but experts believe the real number is significantly lower. Meanwhile, according to the Partnership for Public Service, which studies the federal workforce, DOGE’s attacks on government personnel — its firings, re-hirings, use of paid administrative leave and all the associated lack of productivity — could cost the government upward of \$135 billion this fiscal year

their decimation of USAID has had fatal consequences. At a hearing in the House last week, Democrats confronted Secretary of State Marco Rubio with my colleague Nick Kristof’s reporting from East Africa, documenting suffering and death caused by the withdrawal of aid. Rubio insisted no such deaths have happened, but people who’ve been in the field say he’s either lying or misinformed.

Atul Gawande, an assistant administrator for global health at USAID in Joe Biden’s administration, told me that during a trip to Kenya last week, he visited the national referral hospital. There’s been a major increase in the number of patients with advanced HIV symptoms, a result of losing access to antiretroviral medication. At refugee camps on the border of South Sudan, food aid has been cut so severely that people are getting less than 30 per cent of the calories they need. “It is not enough to survive on, and that has caused skyrocketing levels of severe malnutrition and deaths associated with it,” said Gawande.

Musk apparently did not anticipate that it would be bad PR for the world’s richest man to take food and medicine from the world’s poorest children. The Post reported that he hadn’t foreseen “the intensity of the blowback to his role in politics over the past year.” He’s been doing a series of interviews that Axios called an “image rehab tour.” If there were justice in the world, Musk would never be able to repair his reputation, at least not without devoting the bulk of his fortune to easing the misery he’s engendered. Musk’s sojourn in government has revealed severe flaws in his character — a blithe, dehumanising cruelty, and a deadly incuriosity. This should shape how he’s seen for the rest of his public life.

Musk sometimes refers to people he holds in contempt as “NPCs,” video game speak for characters who aren’t controlled by players and thus have no agency. More than just

an insult, the term, I think, reveals something about his worldview. He either doesn’t view most other people as entirely real or doesn’t see the point of treating them as such. As he told Joe Rogan this year, “The fundamental weakness of Western civilisation is empathy,” referring to the emotion as a “bug” in our system.

Yet even as he prides himself on dispassionate rigour, Musk has proved remarkably uninterested in figuring out how the government that he sought to transform really works. Samantha Power, head of USAID under Joe Biden, told me she tried to speak with members of the new administration, hoping to convince them there were elements of USAID’s work that they could leverage for their own agenda. But aside from one meeting with a transition official, her outreach was ignored.

Instead, Musk seemed to derive his view of the agency from conspiracy theorists on X. There, he called USAID a “radical-left political psy op” and amplified a post from the right-wing provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos smearing it as “the most gigantic global terror organisation in history.” It would have been easy for Musk to take his private plane to a country like Uganda to see for himself the work USAID has done providing medicine to people with HIV or feeding refugees from South Sudan. Instead, he drew on the counsel of Internet trolls and staffed DOGE with lackeys who were similarly ignorant. “If you heard the conversations USAID staff had with the DOGE people, there is no word in any language that captures the level of obliviousness about what USAID actually did,” Power said.

This kind of intellectual carelessness should make people reevaluate their faith in Musk’s brilliance. “Being president doesn’t change who you are; it reveals who you are,” Michelle Obama has said. The same is true, apparently, of being the president’s best friend, even fleetingly. — NYT

A journey of walking into change



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author,
translator and a
communications
professional

SOME journeys in life are not measured in miles but in meaning. Such is the nature of pilgrimage; it is not merely a trip, but a calling. It invites you to step into the unfamiliar and walk a path paved with questions. A pilgrimage begins when a place stirs something deep within your soul, and before you know it, your feet are already moving towards it.

Pilgrimage is often seen as the art of walking with intention. As a concept, it usually involves a journey or search for moral or spiritual significance. Typically, it is a physical journey to a shrine or sacred site that holds religious importance. But sometimes, pilgrimage can also be a metaphorical journey, an inward exploration of one's own beliefs.

In fact, many religions attach deep spiritual value to specific locations and places where founders or saints were born or died, where they experienced spiritual awakenings, or where miracles occurred. These sacred sites are often commemorated with shrines or temples that followers are encouraged to visit. Hence, pilgrimage as a ritual is deeply rooted in faith.

Pilgrims may go in search of healing, answers, or other spiritual rewards when performing pilgrimage. They perform pilgrimage to reclaim a part of themselves

they feel they have lost, to experience forgiveness, or to renew their spirit. Some walk barefoot. Some carry stones. Some travel alone. Others are carried along in the stories, prayers, or dreams of those who love them.

However, in Islam, pilgrimage — known as Haj — marks one of the Five Pillars of the faith. These pillars form the foundation of a Muslim's beliefs. Every Muslim who is physically and financially able is obligated to perform Haj at least once in their lifetime. Haj involves a series of sacred rituals and practices, some of which must be performed in a specific order. These rituals are spiritually, emotionally, and physically demanding, but they offer profound rewards.

Each year, millions of Muslims from around the world gather in Makkah, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, to perform Haj. It takes place during the same time each year, in the sacred month of Dhul Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar. Haj begins on the 8th of Dhul Hijjah and lasts approximately five to six days. Its rituals are being performed in different locations and at different times of the day.

Muslims are commanded by Allah to fulfil this sacred pilgrimage, as mentioned in the Qur'an: "You will enter the Sacred Masjid, God willing, perfectly secure, and you will cut your hair or shorten it (as you fulfil the

Typically, it is a physical journey to a shrine or sacred site that holds religious importance. But sometimes, pilgrimage can also be a metaphorical journey, an inward exploration of one's own beliefs.

pilgrimage rituals) there. You will not have any fear. Since He knew what you did not know, He has coupled this with an immediate victory."

Pilgrimage in Islam dates back to 628 CE when the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions performed the first Islamic pilgrimage. He was instructed by Allah to revive the traditions established by the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), centuries earlier. Under divine guidance, the Prophet Ibrahim travelled to the empty desert of Makkah, where he built the Kaaba and performed acts of worship.

Ultimately, pilgrimage is more than a journey to a sacred place; it is an opportunity to detach from everyday distractions, reflect on life, and reconnect with one's faith and values. It is both an outward and inward experience for Muslims, offering them moments of solitude, silence and often, unexpected companionship.

A pilgrimage may begin with a map, but it quickly becomes something more. You start to notice how the earth feels beneath your feet, how the sky shifts in response to your intentions, and how silence speaks in its own way. The road doesn't just lead to a destination, it listens, it responds, and it changes you. As the saying goes, "A journey without challenge has no meaning; one without purpose has no soul."

‘The Matrix is everywhere’: Cinema bets on immersion

PAULA RAMON

In a Los Angeles theatre, a trench coat-wearing Neo bends backwards to dodge bullets that spiral over the viewer's head, as the sound of gunfire erupts from everywhere.

This new immersive experience is designed to be a red pill moment that will get film fans off their couches at a time when the movie industry is desperate to bring back audiences.

Cosm, which has venues in Los Angeles and Dallas, is launching its dome-style screen and 3D sets in June with a "shared reality" version of "The Matrix," the cult 1999 film starring Keanu Reeves as a man who suddenly learns his world is a fiction.

"We believe the future will be more immersive and more experiential," said Cosm president Jeb Terry at a recent preview screening.

"It's trying to create an additive, a new experience, ideally non-cannibalistic, so that the industry can continue to thrive across all formats."

Cinema audiences were already dwindling when the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, shuttering theatres at a time when streaming was exploding.

With ever bigger and better TVs available for the home, the challenge for theatre owners is to offer something that movie buffs cannot get in their living room. Prestige projects like Tom Cruise's "Mission: Impossible — The Final Reckoning" or Christopher Nolan's Oscar-winning "Oppenheimer" increasingly opt for the huge screens and superior film quality of IMAX.

But Cosm and other projects like it want to go one step further, collaborating with designers who have worked with Cirque du Soleil to create an environment in which the viewer feels like they are inside the film.

For film-makers, it's all about how you place the cameras and where you capture the sound, said Jay Rinsky, founder of Little Cinema, a creative studio specialising in immersive experiences.

For the uninitiated: Reeves's Neo is a computer hacker who starts poking around in a life that doesn't quite seem to fit. A mysterious Laurence Fishburne offers him a blue pill that will leave him where he is or a red pill that will show him he is a slave whose body is being farmed by AI machines while his consciousness lives in a computer simulation.

There follows much gunfire, lots of martial arts and some mysticism, along with a romance between Neo and Trinity, played by the leather-clad Carrie-Anne Moss.

Shifting perspectives place the viewer inside Neo's office cubicle, or seemingly in peril.

"They're sometimes inside the character's head," said Rinsky. "The world changes as you look up and down for trucks coming at you."

The result impressed those who were at the preview screening.

"It just did feel like an experience," influencer Vince Rossi said. "It felt like you're at a theme park for a movie almost." — AFP

We are the ocean: Protect it through concrete action

FROM June 9 to 13, France will host the Third United Nations Conference on the Ocean (UNOC3).

This meeting will be a decisive moment: it will bring together, in Nice, a hundred heads of state and government, and several tens of thousands of participants, researchers, scientists, economic actors, community activists and citizens from all over the world. On this occasion, France will have a clear objective: to protect the ocean through concrete actions.

The ocean is our common good. It feeds and protects peoples. It makes us dream and travel. It offers us sustainable energy, means of trade, endless resources and scientific knowledge.

