

INBRIEF

HM GREET'S
NEW GERMAN
CHANCELLOR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Friedrich Merz on being elected as new Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to Chancellor Merz in realising achievements that meet aspirations of the German peoples. His Majesty wished the cooperation and partnership relations between Oman and Germany further expansion in various spheres.



FAREWELL TO UAE
AMBASSADOR

On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office Mohammed Nekhaira al Dhaheri, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty. The ambassador expressed his appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan, the Omani government and people for the support and cooperation extended to him during his tenure. On his turn, HH Sayyid Asaad expressed his thanks to the ambassador for his sincere efforts in boosting bilateral relations between Oman and the UAE, wishing him continued success. He also wished the people of the UAE further progress and prosperity.

SURVEY ON NCDS TO
ENHANCE POLICIES



The Ministry of Health continues its ongoing efforts to enhance public health and achieve national goals in disease prevention through the National Survey on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). The initiative aims to provide accurate data to support health policy development and improve quality of life in Oman.

Dr Shatha bint Saud al Ruqaishiyah, Director of the Non-Communicable Diseases Department at the Ministry of Health, said that the survey serves as an evidence-based strategic tool to assess the burden of NCDs and their associated risk factors across governorates and demographic groups.

She noted that the ministry has built upon previous survey results to implement key national interventions and policies, including drafting and updating national NCD control plans, expanding early screening programmes for diabetes, hypertension and kidney diseases; and linking them to primary healthcare institutions. Additionally, awareness campaigns targeting behavioural risk factors have been intensified.

Oman welcomes US-Yemen ceasefire deal

MUSCAT: A spokesperson at the Foreign Ministry stated that, following recent discussions and engagements conducted by the Sultanate of Oman with the United States and the relevant authorities in Sanaa, Republic of Yemen, efforts to de-escalate tensions have culminated in a ceasefire agreement between the two sides.

Under this agreement, neither party will target the other, including American vessels, in the Red Sea and the Bab Al Mandab Strait, thereby safeguarding freedom of navigation and ensuring the unimpeded flow of international commercial shipping.

The Sultanate of Oman extends its appreciation to both parties for their constructive approach, which

has yielded this positive outcome. It is hoped that this development will pave the way for further progress on regional issues, advancing the shared goals of justice, peace, and prosperity for all.

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the US will stop bombing Ansar Allah in Yemen after the group agreed

to stop interrupting important shipping lanes in the Middle East.

Trump announced that the Ansar Allah has said that they no longer want to fight but did not elaborate on the message.

“They said please don’t bomb us any more and we’re not going to attack your ships,” Trump said.

— Agencies

Truce talks pointless as
Israel wages ‘hunger war’

HAMAS ON TUESDAY dismissed as pointless ceasefire talks with Israel, accusing it of waging a “hunger war” on Gaza, where famine looms, as the Israeli military prepared for a broader assault. The comments from Hamas political bureau member Basem Naim followed Israel’s approval of a military plan involving the long-term “conquest of the Gaza Strip”, according to an Israeli official.

Nearly all of the Palestinian territory’s 2.4 million people have been displaced at least once during the war, sparked after October 7, 2023 attack on Israel. A two-month Israeli blockade since early March has worsened the humanitarian crisis.

“There is no sense in engaging in talks or considering new ceasefire proposals as long as the hunger war and extermination war continue in the Gaza Strip,” senior Hamas official Naim said.

The former Gaza health minister said the world must pressure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government to end the “crimes of hunger, thirst and killings”.

Qatar, a key mediator in the conflict, said that “our efforts remain ongoing” despite major obstacle to a ceasefire.

Israel’s military has said the expanded operations approved by the security cabinet on Sunday would include displacing “most” of Gaza’s population.

Before that phase begins, a senior Israeli security source has said that the timing of troop deployments allowed a “window of opportunity” for a possible deal on captives coinciding with US President Donald Trump’s visit to the Middle East next week.

Israel’s military resumed its offensive on the Gaza Strip on March 18. — AFP



A displaced Palestinian girl cries after watching the Israeli bulldozers demolishing her home in Nur Shams camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on Tuesday. — Reuters

17 outstanding entities feted for excellence

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour honoured distinguished entities for their institutional excellence in 2024 during a ceremony held on Tuesday evening, recognising their efforts in enhancing operational efficiency and advancing the ministry’s goals of fostering a culture of continuous development and improving competitive benchmarks.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Mahad Said BaOwain, Minister of Labour.

Sayyid Salim Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, emphasised that the initiative aims to institutionalise best practices for improving work environments, streamlining



The Ministry of Labour on Tuesday honoured entities. PHOTO BY KHALEAN AL RUZAIKI

procedures, and driving teams towards tangible outcomes that benefit both employees and service recipients. He noted that the awards prioritise innovative thinking over routine procedures and reward mature institutional behaviour rather than temporary achievements.

The Ejada (excellence) system

has encouraged government units to adopt practical mechanisms, programmes, and methodologies that promote innovation and improve service quality for individuals and society. It has also strengthened institutional performance culture and fostered healthy competition among units.

The system evaluated 61 government administrative units starting from January 1, 2023, analysing over 14 million data points, including fixed indicators, employee feedback on administrative practices, job satisfaction surveys, and insights from 170,000 beneficiaries across 700 government service centers in 2023.

Government units were assessed based on their annual performance progress across seven key criteria. Seventeen high-performing government units were honoured, with selection considering institutional size - noting an inverse relationship between size and ease of performance improvement. — ONA

OMAN

NEWCHALLENGES



SHURA PANEL
DEBATES STATE OF
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

MUSCAT: The Economic and Financial Committee of Majlis Ash’shura held its tenth regular meeting of the second annual session (2024-2025), under the chairmanship of Mohammed bin Khamis al Hussaini, Vice-Chairman of the Committee, on Tuesday.

During the meeting, the committee hosted members of the Oman Industrialists Association (OIA). The meeting discussed the expressed desire to evaluate the status of local industries in the Sultanate of Oman. The aim was to analyse the reality of the Omani industry in terms of challenges and opportunities and its readiness to achieve the goals of the Industrial Strategy and Oman Vision 2040.

At the beginning of the meeting, the OIA’s members gave a visual presentation that covered several topics including the local added value of the industrial sector and the protection of national industrial products. It also addressed support programmes provided to the sector, the legislation

The meeting discussed several recommendations that would enhance the growth of the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman including aligning policies with the industrial strategy, strengthening the role of small and medium enterprises.

discussions with the OIA’s members, focusing on the importance of conducting a comprehensive and periodic assessment of the industrial sector’s status from the perspective of current challenges and future opportunities to enhance its contribution to the gross domestic product. The members reviewed proposals and solutions to address these challenges and enhance the role of industry in economic diversification.

The meeting discussed several recommendations that would enhance the growth of the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman including aligning policies with the industrial strategy, strengthening the role of small and medium enterprises and improving the work environment and integration between the public and private sectors.

The committee members emphasised the importance of concerted efforts to empower the sector and increase its contribution to achieving economic diversification and to identify and address the challenges facing the sector.

Separately, the Committee discussed the Ministry of Labour’s statement requiring the appointment of at least one Omani citizen within one month in establishments and companies that have completed one year of their commercial registration. — ONA

and regulations governing the sector, the challenges facing infrastructure, financing as well as the training and employment of nationals cadres in the industrial sector.

The presentation also addressed the most prominent industrial indicators and growth rates of the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman over the past years, noting that the sector still relies on imported raw materials and machinery.

The members of the Economic and Financial Committee held extensive

Oman and Dagestan explore relations



Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef met with Abdulmuslim Abdulmuslimov on Tuesday. — ONA



Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, receiving Abdulmuslim Abdulmuslimov. — ONA

MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, met on Tuesday with Abdulmuslim Abdulmuslimov, Prime Minister of the Republic of Dagestan.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations between Oman and Dagestan. They also explored means of enhancing joint cooperation in economic, trade and investment fields.

They touched on available opportunities in sectors of mutual interest, especially in

industry, technology, tourism, agriculture and infrastructure.

The Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion underscored the Sultanate of Oman’s keenness in expanding cooperation horizons with Dagestan. He also underlined the importance of exchanging expertise and experiences.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, also received Abdulmuslim Abdulmuslimov, Prime Minister of the Republic of Dagestan.

The meeting took place within the framework of the official visit of the Prime Minister of Dagestan to Oman which aims to enhance bilateral relations.

During the meeting, both sides explored means of enhancing relations and exchanging expertise in the tourism field.

The two sides reviewed joint investment opportunities in tourism projects, in addition to exploring cooperation opportunities in the tourism promotion field. — ONA

Oman, EU discuss means
to enhance cooperation

BRUSSELS: The third high-level officials’ meeting between the Sultanate of Oman and the European Union was held in Brussels on Tuesday to explore avenues for strengthening cooperation across various fields of mutual interest, including trade, investment, fisheries exports, education, training, renewable green energy, as well as environmental and tourism collaboration.

The Omani delegation was chaired by Ambassador Munthir bin Mahfoudh al Mandhari, Head of the Europe Department at the Foreign Ministry, while the European side was represented by Anna-Maria Panagiotakopoulou, Head of the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq and Regional Policies Division at the European External Action Service.

The meeting was attended by Ru’aa bint Issa al Zadjaliyah, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom

On the sidelines of the meeting, Ambassador Al Mandhari met with Michael Karnitschnig, Deputy Director-General and Head of the Gulf Office at the European Commission’s Directorate-General for the Middle East and Gulf



Discussions during the meeting focused on bilateral relations between Oman and the European Union. — ONA

of Belgium and Head of Mission to the European Union, alongside representatives from several Omani government bodies and officials from the European External Action Service and the European Commission.

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Director-General and Head of the Gulf Office at the European Commission’s Directorate-General for the Middle East and Gulf.

Discussions during the meeting focused on bilateral relations between Oman and the European Union and ways to enhance them to serve the joint interests. — ONA



SAF CHIEF MEETS OFFICIALS

ANKARA: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF), met with Gen Metin Gürak, Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, on Monday. The SAF chief of staff also met with Yaşar Güler, Minister of National Defence of the Republic of Türkiye, as part of his official visit to the Republic of Türkiye. — ONA

Intellectual Property Day creates awareness on protecting works

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Royal Opera House Muscat, and the Oman Music Centre, organised a celebration marking World Intellectual Property Day 2025 under the theme “Intellectual Property and Music: Feeling the Rhythm of Creativity”. The event aimed at raising awareness about

the importance of protecting creative works and fostering innovation. This year’s theme highlighted music as a universal language that reflects cultural identity and unites people, while also being an industry built on intellectual property rights deserving of protection and support.

Nasra al Habsi, Director-General of Commerce at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment



The event aimed at raising awareness about the importance of protecting creative works. — ONA

Promotion, emphasised that World Intellectual Property Day serves as an opportunity to enhance public awareness of intellectual property rights as a pillar of sustainable development. She noted that IP rights — including patents, trademarks, industrial designs, copyrights and geographical indications — contribute to improving the business environment and advancing societies.

Al Habsi pointed out that intellectual property in music extends beyond composing melodies and lyrics, encompassing performance recordings, album designs and distribution methods, all of which require a fair legal protection framework.

She stressed that proper licensing for the use of musical works is a key tool in safeguarding artists’ rights.

— ONA

SHORT TAKES



Experts from Unesco led the session, aiming to empower academic staff to develop AI-integrated curricula.

WORKSHOPS HIGHLIGHT ROLE OF AI IN EDUCATION

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), in collaboration with various academic and professional institutions, recently organised a series of specialised events and workshops that delved into the increasing potential of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in education, management and tourism. These events placed a strong emphasis on the ethical dimensions of modern AI applications.

The first workshop aimed to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively incorporate AI and robotics into the learning process and featured interactive applications and case studies while highlighting the importance of transitioning from traditional teaching methods to smart learning environments that nurture 21st-century skills. The second workshop, titled “Responsible Use of AI in Organisational Decision-Making”, covered key concepts such as bias, accountability, transparency and responsible innovation. The participants showed keen interest in applying these principles in their work settings, emphasising the shared commitment of the university and ICESCO to ethical digital transformation in professional environments.

The series concluded with a virtual workshop on “Empowering Educators with Ethical AI: Exploring the IIOE Platform for Course Design and Digital Transformation”. Experts from Unesco led the session, aiming to empower academic staff to develop ethical, AI-integrated curricula.

DHOFAR UNIVERSITY ORGANISES CONFERENCE ON ARABIC LANGUAGE



The two-day conference explores human dimensions of fear and related cultural issues. — ONA

SALALAH: Dhofar University on Tuesday began the second international conference themed “Fear in Language, Literature and Culture”.

The two-day conference explores human dimensions of fear and related cultural issues. The conference includes several sessions and working papers presented by academics, researchers and those interested in humanities from Omani, GCC, regional and international universities. The papers touch on the concept of fear within the context of language, identity and creativity. — ONA

Seminar addresses family challenges in elderly care

IBRI: A seminar titled “Elderly Care Amid Family Challenges: Between Social Fragmentation and Care Needs” reviewed several working papers covering the social, psychological and health aspects related to the elderly, the impact of family breakdown on their quality of life, and initiatives to enhance care services.

The event, organised on Tuesday by the Health Committee in Ibri, Al Dhahirah Governorate, in collaboration with the Elderly Care

and Community Health Programme, aimed to raise awareness about the importance of elderly care, strengthen family bonds and discuss challenges faced by the elderly amid social changes. It also encouraged local community engagement in supporting such efforts.

The seminar featured four working papers. The first, presented by Badriya al Mukhrami, a member of Al Dhahirah’s Elderly Care Programme, examined the realities



The event aimed to raise awareness about the importance of elderly care and family bonds amid social changes. — ONA

NORTHWESTERLY WIND ACTIVITY BEGINS, TEMPERATURES RISE

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MAY 6

Northwesterly wind activity began on Tuesday and is expected to continue for several days, affecting most governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. Meanwhile,

the temperatures saw a hike, with Suhar recording 47.1 degrees Celsius on Tuesday.

The impact of the northwesterly wind could result in dust and dirt rising over desert and open areas, which may lead to a reduction in horizontal visibility.

Meanwhile, sea waves have seen an increase in height along all coasts of the Sultanate of Oman, reaching a maximum height of 3.0 metres.

The Oman Met Office stated that high sea waves would be experienced on most of the coasts of the Sultanate of Oman starting from Tuesday and are expected to continue for several days. The sea will be moderate to rough on the coasts of Musandam Governorate and the coasts of the Arabian Sea, reaching a maximum height of 2-3 metres, and there will be calm to

moderate waves on the coasts of the Sea of Oman, 1.25-2 metres.

Clear skies are expected over most of the governorates with high and medium cloud advection, which could bring in isolated rain over Dhofar Governorate. There are also chances for cloud convection over Al Hajar Mountains.

Dhofar also has chances of low clouds and fog formation during the late night and early morning over the governorate’s coastal areas.

Premarital check-up crucial for healthy future

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 6

AS PART of the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to promoting community health, improving the quality of life for citizens and preventing genetic diseases, the Ministry of Health, through its various channels, is urging the public to conduct premarital medical examinations to protect future generations. This involves conducting laboratory blood tests for prospective spouses to reduce the risk of blood diseases, with the goal of building a healthy family.

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has organised a national awareness campaign for premarital medical examinations. This campaign will continue for a full year through 2025, in preparation for the mandatory implementation of examinations in 2026. It is worth noting that premarital medical examinations began in the Sultanate of Oman in 1999 and are available as an optional service in all government primary healthcare institutions.

The ministry has adopted the programme as an effective preventative measure to limit



MoH stated that premarital medical examinations apply to anyone considering marriage.

the spread of genetic blood diseases and reduce the incidence of maternal and child mortality resulting from these diseases. Reducing these diseases also relieves pressure on healthcare institutions and blood banks and helps reduce the financial burden of treating patients on families and society.

The ministry stated that premarital medical examinations are not limited to those with relatives affected by the disease, but rather apply to anyone considering marriage, whether they are relatives or not. This is because the absence of a hereditary disease

in the family does not mean the family is free of disease genes, as these diseases are transmitted through genetic material (genes).

Statistic showed that hereditary blood diseases are widespread in Oman, with the percentage of sickle cell anaemia carriers reaching approximately 6 per cent, and thalassaemia carriers reaching 2 per cent of the total population under five years of age. These rates can only be reduced by conducting a premarital medical examination and seeking appropriate counselling.

A study on Omani youth’s acceptance of premarital screening revealed that 85-94 per cent of them believed in the importance and necessity of medical examination, and the majority confirmed that they would undergo it. 50-91 per cent of them expressed the importance of it, while 10-62 per cent stated that they would change their marriage decision based on the results of the medical examination. The results showed that 23 per cent of those who underwent premarital medical examinations cancelled their engagement or marriage after the examination. 19% were undecided, unsure what to do and were confused. 9.5 per cent preferred to continue for emotional reasons and 4.4 per cent for family reasons.

First camel cheese production unit soon

MUSCAT: A contract was signed on Tuesday to award a project for establishing the first camel cheese production factory in the Wilayat of Rakhyou, Governorate of Dhofar. The step seeks to support economic development, empower rural women and enhance the value chain of dairy products.

The project is being implemented by the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The project will be carried out with funding from Al Jisr charity foundation. The factory is set to start operations during the first quarter of 2026. It is envisaged to process quantities ranging from 500 litres to two tonnes of camel milk per day, with plans in place to gradually increase operational capacity to 5 tonnes by the end of the first year of operation, and later to more than 15 tonnes.

The factory’s products will include the production of fresh and semi-hard cheeses, with future plans to produce hard cheese, condensed milk, milk desserts and ice cream. In its first stage, the factory will

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empower 20 rural women from the Omani Women’s Association in the Wilayat of Rakhyou, Dhofar Governorate. It will enable the women’s role in supporting the local food production sector, in addition to developing the production and marketing of camel products.

The empowered women took part in capacity-building programmes and benefited from intensive workshops and training courses that honed their skills and raised their awareness about quality standards, food safety, finance, marketing and

small business management.

The contract signing ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture.

It’s worth noting that Dhofar Governorate is a major camel habitat in the Sultanate of Oman. Statistics of the year 2023 show that Dhofar Governorate houses approximately 177,821 camels, making Dhofar a vital centre for the camel dairy industry. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

CALL FOR CAUTION AS FIRE INCIDENTS ARE ON THE RISE



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

FIRE CASES in summer have become quite common, with losses of human lives and property reported year after year. However, a well-adhered-to safety policy and security concerns can help prevent these losses.

The firefighting teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Department (CDAA) have called for a collective effort to minimise fire incidents during extreme heat, emphasising that safety is everyone's responsibility.

With temperatures rising, the

chances of sunburn; and vehicle and A/C fires are also high. The CDAA has urged precautions against such mishaps.

"Safety from accidents, especially fire-related incidents during the summer when temperatures climb high, is of great importance. Civilians and firefighters have a significant role in controlling such accidents and minimising losses when they occur," a spokesperson from the CDAA said.

"As far as industrial fires are concerned," he adds, "a proper and effective HSE system needs to be developed and implemented, while all staff members should be well-educated on safety aspects."

“Always try to park your vehicle in the shade as much as possible, keep the windows of the vehicle slightly open when parked to emit hot air, avoid keeping inflammable materials inside the car, conduct routine checks on parts, fix loose cables, perform periodic changes and replace filters as needed.**”**

CDAA OFFICIAL

Accordingly, a set of preventive measures should be taken by everyone in industrial and residential areas to avoid explosions. They include installing smoke and gas detectors on the premises, checking the surroundings of the house before leaving for travel or going away, storing flammable materials away from other materials and exposed areas, ensuring no gas flow is still running after cooking to prevent gas leakage and not leaving candles unattended to avoid open flames.

CDAA further advised citizens and residents to take necessary precautions before heading to rocky mountains, as there has been a rise in unfortunate events such as fire accidents in various regions, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Nevertheless, these disastrous events may be caused by scorching weather, explaining the recent fire accidents across the Sultanate of Oman due to climate change. While industrial fires are mostly the result of negligence, as people give less priority to HSE standards and

machines are subjected to work under extreme heat, vehicles are also subject to heat hazards.

"Those behind the wheels should take extra care, as there is a surge in vehicle fires in summer due to unmaintained parts, overheated cables and A/Cs burning due to overuse and defunct parts," CDAA official said. He suggests a set of preventive measures. "Always try to park your vehicle in the shade as much as possible, keep the windows of the vehicle slightly open when parked to emit hot air, avoid keeping inflammable materials inside the car, conduct routine checks on parts, fix loose cables, perform periodic changes and replace filters as needed," he suggested.

He added that people should keep a fire extinguisher near the driver's seat, avoid smoking, as even a small spark can lead to a fire since vehicle interiors are built of plastic and other highly flammable materials and also to be mindful of switching off the engine immediately if you smell rubber or plastic burning inside or outside the car.

SHORT TAKES



ASDS CHAIRMAN RECEIVES PAKISTANI DELEGATION

MUSCAT: Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), on Tuesday received a delegation from the National Defence University of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest, especially in academic fields. The meeting was attended by senior officers at the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies and the Military Attaché of Pakistan’s Embassy in Muscat. — ONA

SEASON OF EXCELLENCE AT ROHM



The season closes on a high note with a spectacular concert by Lebanese superstar Ragheb Alama, offering fans two nights, May 23 and 24. — ONA

MUSCAT: As the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) draws the curtain on its extraordinary 2024–2025 season, the month of May promises an unmissable celebration of musical diversity, artistic mastery and unforgettable experiences. World-renowned conductor Plácido Domingo returns to ROHM to lead Verdi’s iconic opera *La Traviata* on May 1 and 3, a stunning production by director Marta Domingo with Juliana Grigoryan singing *Violetta* and Yusif Eyvasov singing *Alfredo*. Pre-performance talks will be offered to ticket holders only, providing a deeper look into the music, themes and vision behind this operatic masterpiece. Over the same weekend, the excitement continues with a *Gala Symphony Concert* in two parts on May 2, reflecting the depth of ROHM’s musical reach. Hamdan al Shuaيلي, conductor of the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra, leads the first half, followed by a grand second act conducted by Plácido Domingo — a true meeting of regional and international excellence on one stage. Cultural fusion takes centre stage on May 8 and 9, with *Memories of Alhambra*, a new ROHM production blending Arabic musical heritage with the passion and rhythm of flamenco, performed by the acclaimed *Compañía Flamenca Antonio Andrade*. The season closes on a high note with a spectacular concert by Lebanese superstar Ragheb Alama, offering fans two nights, May 23 and 24, of beloved hits and timeless charisma.

AMITABH BACHCHAN AWESTRUCK WITH OMANI HOSPITALITY

KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

Bollywood icon Amitabh Bachchan has shared a short video praising Oman for its immense natural beauty and for the highly sophisticated and hospitable people through a social media handle tagging the ‘Experience Oman’. The 93 second-long video which starts with a ‘Namaskar this is Amitabh Bachchan’ in his very authentic deep, baritone voice,

goes deep into explaining why the country is so special and tributes the people as well as the nature. “I came to your beautiful country, Oman for a short vacation and I go back with a lot of memories... memories of calmness, peace and serenity and the love of the people which I experienced in Oman. Out of all these factors, the smiling, very warm hospitality of Omanis has really attracted me,” he said. “I was told about the history of the country, the culture, and I would

urge everyone to come to Oman, to experience Oman, because it is a beautiful country.” “My gratitude and my love to all the Omanis and the people of Oman as I carry home the fond memories and these memories shall force me to visit Oman again, again and again,” the video continues. Amitabh Bachchan has visited Oman at least three times earlier. It includes his visit in March 2010 when he received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Muscat International Film Festival.

MoE distributes 3D printers to 339 schools

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION has completed the first phase of the 3D printer distribution project, targeting 339 10th-grade schools across various educational directorates in the governorates. The project was implemented with the participation of the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development, the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision, the Directorate-General of Projects and Services, and the Information Technology Project Management Office, with support from Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Al Suwadi Power Company, SMN Power Holding Company and Oman Arab Bank (OAB). The project provides 3D printers to 640 public schools, including the 10th grade schools implementing 3D modelling units for the IT curriculum. One to two printers are available for each school depending on students’ number density and the number of computer labs in the school. Printing materials will also be provided, allowing students to use these printers to print various models during the IT course. The first phase was implemented over the past three months of this year. It included receiving 3D printers from the supplier and distributing

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The project aims to introduce students to 3D printing technology and its importance to the local and global economy.

them to the select schools. Besides, the project provides training of IT supervisors, teachers and school and office equipment support technicians on the installation, operation and use of 3D printers. The project aims to introduce students to 3D printing technology and its importance to the local and global economy being one of the key future technologies. It also aims to instil values and principles, develop the skills necessary for entrepreneurship, integrate IT with other academic subjects and implement student projects. It also highlights the importance of providing the modern technologies

needed to implement global IT courses, a priority and concern of the Ministry of Education. Ibrahim bin Hamoud al Awaimri, an IT teacher at Abdullah bin Al Harith Basic Education School (grades 5-10) in the Wilayat of Wadi Al Maawil in Al Batinah South Governorate, pointed out that 3D printing technology is now part of the ongoing rapid digital development as it is closely linked to the concepts of Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things. We teach the students how 3D printers can be used in daily life such as printing educational tools, engineering models or even simple spare parts. — ONA

Fake travel agency uncovered

MUSCAT: The Primary Court in Al Buraimi recently issued a judicial verdict convicting the owner of a travel and tourism office after it was proven that he was involved in cases related to forgery, fraud and operating an unlicensed establishment. This came as a result of the efforts made by the Consumer Protection Department in Al Buraimi Governorate in investigating a complaint filed by a female consumer. A consumer had contacted the office to book travel tickets and transferred the required amounts. However, shortly before the travel



date, she received a call from the office owner informing her that the tickets had been cancelled. When she attempted to verify the booking with the airline, she discovered that the tickets were fake, prompting her to file a complaint with the department. The department took the necessary legal measures and referred the complaint to the Public Prosecution, which in turn transferred it to the competent court. The court sentenced the defendant to three months imprisonment for the misdemeanour of forging a private document, another three

months imprisonment and a fine of RO 300 for the misdemeanour of fraud, and fined him RO 400 for the misdemeanour of opening and operating a travel and tourism office without a licence. He was also sentenced to two months imprisonment and fined RO 300 for the misdemeanour of failing to provide the service in a proper manner consistent with its nature. The penalties were consolidated, and the harshest — the second misdemeanour — is to be enforced, in addition to ordering the closure of his shop, which was the instrument of the crime.

Oman showcases investment opportunities in Barcelona

RAHMA AL KALBANI BARCELONA, MAY 6

The Global Seafood Expo kicked off on Monday in Barcelona, drawing wide international participation. Representing the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources, along with a number of leading Omani fisheries companies, are taking part in the event to promote Omani seafood products and strengthen their presence in global markets. Oman’s participation will focus on showcasing investment opportunities in the fisheries sector,

underlining Oman’s commitment to sustainability in fishing and aquaculture, as well as supporting and empowering Omani small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The delegation also aims to open new avenues for trade and logistics partnerships with international stakeholders. Oman’s pavilion features six prominent Omani companies: Muscat International Fish, Fakher Al Bihar, Rimal Shatti Aldiffa, Hussain Al Tamimi & Partners, Global Quality Source and Ocean Fisheries. Oman’s fisheries sector has witnessed notable growth in recent years. In 2023, total fish production



reached approximately 794,000 tonnes, reflecting an average annual increase of 7.5 per cent since 2018. The production value stood at RO 531 million, with 41 per cent of the output exported to over 84 countries — most notably the UAE and Egypt. Through its participation, Oman aims to attract foreign investment, foster technological and commercial partnerships, expand its export markets and promote value-added seafood products. These efforts are aligned with Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises the development of the blue economy and the increased contribution of the fisheries sector to the national GDP.

The Global Seafood Expo is the world’s largest seafood trade event, bringing together over 35,000 buyers, suppliers and professionals from more than 150 countries. With more than 2,200 exhibiting companies covering all segments of the seafood supply chain — including fresh, frozen and processed products, logistics, packaging and equipment — the Expo serves as a strategic platform for networking, knowledge exchange and exploring the latest trends and innovations in the seafood industry, further boosting opportunities for collaboration and investment in this vital sector.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



US President Donald Trump greets Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney as he arrives at the White House in Washington, DC, on Tuesday. — AFP

CARNEY MEETS TRUMP TO RESET STRAINED TIES

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney arrived for White House talks with Donald Trump on Tuesday in a bid to reset a relationship he says has been undermined by the US president’s tariffs and talk of annexation. Carney’s Liberal Party won the April 28 election on promises to tackle Trump and create a new bilateral economic and security relationship with the United States. It will be his first in-person meeting as prime minister with Trump. Shortly before Carney arrived, Trump posted a message on social media.

“I look forward to meeting the new Prime Minister of Canada, Mark Carney. I very much want to work with him, but cannot understand one simple TRUTH — Why is America subsidising Canada by \$200 Billion Dollars a year, in addition to giving them FREE Military Protection and many other things? We don’t need their Cars, we don’t need their Energy, we don’t need their Lumber, we don’t need ANYTHING they have, other than their friendship, which hopefully we will always maintain. They, on the other hand, need EVERYTHING from us! The Prime Minister will be arriving shortly and that will be, most likely, my only question of consequence.”

Carney, a 60-year-old ex-central banker with no previous political experience, was elected Liberal leader in March to replace Justin Trudeau, who had a poor relationship with Trump. “It’s important to get engaged immediately... and I’m pleased to have the opportunity for quite a comprehensive set of meetings,” Carney said on Friday, adding he expected the talks to be difficult yet constructive. He played down the idea of immediate breakthroughs. — AFP

SAUDI ARABIA AND US TO DISCUSS DEAL IN MINING

Saudi Arabia is set to discuss a potential agreement with the United States about cooperation in the fields of mining and mineral resources, the Saudi cabinet said in a statement reported by the country’s state news agency on Tuesday.

The statement did not provide the details of the “memorandum”, which it said would be negotiated by the Saudi Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources; and the United States Department of Energy.

The statement comes ahead of a visit by US President Donald Trump to Saudi Arabia next week.

Saudi Arabia has been rapidly expanding its mining sector as part of its Vision 2030 economic diversification programme, which aims to wean the economy off of oil, with gold, phosphate rock and bauxite its main resources.

The kingdom has also announced discoveries of extensive domestic resources and last year Saudi officials nearly doubled their estimate for the kingdom’s minerals reserves to \$2.5 trillion, largely due to the addition of rare earths.

PHASE OUT PLAN

EU to end all Russian gas imports by 2027



The EU on Tuesday unveiled a long-promised plan to phase out its remaining gas imports from Russia by the end of 2027, a challenge given Europe’s continued dependence on Russian fossil fuels. “Today the European Union sends a very clear message to Russia: no more, no more, will we permit Russia to weaponise energy against us,” EU energy chief Dan Jorgensen said as he set out the measures.

BRITAIN SET TO RESTRICT VISAS FOR SOME NATIONALITIES

LONDON: Britain’s Labour government plans to restrict visa applications from nationalities considered most likely to overstay and claim asylum, a government official said on Tuesday, as it faces pressure from hard-right populists.

Applications for work and study visas from Pakistanis, Nigerians and Sri Lankans are among those set to be curbed, The Times daily reported and an official confirmed on condition of anonymity.

The plans are expected to be laid

out in a policy paper next week that will detail the government’s next steps to reduce net migration, which reached 728,000 last year.

“To tackle abuse by foreign nationals who arrive on work and study visas and go on to claim asylum, we are building intelligence on the profile of these individuals to identify them earlier and faster,” said a spokesperson for the interior ministry, known as the Home Office.

“We keep the visa system under constant review and will where

we detect trends, which may undermine our immigration rules, we will not hesitate to take action,” they added. Labour endured bruising losses in local elections last week, in part due to anger over high levels of regular migration and a failure to stop undocumented migrants. Figures released last month showed that applications across the worker, study, and family visa categories fell by over a third from 1.24 million to 772,000 in the year to March 2025. —AFP

Gazans struggle to live as Israel plans for ‘conquest’

ISRAEL’S plan for the “conquest” of Gaza has sparked renewed fears, but for many of the territory’s residents, the most immediate threat to their lives remains the spectre of famine amidst a months-long Israeli blockade.

The plan to expand military operations, approved by Israel’s security cabinet overnight, includes holding territories in the besieged Gaza Strip and moving the population south “for their protection”, an Israeli official said.

But Gaza residents said that they did not expect the new offensive would make any significant changes to the already dire humanitarian situation in the small coastal territory.