One in three people depend on the ocean for their lives, yet the ocean is in danger. It is a space that is still largely unknown, which does not have global governance, nor the funding necessary for its preservation. The figures are worrying: more than 8 million tonnes of plastic are dumped into the ocean every year, according to a study in the journal Science. Added to this is the overexploitation, which affects more than a third of fish stocks, but also the acidification of waters, the rise of sea level and the destruction of marine ecosystems. And these phenomena are accelerating, direct consequences of climate change.

It is time to act. More than ever, we need to ensure that multilateral action rises to the challenge of protecting the ocean.

Ten years after COP21 and the Paris Agreement, which established a binding global framework to limit global warming, UNOC3 represents a historic opportunity. The "Nice Agreements" would constitute a real international pact for the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean. This pact would thus be directly in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN in 2015.

To achieve this, the discussions in Nice will have to be concrete and action-oriented. It will be a question of working for better governance,



A seagull holds a plastic bag in its beak as it searches for food in Vannes, Brittany, France. More than 8 million tonnes of plastic are dumped into the ocean every year, according to a study in the journal Science.

more funding and a better knowledge of the sea.

In terms of governance, the Treaty on the Protection of Biodiversity in the High Seas (BBNJ) is an essential lever. The high seas — more than 60 per cent of the oceans — are today the only space not governed by international law. The absence of surveillance and common rules leads to a real socio-environmental disaster: massive pollution of hydrocarbons and plastics, illegal and unregulated fishing methods, catches of protected mammals. To put an end to this legal vacuum, we need to get 60 countries to ratify and thus allow the BBNJ Treaty to enter into force.

Protecting the ocean also means mobilising public and private funding and supporting a sustainable blue economy. To continue to benefit from the ocean's tremendous economic opportunities, we must ensure that marine resources can regenerate. In Nice, several commitments will be announced in the areas of international trade, maritime transport, tourism and investment. Finally, how do we protect what

we don't know — or not enough known? We need to increase our knowledge of the ocean and better disseminate it. Today, we are able to map the surface of the Moon or Mars, but the bottom of the oceans remains unknown. They cover 70 per cent of the Earth! Together, let's mobilise science, innovation and education to better understand the ocean and raise awareness among the general public.

In the face of accelerating climate change and the overexploitation of marine resources, the ocean is not one of many issues. That is everyone's business. The questioning of multilateralism must not make us forget our common responsibility. The ocean is a universal link, it is at the heart of our future. Together, we can make UNOC3 a major turning point for our peoples, for future generations and for our planet.

We are proud to be able to count on the Sultanate of Oman commitment to the protection of the environment and especially the oceans.

Together, we will continue this important mobilisation in Nice.



NABIL
HAJLAOUI

The author is
Ambassador of
France

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Oman players during the training session

OMAN PLAYERS FIT AND RARING TO GO

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

As the crucial AFC Asian Qualifiers — Road to 26 are approaching, Oman team players are fully prepared and highly motivated ahead of their crucial clash against Jordan on Thursday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. Sitting on ten points, Red Warriors are eyeing for a victory that would bring them level with their West Asian rivals keeping alive their hopes of automatic qualification for the 2026 Fifa World Cup. The players, under the guidance of head coach Rasheed Jaber, are fit, focused and raring to go as the intensity of the qualifiers reaches its peak.

Coach Rasheed and his technical team have maintained a highly disciplined and focused atmosphere in training sessions, pushing the players to give their utmost in pursuit of a critical three points. The squad will enter this fixture on a high note following strong performances in their recent friendlies, including a 4-1 win over Niger and a 1-0 victory against Lebanon last week.

The players are in good form physically and mentally following various warm up sessions in the last period. The coaching staff set a clear goal and the players will fight for it especially their recent positive momentum including their runner-up finish at the last Gulf Cup and registering positive results in the last two rounds of the Asian Qualifiers against South Korea and Kuwait.

On the other side, Jordan team arrived in Muscat on Sunday night and are set to begin their warm-up sessions on Monday and Tuesday, ahead of their official training on Wednesday at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex venue which will host the tight encounter. Both teams are still in the race for qualification and they are targeting for a triumph. The stage is all set for a high-stake encounter that could shape the final standings in the group. Oman fans will be hoping the Red Warriors can deliver a memorable performance and edge closer to a historic World Cup berth.

Al Zubair leads Merc 2 of N group in Jordan Rally

OMANI RALLY driver Abdullah al Zubair topped the N group in Merc 2 in Jordan International rally which was a strong and more than impressive result, achieving fifth place in the overall rally standings in his Subaru Impreza, followed directly by his teammate Zakariya al Amri. The rally, which consisted of 12 stages, between mountainous and near the Dead Sea, witnessed success in terms of organisation and participation, as 22 cars participated in various categories. Champion Abdullah al Rawahi topped the morning stages on Friday in Til Hilali, Karamah, and Baptism, but he lost the title against Nasser Al Attiyah meanwhile Abdullah al Zubair and his navigator Taha Soomar continued to dominate the Merc 2 group despite the attempts of the rest of the competitors to catch him, especially his direct competitor Zakariya al Amri and his navigator Mohammed al Mazroui and other local competitors from Jordan and Lebanon. Nevertheless, Al Amri still leads the category by 9 points

over Al Zubair, who aspires to win the title this year. Abdullah al Zubair secured the lead in his group from the day one and took it easy on himself on the second day, slowing down after securing a significant lead over the competitor chasing him. Al Amri, meanwhile, had a great race but encountered some problems with his car on the day one, which he was able to recover on the following day and gain good times. The second day of the rally, which took place in Panorama, Suwayma and Wadi Nar, in the Merc 2 group witnessed competition between colleagues Abdullah al Zubair and Zakariya al Amri to seize the category title, but Al Zubair presented a balanced and exceptional performance and implemented a clear strategy to maintain the difference between him and the rest, he was able to decide the matter in advance during the first day& 39s competition, and his strong and fast time in the group gave him the lead in the Jordan International Rally category, and he secured



Abdullah al Zubair during the race

30 points in the category in the Middle East Rally Championship after concluding his fourth round in Jordan, towards competing for the lead. The winner of the first place in the in (N) category, Abdullah al Zubair, with his navigator Taha Soomar, said that the rally was special in terms of the competition, which was fierce in many stages, but thank God

I outperformed many of the competitors who had stronger cars and in a larger category than my category, and we succeeded in achieving the goal, which was to win first place in the category to reduce the lead in the group with my colleague Zakariya al Amri, and I am happy with this, I also hope that private sector companies will support the competitors who achieve international successes

in the name of the Sultanate, especially since these sports are very expensive. I thank everyone who stood behind us in this rally and championship, the supporters, Taha Soomar's my assistants, and the technical team for the great job, it is worth mentioning that many of those witnessed and drivers at the rally asked Al Zubair to participate next year with an R5 category car, as he was one of the fastest drivers in the rally. For his part, competitor Zakariya al Amri said that the rally was difficult and arduous and he faced some problems in some stages, but he was able to overcome them and and recover and presented an ideal race despite the fierce competition, rough stages and hot weather. He added, "Thank God, we are still at the top of the Merc 2 group and we will try to maintain this lead in the upcoming rallies and win the category. I thank my navigator Mohammed al Mazroui for all the support, as well as the audience who came to support us in this rally in Jordan from Oman."

Oman Sail team heads to Greece for 49er tourney



Archive photo from the 2023 Asian Olympic Qualifier

OMAN SAIL High performance team headed to Greece for the 2025 49er European Championship 1st June 2025, Muscat — Oman Sail high performance 49er team will join 56 crews from 25 nations in Thessaloniki, Greece, for the 2025 49er European Championships, organised by the Hellenic Sailing Federation and International 49er and Nacra Class Association. The event, which also features 49erFX and Nacra 17 competition, begins on June 3 and runs through until June 8, with a practice race on June 2. Representing Oman will be Musab al Hadi and Waleed al Kindi, with three races scheduled for each day of qualifying culminating in a final series and medal race on the last day of competition. Hashim al Rashdi, Oman Sail's Head Performance Coach, said, "This is a prestigious event where we will line up against some of the most accomplished 49er sailors in the world. The qualification campaign for the Asian Games 2026 and Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games will

begin soon and events like this in the build up are valuable experience to make sure our preparations are on track and our sailors realise the levels they need to reach. We are looking forward to testing ourselves against such a diverse fleet in Greece and progressing throughout the year." Musab al Hadi added, "We are incredibly focused and determined to achieve our ultimate goal of qualifying for the Olympic Games and representing the nation in the sailing competition.

Together with Waleed al Kindi, we have been working on our tactical and technical approach to racing, and we are both looking ahead to improving on the water this season. The 49er European Championship is the first step on what we hope will be a successful journey." The team will be coached during the Championship by experienced Polish coach Jacek Nowak.

A former Polish national 49er team sailor himself, Nowak has also gained experience on board the Poland team in the Star Sailors League 2023 and

on board the victorious Cape31 Team 'Aspire'. He has been coach of the Finnish national 49er team and guided a variety of crews through European and World Championship campaigns. Jacek Nowak commented, "The tactical and technical aspect of the championship is vital to the long-term success of Oman's 49er team. The crew need to be able to anticipate and adapt to changing conditions and situations to score points and secure a place in the final series. We have been working on tactics and how to overcome challenges on the water, stay focused and make the correct choice under pressure. This ability will be important in Greece but also extends beyond a single event to build a winning mentality." After the conclusion of the 49er European Championship in Greece, the team will then return to Oman before departing for Germany to take part in Kieler Woche from June 21-25. The team will also be competing at the 49er World Championship in Italy from October 7-13, and the Asian Sailing Championship in November.