“Israel has not stopped the war, the killing, the bombing, the destruction, the siege and the starvation — every day — so how can they talk about expanding military operations?” Awni Awad, 39, said.

Awad, who lives in a tent in the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis after being displaced by Israeli evacuation orders, said that his situation was already “catastrophic and tragic”.

“I call on the world to witness the famine that grows and spreads every day,” he said.

The UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) in late April said it had depleted all its foods stocks in Gaza due to Israel’s blockade on all supplies since March 2.

Aya al Skafy, a resident of Gaza City, said her baby died because of malnutrition and medicine shortages last week.

“She was four months old and weighed 2.8 kilograms (6.2 pounds), which is very little. Medicine was not available,” she said. “Due to severe malnutrition, she suffered from blood acidity, liver and kidney failure; and many other complications. Her hair and nails also fell out due to malnutrition.”

Umm Hashem al Saqqa, another Gaza City resident, fears her five-year-old son might face a similar fate, but is powerless to do anything about it.

“Hashem suffers from iron deficiency anaemia. He is constantly pale and lacks balance; and is unable to walk due to malnutrition,” she said.

“There is no food, no medicine



People walk past a wall a mural depicting destruction in the Gaza Strip in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank on Tuesday. — AFP

and no nutritional supplements. The markets are empty of food; and the government clinics and pharmacies have nothing.”

Gaza City resident Mohammed al Shawa, 65, said that Israel’s new military road map changes little as it already controls most of Gaza.

“The Israeli announcement about expanding military operations in Gaza is just talk for the media, because the entire Gaza Strip is occupied, and there is no safe area in Gaza,” he said.

The UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that 69 per cent of Gaza has now been either incorporated into one of Israel’s buffer zones, or is subject to

evacuation orders.

That number rises to 100 per cent in the southern governorate of Rafah, where over 230,000 people lived before the war but which has now been entirely declared a no-go zone.

“There is no food, no medicine and the announcement of an aid distribution plan is just to distract the world and mislead global public opinion,” Al Shawa said, referring to reports of a new Israeli plan for humanitarian aid delivery that has yet to be implemented.

“The reality is that Israel is killing Palestinians in Gaza by bombing, shooting, or through starvation and denial of medical treatment,” he said. — AFP

PRESIDNETIAL VISIT

Palestinian president to visit Beirut



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas will visit Lebanon on May 21 to discuss extending Beirut’s authority to Palestinian camps, a Lebanese government official said on Tuesday, as Abbas’s office confirmed the date.

The visit comes after President Joseph Aoun said authorities were working to “withdraw (unauthorised) heavy and medium weapons from all Lebanese territory” and that he would raise disarmament of the camps.

FIRST GLIMPSE

King Charles, Camilla unveil portraits



Lifelike and atmospheric portraits of Britain’s King Charles and Queen Camilla commissioned to mark their coronation have been unveiled by the couple. Charles and Camilla gave the world the first glimpse of the separate full-length state portraits on display at London’s National Gallery, with artist Peter Kuhfeld saying he hoped his depiction of the monarch captured “the man and the king.” Paul Benny painted the queen.

SHORT TAKES



Britain’s Secretary of State for Business and Trade Jonathan Reynolds with Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal for trade talks, in London. — Reuters

BRITAIN AND INDIA CLINCH TRADE DEAL

LONDON: Britain and India clinched a long-coveted free trade pact on Tuesday after tariff turmoil sparked by US President Donald Trump forced the two sides to hasten efforts to increase their trade in cars and food. The deal, between the world’s fifth and sixth-largest economies, has been concluded after three years of stop-start negotiations and aims to increase bilateral trade by a further 25.5 billion pounds (\$34 billion) by 2040 with liberal market access and eased trade restrictions. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the trade deal was “ambitious and mutually beneficial”. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said it would strengthen alliances and reduce trade barriers in this “new era for trade”. The deal lowers tariffs on goods such as advanced manufacturing parts and food products, and agrees to quotas on both sides for auto imports. It will allow more British firms to compete for contracts in India, and enable Indian workers to travel to Britain for work, without changing Britain’s points-based immigration system. Both countries are also seeking bilateral deals with the United States to remove some of Trump’s tariffs that have upended the global trade system, and the resulting turmoil sharpened focus in both London and New Delhi on the need to clinch a UK-India trade deal. — AFP

MERZ ELECTED GERMAN CHANCELLOR



German conservative leader Friedrich Merz was elected by lawmakers as the country’s new chancellor on Tuesday, hours after suffering a humiliating defeat in a first round of voting on an extraordinary day in Berlin. Merz secured the necessary absolute majority to succeed outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz in the second round of voting, receiving 325 votes in the 630-seat Bundestag, Germany’s lower house of parliament.

SEVEN PARAMILITARIES KILLED IN PAKISTAN BOMB ATTACK

QUETTA: Seven Pakistani paramilitary troops were killed and five others wounded on Tuesday in a homemade bomb attack on a convoy in southwestern Balochistan province, officials said. Violence has surged in Balochistan, which borders Afghanistan and Iran, in recent years as groups step up their fight against authorities. The Pakistani military said in a statement that fighters from the

Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) had targeted a vehicle carrying security forces with a homemade bomb near the town of Mach in Kachhi district. It said seven paramilitary troops were killed. A senior local government official said the vehicle that was hit was part of a convoy on its way to a security operation. He said five others were wounded and were taken by helicopter to a military hospital in the provincial capital, Quetta.

The attack took place around noon in a mountainous region rich in coal mines that has been hit regularly by attacks from separatist groups led by the BLA. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the attack. More than 200 people, mostly members of the security forces, have been killed since January 1 by armed groups in Balochistan and neighbouring Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, according to a tally. — AFP

Ukraine targets Moscow with drones; airports shut

A Ukrainian drone attack forced Moscow to close its airports for several hours, Russian officials said on Tuesday, before President Vladimir Putin will host several leaders to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany. With Chinese President Xi Jinping expected to arrive in Moscow on Wednesday for a parade on May 9 to mark the anniversary, Russian war bloggers also reported a new Ukrainian armoured ground incursion into the Kursk region. Putin has called for a ceasefire from May 8-10 — a proposal Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has called pointless, instead pushing for an unconditional ceasefire over at least 30 days in line with a US proposal. So-called Victory Day is a major holiday in Putin’s calendar and the Russian leader has invited the leaders of several nations to try to show he is not isolated over his full-scale war on Ukraine. The US and most European leaders will not be attending.

Ukraine’s foreign ministry urged countries on Tuesday not to participate in the parade, saying any such participation would go against some countries’ declared neutrality in the war.

Earlier on Tuesday, Russian officials said air defence units destroyed Ukrainian drones targeting Moscow in a second night attack in a row, prompting the closure of all airports in the capital for several hours.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said on social media at least 19 Ukrainian drones were destroyed on their approach to Moscow “from different directions,” causing no major destruction or injuries.

Russia’s aviation watchdog said flights were halted at all four airports that serve Moscow for several hours overnight to ensure air safety. Airports in a number of regional cities were also closed.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday the drone attack showed Kyiv wanted to continue the war.

Zelenskiy has repeatedly said he wants a ceasefire, calling on Kyiv’s allies to apply greater pressure on Moscow to put the measure in place.

Meanwhile, Kyiv said that Russia attacked



Ukrainian prisoners of war are seen after a swap, amid Russia’s attack on Ukraine, at an unknown location in Ukraine, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Ukraine with 136 drones overnight, of which 54 were shot down and 70 others fell without causing any damage.

Ukraine says its drone attacks are aimed at destroying infrastructure key to Moscow’s overall war efforts and are in response to Russia’s continued assault on Ukrainian territory, including residential areas and energy infrastructure. Meanwhile, Putin and China’s Xi Jinping will discuss the Ukraine conflict and US-Russia relations in talks between the two presidents in Moscow on May 8, the Kremlin said on Tuesday.

Moscow and Beijing have deepened ties amid Russia’s military offensive on Ukraine,

launched in February 2022. “The most important issues will be discussed in a one-on-one meeting, the Ukrainian topic and Russian-US relations,” Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov told reporters. Russia is rolling out the red carpet for Xi with a state visit, set to start on Wednesday, with the Chinese president also set to be guest of honour at Moscow’s grand May 9 Victory Day parade on Red Square. China has portrayed itself as a neutral party in the three-year conflict, although Western governments say its close ties to Russia have given Moscow crucial economic and diplomatic support. — Agencies

Cardinals enter seclusion ahead of conclave to elect new pope

CARDINALS WHO will take part in the secret conclave to elect a new Catholic pope began checking into two Vatican hotels on Tuesday, where they will be barred from contact with the outside world as they decide who should succeed Pope Francis.

The conclave will start behind the closed doors of the Sistine Chapel on Wednesday afternoon, with all cardinals under the age of 80 able to vote on who should be the next leader of the 1.4-billion-member Church.

The race to succeed Francis, who died last month, is seen as wide open. Although a few names have been cited as possible front-runners, several of the 133 cardinals expected to vote in the conclave have said they do not know who will become the next pope.

“I have no guess,” Cardinal Robert

McElroy said during a visit to a parish in Rome on Monday evening.

The conclave process is “profound and mysterious,” said McElroy, the archbishop of Washington, DC. “I can give you no insights into who is ahead,” he said.

Some cardinals are looking for a new pope who will continue with Francis’ push for a more transparent, welcoming Church, while others are seeking retrenchment to more traditional roots that put a premium on doctrine.

Conclaves are often spread out over several days, with multiple votes held before a contender wins the necessary three-quarters majority to become pope.

During the conclave period, the voting cardinals will stay in two Vatican guesthouses and take an oath to remain out of contact with anyone not participating in the secret vote.



Cardinals participate in General Congregation, ahead of the Conclave, at the Vatican, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Francis had a priority of appointing cardinals from countries that had never had them before, such as Haiti, South Sudan and Myanmar.

This conclave will be the most geographically diverse in the Church’s 2,000-year history, with clerics from 70 countries taking part.

Japanese Cardinal Tarcisio Isao Kikuchi told La Repubblica newspaper that many of the 23 cardinals from Asia voting in the conclave planned to vote as a block.

He contrasted their strategy with that of the 53 cardinals from Europe, who are known to vote in terms of individual countries or other personal preferences.

“We Asians are probably more unanimous in supporting one or two candidates ... we will see which name will come out as the leading candidate,” said Kikuchi.

— AFP

OPINION

The luban mindset... resilience before AI



KHALID ALSAFI
AL HURAI BI

The writer is an
innovator and an
insights storyteller

LONG BEFORE balance sheets and performance reviews, our cultures perfected a different kind of leadership ritual, before technology and AI... the burning of luban and bukhur, the fragrant resin from frankincense trees, in the morning. In centuries old towns and busy souqs alike, families would light a pinch of this sacred incense to welcome guests, purify the air and soothe the spirits. That simple act, lighting the jamrah charcoal or ember, lifting the smoke, carrying the scent through every room, was an early lesson in luban mindset and resilience: Tending and keeping the flame to what matters, even when the world is uncertain.

Our parents' generation, those who grew up in the 1950s through the 1970s, lived by that lesson. They trekked bare footed to harvest frankincense in Dhofar's hills, traded its precious produce in coastal markets, and brought home more than income. They brought home a practice of care. Even when modern jobs called them to nearby towns or across borders, they still scented their homes with luban and bukhur each dawn and dusk, reminding themselves that renewal begins with small, consistent acts of kindness and rituals.

Women are the unsung guardians of this tradition. While fathers sailed or tilled fields, mothers ground spices for home cooked meals and used luban's antiseptic smoke to guard their families against sickness. They mended clothes under flickering fanus or lantern light, stretched limited resources to feed and educate children, and never missed a chance

to offer incense to guests, weary travellers or weary souls. Their resilience was a quiet alchemy: Transforming hardship into hope, one whiff at a time.

Today, the United Nations warns of live streamed dehumanising settler-colonial occupations, intensifying geopolitical tensions, and trade wars that shake markets overnight. In this age of viral headlines, data and attention economy, not to mention 24 hour news cycles, speed and disruption are celebrated, but without a resilient foundation, they collapse under pressure. Just as luban smoke carries healing molecules through stuffy air, resilient leaders must infuse their institutions with steady values that endure beyond crises.

Across the Sultanate of Oman's boardrooms and beyond, I have seen executives dazzled by data dashboards and quarterly gains. Yet the most effective leaders I know lead from the inside out. They draw upon a deeper well: An unwavering sense of purpose, the composure to weather setbacks, and the flexibility to adapt without losing their core identity. Like frankincense trees that thrive in rocky soils, they find nourishment in adversity.

This luban mindset matters in every arena:

Business: When global value chains falter, trade is plagued by wars, deep fakes, or markets pivot, resilient teams hold fast to long term vision rather than panic at short term losses.

Government: Policy makers who anticipate crises, listen to diverse voices and adjust strategies build public trust that outlasts

Let its enduring
aroma inspire
you... purify your
purpose, nourish
your principles, and
lead with the quiet
resolve that built
our communities

promotion opportunities, or election cycles.

Community: Families and neighbours who share their burdens and light their luban together, emerge stronger and more united through economic or emotional storms.

I speak not as a distant commentator but as someone who believes that each and every community, blessed with a generational trauma, can help its members turn it into healthy opportunities for growth. I am blessed to have survived the perils of running for a public office, career crossroads, bias and private heartache. I have learned that resilience is not a one time triumph; it is a daily choice. It is lighting the ember of intention each morning, drawing on the "Habits of Highly Effective People" to find your voice, uphold your values and help others find theirs, whether or not anyone notices.

Our parents taught us how to tend the flame long before we ever heard the word "leadership" or "AI". They showed us that true strength lies not in looking at people as data, imposing will, but in steady, purposeful action: The courage to act with integrity, the patience to endure hardship and the humility to learn from every challenge.

So in today's fast paced world of boardroom negotiations and global uncertainties, remember the luban mindset. Let its enduring aroma inspire you... purify your purpose, nourish your principles, and lead with the quiet resolve that built our communities. That resilient mindset carried our communities through centuries of change, and it can guide us through every wave of disruption ahead.

INDIA’S WOMAN
FIGHTER PILOT
TRAILBLAZER
EYES SPACE

JULIE FRAYSSE AND BHUVAN BAGGA

The excited little girl who first touched a plane two decades ago is now flying high as the face of India’s fast-modernising military and its only woman Rafale fighter pilot. “This is where my adventure began,” Shivangi Singh, 29, said at the Air Force Museum in New Delhi, recalling her first visit as a child when she “gawked” and “immediately knew that I wanted to become a pilot”.

Women were first inducted into the fighter pilot ranks in 2015, two decades after they were allowed to join the Indian Air Force (IAF).

“There have been many of us,” said Singh, a lieutenant. “This not only reflects modernisation (of our society), but also the fact that we can now realise our dreams.”

Singh, who is married to a fellow fighter pilot, is the first Indian woman to fly the French-made single-seat Rafale jets. New Delhi last month signed a multi-billion dollar deal for 26 of the aircraft from Dassault Aviation, adding to 36 already ordered.

The jets are part of a major modernisation of the IAF to replace its ageing fleet of Russian-made MiGs.

The deal comes as tensions with Pakistan rise after New Delhi blamed Islamabad for an attack in Kashmir in April that killed 26 people. Pakistan has rejected any link to the assault.

Singh, born in the holy city of Varanasi, had to excel in both academics and sports to break into a job once seen by many as something only men could do.

“My mother was a great source of inspiration as she didn’t just want me educated -- she wanted me to be independent, and backed all my endeavours,” the pilot added.

India’s Air Force had more than 1,600 woman officers, including many pilots, according to official statistics from 2023. The world’s most populous nation also has highest proportion of woman commercial pilots -- at about 14 per cent of the total strength.

Singh detailed her experience of flying, from “nervous and anxious” when she first sat in the cockpit, to the “incredibly exhilarating” moment when flying solo. — AFP

Finding balance through
ancient wisdom

THE FOG of depression lifted slowly during my stay at a Zen Buddhist monastery in Kyoto Japan. Each morning I would join the monks in meditation. The simple act of focusing on my breath gradually untangled the knots in my mind that medication alone couldn’t reach.

My journey with mind-body practices began in desperation. Clinical depression had left me feeling disconnected and hopeless, even with prescribed antidepressants. During retreats at Buddhist monasteries in England and later Japan, I discovered something powerful – while meditation didn’t replace my medication, it gave me tools to recognise destructive thought patterns before they overwhelmed me.