SHORTTAKES



Tommy Paul in action during his 4th round match.

PAUL REACHES FRENCH OPEN QUARTERS

PARIS: World number 12 Tommy Paul blitzed Australian Alexei Popyrin 6-3 6-3 6-3 on Sunday to become the first American male player to reach the French Open quarter-finals in 22 years.

Paul matched Andre Agassi's run from 2003 after Americans on Saturday equalled a 40-year-old record with five women and three men in round four of the clay court Grand Slam.

Paul also became the only active American player to reach the last eight on all three surfaces after his 2023 Australian Open semi-final and 2024 Wimbledon quarter-final runs.

"I am very happy to get a straight sets win. I have been playing some very long matches so that felt really good," Paul, who spent almost 11 hours on court in his previous three rounds, which included two five-setters, said in a post-match interview.

"Shorter matches like this help a lot." The 28-year-old found himself a break down after the first game, before immediately resetting the match's trajectory, breaking straight back to correct his early setback. Popyrin, a former junior champion in Paris like Paul, had not lost a set in his run to the fourth round but found himself a set down when he was broken again, with Paul's superior movement and clinical shot-making handing him the first set. The Australian, constantly turning to his box to express his frustration, was clearly rattled with Paul attacking at every chance and with Popyrin's second serve proving a weakness.

He was broken again at the start of the second set with Paul now firing on all cylinders and hitting winners at will.

The American added another break to land the set before going 3-0 up in the third and finishing off his 25th-seeded opponent in less than two hours.

He will now face either second seed and defending champion Carlos Alcaraz or fellow American Ben Shelton. — Reuters



Pascal Siakam (43) shoots the ball against New York Knicks centre Mitchell Robinson (23). — Reuters

Pacers defeat Knicks to reach first NBA Finals

THE INDIANA PACERS, fuelled by 31 points from Pascal Siakam and a 21-point double-double from Tyrese Haliburton, beat the New York Knicks 125-108 on Saturday to reach the NBA Finals for the first time since 2000. The Pacers used a big third quarter to break open a close game and kept the pressure on in the fourth period to win the best-of-seven Eastern Conference finals 4-2.

They reached the championship series for the second time in franchise history, and will be chasing their first title when the Finals open in Oklahoma City on Thursday.

Haliburton said the series triumph was especially sweet after the Pacers were swept in the conference finals last season by eventual champions Boston.

"You know, we got to the same spot last year, fell short and we just worked our tails off as a group to get back here," he said. "It's been a bumpy road with our start and (I'm) just really proud of the resilience of this group."

He was already looking ahead to the formidable challenge of the Thunder, who led the league with 68 regular season wins and saw star Shai Gilgeous-Alexander named Most Valuable Player.

"It's an exciting time, but we understand that there's a long road ahead, a lot more work to do," Haliburton said. "We've got four more to go."

New York had fended off elimination with a dominant defensive display in game five, but couldn't send the series to a decisive game seven.

Instead the Knicks, who earned their two NBA titles in 1970 and 1973, remain in search of their first trip to the Finals since 1999.

Siakam, who won a title with Toronto in 2019, was named MVP of the series, bouncing back after a disappointing outing in game five, when the Knicks used a dominating defensive effort to extend the series.

"After a bad game five, we wanted to bounce back," said Siakam, who added five rebounds and three blocked shots on Saturday.

"And I have 100 per cent belief in my teammates. Whenever we're down, we always find a way — and we did that tonight."

Haliburton shook off early shooting struggles to finish with 21, adding 13 assists to key an offensive effort that saw seven Pacers players score in double figures.

PACERS RESPOND

That included 18 off the bench from Obi Toppin and 11 from backup Thomas Bryant as the Pacers reserves outscored the Knicks reserves 38-20.

"I'm really proud of this group," Haliburton said. "We had a tough showing last game as a group. We wanted to respond."

"We did a great job of that," he added. "I'm just so proud of this group and I don't even have words right now."

OG Anunoby led the Knicks with 24 points. Karl-Anthony Towns added 22 points and 14 rebounds and Jalen Brunson scored 19 points and handed out seven assists.

But Indiana emerged from a fast-paced first quarter that featured five lead changes with a one-point lead and never trailed again, harrying New York into 18 turnovers that led to 34 Pacers points.

Haliburton, scoreless in the first quarter, warmed up with eight points in the second, including a thunderous dunk after teammate Andrew Nembhard's steal — one of 10 of New York's first-half turnovers.

Nembhard came up with another steal from Brunson and fed Siakam for a layup to push Indiana's lead to six points before Anunoby drilled a basket in the final second of the first half to cut the Knicks' deficit to 58-54 at the break. The Pacers opened the third quarter on a 9-0 run and pushed their lead to 15 points, 78-63, on back-to-back three-pointers from Nembhard and Bryant, sending the crowd at Gainbridge Fieldhouse into a frenzy. The Knicks quickly trimmed the deficit to seven only for the Pacers to pull away and take a 92-77 lead into the fourth quarter. Haliburton, who had just 10 points through the first three quarters, added 11 in the final frame as the Pacers romped home. — AFP

Scheffler grabs lead at PGA Memorial Tournament

WASHINGTON: World number one Scottie Scheffler conjured a late birdie blitz to fire a four-under-par 68 and grab a one-shot lead after the third round at the PGA Tour's Memorial Tournament in Dublin, Ohio on Saturday.

Scheffler, bidding to successfully defend his crown at Muirfield Village, rattled in four birdies in the final five holes to drop to eight under, one ahead of overnight leader Ben Griffin, who stumbled with an even-par 72.

"I don't know what the scoring average was today, but I was definitely proud of the way I finished and it was really challenging," Scheffler said afterward. "Through 13 holes I felt like I was playing really good and I was only even par. Just a hard golf course." Three-time major champion Scheffler,

who started the day three off the pace, was forced to bide his time after opening his round with 13 pars.

But the 28-year-old American got things going on the par-four 14th, draining a 10-foot birdie putt before making a birdie four on the par-five 15th, when his third shot from the edge of the green left him with a tap-in.

A par on 16 left him at two under for the day but Scheffler was soon on the move at the par-four 17th, when he stuck his approach to eight feet and then rolled in the birdie putt.

Another birdie on the 18th, with Scheffler draining a 14-foot birdie putt, thrust him into a share of the lead alongside Griffin. At that stage, Griffin looked to have overcome the worst of a roller coaster round to hang



Scottie Scheffler plays his shot from the second tee. — Reuters

on to the lead. The in-form American, chasing his third PGA Tour win of the year, had got off to a smooth start after a trio of early birdies on the sixth, seventh and eighth holes. But four straight bogeys derailed his progress and allowed the chasing pack to close. Griffin steadied the ship with back-to-back birdies on 14 and 15 leaving him on 10 under, five clear of the field.

NO LEAD SAFE

Yet Scheffler's late charge narrowed the deficit and ensured Griffin headed to the 18th with a share of the lead.

He looked to have done enough to finish the day alongside Scheffler when his third shot from the greenside rough left him with a five-footer to par.

But Griffin's short putt rolled

wide for bogey, leaving him with the daunting task of having to chase Scheffler in Sunday's final round.

"I felt like I was starting to separate myself midway through and then kind of got to some tough holes and didn't execute very well," Griffin said. "You can do that out here. Tomorrow I've got to clean up some of those holes, make sure I stay aggressive." Scheffler, meanwhile, said he had not panicked after seeing Griffin go five shots clear at 10 under earlier in the round.

"No lead's safe around this place," Scheffler said. "I knew if I kept going and played a decent round, I would be in somewhat of a position to chase him down tomorrow." Canada's Nick Taylor is third on the leaderboard on five under, three behind Scheffler, following a two-over-par 74. — AFP

SPORTS

PSG blank Inter 5-0 to win 1st CL title

AFTER ALMOST 15 YEARS of huge investment, frequent disappointment and occasional humiliation, Paris Saint-Germain got their hands on the UEFA Champions League trophy on Saturday, allowing their Qatari owners to bask in the glory of an emphatic triumph.

PSG could not win European football's biggest prize in previous seasons with Zlatan Ibrahimovic, or later with Neymar and Kylian Mbappe, and even after that when they added Lionel Messi to the mix. But they have done it now after shifting the focus away from signing glamorous superstars and letting a brilliant coach in Luis Enrique work with a hungry, dynamic young team.

PSG have been Europe's best side in 2025, but the display against Inter Milan in Munich topped it all as they romped to a 5-0 victory, the biggest win in the final in the competition's history. It was ultimately worth the long wait for the Gulf owners who arrived in 2011 when Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) bought an ailing club.

Qatar got the perfect World Cup final in 2022, when Messi's Argentina beat Mbappe's France on an epic night in Doha, and now Qatari-owned PSG have the most stunning Champions League final win. It is easy to forget now, but they lost three of their first five games in the tournament this season.

"We had a difficult start. Everyone criticised us and doubted us. Lots of people didn't believe in our project," PSG president Nasser al Khelaifi told broadcaster Canal Plus.

"The objective now is to win again. It has taken 14 years of hard work but we are building something for the future."

Khelaifi, who is close to Qatar's ruler and holds several influential positions in football including as chairman of the European Club Association, was beaming as he celebrated with the trophy.

It is just the second time any French club has won it after



PSG players celebrate with the Champions League trophy. — Reuters

Marseille in 1993. It surely won't take over 30 years for PSG to win another Champions League, especially as this thrilling young side should now stay together for a long time.

The average age of their starting line-up on Saturday was under 25 and their oldest player is Marquinhos at 31 — he has been there since 2013.

"I have suffered and I have grown with this team," the Brazilian told broadcaster M6.

"My thoughts are with all the players who played here but were not able to win it."

It has required 14 years, eight coaches, and over two billion euros (\$2.27 billion) spent on transfer fees for QSI to get here.

In the last 12 campaigns before this season, PSG reached one final, losing to Bayern Munich in Lisbon in 2020.

There were two semi-final defeats, but there have also been humiliating collapses in the last 16 against Barcelona in 2017, Manchester United in 2019 and Real Madrid in 2022. "I said when I came in that the objective was to win important trophies, and the only one missing was the Champions League," said Luis Enrique, appointed in 2023.

CLUB WORLD CUP THE NEXT TARGET

After Abu Dhabi-owned Manchester City's victory two years ago, also against Inter, it is another triumph

for a club with mega-rich Gulf owners.

PSG's victory was always only a matter of time. Their revenue last year of just over 800 million euros made them the third-richest club in analysts Deloitte's Football Money League. They sat behind only Real and City, and just ahead of traditional European aristocrats United, Bayern and Barcelona.

PSG's last reported annual wage bill was close to double Inter's entire revenues.

The difference with past years is that they are now spending the money more intelligently, on the likes of Saturday's two-goal hero Desire Doue, Joao Neves and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia. Luis Enrique

and sporting director Luis Campos recently signed new contracts with the club who also won all three available titles in France this season. PSG will now take away more than 100 million euros just in prize money from winning the Champions League, and there is the chance for more glory and riches as they head to the highly lucrative Fifa Club World Cup in the USA. Qatar-owned PSG's quest for domination will not stop with Europe.

"I think it is an incredible competition," said Luis Enrique, whose side face Atletico Madrid in Los Angeles in two weeks' time.

"Our aim is to be competitive and to try to win a fifth trophy of the season." — AFP

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Relying on the public sector as the primary source of employment is no longer feasible: IMF report.

220,000 NEW OMANI JOBS REQUIRED BY 2030 TO MEET GROWTH TARGETS: IMF

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

THE OMANI economy must generate over 220 thousand jobs for its national workforce by 2032 to meet the country's national growth demands, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The figure is based on projections that 550,000 nationals will enter working age within the next year, with participation rates expected to remain around 67%.

Published in the IMF's Selected Issues Paper, "Labour Market Dynamics in Oman," April 2025, the report underscores that relying on the public sector as the primary source of employment is no longer feasible amidst efforts to ensure medium-term fiscal sustainability and reducing reliance on hydrocarbon revenues.

According to the report, while 56% of the Omani workforce is in the private sector, the public sector remains a favorable destination for Omanis due to job security, higher compensation, and more relaxed work arrangement.

The private sector, however, remains dominated by expatriates, which make up 86% of the workforce with wages significantly lower on average, particularly in low- and medium-skilled jobs, creating a wage disparity that deters private firms from hiring nationals without government intervention.

Furthermore, the IMF notes that Oman's education system, despite improvements, is not sufficiently aligned with the needs of a diversifying economy, causing a discrepancy in the skills required by the private sector and those available in the labour market.

According to the report, a large share of educational paths chosen by Omanis are still tilted towards humanities and business administration rather than science, engineering, and technology fields. Additionally, enrollment rates in vocational education represents less than 2% of enrollment in higher education.

Another identified challenge is the female labour participation rate which stands at 32%, in comparison to 89% for men. Omani women hold fewer senior and managerial roles, which could discourage them further from entering the labor market, despite higher academic performance among women, the report notes.

Finally, another key restraint to the labour market is limited mobility, especially for expatriate workers. Until recently, labour regulations required expatriates to remain with their initial employer for 12 months before qualifying for an unconditional job transfer. This restriction indirectly encouraged firms to favour expatriates over nationals, as their limited bargaining power contributed to lower wage expectations. In turn, this dynamic reduced the attractiveness of private sector roles for low-skilled Omanis.

The IMF hailed the new Social Protection and Labour Laws as a step in the right direction toward addressing longstanding challenges in the Omani labour market, while also recommending complementary policies to amplify their impact.

Oman posts RO 540m surplus on oil gains

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

OMAN posted a fiscal surplus of RO 540 million at the close of 2024, outperforming initial expectations and reversing a projected deficit of RO 640 million. The stronger-than-anticipated outcome was fuelled by robust oil revenues and disciplined expenditure, reinforcing the Sultanate's progress towards fiscal sustainability under Oman Vision 2040.

Citing the audited financial performance of the State General Budget for 2024, the Ministry of Finance noted that total state revenues reached RO 12.78 billion, representing a 16 per cent increase over the budgeted RO 11.01 billion.

The uptick was largely attributed to favourable oil market dynamics. Oman's average oil price stood at USD 82 per barrel—well above the assumed USD 60—adding significant upside despite a decline in production volumes.

Daily output averaged 997,000 barrels, compared to the budgeted 1.031 million barrels per day, reflecting Oman's continued adherence to voluntary OPEC+ cuts.

Oil revenues rose by 26 per cent year-on-year to RO 7.45 billion, while gas revenues



Oil revenues rose by 26 per cent to RO 7.45 billion, while gas revenues climbed to RO 1.82 billion, marking a 16 per cent gain from budget estimates.

climbed to RO 1.82 billion, marking a 16 per cent gain from budget estimates. Non-oil revenues remained broadly stable at RO 3.51 billion, marginally below expectations.

On the spending side, total public expenditure reached RO 12.24 billion, exceeding the original allocation of RO 11.65 billion by five per cent.

The rise in expenditure was driven primarily by a surge in development spending, which grew by 31 per cent to RO 1.5 billion.

Contributions and other payments increased 14 per

cent to RO 2.2 billion, while current expenditure was maintained within target, declining slightly to RO 8.53 billion.

The Ministry of Finance stated that the increase in development spending reflects the government's ongoing efforts to support infrastructure expansion, social protection, and economic diversification.

Additional spending was directed towards accelerating project delivery, enhancing public services, and stimulating domestic growth—all core objectives under Oman

Vision 2040. In parallel with its revenue performance, Oman made further progress on debt reduction. More than RO 660 million in public debt repayments were made during the year, bringing total outstanding debt down to approximately RO 14.6 billion.

Additionally, over RO 1.6 billion in private sector obligations were fully settled through the automated financial cycle system, helping improve liquidity and bolster confidence among contractors and service providers.

The Ministry affirmed its commitment to responsible fiscal management and stated that the 2024 performance demonstrates the effectiveness of its macro-fiscal strategy.

The combination of higher revenues, contained spending, and debt reduction enhances Oman's credit outlook and positions the economy for greater resilience in the years ahead.

As oil markets stabilise and domestic reforms advance, Oman's ability to generate fiscal space while investing in development priorities signals growing alignment with its long-term transformation goals.

The 2024 budget execution stands as a key milestone in the country's journey towards balanced growth and economic diversification.

EDO seeks partners to support energy transition, ICV

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

AN OMANI delegation comprising officials from Energy Development Oman (EDO), the wholly government-owned energy sector holding company, and the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, has embarked on a visit to Japan to meet with executives of two major conglomerates – Sumitomo Corporation and Nippon Steel.

EDO said in a post on Sunday that the visit is part of efforts to efforts to “develop strategic partnerships and enhance the localization of manufacturing in the energy sector”. Affiliated to the Ministry of Finance, EDO owns 60 per cent of the Block 6 concession operated by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), 100 per cent of Block 6's non-associated gas concession, and 100 per cent of Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom), the master-planner of the Sultanate's green hydrogen industry.

Significantly, discussions with the Japanese corporations encompass a wide range of objectives relevant to, among other areas, the energy transition, local manufacturing, and national capacity building.

“The visit's agenda includes several sessions addressing advanced industries supporting the energy sector, carbon



Members of the Omani delegation pictured during their tour of a site in Japan (Credit: EDO)

capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS) technologies, as well as the development of integrated industrial parks. This visit reflects (EDO's) direction toward building a comprehensive industrial base, founded on knowledge transfer, role integration, and long-term collaboration that contributes to empowering national capabilities and enhancing the sector's readiness,” said EDO.

“During the visit, the company presented the Local Content Framework and Oman's readiness to host high-quality industrial investments, strengthening its position as a competitive hub in global energy value chains,” it further added.

Both Sumitomo Corporation and Nippon Steel are longstanding suppliers of Oil

Country Tubular Goods (OCTG) - pipes and casings used in oil and gas drilling and production operations – for Oman's hydrocarbon sector. EDO, by virtue of its majority shareholding in PDO, is one of the largest customers for OCTG hardware.

The supply arrangement with PDO dates back to around 2003 when Sumitomo Corporation, together with Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corporation (NSSMC), signed deals to provide high quality OCTG goods to Oman's national oil company. A specialized storage area for OCTGs was also established in Port of Duqm's logistics zone as part of a 'Mill to Well' model designed to optimize supply chain efficiencies linked to the supply of these pipes to PDO.

Earlier this year, EDO signed an MoU with Sumitomo Corporation Middle East to explore the localisation of OCTG manufacturing in Oman. The MoU also aimed to strengthen local manufacturing capabilities and reduce reliance on imports.

Another large consumer of OCTG is BP, which operates the tight-gas fields of Block 61. In July 2018, Nippon Steel & Sumitomo Metal Corporation forged a strategic partnership for the supply of OCTG to BP Exploration (Epsilon) Ltd of Oman (BP Oman).

ADVERTORIALS

SMOOTHJOURNEY



The teams distribute gifts to the pilgrims, including specially designed Haj bags with essential supplies, ensuring smooth travel experience.