On the Internet you’ll find countless non-qualified “experts” promoting mind-over-matter theories suggesting you can cure serious diseases through alternative “natural” medicines with positive thinking. These false masters are dangerous, and some have had their lives cut short by rejecting traditional medical treatment.

I’m not therefore suggesting meditation can cure any illness, but evidence supports that practices like meditation can help manage symptoms of serious conditions including the side effects of cancer treatment. Some alternative approaches can complement, not replace, conventional medical treatment. What I experienced personally now has scientific backing. When stressed, your body releases hormones that damage your heart and weaken your immune



Mind-body medicine works best alongside conventional healthcare.



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a
former Cambridge
School Principal
and an Interview
Skills Adviser

system. Mind-body practices help lower these stress hormones, allowing natural healing systems to work better. A groundbreaking Stanford study found women with late-stage breast cancer who participated in support groups lived twice as long as those who didn’t. The connection between thoughts and physical health isn’t just ancient wisdom – it’s measurable reality.

This understanding isn’t new. Hippocrates recognised “the natural healing force within us” thousands of years ago. While Western medicine historically separated mind from body, ancient healing traditions like Chinese Medicine always viewed them as inseparable. Western science finally caught up in the 1960s when researchers noticed how emotions like depression worsened physical

conditions like arthritis.

Since my monastery stays I’ve learned meditation was just one approach among many. Biofeedback uses equipment to show bodily functions in real-time, helping you control them – effective for pain and headaches. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy helps identify and change harmful thinking patterns that worsen depression and anxiety. Other techniques include guided imagery, muscle relaxation and hypnosis for relieving anxiety and pain.

During my monastery stays, I noticed improvements not just in mood but also in unexpected areas – better sleep, improved digestion and fewer tension headaches. Research confirms mind-body approaches help reduce effects of numerous conditions beyond mental health: cancer treatment side effects, high blood pressure, asthma, heart disease, chronic pain, digestive issues, diabetes complications and immune disorders.

In meditation halls in England and walking monastery gardens in Japan, I learned that sometimes the most profound medicine begins with simply learning to breathe with awareness. The mind and body aren’t separate systems – they’re one interconnected whole.

Mind-body medicine works best alongside conventional healthcare, creating a complete approach to wellness that honours both scientific advances and your body’s remarkable capacity to heal. My personal journey taught me that while these practices aren’t miracle cures, they can be powerful allies in healing our whole selves.

Preventing illegal transactions in human organs



SAMUEL KUTTY

The writer is a freelance journalist and author who worked in Oman and India

CONSIDERED a miracle of twentieth-century medicine, organ transplantation has experienced record-setting trends over the past decade, thanks to advancements in surgical techniques and overall patient care.

The donation of organs benefits not only the recipients but also their families, friends and colleagues who love and support those in need of transplantation. It represents a life-giving and life-enhancing opportunity for individuals who have exhausted all other avenues of hope.

When a person requires an organ transplant, it is typically due to one of their organs functioning poorly or failing. Undergoing an organ transplant can extend a person's life and enable individuals with chronic illnesses to achieve a normal lifespan. According to the December 2024 International Report on Organ Donation and Transplantation Activities, global organ transplantation increased by over 9 per cent in in 2023, “an increase driven by an expansion of both deceased and living organ donation compared to 2022.”

In May 2024, member countries of the World Health Organization approved a draft resolution aimed at enhancing the availability of organ transplantation, ensuring ethical access and improving oversight of the transplantation of human cells, tissues and organs.

“The resolution lamented that there is still a noticeable lack of growth and asymmetrical development in transplantation worldwide, with many countries failing to establish the necessary systems, including legislation, governance, a specialised workforce, infrastructure and financing.”

The resolution, which includes a global action plan and monitoring framework, aims to prevent and combat human trafficking for the purpose of organ removal, as well as the trafficking of human organs. It also seeks to protect victims and survivors of these crimes by strengthening legislative frameworks.

However, the gap between the demand for and supply of organs continues to widen worldwide, fostering the rise of transplant commercialism. While the trade of solid organs is most prevalent in impoverished countries, the commercialisation of body parts, such as tissues, is also widespread in economically developed nations.

International travel for the purpose of undergoing commercialised organ transplantation remains a contentious issue that conflicts with the ethical principles of sound medical practice.

A variety of international legal instruments and transplant societies define, condemn and criminalise these practices, issuing statements related to organ commercialism.

The Sultanate of Oman, through a Royal Decree, has enacted laws that explicitly prohibit the sale or purchase of organs and human tissues. These laws impose severe penalties on individuals found

The Sultanate of Oman, through a Royal Decree, has enacted laws that openly prohibit the sale or purchase of organs and human tissues. These laws impose severe penalties on individuals found guilty of coercion, fraud, or engaging in illegal transactions

guilty of coercion, fraud, or engaging in illegal transactions. Offenders will also face imprisonment and substantial fines.

A National Committee will be established within the Ministry of Health to oversee the implementation of policies, licensing and medical standards related to organ donation. The committee will also be responsible for promoting public awareness and ensuring ethical practices in this field.

Strict conditions have been established for living organ donations. Donors must provide voluntary written consent, and the recipient must be a close relative or spouse. In certain cases, donations from non-relatives may be permitted, but only with specific approval.

The sale or coercion of donations, especially when involving vulnerable individuals such as children or incapacitated persons, is strictly prohibited.

Although organ donation is a personal choice, an increase in participation could alleviate the suffering of thousands of individuals who die each year. Additionally, it would allow for the utilisation of numerous healthy organs that are either buried in cemeteries or cremated at funeral homes every day.

Though organ donation, whether from living or deceased donors, is gaining momentum, a widening gap still exists between the demand for and the supply of transplantable organs. And yet, tens of thousands of viable organs are lost each year instead of being allocated to patients who are desperately in need.

GABON’S NEW PRESIDENT FACES BIG CHALLENGES

EMMANUEL PARISSE

Big challenges await Gabon's new president Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema as he takes the reins of a country rich in oil but struggling with debt. The general was sworn in on Saturday after winning 94.85 per cent in the April 12 vote in which international observers signalled no major irregularities.

His victory followed a 19-month transition after he took power in a coup in August 2023 that ended the 55-year rule of the Bongo dynasty.

Following his inauguration in front of around 40,000 people at a stadium near the capital Libreville, Oligui enjoys strong popularity as he begins his term but faces high expectations of economic and social reform.

The new 50-year-old president said he measured “with gravity, the immensity of the burden that falls upon him”. He campaigned on six “pillars”: reform of the water and electricity sector, youth employment through business promotion, housing and transport, social justice and human capital, sustainable development and governance reform.

Among the pressing issues is the electrical grid, managed by the public company SEEG, which suffers regular failures due to a lack of investment.

Gabon suffers a glaring lack of infrastructure: it has a “highway directorate” but no highways.

Despite successive building plans, only 2,000 of its 10,000 km of roads are usable, according to official data. The new head of state has cast himself as a “builder”, proudly launching or relaunching numerous construction projects, particularly in Libreville.

Campaign posters pictured him wearing a builder's hard hat and public television regularly broadcasts images of buildings under construction.

Among the major projects promised during the campaign was a new north-south railway line linking the deep-water port of Mayumba and the Booue hydroelectric dam. Faced with the depletion of its oil resources, Gabon needs to diversify its economy. “There is still dependence on oil,” said Francois Gaulme, an associate researcher at the French Institute of International Relations (IFRI).

“The economy needs to be diversified and this has never been done on a large scale.”

Although oil extraction, the bedrock of the economy, has generated billions of annual profits since the first drilling in the 1950s, Gabon's debt has swelled. From 72 per cent of GDP in 2023, it rose to 73 per cent in 2024 and is projected to hit 80 per cent this year. Oligui pledged in his speech to work with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank “to better repay our external debt”.

Tidiane Diop, an international consultant, said the country must address “the employment issue, the disparities between rural and urban areas; and the issue of payment arrears”. — AFP

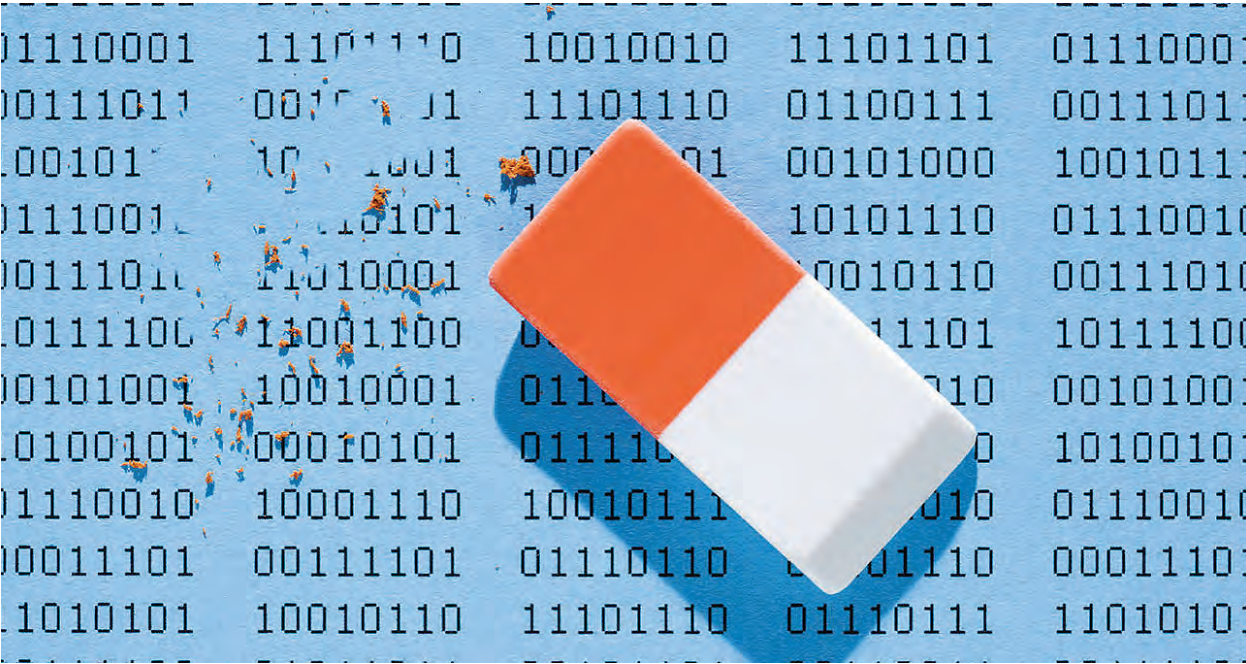
America is erasing the data the world needs

In recent months, thousands of web pages and datasets have been removed from United States government websites. An informal army of “data rescuers” has emerged to download, save and republish vital information, including some 300,000 datasets on data.gov, before it is lost. But preserving existing data is only a temporary measure. The bigger question is how future data — particularly the health and climate data that are essential to guide policy — will be produced and published.

This is not just an American problem. The US government has long supported the production of official statistics in low- and middle-income countries. For example, the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) programme has been helping to produce survey data on key indicators such as child health and nutrition in 90+ countries for more than 40 years. These data have guided the development of countless valuable initiatives, from a support programme for pregnant women in Pakistan to an app that broadens access to support for victims of domestic violence in Uganda. Ten of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals rely on DHS data to track progress.

But US President Donald Trump's administration has now suspended the DHS programme indefinitely and is dissolving the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which runs it. Alternative means of producing important health, demographic and other social data are urgently needed.

One useful change would be to make better use of administrative data — the data that flow through government systems every time a new patient enters a hospital, a classroom register is taken in a school, or a new baby is born — rather than relying primarily on surveys. With efforts to consolidate and streamline major household-survey programmes already under way, greater reliance on administrative data would simply



The US government has long supported the production of official statistics in low- and middle-income countries.



SHAIDA BADIEE

The writer is a former director of the World Bank's Development Data Group, is a co-founder and Managing Director of Open Data Watch

require a shift in focus — and investment — by governments and development partners.

Climate data are also under growing pressure. The US administration has removed or made less accessible datasets the world relies on to track and predict changes to the climate. Meanwhile, proposed funding cuts are casting doubt on the future collection and analysis of such data. Even the data that are collected might not be shared internationally, given America's withdrawal from multilateral initiatives like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

While the European Union, Japan and others also have huge climate-data programmes, filling the gap left by the US will take considerable time and money, both of which are in short supply. Given this, innovators are needed to devise new tools and models; and to realise the full potential of new technologies, such as AI.

The US government is not just erasing or obscuring data; it is also floating proposals to alter how data are reported.

For example, Secretary of

Commerce Howard Lutnick has suggested dropping government-spending measures from GDP calculations. This change would make it more difficult to assess the impact of the US administration's massive federal spending cuts on the US economy.

But established norms exist for a reason: they ensure the reliability and comparability of data over time and across countries. Lutnick's proposed change would undermine the reliability and usefulness of cross-country GDP comparisons. The international statistical community must therefore hold firm in defending long-established methods and principles, with the support of partners who recognise the critical importance of this often-overlooked but essential government function.

Statisticians, data scientists and open-data advocates around the world are developing strategies and taking action to recover, protect and future-proof data. Data producers and users, in the US and elsewhere, can support these efforts — which will be neither easy nor straightforward — in five ways.

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SPORTS

FRIENDLY MATCHES



OMAN TO PLAY NIGER, LEBANON IN MAY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 6

The Oman national football team will take on Niger in a preparatory match on May 20 in Muscat and it will be followed with another warm-up game against Lebanon on May 28. The friendly matches were announced by the Oman Football Association through its X account. The ties are part of the Red Warriors' preparations for 2026 Fifa World Cup qualifiers.

In June, the Red Warriors will play the two decisive remaining matches in the qualifiers. First will be against Jordan in Muscat on June 5 while the following encounter will be against Palestine on June 10 in an away match. According to the OFA, the final squad selected by head coach Rasheed Jaber will be announced after the last round of the top-tier domestic league on May 8.

The Sultanate of Oman's football team managed to boost their hopes for both automatic and playoff spot qualification to the 2026 Fifa World Cup following their essential 1-0 win over the hosts Kuwait and the last draw against South Korea in last March. Oman are currently in fourth place with 10 points from eight matches and have a six-point gap with group toppers South Korea with two rounds remaining.

OMAN GIRLS' TEAM GEARS UP FOR GULF, ARAB TOURNEYS



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 6

Oman's girls' 3x3 basketball team continues its intensive preparations ahead of upcoming two major tournaments: the Gulf Girls 3x3 Basketball in Dhofar this September, and the Arab 3x3 Championship in November at Al Mouj Muscat.

Training sessions are held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, under the supervision of Tunisian coach Wafa Zagdoudi and assistant national coach Nidal al Mughairiyah, with the participation of 19 players from various age categories.

The squad includes 19 players: Shams Al Duha al Khanji, Abeer al Ismaeili, Ghadeer al Ismaeili, Reema al Mughairi, Noor al Kharousi, Malak al Sulaimi, Buthaina al Maamari, Zainab al Busaidy, Ruba al Kalbani, Nareen al Maamari, Maryam al Nomani, Fatma al Nomani, Sayyida Sara al Saeed, Somaya al Falahi, Sayyida Lamar al Saeed, Aseela Yasser Suleiman, Aisha al Yafei, Marwa al Ajami and Zaina Batash.

Head coach Wafa Zagdoudi emphasised the importance of this phase of preparation, saying: "We are currently focused on building chemistry among the players and improving their physical and technical performance, especially since most of them are participating in a major tournament for the first time. We have promising talents, and the performance is improving with every session. Our goal is not just to participate honourably, but to compete and achieve positive results."

Seeb clinch OVL title to secure historic treble

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 6

SEEB CLUB clinched the 2024-2025 First Division Volleyball League title after a well-deserved victory over Salam Club, winning three sets to one in the final match held at the Sohar Sports Complex arena on Monday. The match saw a packed crowd of passionate fans from both sides, creating an electric and enthusiastic atmosphere.

The final was held under the patronage of Mohammed al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah, and in the presence of Engineer Ibrahim al Muqbali, Chairman of the Oman Volleyball Association, along with several prominent sports figures.

Seeb started the match strongly, opening the scoring early. Salam managed to equalise after a powerful serve from Seeb's professional player Bogdan, which went out of bounds. Seeb maintained the pressure, with Saud al Maamari scoring to regain the lead. However, another serving error by Bogdan allowed Salam to equalise again, adding to the early excitement of the match.