MEETHAQ:
ENRICHING
PILGRIMS TRAVEL
EXPERIENCE TO HAJJ

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat is continuing its initiative to support pilgrims during their Hajj journey. Running until June 4, 2025, Meethaq teams will be present at Muscat International Airport and the Al-Rub’ Al-Khali Boarder with Saudi Arabia in Ibri, in partnership with Ibri Charity.

The teams will distribute gifts to the pilgrims, including specially designed Hajj bags with essential supplies, ensuring smooth travel experience.

Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager – Meethaq Personal Banking, said: “I would like to express my sincere appreciation to our valued customers and visitors for their positive feedback regarding this initiative, which reflects Meethaq’s commitment to community engagement during religious, national and social occasions.

This effort reinforces our dedication to social responsibility and community service. During the Hajj season, Meethaq is offering tailored banking services for pilgrims, including Travel Finance at a competitive profit rate and a variety of credit card benefits.”

Meethaq’s Travel Finance solution is designed to be comprehensive and customer-centric. It provides financing with convenient installment plans, competitive pricing and minimal charges.

The offering is made more accessible through strategic partnerships with top travel operators across the Sultanate of Oman.

Pensioners are also eligible to benefit from Travel Finance product by assigning their pension to Meethaq. Notably, Travel Finance offering has been developed under the principle of Sharia’a compliant Ijarah, ensuring full alignment with Islamic finance practices.

Meethaq Islamic Banking also offers a wide range of credit cards designed to meet diverse customer needs. These include Meethaq Lulu Credit Card, Visa Gold Credit Card, Visa Platinum Credit Card and Hafawa Visa Signature Credit Card. Cardholders can enjoy exclusive benefits such as airport lounge access, cashback rewards, and the flexibility of the Easy Payment Plan.

Additional features include free issuance of supplementary cards for family members, secure online shopping, global acceptance, and access to an extensive range of international privileges and discounts.

Furthermore, Meethaq has provided a package of banking facilities for companies and contractors involved in Hajj and Umrah trips, who are accredited by the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs. The initiative is designed to support their working capital needs and facilitates the purchase of buses, further enabling them to efficiently serve pilgrims during the Hajj and Umrah seasons.

Sohar
International
honoured with
three awards at
NABS 2025

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its stature as a multifaceted banking leader—defined by strong growth, purposeful innovation, and societal impact, Sohar International was honored with three prestigious accolades at the Oman Banking and Finance Awards, held during the landmark 10th edition of the New Age Banking Summit (NABS) 2025: Best Digital Transformation Initiative, Most Innovative CSR Initiative, and Best Bank – Growth.

These recognitions underscore the bank’s ability to navigate market dynamics while delivering lasting value to stakeholders and contributing to Oman’s broader



socio-economic ambitions. Abdulwahid Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer at Sohar International, stated,

“These awards are a reflection of our collective ethos, one that integrates future-forward thinking with impact-led execution. At Sohar International, we do not pursue innovation as a trend, but as a means to elevate the human experience, foster economic vitality, and create ripple effects that benefit society at large.

Whether through breakthrough technologies, performance-driven financial strategy, or inclusive social initiatives, we remain committed to being a bank that keeps pace with evolving landscapes while building a strong future for generations to come.”

Kia PV5 WAV: New era of
wheelchair accessible EV

KIA Corporation showcased the PV5 WAV (Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle) model at the Financial Times’ Future of the Car Summit in London, in collaboration with UK-based Motability Operations Ltd.

Part of Kia’s ongoing commitment and contribution to enhancing mobility for people with disabilities, the exhibition underscores the company’s leadership as a Sustainable Mobility Solutions Provider.

“The PV5 WAV is more than just a vehicle; it’s a gateway to independence and freedom for those with mobility challenges,” an official from Kia Corporation shared.

“By integrating cutting-edge Platform Beyond Vehicle (PBV) technology with thoughtful design, we are paving the way for a future where everyone can enjoy the benefits of sustainable mobility, and our partnership with Motability Operations is a testament to our commitment to making this vision a



The PV5 WAV is more than just a vehicle; it’s a gateway to independence and freedom for those with mobility challenges.

reality.” Kia’s development of a competitive electric WAV (eWAV) has aligned with the evolution of its industry-leading PBV models and comes in response to increasing worldwide demand for accessible vehicles.

Factors such as increased life expectancy and growing elderly populations are leading to a greater requirement for

WAVs, with transport operators expanding their WAV-related services and changes being made to WAV-related policies in certain markets.

With the continued growth of the sector projected to clash with the planned phasing out of ICE vehicles that would usually be converted into WAVs, the introduction of eWAV options is

of vital importance. Kia’s PV5 WAV is designed to provide freedom of movement not only for wheelchair users, but their families, caregivers and drivers as well. The vehicle will enable users to enjoy more convenient, comfortable and accessible travel while seamlessly transitioning to electric mobility. The PV5 WAV features a side-entry system that allows wheelchair users to board safely from the sidewalk. It also includes a third-row tip-up seat, enabling caregivers to assist wheelchair passengers from the side.

The model will provide easy curb-side access to enhance safety and convenience. It will also feature a quick-use, 300kg-rated wheelchair entry ramp and a specially developed wheelchair belt fastening system. Beyond hardware innovations, the PV5 WAV will also integrate necessary applications for individuals with disabilities, based on the AAOS open software platform.

SOHAR Emergency Response Organisation inaugurated

SUHAR: Under the auspices of Eng Saeed bin Hamoud bin Saeed al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communication, and Information Technology, SOHAR Port and Freezone hosted the inauguration ceremony of the SOHAR Emergency Response Organisation, a milestone that redefines industrial safety and resilience in Oman.

The SOHAR Emergency Response Organisation is a fully integrated initiative, jointly established by SOHAR Port and Freezone in close partnership with its tenant community.

Designed to serve all stakeholders, from employees and contractors to port users and visitors, this model represents a unified, community-wide approach to emergency preparedness.

Its collective nature is what sets it apart as



The SOHAR Emergency Response Organisation is a fully integrated initiative, jointly established by SOHAR Port and Freezone in close partnership with its tenant community.

a first-of-its-kind initiative in the region. Ensuring the safety of people and the protection of valuable assets are fundamental principles at SOHAR. The Emergency Response Organisation enhances risk mitigation, safeguards facilities, and ensures business continuity, directly supporting SOHAR’s mission to be a reliable, safe, and sustainable industrial hub. Al Maawali emphasised the broader significance of this achievement: “The SOHAR Emergency Response Organisation represents a critical step in aligning with Oman’s vision for resilience and sustainability. By enhancing safety standards and ensuring operational continuity, it supports not only SOHAR’s growth but also Oman’s strategic objectives in the logistics sector.”

BankDhofar provides exclusive services and benefits to support SMEs

MUSCAT: Aligned with the government’s ongoing efforts to empower small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across Oman, BankDhofar— Second-largest bank by branch network in the Sultanate of Oman— Offers exclusive benefits for SMEs, contributing towards the growth and expansion of these businesses that further support & build the local economy.

BankDhofar offers its SMEs a dedicated business account with features tailored specifically to the day-to-day needs.

These include a smart point-of-sale (POS) system to facilitate sales

transactions and boost revenue, a wage protection system that streamlines salary payments, and a remote cheque collection and deposit service that enables efficient processing of bulk cheques, offering greater flexibility to business owners. BankDhofar recently launched SME Pro innovative solutions that simplifies banking for SMEs by enabling instant registration without the need for paperwork or in-person visits. Business owners can sign up securely using a one-time password (OTP), ensuring convenience and enhanced protection. Additionally, with BankDhofar



BankDhofar offers its SMEs a dedicated business account with features tailored specifically to the day-to-day needs.

SME Pro, Business owners can benefit from a host of exclusive features designed to support their business needs. These include free transfers on the first transaction and every third transaction thereafter, applicable to both local and international transfers. Additionally, they will receive a complimentary annual checkbook, along with exemptions from service fees and annual credit card fees for the first year. SME owners will also be provided with a free direct debit card for the first year, six free Wage Protection System (WPS)

transactions, access to a smart device point-of-sale (POS) system, remote check collection services, and a range of other value-added solutions tailored to enhance operational efficiency and financial flexibility. To further support SME growth, BankDhofar introduced a suite of credit cards designed exclusively for small and medium businesses. These cards are available without the need to submit additional financial documentation, and include Mastercard Gold, Mastercard Platinum, Mastercard World, Visa Gold, Visa Signature, and Visa Infinite options.

BUSINESS

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT



This move aligns with broader efforts to integrate digital technologies, empower youth and promote alternative career paths.

OMAN ENTERS ESPORTS ARENA WITH FIRST PRO GAMING TEAM

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

Oman has taken a significant step into the fast-growing global esports industry with the launch of its first professional gaming team, marking a new chapter in the Sultanate of Oman’s digital and youth development ambitions.

The milestone was announced during a signing ceremony hosted by Nova Esports, a newly established company aiming to develop a professional and sustainable esports ecosystem in Oman. The organisation has introduced its inaugural team of competitive gamers, who are set to represent the country in regional and international tournaments.

This move aligns with broader efforts to integrate digital technologies, empower youth, and promote alternative career paths as outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

“Oman’s youth possess immense potential, and esports provides a dynamic platform for them to excel. By offering professional training, mentorship, and global exposure, we’re not just creating players, we’re shaping future leaders in the digital economy,” said Hilal al Sinani, CEO of Nova Esports.