Khamis al Jabri then added a third point for Seeb, but Pakistan's Murad Khan responded with an equaliser for Salam. The back-and-forth scoring continued with Seeb's professional player Artem giving his team the lead again, only for Waleed al Farsi of Salam to level the score at 4-4.

The intense exchanges persisted, with Ahmed al Turabi scoring for Seeb before Salam responded again. Bogdan then scored two consecutive points to give Seeb the upper hand. Gradually, Seeb took control of the first set, widening the gap and eventually sealing it 25-16.

In the second set, Salam mounted a strong comeback led by Bahraini professional Mohammed Yaqoob and teammate Abdullah al Shibli. Their organised team play earned them the set 25-23, leveling the match and raising the intensity of the contest.

The third set was closely contested with long rallies and tactical exchanges. Both



Seeb players celebrate with the OVL shield.

teams remained neck and neck, but Seeb ultimately prevailed 25-23 by capitalising on key moments with better focus.

In the fourth set, Salam attempted to push the match to a decisive fifth set, opening the scoring through Ibrahim al Hashemi. However, Seeb quickly regained composure and surged ahead with standout performances by Artem and Saud al Maamari. They secured the set 25-19, sealing the championship title.

BOGDAN BEST PLAYER

With this win, Seeb completed a historic treble for the season adding the league title to their earlier triumphs in the Super Cup against Salam and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Shield after defeating Majees.

During the award ceremony, the Governor of North Al Batinah presented

Seeb players with gold medals and handed the league shield to the team captain. Salam received silver medals, while Majees were awarded bronze medals.

During the award ceremony, players who won the individual skill awards were also honoured. Abdullah al Muqbali from Seeb received the Best Libero award, while his teammate Adam al Jalboubi earned the Best Setter award. The Best Player in Position 3 award was shared between Saud al Maamari from Seeb and Khalid Nasser al Muqbali from Salam. The Best Player in Position 4 award was jointly awarded to Hilal al Muqbali from Majees and Adam al Jaradi from Salam. The Best Opposite Spiker in Position 2 award went to Aslon John from Al Bashayer. The individual awards concluded with Seeb's professional player Bogdan being crowned Most Complete Player of the League.

Oman fourth in Asian Yogasana Championship 2025

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

MUSCAT: A strong Omani yoga team comprising both Omanis and expatriates returned to Muscat after ranking fourth in second Asian Yogasana Sports Championship 2025. Oman secured 11 medals, including one gold, four silver and six bronze in the championship held at the Indira Gandhi Stadium, New Delhi, from April 25 to 27.

The event, which marked a historic chapter in the evolution of Yogasana as a structured, competitive sport in Asia, witnessed participation from 21 Asian nations, each bringing forth the richness of Yogic tradition, athletic excellence and cultural unity.

Organised by 'Asian Yogasana', a body recognised by the Olympic Council of Asia and hosted by Yogasana Bharat, the only nationally affiliated body under World Yogasana, the championship was supported by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, and The Sports Authority of India (SAI).

The championship featured



Oman secured 11 medals, including one gold, four silver and six bronze in the championship in India.

88 competitive events across Junior, Senior, Senior A, and Senior B categories. A defining highlight of the event was the dominance of female participation, with 302 female athletes surpassing 174 male athletes, underlining the growing trend of women's empowerment in Yogasana sports.

Salha Hakim Mohammed, Positive Energy, Oman and

President of Oman Yogasana Federation and Anuradha Murugan, Secretary, Oman Yogasana Federation, and the selected Technical Official from Oman, led a team of six athletes for the competition.

The Oman team comprised Salha Hakim Mohammed, Positive Energy, Oman, President of Oman Yogasana Federation, Anuradha Murugan – Team Coach &

Technical Official from Oman for second Asian Yogasana Sport Championship, Secretary of Oman Yogasana Federation, Halima al Mataani, Team Manager, Bikram Mishra, Team Coach, Sree Vaishnavi Jeyakumar, Team Captain, Olimuthu Rani, Athlete Sanmath Kaur Ajmani, Yashvi Rajesh, Athlete, Paranjay Sanjeev Vyas and Vivaan Rai.

FOURPHASES



The event will take place from July 15 to 24, starting from Barr Al Hikman and concluding at Ras Al Hadd, traversing the coastal regions of Oman.

OMRAN GROUP
LAUNCHES 2025
OMAN KITE FESTIVAL

MUSCAT: In a significant step to cement Oman’s position on the global map of adventure and sports tourism, Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group), in collaboration with Oman Sail, announced the launch of the Oman Kite Festival 2025. The event will take place from July 15 to 24, starting from Barr Al Hikman and concluding at Ras Al Hadd, traversing some of the most picturesque coastal regions of the country.

Sultan Sulaiman al Khudoori, Assets Manager at Omran Group emphasised that the festival aligns with Omran Group’s strategy to diversify tourism experiences and unlock the potential of Oman’s exceptional natural assets. He noted that the strong momentum generated by last year’s downwinder races served as a driving force for scaling up the event this year, both in geographical scope and event duration. The expanded format is expected to attract a larger number of international athletes and deliver a richer tourism offering that reflects the diversity of Oman’s coastal environments.

Shaima Said al Asmi, events specialist at Oman Sail stated that the festival marks a major milestone in the development of marine sports in Oman. He highlighted the country’s ideal coastal conditions—ranging from ecological variety to favourable wind and weather — and noted that the participation of elite international kitesurfing brings a new dimension to the festival and strengthens Oman’s positioning as a top destination for water-based adventure tourism.

The festival will feature a series of races, including the multi-stage ‘Downwinder’ race, which unfolds over four phases: from Barr Al Hikman to Masirah Island, from Masirah to Ras Al Ruwais, then from the Pink Lagoons to Al Ashkharah, and finally from Ras Al Jinz to Ras Al Hadd. Complementing the main event are additional competitions, such as the Kite Course Race at Barr Al Hikman, Coastal Race at Masirah Island, and Slalom Race at Ras Al Hadd. On the sidelines, the festival will offer family-friendly activities and an SME exhibition at Ashkharah Municipal Park.

Serving as a dynamic platform to showcase Sultanate of Oman’s breathtaking coastal and marine landscapes, the Oman Kite Festival 2025 contributes to boosting tourism activity and reinforcing Oman’s reputation as a premier destination for international sporting events.

The initiative also aims to promote under-explored destinations, support domestic tourism, and expand the reach of adventure and experience-based travel across the country.



The championship, which is acting as the qualifiers for the 2026 IHF Men’s and Women’s Beach Handball World Championships, will run in Muscat until May 15.

Asian beach handball opens
with spectacular ceremony

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 6

THE 10th AHF Asian Men’s and Women’s Beach Handball Championship made a spectacular start in Muscat following the grand opening ceremony at sands court in the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Tuesday night. The championship, which is acting as the qualifiers for the 2026 IHF Men’s and Women’s Beach Handball World Championships, will run in Muscat until May 15 in presence of nine teams for Men’s competition distributed into two groups while one group for women’s competition including four teams.

Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, former Oman Olympic Committee chairman and Chairman of Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), officially announced the start of the tournament in presence of Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, Chairman of Oman Handball Association (OHA) and Head of the Organising Committee, Bader Dhiyab, Vice-President of the International Handball Federation (IHF) and Treasurer of the Asian Handball Federation (AHF), members of the OHA board, officials from AHF, heads of participating sports federations, and national team delegations.

The matchday two on Wednesday will see three matches. Jordan will meet the Philippines in Group B at 6 pm while Pakistan will take on Iran in the same group. Saudi Arabia will eye for strong start against Hong Kong in Group A at 7 pm.

The top four in each group will secure slots directly to the quarterfinals on May



Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, former OOC chairman, opened the tournament in presence of Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, OHA chairman, and Bader Dhiyab, Vice-President of the IHF.

12. The semifinals are scheduled for May 13 while the final is on May 15. The women’s competition includes four teams playing each other twice in a league round-robin format across 12 games in total.

IDEAL DESTINATION

The OHA chairman in his welcome speech said that everyone is delighted to extend the warmest welcome to all participants here in beautiful city of Muscat.

“Oman is a perfect venue for such a prestigious Asian event. The city’s tourism-friendly climate, natural beaches and infrastructure have made it an ideal destination for hosting major tournaments, reflecting Oman’s continuous advancement in the sporting field.”

“Hosting this championship affirms Oman’s leadership in organising

international sports events and reinforces its strategic role as a prime hub for beach sports.”

“Our beaches have long been a captivating destination for thrilling and skillful sports like beach handball. Oman previously hosted the IHF World Championship, and this event once again highlights the broader impact of sports, extending beyond competition to tourism, economic stimulation, and global promotion of Oman as an ideal beach sports destination,” he concluded.

Bader Dhiyab, Vice-President of IHF and Treasurer of the AHF, delivered a speech on behalf of the AHF: “I extend my heartfelt congratulations and best wishes for the success of the 10th AHF Asian Men’s and Women’s Beach Handball Championship – Qualifiers for the 2026 IHF Beach Handball World Championship.”

“This major Asian gathering is one of the AHF’s key objectives, bringing together youth from across Asia.”

“We wish all participating teams the best of luck and extend sincere thanks to the Oman Handball Association for their tremendous efforts in organising this significant event. We also recognise the outstanding work of Omani youth in ensuring the success of this and other international championships,” Dhiyab said.

The ceremony featured a visual presentation highlighting Oman’s history of hosting major beach handball tournaments and the national team’s achievements. This was followed by a traditional artistic performance titled ‘Our Heritage, Our Pride — and on the Sands Lies Our Glory’. The ceremony concluded with the official declaration of the tournament’s opening by the chief guest.

Jokic-inspired Nuggets stun Thunder, Knicks down Celtics

LOS ANGELES: Aaron Gordon scored a last-gasp three-pointer and Nikola Jokic produced a 42-point masterpiece as the Denver Nuggets stunned the top-seeded Oklahoma City Thunder 121-119 in a dramatic NBA Western Conference semifinal series opener on Monday.

Nuggets forward Gordon drained a 25-foot effort from outside the arc with four seconds remaining to snatch victory against a Thunder line-up who had led by as many as 14 points in the third quarter at the Paycom Center in Oklahoma City. The Thunder continued to lead by double digits for much of the fourth quarter, but saw their advantage evaporate after 18 points from Serbian star Jokic in the final frame.

The towering three-time NBA Most Valuable Player finished with

22 rebounds, six assists, two blocks and a steal in addition to his 42-point tally.

Oklahoma City were left ruing two missed free throws from forward Chet Holmgren with 10 seconds remaining with his team defending a slender 119-118 lead. Those misses proved costly, with Denver rebounding and launching the final offensive raid that ended with Gordon’s winning three-pointer.

Denver interim coach David Adelman paid tribute to the all-round effectiveness of Gordon, who finished with 22 points and 14 rebounds.

“I’m looking at ball-handling, responsibilities, leadership — he is a Denver Nugget, the soul of our team,” Adelman said. “So cool to see him have a moment like that.”



Oklahoma City Thunder’s Isaiah Hartenstein (55) drives to the basket against Denver Nuggets’ Nikola Jokic (15) in the second round. — **Imagn Images**

Gordon said the Nuggets’ calmness under pressure had helped them close out the win.

Gordon and Jokic were backed by 21 points from Jamal Murray and 18 points from Russell Westbrook.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led Oklahoma City with 33 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists, with Alex Caruso scoring 20 off the bench after shooting five three-pointers.

Game two of the best-of-seven series takes place on Wednesday.

BRUNSON BRILLIANCE

In the Eastern Conference semifinals, a pulsating battle in Boston saw the New York Knicks dig deep to edge past the reigning champion Celtics 108-105 after Jalen Brunson and OG Anunoby scored 29 points apiece for New York. Brunson

— the 40-point hero of New York’s series-clinching win over Detroit last week — was once again in superb form as the Knicks climbed out of a 72-52 hole in the third quarter to snatch game one at the TD Garden. Brunson’s 29 points included five-of-nine from three-point range, with Anunoby pouring in six three-pointers in his 29-point haul.

Jaylen Brown and Jayson Tatum led Boston’s scoring with 23 points apiece on a miserable shooting night for the Celtics, who missed 45 three-point attempts — the most ever missed threes in a playoff game.

“It was a Great team win,” Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. “We started well, then we fell into a hole and then we fought our way out and then we made tough plays down the stretch,” Thibodeau added. — **AFP**

SPORTS

HARDESTDECISION



Chelsea's Nicolas Jackson in action with Liverpool's Trent Alexander-Arnold. — Reuters

ALEXANDER-ARNOLD CONFIRMS LIVERPOOL EXIT

LIVERPOOL: Trent Alexander-Arnold will leave Liverpool when his contract expires at the end of the season, saying it was the “hardest decision” of his life ahead of a widely expected move to Real Madrid. Alexander-Arnold is out of contract at the end of June and the England right-back’s future had been the subject of intense debate throughout Liverpool’s charge to the Premier League title this season.

“After 20 years at Liverpool Football Club, now is the time for me to confirm that I will be leaving at the end of the season,” the 26-year-old posted on X. “This is easily the hardest decision I’ve ever made in my life.” Alexander-Arnold’s contract talks over a free transfer switch to Real are reported to be at an advanced stage.

He will depart as a Premier League champion after the Reds moved level with rivals Manchester United on a joint-record 20 English top-flight titles.

“I know many of you have wondered why or been frustrated that I haven’t spoken about this yet, but it was always my intention to keep my full focus on the team’s best interests, which was securing No 20,” Alexander-Arnold said. “This club has been my whole life — my whole world — for 20 years. From the academy right through until now, the support and love I have felt from everyone inside and outside of the club will stay with me forever. “I will forever be in debt to you all. My love for this club will never die.”

Liverpool-born Alexander-Arnold was one of three high-profile Reds players whose deals were due to run out at the end of the season — a contract saga that provided a continuous backdrop to Arne Slot’s first campaign in charge. Top-scorer Mohamed Salah and captain Virgil van Dijk signed new deals in recent weeks but Alexander-Arnold has opted to leave.

The defender made his senior debut in 2016 and has made 352 appearances for the Reds to date, scoring 23 goals and lifting multiple trophies including the 2019 Champions League and two Premier League crowns.

GRATITUDE

Liverpool were reportedly willing to make Alexander-Arnold one of the highest-paid defenders in Premier League history in a bid to keep him. But the lure of playing for Real alongside close friend and England team-mate Jude Bellingham proved impossible to resist.

Despite the snub, Liverpool paid tribute to Alexander-Arnold, who joined the club as a six-year-old.

“Alexander-Arnold will depart with our gratitude and appreciation for his contribution during a sustained period of success,” the club said in a statement. — AFP



Spa Francorchamps was the venue for some of Ahmad al Harthy’s most spectacular achievements in motor racing.

Al Harthy Belgium-bound as FIA season continues

SPA Francorchamps, venue for some of Ahmad Al Harthy’s most spectacular achievements in motor racing, welcomes the FIA World Endurance Championship for round three of the season this Saturday, May 10, where the Omani aims to continue his and Team WRT’s podium momentum.

Fresh from a near-victory at Imola in Italy less than three weeks ago, where team-mate Kelvin van der Linde took the chequered flag a mere 0.3 seconds shy of the race win, the duo and fellow Team WRT racer Valentino Rossi are focused on trying to go one better at Spa. Imola very much marked the true start of the 2025 season for the No 46 BMW M4 LMT3 entry with a spectacular performance – Al Harthy was fastest by some margin in qualifying and Rossi then sealing pole position in Hyperpole.

In the fight for victory throughout, an unfortunate penalty threatened to derail the squad’s podium challenge but an outstanding final stint from Van der Linde brought the BMW back through the order superbly to second place, a fraction from the win.

Rocketing up the championship standings into the LMGT3 top six as a result, only eight points shy of the top three, the goal in Belgium is to continue the high level of performance in the TotalEnergies 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps to solidify their 2025 championship challenge.

Not only that, there is a clear desire for some redemption too after an unfortunate

2025 FIA WEC LMGT3 DRIVER STANDINGS (AFTER RD2):
1. Ben Keating / Daniel Juncadella / Jonny Edgar, 44 pts
2. Arnold Robin / Finn Ghehrsit, 33 pts
3. Gregoire Saucy/James Cottingham/Sebastien Baud, 27 pts
6. Ahmad al Harthy/Valentino Rossi/Van der Linde, 19 pts

2025 FIA WEC LMGT3 TEAM STANDINGS (AFTER RD2):
1. TF Sport (Corvette Z06 LMGT3.R), 44 pts
2. Akkodis ASP Team (Lexus RC F LMGT3), 33 pts
3. United Autosports (McLaren 720 S LMGT3 EVO), 27 pts
6. Team WRT (BMW M4 LMGT3), 19 pts

Team WRT’s Ahmad al Harthy aiming for more podium success in Rd3

Omani excited to be back at Spa, scene of huge racing career successes

Al Harthy, Rossi, Van der Linde determined to build on Imola P2 result

retirement from last year’s encounter at Spa. Contact from one of the Hypercar class Porsches midway through hour two ended the BMW’s involvement while in the battle for the LMGT3 podium.

Historically, of course, OQ Group, Sohar International, Omantel, Oman LNG, BMW Oman, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and

Youth and Experience Oman supported racer Al Harthy has a strong affinity with Spa-Francorchamps having enjoyed tremendous success there.

Unquestionably his career highlight at the track to date was Pro-Am class victory in the Total 24 Hours of Spa in 2019 in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup, then known as the Blancpain Endurance Cup. All achieved from a pitlane start!

Ahmad Al Harthy:

“We’re all looking forward to continuing the FIA WEC season at Spa this weekend, Imola was an amazing event and really did kick-start our championship. Everyone at Team WRT did an incredible job, Vale and Kelvin were super quick as always and I was so happy with my performance in both qualifying and the race.

“What can you say about Spa that hasn’t already been said? It’s an incredible track, one of the best in the world, and we have enjoyed so much success there over the years. I’ve always loved racing at Spa, the track is an amazing challenge and it’s one of those places where I have always seemed to go well. After being so close to the win at Imola, we’re aiming to fight just as hard again this weekend.”

Practice at Spa begins on Thursday, May 8, with the opening two sessions ahead of session three on Friday, and then qualifying at 14:40 local time – Hyperpole following straight after. On Saturday, the TotalEnergies 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps will begin at 14:00 local time. Follow live at [www.fiawec.com](#)

Cummins heroics in vain as rain forces Hyderabad out of playoff

HYDERABAD, INDIA: Pat Cummins’ figures of 3-19 went in vain after rain ended his and Sunrisers Hyderabad’s chances of reaching the playoffs as their clash against Delhi Capitals was called off on Monday.

Hyderabad restricted Delhi to 133-7 in 20 overs, but rain fell ahead of the chase and after about one hour and 45 minutes the officials decided to share one point each between the two teams.

Rain stopped after more than 70 minutes but the ground remained covered with puddles of water and Cummins and Delhi skipper Axar Patel shook hands.

Last year’s runners-up Hyderabad with seven defeats, three wins and one no result fell out of the playoffs contention along with Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals.

Delhi in fifth place keep their dream alive of winning their first-ever IPL title.

The top four teams at the end of the league stage will move into the playoffs.

Australia’s Cummins struck on the first ball of the match and had the opposition reeling at 62-6, before Ashutosh Sharma and Tristan Stubbs put on 66 runs for the seventh wicket.

Cummins elected to field



Sunrisers Hyderabad’s Pat Cummins celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Delhi Capitals’ Karun Nair during the IPL match in Hyderabad. — Reuters

first and took a wicket in each of his first three overs to send back Karun Nair for a first-ball duck, Faf du Plessis (three) and Abishek Porel (eight).

Harshal Patel dismissed Axar, and KL Rahul fell to Jaydev Unadkat in a dominant bowling performance by Hyderabad.

Stubbs and impact substitute Ashutosh both scored 41 each to check Delhi’s slide.

Ashutosh took on the attack in his 26-ball knock, laced with two fours and three sixes, before falling to Sri Lankan Eshan Malinga in the final over. — AFP

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
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Nizwa Industrial City has localised 19 new investment projects in 2024.

NIZWA INDUSTRIAL CITY ATTRACTS RO 28 MILLION IN NEW INVESTMENTS

NIZWA: Nizwa Industrial City, part of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has localised 19 new investment projects in 2024 with a combined value of RO 28 million, spanning over 131,000 square metres.

These additions bring the total number of active projects in the industrial zone to 186, with cumulative investments surpassing RO 504 million. The city currently employs over 6,100 workers, with an Omaniisation rate of 45%.

Engineer Ishaq bin Ibrahim al Kharousi, Acting Director General of Nizwa Industrial City, said the Madayn Pioneer Complex — a dedicated SME development initiative — is 60% complete.

The RO 1.2 million project will offer 10 ready-built workshops for small and medium enterprises.

Al Kharousi also noted that consultancy work has begun on a new residential project to support the growing workforce, while general maintenance upgrades are being prepared. Additionally, the master plan for Phase 5 — a 4 million square metre expansion — has been completed.

On the sustainability front, the industrial city has planted over 1,700 trees, with plans to add 600 more.

In cooperation with the Environment Authority, 670 trees have been planted and 200 distributed to companies. Several tenants are exploring solar energy solutions and recycling initiatives, especially in aluminium and copper sectors. — ONA

New HR reform to power Oman Vision 2040 goals

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MAY 6

TAKING A BOLD STEP towards attainment of the national objectives of Oman Vision 2040, the Ministry of Labour unveiled a major programme of human resources reform under the “Ejada” system.

The programme is one of the strategic pillars of the government’s broader agenda to build a knowledge-based economy powered by skilled and able national human capital.

Underlying this effort is the creation of the “Ejada” Human Resources Management Matrix, a planning framework designed to improve public sector performance by introducing international best practices in human capital management.

Through aligning human resources development with international best practice, the Ministry hopes to improve the efficiency, flexibility, and sustainability of public institutions. The Initiative



The ‘Ejada’ initiative marks a new era in public sector talent management.

directly covers some of the central topics of Oman Vision 2040, including the prioritization of building human capital, institutional performance, and the establishment of an agile, empowered administrative system. Officials of the ministry unveiled the vision, mechanisms, and next steps for the new model in a recent stakeholder presentation to implement in government institutions.

One of the most important aspects of the reform is the application of the internationally recognised

Nine-Box Talent Model, which classifies staff by performance and potential.

This allows for targeted development, succession planning, and strategic workforce placement — essential to building a dynamic, forward-looking civil service.

Dr Mohammed bin Mustafa al Najjar, Director General of Training at the Ministry of Labour, said: “The basis of the new HR grid ‘Ejada’ comes from unambiguous strategic direction, as well as Royal instructions to establish a robust and sustainable

governmental framework on the basis of national talent.”

“Humanity is at the centre of this transformation,” Dr Al Najjar stated, “To ultimately realise the ambitions of Oman Vision 2040, we must embrace modern, forward-thinking methods that go far beyond traditional practices.

Our vision is to equip government organisations with the tools and frameworks needed to unlock the full potential of Omani capabilities and build a future-proof public service.”

Critical, though, is that the initiative is grounded in Royal directives and national policy recommendations to create a professional, value-based public sector.

It encourages innovative, unconventional HR practices to replace traditional systems with practices that promote continuous development and institutional excellence. Since Oman Vision 2040 set clear goals for government performance and human capital competitiveness, Ejada is a milestone response to those national appeals.

ITHCA INVESTS IN US SEMICONDUCTOR INNOVATOR

MUSCAT: Ithca Group has signed a strategic investment agreement with US-based Lumotive, a leader in programmable optical semiconductors, as part of its broader ambition to position Oman as a regional technology hub.

The deal was formalised by Eng Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari,

CEO of Ithca Group, and Sam Heidari, CEO of Lumotive, during a ceremony held on Tuesday, May 6, 2025, in Muscat.

This investment marks Ithca’s second foray into the semiconductor sector and aligns with Oman’s Vision 2040 and its National Digital Transformation

Plan, which aims to build a knowledge-based economy rooted in advanced technologies.

Al Mandhari stated the investment reinforces Ithca’s commitment to partnering with global tech leaders and facilitating knowledge transfer. “We are working to build a nucleus of

Omani talent in semiconductor design to serve regional and international markets,” he said.

Lumotive CEO Sam Heidari welcomed the partnership, saying it opens the door to expanding the company’s presence in Oman and collaborating on R&D and local capacity building. — ONA

OETC eyes smart grid strategy to meet renewables targets

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 6

OMAN Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) is accelerating efforts to modernise the national grid in support of the Sultanate’s clean energy transition, aiming to enable 30 per cent renewable energy integration into the electricity mix by 2030.

Speaking at the 22nd Annual Conference of the Energy Regulators Regional Association (ERRA) in Muscat, Hisham al Riyami, General Manager – Planning at OETC, reaffirmed the company’s commitment to advancing Oman Vision 2040 targets.

“The government and policymakers have set a clear target to achieve around 30 per cent renewable energy in the national energy mix by 2030 — equivalent to approximately nine gigawatt of



Achieving the 30-per cent target will require significant investment in infrastructure upgrades: Hisham al Riyami, General Manager – Planning, OETC.

installed capacity,” Al Riyami said.

He noted Oman’s natural advantage lies in the diversity of its renewable resources. “Solar energy is abundant during the day, while wind energy tends to be stronger at night. This complementary pattern provides an excellent opportunity to meet demand under various operational

scenarios,” he explained. As the national transmission system operator, OETC plays a pivotal role in enabling and integrating renewables. “We aspire to become a national champion in this field,” Al Riyami said.

“We are working closely with our regulator, policymakers, and subsidiaries to ensure full

coordination and readiness to connect these energy resources to the national grid.” Achieving the 30 per cent target, he added, will require significant investment in infrastructure upgrades.

“Much of the existing network was not designed to accommodate such high levels of renewable integration. We are upgrading transmission lines and substations to ensure the safe and efficient delivery of power from source to demand centres.”

Al Riyami outlined OETC’s broader ambition to build a smart, world-class, self-healing grid capable of detecting, absorbing, and responding to disruptions. He highlighted the adoption of advanced technologies to optimise asset management, improve maintenance, and reduce system losses. In southern and remote areas, such as the southwest of Oman, growing demand

necessitates rapid infrastructure development.

“We are prioritising the development of digital systems for real-time monitoring, data collection, and predictive decision-making,” he said. Technologies such as SCADA and AI-based forecasting tools are increasingly central to grid optimisation.

Al Riyami also stressed the value of microgrids—small, decentralised systems that can operate independently in case of wider network issues. “This decentralised approach enhances system reliability and supports national energy security,” he noted.

He concluded, “We are focused on building a flexible, intelligent, and sustainable transmission network—one that can integrate variable renewable energy, forecast demand accurately, and respond dynamically to Oman’s evolving energy needs.”

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort has hosted distinguished international events, weddings and high-profile delegations within its first year.

ST REGIS AL MOUJ MUSCAT RESORT NAMED BEST NEW BUSINESS HOTEL

MUSCAT: The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, the capital’s best address and Oman’s new icon of luxury hospitality, has been awarded Best New Business Hotel in the Middle East at the Business Traveller Middle East Awards 2025.

“This recognition is not only a proud moment for our team — it is a reflection of Oman’s growing presence on the global luxury hospitality map,” said Wassim Daageh, General Manager of The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort. “At The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, we are not just delivering exceptional service — we are creating a new standard, rooted in passion, precision and the timeless spirit of Omani elegance. This award is a tribute to our team, whose commitment and heart define every guest experience.”

The award reflects the hotel’s steadfast dedication to delivering exceptional experiences for discerning business guests. With Muscat’s largest pillarless ballroom and refined meeting spaces, The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort has hosted distinguished international events, spectacular weddings and high-profile delegations within its first year — setting a new benchmark for gatherings in Oman.

Blending the timeless allure of the St Regis legacy along Muscat’s majestic coastline, the resort features 250 elegantly appointed guest rooms and suites with captivating views of the Arabian Sea and the championship golf course.

Refined meeting spaces, the legendary St Regis Butler Service, world-class dining experiences and the exclusive Guerlain Spa come together to create an exquisite sanctuary for global business travellers.

BEYOND ONE LAUNCHES FRIENDI PAY IN OMAN

MUSCAT: Beyond One, the digital services provider and global tech company, has announced the launch of FRiENDi Pay, a licensed digital mobile wallet service that will transform how people in Oman makes payments and send money internationally.

Building on FRiENDi Mobile’s established reputation serving more than 750,000 Oman users, FRiENDi Pay offers a comprehensive financial solution for all Oman residents and citizens seeking hassle-free money transfers. The platform simplifies both international remittances and local transactions, allowing users to support family overseas or manage expenses with friends nearby.

Oman’s digital payments market is experiencing rapid growth, expected to reach \$9.61 billion in 2025 and more than double to \$20.83 billion by 2029. Within this expanding sector, digital payment and money movement alone are projected to hit \$116.76 million in 2025.

BANKDHO FAR’S MINOR ACCOUNT SPURS SAVING CULTURE

MUSCAT: Designed specifically for individuals aged 13 to 18, the Minor Savings Account offers young customers a valuable opportunity to learn about personal finance in a secure and supportive environment.

The account provides a host of benefits that encourage good financial habits from a young age. With no minimum balance fees, young account holders can begin their financial journey without the pressure of maintaining a high balance. This flexibility allows them



The account provides a host of benefits that encourage good financial habits from a young age.

to start saving with ease, whether for short-term goals or long-term aspirations. Besides, account holders also receive a customised debit card with name, giving them a sense of ownership and responsibility over their financial decisions.

The card comes with reasonable transaction limits — RO 50 per transaction and RO 200 per month — to ensure responsible use, while the parent/guardian retains the authority to deposit and withdraw funds as needed.

Kia takes four victories in 2025 iF Design Awards

KIA has achieved four awards at the 2025 iF Design Awards, highlighting its leadership in design and technological innovation across various sectors. Globally renowned for honouring outstanding design excellence, the iF Design Awards have recognised Kia’s cutting-edge vehicle designs and digital advancements, solidifying the brand’s reputation for innovation.

Kia’s recognition at the 2025 iF Design Awards underscores the brand’s commitment to delivering innovative, user-centred designs that go beyond the automotive industry and extend into digital engagement and customer experience.

Launched in 1954, the iF Design Awards is a highly respected global design competition. Each year, the awards celebrate exceptional designs across various categories, recognising only the most groundbreaking and innovative creations.

Winning an iF Design Award highlights the global impact and ingenuity of each design. All award-winning entries are presented on www.ifdesign.com



The awards recognised Kia’s cutting-edge vehicle designs and digital advancements.



and published in the iF Design App. The Kia EV3 was named Winner in the 2025 iF Design Awards Automobiles category thanks to its groundbreaking aesthetics.

The all-electric compact SUV was celebrated for its bold, geometric exterior and innovative interior design that embodies Kia’s ‘Opposites United’ philosophy. The EV3 stands out thanks to its unique character, maximising space and accessibility with a focus on a personalised driving experience.

Kia received multiple accolades at the 2025 iF Design Awards for its design excellence across a

range of customer touchpoints, with three category victories. CES 2024 Booth Design (Trade Fair category), CES 2024 Film (3D Digital Animation category) and Kia App (Mobile Application UI Design Category)

Kia’s booth design at CES (Consumer Electronics Show) 2024, titled ‘A Place of Inspiration’, received recognition in the ‘Trade Fair’ category.

The inviting, open layout of the stand enabled visitors to experience Kia’s Platform Beyond Vehicles (PBVs) through four unique lifestyle zones — Park, City, Home and Factory — demonstrating how PBVs will shape the future of mobility by

meeting users’ diverse needs with unprecedented levels of flexibility and customisation.

Kia’s exhibition film, shown at CES 2024 and also called ‘A Place of Inspiration’, was named Winner in the 2025 iF Design Awards ‘3D Digital Animation’ category. The film creatively reinterprets Kia’s PBV vision and demonstrates how these vehicles will revolutionise daily life while reflecting Kia’s core brand values.

This double win follows the brand’s Red Dot Design Award last year and further highlights Kia’s strong capabilities in brand communication and design innovation.

Air India Express appoints Khimji’s Travel and Tourism as representative agency in Oman

MUSCAT: Air India Express has appointed Khimji’s Travel and Tourism as their representative agency for Oman. The partnership was announced at the Arabian Travel Market 2025 in Dubai, underscoring the airline’s ongoing commitment to expanding its reach and strengthening customer engagement in the key Oman market.