The company’s strategy extends beyond forming a team. It also includes the development of structured training programmes, educational workshops, and competitive gaming opportunities designed to enhance transferable skills such as teamwork, discipline, strategic thinking, and resilience—traits increasingly valued in today’s tech-driven economy.

“Youth empowerment through esports—Nova Esports is more than a gaming company; it’s a movement dedicated to empowering Oman’s next generation,” said Saba al Sinani, Deputy CEO.

“Through structured training programmes, educational workshops, and competitive opportunities, Nova aims to develop professional skills, discipline, teamwork, and strategic thinking—core values of esports that translate into real-world success.”

Beyond gameplay, the initiative is envisioned as a catalyst for digital entrepreneurship. The company plans to create pathways into various roles across the esports value chain, such as shoutcasting, content creation, game development, and event management. This comprehensive approach is designed to lower barriers to entry in the digital economy and foster a pipeline of talent that can compete globally.

The organisation also aims to bridge the digital divide in Oman by offering access to modern gaming infrastructure and technical know-how. This initiative ties into national priorities such as youth engagement, digital transformation, and social innovation. In addition to team development, Nova Esports plans to host tournaments, livestreams, and interactive events, further embedding esports culture into the local community and raising awareness about its economic and developmental potential.

EARLY REBOUND

US consumers pulling back spending



US consumer spending increased marginally in April, with households opting to boost savings amid mounting economic uncertainty because of a constantly changing tariff landscape.

The report from the Commerce Department on Friday suggested the economy struggled to rebound early in the second quarter after contracting in the January-March quarter for the first time in three years. — Reuters

SWEEPING EFFECT

S Korea exports fall as tariffs hit shipments



South Korea’s exports fell in May for the first time in four months, as shipments to the United States and China dropped on global trade conflict triggered by US President Donald Trump’s sweeping tariffs.

Exports from Asia’s fourth-largest economy, an early bellwether for global trade, declined 1.3% from the same month last year to \$57.27 billion, data showed on Sunday. — Reuters

RAISING PROSPECT

EU to countermeasure steel tariffs hike



The European Commission said on Saturday that Europe was prepared to retaliate against President Donald Trump’s plan to double tariffs on imported steel and aluminium.

Trump’s announcement intensifies his global trade war and came just hours after he accused China of violating an agreement with the US to mutually roll back levies and trade restrictions for critical minerals. — Reuters

CEO TALK

Decarbonising the planet, one rock at a time

WALAA HAMDAN & JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 1

In the escalating global battle against climate change, few figures personify purpose-driven entrepreneurship as compellingly as Talal Hasan, Founder and CEO of Omani climate-tech start-up 44.01. At the heart of his venture lies a deceptively simple yet world-changing mission: to remove as much carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere as possible — permanently, affordably, and at scale.

Hasan’s personal and professional transformation began not in a laboratory, but with a headline in 2018 that revealed the grim reality that Oman’s seas contained the world’s largest known ocean “dead zone” — a vast, oxygen-depleted area where marine life could no longer survive.

At the time, Hasan was working in venture capital at IDO Investments, backing high-growth tech and energy start-ups.

But that sobering report shifted his trajectory entirely. “I grew up as an environmentalist,” he recalled at a recent Start-up Grind Muscat event, hosted by Walaa Hamdan.

That revelation about Oman’s marine life spurred deep research into climate science, eventually leading him to carbon capture — and more importantly, carbon storage, the Achilles’ heel of many climate solutions. “There was all this talk about capturing carbon, but no one was asking where to put it,” he explained.

His answer? Mineralisation — a natural process that turns



Talal Hasan (2nd right), Founder & CEO of Omani climate-tech start-up 44.01.

captured CO₂ into rock by injecting it into peridotite-rich formations, which are abundant in Oman. This process offered the promise of permanent, verifiable CO₂ removal. That idea crystallised into 44.01, named after the molecular weight of CO₂.

Yet, moving from idea to implementation wasn’t easy. Hasan left behind a prestigious, well-paid role in government — a “very comfortable” position, he admitted. “My own family thought I’d gone crazy,” he joked. “But if you really believe in what you’re doing... I just went for it.”

The early days were lean and uncertain. “We didn’t even know what kind of team we needed,” he admitted. But he knew people were everything.

Leveraging his network, he brought in a renowned carbon mineralisation scientist, a trusted colleague from IDO, and even interns from IDO programmes. Each person was chosen not just for technical skill, but for cultural fit. “Spend time on culture,” he emphasised. “Spend a lot of time on it.”

At 44.01, team culture is

intentional. They hold annual offsites, empower individuals to lead and foster what Hasan calls a “culture of thinking big.” As he put it, “If you develop that culture of punching big, of being ambitious, and you get everyone in the team thinking like that, it starts to drive itself.”

One of the company’s first major hurdles was securing regulatory approval. “Our first step was: Can we get the permit?” Hasan said.

After months of pushing, they earned the world’s first permit to mineralise CO₂ in this way — a milestone that validated their method and opened the door to commercial projects.

SCALING THE VISION

Partnerships have been vital to scaling the vision. Early on, Hasan found himself navigating regulatory minefields, bringing six different government agencies to the same table — many of them meeting each other for the first time. “If you can get more people to collaborate and get them in a room together, the sky’s the limit,” he said.

OMAN-IRAN AGREEMENT TO BOOST TRADE AND INVESTMENT

MUSCAT: A new Trade Preferences Agreement between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran is set to enhance economic cooperation and deepen the commercial partnership between the two countries.

The agreement aims to facilitate the flow of goods by reducing or eliminating customs duties on a number of agreed-upon products, while also simplifying trade procedures. This is expected to stimulate industrial activity, expand investment opportunities, and increase the overall volume of bilateral trade.

Dr Saleh bin Saeed Masan, Under-Secretary for Commerce and Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, described the agreement as the result of a lengthy process of coordination and negotiation guided by the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

He emphasised that the agreement reflects



DR SALEH BIN SAID MASAN
Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry.

Ministry, confirmed that the agreement was drafted in alignment with both domestic legislation and international treaties to

a careful balancing of national interests and provides a supportive environment for trade growth. Dr Masan noted that it is expected to contribute significantly to the growth of national exports, strengthen supply chains, and provide competitive production inputs to local industries.

Supporting this view, Khamis bin Abdullah al Farsi, Advisor for Legal Affairs at the Ministry, confirmed that the agreement was drafted in alignment with both domestic legislation and international treaties to

which Oman is a party.

He stressed that the agreement does not conflict with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Economic Agreement and was designed to safeguard national security and economic interests.

Al Farsi explained that the drafting process involved extensive coordination with various government agencies, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economy, and the Royal Oman Police’s Directorate General of Customs.

The final agreement includes provisions for the reduction of customs tariffs on a broad range of goods, along with mechanisms to ensure fair competition and resolve any disputes that may arise. The agreement is expected to open new avenues for businesses and investors in both countries, support the diversification of Oman’s trade partners, and enhance access to markets across the region. — ONA

OPINION

A trove of transformative technologies: Industry 4.0



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat.

THE HUMAN RACE has progressed through a series of industrial revolutions. It started with the first industrial revolution that brought in steam and mechanization in the 18th century, followed by the rise of electricity in the second industrial revolution. The world experienced digitalization in the 70s during the third industrial revolution. Now we are experiencing the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution.

The fourth industrial revolution has transformed how we think, work, behave, interact, and perceive the world. It is a fusion of physical, biological, and digital systems.

The dominant technologies of the industrial revolution are artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, augmented reality (AR), Internet of Things (IoT), and 3D printing. It has also empowered businesses with real-time data exchange and intelligent automation across industries.

Industry 4.0 promises transformative benefits across sectors, such as enhanced productivity and customization, innovation and entrepreneurship, healthcare advancements, educational opportunities, sustainability, and the creation of new business models.

Despite its promise, Industry 4.0 introduces significant risks: employment disruption, income inequality, privacy and security, trust and social cohesion, and global inequality. The relevance of Industry 4.0 comes with a multiplier effect. With the extensive growth and increased usage of AI

across business verticals and industries, the integration of AI with other technology tools has enhanced value creation across sectors. Today, AI has become the driving engine of Industry 4.0.

Businesses have leveraged the integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning to predict and prevent machine failures, optimize production and supply chains, enhance product quality and customization, and ensure energy efficiency and sustainability.

The indelible mark of Industry 4.0 is the ability of machines to process vast amounts of real-time data by using advanced computation processes to provide immediate responses to businesses and industries, where split-second decisions can drive significant improvements in safety, productivity, and competitiveness.

Some aspects of Industry 4.0, which are less known, are the environmental paradox. For instance, it helps optimize resources, reduces energy use, and accelerates electronic waste production.

The rapid obsolescence of smart devices at a quicker pace than the evolution of e-waste management strategies is causing environmental damage.

Industry 4.0 enables the deployment of “smart dust”—tiny, networked sensors that can monitor everything from factory floors to supply chains. While this improves efficiency, it raises concerns about pervasive surveillance and privacy, especially as these sensors become smaller, cheaper, and more

The fourth industrial revolution has transformed how we think, work, behave, interact and perceive the world. It is a fusion of physical, biological and digital systems.

widespread. Industry 4.0 adoption has exacerbated the digital divide, as many small and medium enterprises across the globe lag in adopting these technologies.

In some countries, less than 20% of SME's are implementing the technologies of industry 4.0, and they highlight the significance of the digital divide and fear that this divide could widen economic inequality.

Another capability of Industry 4.0 is to enable businesses to adopt mass customization, which refers to the ability to generate and create highly individualized products. This could further develop problems related to supply chain complexity, inventory management issues, and increased costs.