Under this partnership, Khimji’s Travel and Tourism will provide comprehensive sales, marketing and distribution support to Air India Express in Oman.

This localised approach will improve accessibility for travellers and trade partners while supporting the Air India Express’ broader growth plans in the region.

Khimji’s Travel and Tourism stands out as a trusted, innovative and customer-centric travel management company in Oman, offering a wide range of services for leisure and business



flyers; and leveraging both its local expertise and international partnerships to deliver exceptional travel experiences. Air India Express operates over 50 weekly flights from Muscat to 10 Indian cities: Chennai, Delhi, Kannur, Kochi, Kozhikode, Lucknow, Mangaluru, Mumbai,

Thiruvananthapuram, and Tiruchirappalli.

The airline also operates three weekly flights from Salalah, directly connecting the South Indian cities of Kochi and Kozhikode.

Dr Ankur Garg, Chief Commercial Officer, Air India Express, said, “As one of our key markets in the Middle East, Oman holds significant importance for Air India Express, thanks to the vibrant Indian expat community and the growing number of Omanis choosing Indian destinations for leisure and medical tourism.

This partnership will help us stay closer to our customers and offer them even more reliable and seamless travel options to and from India.”

Malvika Khimji, Director, Khimji’s Travel and Tourism said, “We are honoured to collaborate with Air India Express, a prestigious airline renowned for its market leadership on Indian-Middle East routes and focus on customer-centric travel.”

National Finance’s Q1 performance highlights effective operation strategies

MUSCAT: Driven by a robust growth strategy, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, has reported an impressive performance for Q1 ended March 31, 2025.

The company’s achievements are a testament to its focus on operational efficiency and a people-centric culture, both of which have played a pivotal role in its success. Furthermore, the results spotlight National Finance’s commitment to sustainable growth, supported by a comprehensive strategy that

integrates prudent risk management, preparedness for market shifts and continuous operational optimisation.

National Finance continues to maintain its leadership position in the nation’s finance and leasing sector, with a total regulatory capital of RO 141.69 million — the highest among Finance and Leasing Companies (FLCs) in the Sultanate of Oman. This strong capital base provides a solid foundation for the company’s ongoing growth and expansion.

National Finance remains the largest FLC in the country in terms of



Tariq Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance.

asset size, branch network, revenues and profitability.

For the period ending 31 March, 2025, the company achieved an operating profit of RO 5.96 million, marking a 51.83% increase compared to RO 3.93 million in March 2024.

Net Investment in Lease also saw steady growth, reaching RO 600.74 million, up 3.78% from RO 578.87 million in December 2024. Profit after tax surged to RO 3.31 million, an increase of 36.64% from RO 2.42 million in March 2024, underscoring the company’s

strong financial performance and sustained profitability.

Reflecting on the company’s achievements, Tariq Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance, stated, “The consistent growth in our performance and market share underscores our resilience in navigating a dynamic market landscape. Through strategic foresight and a commitment to operational optimisation, we have successfully streamlined our efforts to maintain a forward-looking approach while ensuring sustainable growth.”

BUSINESS

OFFSHORE INVESTIGATION



The fieldwork included deep and shallow borehole drilling, Cone Penetration Testing (CPT), and detailed assessments of pipeline routes and marine anchoring points. Image for illustration only.

KEY GEOTECHNICAL WORK COMPLETED FOR DUQM GREEN AMMONIA PROJECT

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 6

IN A key step toward advancing Oman’s clean energy ambitions, the fieldwork phase of an offshore geotechnical investigation has been successfully completed for a major green ammonia plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

Finalised in April 2025, the fieldwork included deep and shallow borehole drilling, Cone Penetration Testing (CPT), and detailed assessments of pipeline routes and marine anchoring points. These investigations provide the technical foundation for the design and construction of the green ammonia facility, a strategic project aligned with Oman Vision 2040’s goals for economic diversification and renewable energy leadership.

In a statement, Darkocean Geostar UAE, the company leading the survey efforts, said the work equips developers and regulators with the essential data needed to support safe and sustainable engineering decisions for the project.

“This marks a critical milestone in the development of the Duqm ammonia plant,” said Dr Surya Kumar Ippenta, PMP, Managing Director of Darkocean Geostar. “Our work provides stakeholders with the data needed to advance Oman’s sustainable industrial future.”

Duqm is rapidly positioning itself as a key hub in Oman’s green energy value chain, attracting global attention for its strategic port access, industrial infrastructure, and growing cluster of hydrogen and ammonia ventures. The upcoming ammonia plant is expected to utilise green hydrogen produced from renewable energy sources, converting it into ammonia for export to global markets seeking low-carbon fuel alternatives.

Alongside the geotechnical surveys, Darkocean Geostar is currently conducting oceanographic data collection at the project site. This next phase will provide crucial insights into marine currents, sediment movement, and environmental dynamics—information necessary for infrastructure planning and environmental compliance.

Industry observers emphasise the importance of such data in de-risking major infrastructure investments and expediting regulatory approvals. The timely completion of field investigations strengthens confidence among investors and project stakeholders involved in Oman’s clean energy sector.

The Duqm SEZ, under the supervision of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, is a cornerstone of Oman’s strategy to become a regional leader in green fuels. With critical fieldwork now complete, the ammonia project is poised to advance into design, permitting, and construction, marking another step in Oman’s transition toward a sustainable energy future.

NOT WEAK

EU won’t be pressured into US unfair deal



The European Union does not feel under undue pressure to accept an unfair trade deal with the United States, the EU’s trade chief said on Tuesday, adding that other trading partners were very keen to accelerate talks with the bloc.

“We do not feel weak. We do not we do not feel under undue pressure to accept a deal which would not be fair for us,” European Trade Commissioner Maros Sefcovic said. —Reuters

EXCISE DUTY

New car market in UK declines by 10.4%



Registrations of new cars in the UK fell by 10.4% last month, new figures show. Industry body the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) said 120,331 new cars were registered in the UK in April.

That compares with 134,274 during the same month last year. The SMMT attributed the decline to a number of factors, including changes to vehicle excise duty rules. — dpa

UNEXPECTED RISE

Spain’s unemployment declines sharply



Spain’s unemployment declined at a sharper-than-expected pace in April, data from the Labour Ministry showed on Tuesday. The number of unemployed fell by 67,420 from the previous month compared to the expected increase of 6,500.

Unemployment decreased by 153,782 or 5.77%. With this fall, registered unemployment was 2.5 million, the lowest since July 2008. — dpa

STUDENTS WIN AWARD FOR SMART AUTO-MAINTENANCE ROBOT

MUSCAT: In a breakthrough achievement reflecting the technical ingenuity of Omani youth, a team of students from the Sultanate of Oman has secured third place in a high-level engineering innovation competition at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), USA.

The students were honoured for developing an integrated smart system that automates vehicle maintenance. Their project, combining two innovative technologies — “Lio”, an automatic oil-changing machine, and “AOFR”, a robotic unit



that replaces car oil filters — delivers full service in under ten minutes, without lifting the vehicle.

The invention is distinguished by its precision, efficiency, and hygiene. Fully automated and sensor-enabled, the system eliminates the need for human intervention, reduces the risk of oil spills and enhances overall safety.

A user-friendly touchscreen provides real-time feedback on temperature and operation, helping maintain clean and environmentally sound conditions.

Bandar Al Khairan set for sustainable tourism

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 6

OMANI DESIGN and architectural consultancy firm Hoehler + alSalmly (H+S) has announced that it has been awarded a contract by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for advisory services linked to the development of Bandar Al Khairan, a pristine coastal haven of Muscat Governorate, into an eco-tourism area.

Located off the blacktop to Yiti, a major destination for real estate, tourism and hospitality investment, Bandar Al Khairan has already been designated a general ecotourism area vide Royal Decree 45/2007, conferring upon this natural sanctuary a high degree of environmental protection.

Given its proximity to the capital city, Bandar Al Khairan attracts tourists, picnickers and weekenders eager for a day out amid its tranquil settings with its distinctive mangrove forests, limestone cliffs, secluded covers and serene waters.

From the ecological standpoint, Bandar Al Khairan is also known for its rich biodiversity, reflected in its extensive coral reefs and marine habitats. Furthermore, as a carbon sink in its own right, conserving this sanctuary is also imperative to Oman’s climate mitigation objectives.

Of late, however, with major upscale resort and hospitality developments coming up in the vicinity of this sanctuary, Hoehler + alSalmly has been tapped by Oman’s authorities to ensure Bandar Al



Illustration of a new resort development under construction at Bandar Al Khairan.

Khairan’s development is in accordance with sustainable guidelines and regulations.

“As part of this project, we will be leading the planning, research, and analysis to ensure the best possible outcome — designing a sustainable framework that enhances and protects the unique environment of Bandar Al Khairan, a designated protected area,” the sustainability-focused architectural firm noted in a post.

“This project is a major step toward enhancing sustainable tourism in one of Oman’s most beautiful natural environments. We are truly honoured to play a role in shaping a destination that reflects

Oman’s ecological and cultural richness,” the company further added.

Already, parts of Bandar Al Khairan ocean-facing waterfront are being transformed into high-end resort developments designed and built based on sustainable standards.

Notable is Bandar Al Khairan Resort & Spa, a lavish development promoted by Musstir, the hospitality arm of MB Group, with an investment of RO 36 million.

According to Bangkok-based boutique hotel chain Minor Hotels, the property will be operated by Anantara and feature 51 guest rooms, 46 chalets and 24 villas. The property is due to launch in 2026.

MSX promotes promising companies market

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) kicked off its first governorate-level session on the Promising Companies Market and Incentive Programme on May 5. The event, held in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), marks the start of a nationwide series aimed at strengthening the investment landscape and broadening access to financing across Oman.

This initiative aligns with a wider national strategy to diversify income sources, deepen the financial sector, and cultivate a new generation of savvy investors—part of the broader goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The Incentive Programme, developed by the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit under the Capital Market Development initiative, offers tailored support to help closed and family-owned businesses list on the MSX. The programme follows three tracks:

1. Supporting the transformation of companies valued over RO 10 million into public joint-stock companies.



2. Launching the Promising Companies Market for SMEs with a market value above RO 500,000.

3. Encouraging limited liability companies with over 20 Omani employees and similar valuations to become closed joint-stock companies.

Majda bint Said al Hinai, Project Manager, noted that the programme fosters financial sustainability through improved access to funding, stronger corporate governance, and

enhanced transparency. She added that the Promising Companies Market balances regulatory standards with the private sector’s needs.

Noor al Hamidi of the Financial Services Authority outlined the listing process, which includes company valuation, appointment of an issuing manager, prospectus preparation, and registration with the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.

Bader bin Hamood al Hinai, Chief Operating Officer at MSX, explained listing requirements such as legal entity structure, two years of financial history, a one-year lock-in period for founders’ shares, and audited financial statements—though exemptions may apply.

Eligible investors include existing shareholders, licensed financial institutions, insurance companies, the Social Protection Fund, investment funds, and high-net-worth individuals.

Investor services such as the ‘Saham Oman’ mobile app, portfolio monitoring, and pledge options were also highlighted.

OPINION

Nano influencers: A new friend in town for SMEs



DR RAJA TUMATI

The writer is a senior lecturer and programme coordinator at Oman Tourism College

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED enterprises (SMEs) in Oman are leveraging social media to boost visibility, attract customers, and develop their businesses. Influencer marketing, which involves famous personalities such as Messi, Ronaldo, and Beyoncé, is gaining popularity. These partnerships offer brand recognition and revenue but come with costs.

The nano-influencer, a new type of influencer, has emerged as a solution to the high costs associated with famous influencers, making SMEs affordable to partner with them. The influencer marketing market is valued at \$24 billion as of 2024, up 13.7% from its 2023 estimation of \$21.1 billion.

Nano influencers, who have fewer followers anywhere between 500 and 5000, are growing in popularity because of their capacity to establish personal connections with their followers and offer a relatable method of brand promotion.

Their impact on consumer choices is substantial, and, in some cases, they have even higher engagement rates than celebrities or mega-influencers. Anyone with more than one million followers in their influencer network is regarded as a mega-influencer.

There are several reasons SMEs in Oman must associate with nano-influencers. The first of these is affordability. Nano-influencers are more affordable than mega-influencers and celebrities.

Owing to their affordability, SMEs can collaborate with multiple nano-influencers to promote their businesses, rather than paying a

mega-influencer a hefty fee. Finding a spot for a business in this competitive arena is made possible through nano-influencer partnerships.

The second is effective engagement: nano-influencers have a more significant influence despite having less reach due to their smaller following size and pre-existing trust in their followers.

They have more time to respond to their followers, allowing them to connect better with their followers.

However, this kind of engagement is unthinkable with mega-influencers, as they are beyond the reach of their followers, and their sense of loyalty and confidence in fostering their personal touch is slim. SMEs are more likely to follow influencers who align with their products or services, allowing easier campaign reach and targeted client engagement.

Third, trust: SMEs may increase the credibility of their brand and draw customers to their products or services by working with nano-influencers as they leverage trust with their audience.

For example, followers view a nano-influencer's endorsement of a product or service as a sincere suggestion rather than an advertisement. Owing to their previous experience and positive interactions, when nano-influencers suggest something, followers tend to take advice on a positive note.

Fourth, accessibility: generally, mega-influencers tend to favour larger businesses over SMEs.

However, nano-influencers are eager to advocate for small companies and their

Nano influencers, who have fewer followers anywhere between 500 and 5000, are growing in popularity because of their capacity to establish personal connections with their followers and offer a relatable method of brand promotion.

products and services.

Additionally, nano-influencers are consistently available and keen to collaborate and expand their services for SMEs. In addition, they provide high-quality services and offer regular updates on SMEs to their followers, not just one-off promotions.

For instance, one of the Omani nano-influencers is based in the Al Batinah South Governorate with 4,300 followers.

He frequently travels both inside and outside of Oman and shares an array of photos and videos of tourist locations, places to stay, dining establishments, and shopping.

Following his posts, followers generally enquired about places, cuisine, costs, quality, and overall experience.

Based on his recommendations, some of his followers ordered cakes in Layali Cakes, perfumes in Atyah Al Sheekh, and food ordered online in the Lahab Kitchen Restaurant.

Similarly, another nano-influencer from Al Dakhiliyah Governorate posted pictures and videos of tourist spots, food, and other shopping items on his Instagram page, mostly covering the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

Based on his suggestions, followers had coffee at Anat Café in Nizwa; purchased halwa from Al Gatheeb in Nizwa Souq; bought dates, nuts, and green tea from Al Sharaa Mills in Bahla; honey from Manahel Al Sahtan; and traditional Omani men's dress and accessories from Hybit_3rees.

Finally, for SMEs, financial constraints are frequently at the top of the list.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE AGRIFISH FUND TO THE FISHERIES SECTOR



HANAN AL SULAIMI

The writer is Executive Director - Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund

THE fisheries sector plays a crucial role in enhancing food security and fostering local economic growth in the Sultanate of Oman. In 2023, total fish production in Oman was estimated at approximately 793,000 tonnes, with a total value of RO 189 million — an increase of 5.9% compared to 2022. Additionally, the fisheries sector's contribution to the Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) grew from RO 364.5 million to RO 427.7 million over the same period, reflecting a growth rate of 17.3%. Notably, more than 90% of fishing activities rely on artisanal fishing and related operations, ensuring the sector's sustainability.

The Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund has financed several projects within the fisheries sector, with a total of 13 projects implemented by the end of 2023.

These projects have been categorised into eight specialised fields, including advisory and monitoring initiatives aimed at raising awareness and promoting best practices to safeguard and efficiently utilise marine resources.

The fund has also supported aquaculture projects, recognising the importance of preserving local genetic resources and enhancing performance efficiency. Other funded projects have focused on fishery resource development, fish quality and safety control, as well as fish product marketing and processing.

One of the significant advancements in the sector has been the successful introduction of an electronic marketing system across five fish markets — Sohar, Qurayat, the new Seeb market, Masirah and Dibba.

Additionally, efforts are underway to establish a central drying unit for small pelagic fish (such as sardines and anchovies) following research trials aimed at identifying optimal practices to maximise value addition. Another key initiative involves enhancing natural fish stocks by deploying artificial coral reefs, which attract thousands of fish and marine organisms, fostering a suitable environment for reproduction.

Beyond financing projects that directly boost fish production, the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund has also supported initiatives in statistical and knowledge-based development.

Physical gold vs digital gold: How to choose?