Rather than being a technological shift, the fourth industrial revolution is transforming societies. If governments, professionals, industry, and academia do not distribute benefits inclusively and address issues like ethical governance and cybersecurity, the world could experience a global dilemma.

History is witness to the reshaping of societies of previous revolutions, and the fourth industrial revolution also presents both unprecedented opportunities and formidable challenges for the future.

The indelible mark of Industry 4.0 is the rise of a tectonic shift in the conceptualization, creation, production, and distribution of products and services that are technology-enabled in every process and operation to scale to new heights of efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity.

CHINA’S STOCK MARKET FAVOURS FOXES OVER HEDGEHOGS

EDWARD CHANCELLOR

“The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” The famous adage of the ancient Greek poet Archilochus is reflected in investors’ deeply contrasting attitudes towards China’s stock market.

Over the past year, the foxes, who have a trading mentality, have been riding a rally in Chinese equities. Hedgehogs have stayed away. The one thing they know is that the People’s Republic is no place for long-term investors.

Over the past decade, US stocks have trounced Chinese equities. That order has reversed this year. Since the beginning of January, the S&P 500 Index is basically flat while the MSCI China Index, which includes mainland companies listed in Hong Kong and New York, has climbed over 10%.

On the surface there’s plenty for investors to get excited about. Chinese companies remain ultracompetitive, as evidenced by the country’s massive trade surplus.

The People’s Republic boasts several world-class firms, including tech giant Tencent and carmaker BYD. It also dominates cutting-edge technologies from electric vehicles to battery storage.

Viewed over a longer period, Chinese equities have profoundly disappointed. Since the re-establishment of the country’s stock market in the early 1990s, they have returned a mere 3.3% a year after inflation, according to UBS.

That’s just half the average long run historic return of the US stock market, and in line with the return on Chinese bonds. The country’s stocks look relatively cheap at 15 times cyclically adjusted earnings, less than half the level of their US counterparts. But Chinese equities traded at a similar valuation 10 years ago.

What explains the systematically low returns from Chinese stocks? In his recently published book “The Making of Modern Corporate Finance”, the author and consultant Donald Chew argues that China has adopted the form of Western financial practices - stock exchanges, regulators, brokers, and auditors - but not their substance. Chinese companies and investors operate without the strict rule of law or strong property rights.

Beijing views the stock market primarily as a place to raise cheap capital rather than reward those who provide it, says Chew. There’s no market for corporate control in China. Minority shareholders have little influence.

Listed Chinese companies have low profit margins and sluggish asset turnover. Over the past decade, their returns on equity have fallen from 10% to 6%, according to Gillem Tulloch, founder of Hong-Kong based GMT Research. — Reuters

Firms shed more jobs as tax rises start to hurt

EMPLOYMENT LEVELS in the UK deteriorated considerably by the end of the first quarter, official data has suggested, in signs that Chancellor Rachel Reeves £20 billion tax raid on employers has squeezed firms’ profits.

Figures released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) revealed that the number of pay-rolled employees fell by 53,000 over the first three months of 2025.

The early estimate of payrolled employees for April showed a decrease by 33,000. Signs that inflation may remain sticky in the months ahead were also represented by high levels of annual pay growth, which reached 5.6 per cent in the three months to March.

It could increase challenges for interest rate-setters at the Bank of England though wage growth in the three months to March was slightly lower than the 5.7 per cent figures pencilled in by Bloomberg, which polled several economists in the lead-up to the release.

It also came in below recent figures showing wage growth was 5.9 per cent in the three months to February. Total pay growth, which includes bonuses, was 5.5 per cent between January and March while unemployment edged up to 4.5 per cent.

“Wage growth slowed slightly in the latest period but remains relatively strong, with public and private sectors now showing little difference,” Liz McKeown, director of economic statistics at the ONS said.

“The broader picture continues to be of the labour market cooling, with the number of payroll falling in the first quarter of the year. The number of job vacancies has also fallen again, with the rate of decline increasing in the last few months.”

Institute of Directors policy advisor Alex Hall-Chen said the figures showed the government needed to take “urgent action” on improving employment levels.



An employee arranges produce inside a supermarket in Richmond, west London, Britain. Image for illustration only. — Reuters



ANDY JALIL

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

“The business case for hiring has been weakened by a perfect storm of (April’s) increased employer national insurance contributions (NIC’s) and above-inflation increases to the minimum wage, alongside a wave of measures in the Employment Rights Bill which will make hiring riskier and costlier,” Hall-Chen said.

A poll of 31 major retailers has found the Employment Rights Bill, currently still going through parliament, will lead to early job cuts and price rises, in the latest sign the government’s legislative agenda risks harming economic growth.

The bill introduces sweeping changes to zero-hours contracts, sick pay, leave, flexible working and dismissal, and is set to pile extra costs on employers.

The retail sector is already facing significant pressures from high taxes in addition to NIC’s which is stifling employment and undermining investment. The British Retail Consortium has now found that major retailers are increasingly concerned about

the hits they will suffer from the government’s Deputy Leader Angela Rayner’s workers’ rights reforms.

Seven in 10 HR directors at big retailers believe that the workers’ rights reforms will have a negative impact on their businesses, according to BRC’s survey, highlighting the widespread pessimism about the damage the bill could do in its current form.

More than half of respondents also said that the Employment Rights Bill would lead to a reduction in staff members while 61 per cent said it would “reduce flexibility” in job offerings.

The 31 retailers surveyed employ some 500,000 people, the BRC said. Among the proposed changes to employment rights are outlawing ‘exploitative’ zero-hours contracts and providing guaranteed hours. The BRC said they would limit the number of part-time job offerings which comprise half the sector’s workforce.

The BRC’s chief executive, Helen Dickenson, warned that the changes to the employment rights risked “putting retail job

numbers further into reverse.” She added: “Those in charge of retail hiring are clear: unless amended, the bill will make it even harder to keep and create jobs and reduce the flexibility that defines many existing retail roles.”

The BRC also warned consumers face paying more for items at high street shops as most HR directors said the cost of the bill would have a knock-on effect on the price of goods.

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ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

HOW THE OMAN PERFUME SHOW IS THE ULTIMATE INDUSTRY INCUBATOR₂₀

MUSIC

‘My greatest dream’ - Taylor Swift buys back rights to old music



POP SENSATION Taylor Swift, who was locked in a feud with record executives since 2019 over ownership of her music, has bought back the rights to her entire back catalogue, she said on Friday.

“All of the music I’ve ever made... now belongs... to me,” she wrote on her website, after years of disputes over her first six albums, a number of which she rerecorded to create copies she owns herself.

“To say this is my greatest dream come true is actually being pretty reserved about it,” she wrote in the letter to her devoted followers.

“To my fans, you know how important this has been to me — so much so that I meticulously re-recorded and released four of my albums, calling them Taylor’s Version.”

Those records included the award-winning “Reputation” and “Taylor Swift.”

Swift bought back her masters from Shamrock Capital, an LA investment firm, for an undisclosed amount.

The re-recording power move came in the wake of public sparring with industry mogul Scooter Braun, her one-time manager whose company had purchased her previous label and gained a majority stake in her early work.

He later sold Swift’s master rights to the private equity company.

In 2019, Taylor Swift expressed her frustration, asserting that artists should own their work.

Renowned for advocating artists’ rights, she built her brand around this principle. Swift’s fight to regain control of her masters surpasses many, including Prince, George Michael, Jay-Z and Kanye West, who also sought to control their recordings.

Her nearly two-year, \$2 billion Eras tour shattered records, helping offset her catalogue’s purchase costs. Spanning 149 shows worldwide, her performances drew millions of fans worldwide. Swift noted that her ongoing battle has sparked vital industry conversations, emphasising how artists’ ownership is crucial for creative freedom. — AFP

Q U I C K F E A T U R E S



LIFESTYLE

Youth from across Iraq and several European countries take part in the Oceanic Avalanche Electronic Music Festival on top of the Haibat Sultan Mountain in the town of Koye (Koysinjaq), east of Arbil, northern Iraq. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

South Korean actor Lee Byung Hun attends “Netflix TUDUM 2025: The Live Event” at the Kia Forum in Inglewood, California. — AFP



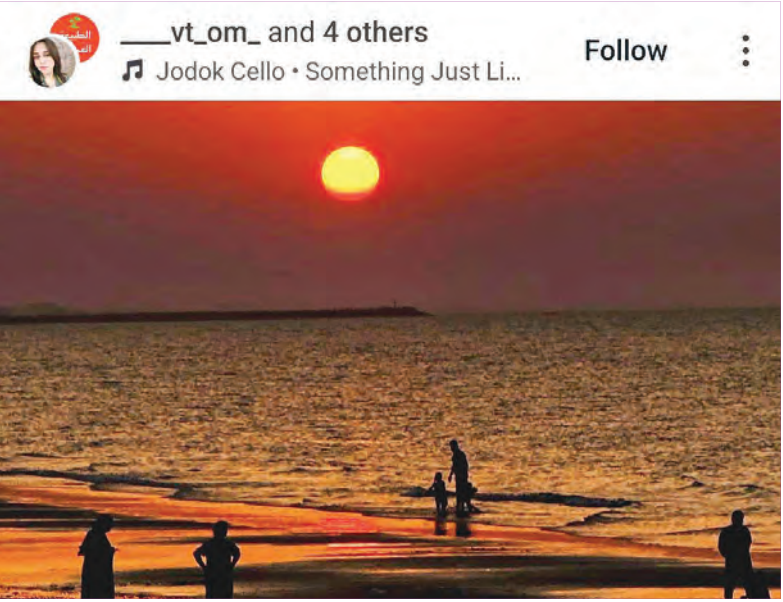
FESTIVAL

A dog sculpture titled “Sumpfdackel” made of daffodil flowers is pictured during the Daffodil Festival (Narzissenfest) in Altaussee, Austria. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Banksy reveals lighthouse image in undisclosed location



BANKSY HAS put an image of a lighthouse and the words “I want to be what you see in me” in an undisclosed location.

The image on his Instagram has two older people walking their two dogs near the artwork, which is in black and white with the lighthouse tower shining outwards.

Another picture shows a blurred person riding a scooter and a graffiti tag close by the artwork.

The Bristol graffiti artist has seen his works fetch millions at auction, and led to speculation over his identity.

The latest work, revealed on Thursday, has a tag that seems to say “Yaze,” which is the mark used by Canadian graffiti artist Yaze, who also goes by the name Marco The Polo and cites Banksy as an inspiration.

The quote used by Banksy could also have been taken from a song by Tennessee-based country band Lonestar,

called “Softly,” which features the lyric: “I want to be what you see in me. I want to love you the way that you love me.”

Online speculation has claimed that the new piece could be in French city Marseille, a location where French street artist Invader has brought his pixelated style.

Last year, London saw a swathe of animal-themed Banksy works including a rhino seemingly mounting a silver Nissan Micra, two elephant silhouettes with their trunks stretched out towards each other, and three monkeys that looked as though they were swinging on a bridge.

Since putting one of a gorilla lifting the shutter at London Zoo, Banksy has also posted another image, of a Madonna with baby Jesus and what looks like a bullet hole.

The lighthouse is his latest image. — PA Media/dpa



‘Moving forward’: Gen-Z farmer growing Fukushima kiwis



A SHORT drive from the Fukushima nuclear disaster site, novice farmer Takuya Haraguchi tends to his kiwi saplings under the spring sunshine, bringing life back to a former no-go zone.

Haraguchi was 11 years old when Japan’s strongest earthquake on record struck in March 2011, unleashing a tsunami that left 18,500 people dead or missing.

The wall of water crashed into the Fukushima nuclear plant on the northeast coast, causing a devastating meltdown.

At the time, the bookish young Haraguchi, who grew up far away in Osaka, feared that radiation would make the whole country uninhabitable.

But now, aged 25, the new resident of the rural town of Okuma says he believes in the future of Fukushima region.

“Everyone knows about the nuclear accident. But not many people know about this area, and how it’s moving forward,” Haraguchi, tanned from working on his farm, said.

“By growing kiwis here, I want people to take an interest in and learn about what Fukushima is really like these days.”

The region of Fukushima is renowned for its delicious fruit, from pears to peaches, but the nuclear disaster led many people in

Japan to shun produce grown there.

Just over 14 years later, following extensive decontamination work including stripping an entire layer of soil from farmland, authorities say food from Fukushima is safe, having been rigorously screened for radiation.

Last year, Fukushima peaches were sold at London’s Harrods department store, while in Japan some consumers now choose to buy the region’s produce to support struggling farmers.

“The safety has been proven,” said Haraguchi, who often sports a kiwi-print bucket hat. “I think it’s important that we do it here.”

- STARTING FROM ‘ZERO’ -

Haraguchi studied software engineering but dreamed of becoming a fruit farmer. His first visit to Okuma in 2021 was for a student event, where he met residents working to revive kiwi farming and a veteran farmer whose kiwis’ rich flavour impressed him. Inspired, Haraguchi returned repeatedly for research and co-founded ReFruits with a recent Tokyo graduate. They manage 2.5 hectares and plan to harvest kiwis next year. He views Fukushima’s destruction not as a setback but as an opportunity to test new ideas, having experienced a zero level of activity.

After the disaster, nuclear fallout

forced Okuma’s 11,000 residents to evacuate. Across Fukushima, about 80,000 people were ordered or chose to leave.

While reactors have been stabilised, decommissioning will take decades. From 2019, parts of Okuma were declared safe for residents, but only a few have returned. Young outsiders like Haraguchi moved in, attracted by government subsidies for housing and start-ups. Today, around 1,500 people live there, with over 1,000 newcomers working in various fields including agriculture and tech.

Radiation sensors in Okuma show levels within safety limits, though still higher than distant areas. Soil tests on Haraguchi’s farm reveal slightly elevated radiation but within international safety standards. Food tests also confirm low radiation levels. However, Kaori Suzuki’s citizen science group warns that risks may persist, encouraging caution in food consumption.

Haraguchi aims to promote Fukushima’s produce confidently and transparently. He travels internationally to share his experiences and hopes that openness will help restore trust in the region’s agricultural products. “We don’t need to force our products on uncomfortable consumers,” he emphasises. “We want to sell to those who understand and trust our efforts.” — AFP

FEATURES



shades of grey, simple but sophisticated, reflecting the brand's focus on purity and balance. As visitors stopped by, they eagerly discussed each ingredient and the process behind every scent, from the raw materials to the finished product. The team was busy, engaging with passersby, explaining how their perfumes are crafted, and sharing their vision of putting Omani perfume on the international map.

OVA Perfume isn't alone. Behind the scenes, dozens of new perfume houses have sprung up across Oman, spurred by the lucrative possibilities of the fragrance industry. With many young Omanis pursuing their dreams and seeing the potential in perfumery, the scene is buzzing with innovation and enthusiasm. These brands are eager to bring a piece of Oman's natural beauty — like frankincense, rose and oud — into bottles that appeal worldwide. The energy among these start-ups mirrors a broader growth trend: Oman's perfume industry is now recognised as an important part of the national economy and cultural identity.

The growth of the perfume market in Oman reflects

such as Asateer Oud and Dkhoon Emirates have joined the mix, bringing diversity and fresh perspectives to the event.

A key part of the show's success lies in the seminars and workshops designed for aspiring perfumers and industry enthusiasts. Over five days, visitors have the chance to learn about scent blending, ingredient sourcing and the latest technology in perfume production.

These sessions are packed with tips and tricks, perfect for those who dream of starting their own brands or improving their craft. Attendees can discover innovative ways to create long-lasting fragrances, explore sustainable practices and get insights into branding and marketing. The event truly offers a 360-degree experience — blending business, tradition and innovation.

The importance of these educational sessions can't be overstated. With the perfume industry becoming more competitive and globalised, staying updated on technological trends and market shifts is essential. For example, advances in sustainable sourcing and eco-friendly packaging are gaining popularity, and many young perfumers are eager to adopt these new practices to set themselves apart.

As the show approaches its final day on June 2, the atmosphere is lively. Visitors are enjoying not only the scents but also the accompanying activities — live music performances, food stalls and open



HOW THE OMAN PERFUME SHOW IS THE ULTIMATE INDUSTRY INCUBATOR

BY YERU EBUEN

THIS YEAR'S Oman Perfume Show once again drew a large crowd, especially young entrepreneurs eager to turn their passion for scents into a thriving business.

Since its inception, the Oman Perfume Show has been more than just a marketplace — it's become a launchpad for young Omanis and emerging perfume brands trying to make a mark in a competitive industry. The event provides an ideal space for fresh talent to showcase their creativity and visions, ensuring the future of Oman's fragrant tradition remains vibrant and evolving.

One of the standout young brands this year is OVA Perfume. Their owner and team are passionate about their heritage, drawing inspiration from Oman's rich ingredients and blending them with modern ideas to create fragrances suited not just for local tastes but for global markets.

Their stall caught the eye with its monochrome design of many

larger regional trends. Globally, the fragrance industry is booming — with Mordor Intelligence estimating the GCC market to be worth over \$3 billion in 2024. The Middle East, in particular, has a long-standing tradition of scent craftsmanship. Countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman have become key players, thanks in part to their access to unique ingredients and a culture that prizes scent as a reflection of hospitality and identity.

Oman's own ingredients are especially prized. The country's frankincense from Dhofar, Damask roses, and luban (liquorice) are highly valued in the world of perfumery. These ingredients have been used in perfumes for centuries and are now increasingly sought after by brands aiming to incorporate authentic, locally-sourced components. The unique biodiversity of Oman makes it an ideal place for perfumers looking to source raw materials that are truly exceptional. Industry experts forecast that this emphasis on local ingredients will only intensify, attracting more brands and investment.

This year's Oman Perfume Show reinforced that notion — showcasing the best of what Oman has to offer. The show isn't just about selling scents; it's a celebration of craftsmanship, ingredients and the stories behind each fragrance. As one walks through the exhibition hall, it's clear that Oman is carving out a niche where tradition meets modernity. New brands like Immortal Oud from Thailand and regional players

conversations with perfumers. For many, this is more than a shopping trip; it's an immersive experience that celebrates culture and creativity. The event even includes a calligraphy corner where visitors can personalise perfume bottles — making for perfect Eid gifts or souvenirs.

With more than 100 exhibitors from across the GCC and Asia, this year's event has clearly cemented Oman's place as a rising fragrance hub. As it wraps up, the show leaves behind a sense of excitement and possibility. Oman is embracing its fragrant roots and heading into a future where its scents reach markets around the world, telling stories of land, tradition and creativity.

Whether you're a perfume enthusiast, a budding perfumer, or simply curious about Oman's aromatic heritage, the show offers a snapshot of a thriving industry on the cusp of even greater achievements. And with the momentum it has gained, Oman's floral, spicy and woody scents are set to become more popular worldwide — all thanks to the passion of young Omanis and their shared love for the art of perfumery.