GOLD HAS been a highly sought-after asset class due to its rarity, liquidity, and protection against inflation. It is also considered a safe haven asset.

Investing in gold is a crucial decision for many investors. The question is how to invest, when to invest, and how much to invest.

There are two ways to invest in gold, viz, physical gold and digital gold. Let us examine the pros and cons of both types of investments.

PHYSICAL GOLD: GOLD COINS VS GOLD BARS

Physical gold refers to jewellery, gold coins, and gold bars. Buying gold in the form of ornaments has inherent risks, viz, loss on making charges, taxes, safekeeping, and purity. The next option is gold coins and bullion. Both are advisable. Gold bars are 24 carat with 999.9 purity, while gold coins are 22 carat with 916 purity.

A key advantage of gold bars is their lower premiums compared to gold coins, making them cost-effective for bulk purchases.

Another advantage of gold bars is that there is no value-added tax. (VAT). For example, if you buy gold coins for RO 5000, you have to pay a VAT of RO 250. (@ 5 per cent).

Suppose you sell it at a later date, the VAT paid, ie, RO 250, is a loss for you. But gold bars are VAT-free, which makes them attractive to buy. The lower premium and high purity make gold bars an attractive investment in the long term.

Between the gold coins and gold bars, gold bars need a higher amount, while gold coins need a relatively smaller amount. Also, gold coins are more liquid than gold bars in view of their size and weight. However, gold bars are suggested as a diversified investment with a long-term horizon, subject to storage and insurance costs.

DIGITAL GOLD

The current trend is E-Gold or digital gold. Digital gold, in simple



A key advantage of gold bars is their lower premiums compared to gold coins, making them cost-effective for bulk purchases.



R MADHUSOODANAN

The writer is the Executive Advisor to the Board, Global Money Exchange, Muscat

terms, is an electronic form of gold investments. This method is very convenient, cost-effective, and no worry about its purity and safekeeping.

Digital gold is becoming popular globally. For example, digital investment in India has grown by over 70 per cent post-pandemic, and a large number of investors are looking for online gold investment.

Gold savings Mutual Funds, Gold ETFs, online gold investment apps, etc are popular digital gold investment options.

Through the online applications, one can buy, sell, and hold gold in digital form.

Under this scheme, gold with a purity of 999.9 is purchased and kept digitally. This gold is backed by physical gold and kept with trusted custodians.

This is best suited for long-term investment in gold as part of your diversified portfolio.

The redemption may be made in the form of physical gold coins, gold bars, cash, ornaments, or a combination of these.

For ornaments, making, and other charges are to be borne by the investor. In India, MMTC-PAMP is one of the leaders offering digital gold of 999.9 purity. G-Pay, Phonepe, Paytm, Amazon Pay etc are popular digital gold investment apps.

The gold so bought is maintained in the Gold Accumulation Plan (GAP), which can be verified by the investors. In Oman, several gold merchants and jewellery shops offer this digital form of buying gold.

HOW TO INVEST IN GOLD

Gold prices have skyrocketed to new heights in the last few years.

There are several reasons for the rally, including the recent trade and tariff policies of the Trump administration.

During turbulent times, the global investing community shifts its assets to gold, as gold is considered a safe haven. The price of 1 troy ounce of gold (31.1035 grammes) was \$2,290 in April 2024, and now it stands at \$3,126.

One gramme of 22 carat gold was RO 31 in December 2024, while it is above RO 37 per gramme now. Investors waited to cool down the price, but it rallied due to global reasons. So the question is how and when to buy gold.

The thumb rule is that one will not be able to catch the best price. The gold market is highly volatile. The practical option is to stay invested for the long term and buy the gold consistently at regular intervals, irrespective of the price. This helps to average out the price.

Buying gold coins and bars may not be practical under this method, as this requires a large amount. Here comes the advantage of investing smaller amounts at regular intervals in digital gold.

Among other investments, select a trusted online app and buy gold regularly, according to your capacity to buy, with long-term objectives.

Both holding physical and digital gold have their advantages and disadvantages. One can touch and feel the physical form of gold, while the virtual forms are intangible.

Undoubtedly, digital gold is an excellent investment alternative to fight inflation and diversify your investment portfolio. Having said that, the investment in gold is also subject to market risks.

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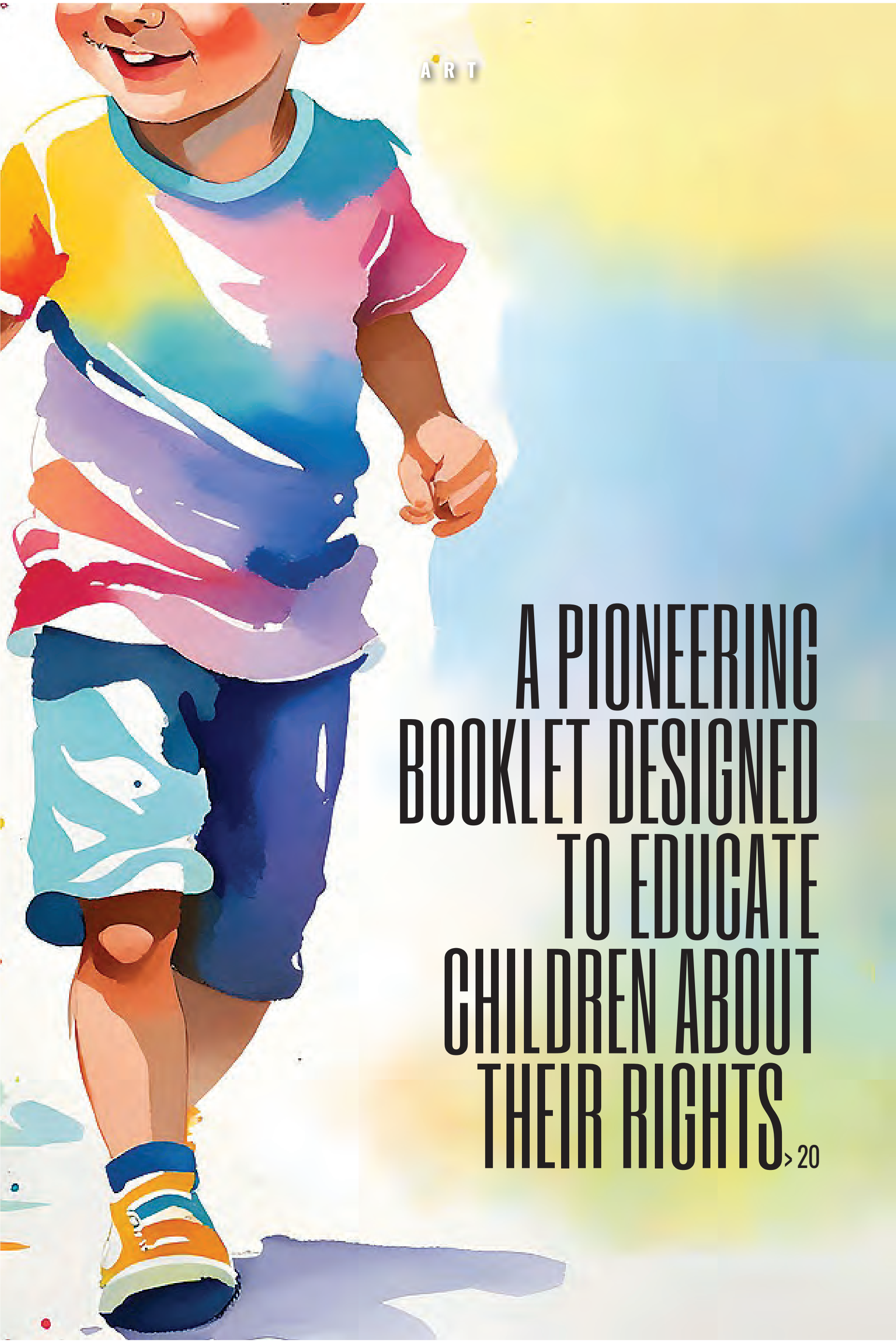
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ART/LIFE



ENTERTAINMENT

‘Maybe Happy Ending’ and ‘Death Becomes Her’ lead 2025 Tony nominations



BROADWAY musicals “Maybe Happy Ending,” “Buena Vista Social Club” and “Death Becomes Her” led the tally of Tony Award nominations, each with 10, when they were announced on Thursday ahead of the June 8 awards ceremony.

The 78th annual Tony Award nominations, celebrating the best in Broadway theatre, reflect a season shaped by unique storytelling and genre experimentation with new works that push boundaries in form, subject and perspective.

Previous Tony Award winners Sarah Paulson and Wendell Pierce announced the awards.

“Maybe Happy Ending” is a story about obsolete robots in a futuristic Seoul; “Buena Vista Social Club” brings the iconic Cuban musical collective’s story to the stage, and “Death Becomes Her” is based on a dark comedy film.

In the Best Play category, nominees include “John Proctor Is the Villain,” which draws on “The Crucible” to examine teenage self-discovery in the #MeToo era; “Oh, Mary!,” the much-talked-about satirical reimagining of Mary Todd Lincoln’s personal life, by Cole Escola, who is also nominated as its star; and “The Hills of California” by Jez Butterworth, a family drama set in a declining British seaside town. Notable revivals nominated are “Gypsy,” “Sunset Blvd.,” and “Our Town.”

Some of this season’s Hollywood heavyweights were also nominated, including George Clooney in his Broadway debut in “Good Night, and Good Luck”; Sarah Snook, who plays more than two dozen characters in the one-woman reimagining of “The Picture of Dorian Gray” and Sadie Sink in “John Proctor Is the Villain.”

But high-priced “Othello,” starring Denzel Washington and Jake Gyllenhaal, was completely left out of the nominations.

Leading acting nominations in musicals include Jonathan Groff for his performance as Bobby Darin in “Just in Time”; six-time Tony winner Audra McDonald in the legendary role of Mama Rose in the revival of “Gypsy”; and Nicole Scherzinger in a much-lauded performance as fading movie star Norma Desmond in “Sunset Blvd.”

Directing nominations for musicals include Michael Arden for “Maybe Happy Ending” and Jamie Lloyd for “Sunset Blvd.” and Sam Mendes for “The Hills of California” and Danya Taymor for “John Proctor Is the Villain.” — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



HERITAGE

A female ondel-ondel puppet — giant traditional puppet from Jakarta’s Betawi culture — with braces is seen in Jakarta. —AFP



LIFESTYLE

Britain’s King Charles III unveils his official Coronation State Portraits during a visit to The National Gallery, in central London. —AFP



MUSIC

US musician and singer Jon Batiste arrives for the 2025 Met Gala at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Bird Watching



Beauty of Oman's Mountains

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Ronan the Sea Lion Is Probably Better Than You at Keeping a Beat



THE CALIFORNIA sea lion Ronan probably has a better rhythm than you. Scientists earlier showed that Ronan, a resident of the Long Marine Laboratory at the University of California, Santa Cruz, was the first non-human mammal who could be trained to keep a beat, including moving in time with music. That was in 2013, when Ronan was young, so researchers recently decided to test the 15-year-old sea lion's skills again. It shows "that humans are not the only mammals able to keep a beat," said Tecumseh Fitch, a cognitive biologist at the University of Vienna who wasn't involved in a new study published in the journal Scientific Reports. Parrots keep a beat by moving their bodies. And other studies highlighted the beat-keeping capabilities of monkeys and rats. But after more than a decade, "Ronan the sea

lion's rhythmic entrainment is clearly the best known in non-human vertebrates," Fitch said. The researchers trained Ronan for a few months and then compared Ronan's skills to those she had when she was 3 — showing that she had improved her skills as she matured. Then, the team tested Ronan's ability to move her head in time with tempos of 112, 120 and 128 beats per minute and compared it with the ability of 10 people age 18-23 to move their arm in time with those same tempos. In every parameter tested, Ronan was head of the class. "There was no human that was better than Ronan on every measure of precision and consistency," said Peter Cook, a cognitive neuroscientist at New College of Florida. "And she was better than most humans on all measures, so she really rose to the top." — GENNARO TOMMA / NYT



Stars shine at Met Gala, showcasing Black dandyism

THE BRIGHTEST stars in Hollywood, music, sports and fashion hit the red carpet on Monday for the Met Gala, the extravagant Manhattan fundraiser that this year spotlights the subversive style of Black dandyism. The blockbuster night's theme explores the sharply tailored dandy aesthetic and its rich, complicated history. It also celebrates the opening of a corresponding exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute. But for the fashionistas, the Met Gala — always the first Monday in May — is simply one of the world's top red carpets with blinding star power. Oscar-nominated actor Colman Domingo and Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton, two of the co-chairs of fashion's marquee event, were among the early arrivals alongside gala supremo Anna Wintour, the editor-in-chief of Vogue. Domingo paid tribute to the late Andre Leon Talley, Vogue's first Black creative director and one of fashion's towering figures, in a royal blue Valentino cape with a glittering white collar over a snazzy black and gold jacket and grey tweed trousers. Hamilton meanwhile wowed in a sharp cream suit and matching backwards cap, diamonds glittering in his ears, as well as on his lapel, cuffs and hands. And musician and designer Pharrell Williams, another co-chair, looked snappy in a short, pearl-encrusted white jacket and flared black tuxedo trousers. Tailored suits, bejewelled brooches, canes and jaunty hats were de rigueur for the men. Among the women in attendance,

actor Teyana Taylor definitely understood the assignment, arriving in a black suit with red pinstripes and matching huge red coat, the back fully pleated and "Harlem Rose" embossed in the fabric. Rapper DoeChii wore a logo-heavy Louis Vuitton cream shorts suit with burgundy accents, a cigar dangling between her lips. And actor Zendaya, always a huge hit at the gala, stunned in a slim white suit and dramatic brimmed hat —perhaps some bridal chic now that she is engaged to Tom Holland? Last to arrive at the party was Rihanna, cradling her new baby bump in an all-black ensemble after revealing she was pregnant as the event began. Her partner A\$AP Rocky, a gala co-chair, confirmed the pregnancy on the carpet: "I'm glad everybody's happy for us because we're definitely happy." Former US vice-president Kamala Harris skipped the red carpet but attended the gala in an understated black and cream gown from Off-White.

NEW SENSE OF IMPORTANCE The gala comes five years after the enormous anti-racist uprising of the Black Lives Matter movement, which pushed a number of cultural institutions in the United States to grapple with their representation of race and diversity. This Met theme is years in the making but now coincides with Donald Trump's recent efforts to quash institutional initiatives to promote diversity — a push to keep culture and history defined on the Republican president's terms. The Met Gala and its exhibit, "Superfine: Tailoring Black Style," promises a sharp contrast to that

notion, a deep dive into Black dandyism from the 18th century to today. "Obviously, this exhibition was planned many years ago, and we didn't know what would be happening in the political arena, but it's taken on a new sense of importance and purpose," Wintour said. SUBVERSION Guest curator and Barnard professor Monica Miller's book "Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity" was the Met's inspiration. Her book details how dandyism was a style imposed on Black men in 18th century Europe, when well-dressed "dandified" servants became a trend. But Black men throughout history subverted the concept as a means of cultivating power, transforming aesthetic and elegance into a means of identity establishment and social mobility. During the vibrant Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, men wore sharp suits and polished shoes as a show of defiance in racially segregated America. "Superfine" is a rare Costume Institute exhibition to spotlight men and male fashion, and the first to focus on Black designers and artists. The Met Gala was first organised in 1948 and for decades was reserved for New York high society — until Wintour transformed the party into a high-profile catwalk for the rich and famous in the 1990s. It remains a fundraiser for the Costume Institute. The famed Manhattan museum said on Monday it expected to rake in \$31 million this year. —AFP

FEATURES

A PIONEERING
BOOKLET
DESIGNED
TO EDUCATE
CHILDREN ABOUT
THEIR RIGHTS



BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

IN A WORLD increasingly focused on safeguarding children's rights and well-being, Oman's latest initiative exemplifies how national efforts align with global trends to create safer, more informed environments for children. On April 30, the Children First Association — Oman's leading child advocacy organisation — unveiled its newest educational resource, “I Am Aware”, a pioneering booklet designed to educate children about their rights, personal safety, and how to recognise and respond to abuse.

The launch, overseen by HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU, signals a significant leap forward in Oman's ongoing commitment to child protection. The initiative reflects a broader realisation, mirrored in many countries worldwide, that children's rights require proactive, multifaceted approaches rooted in education, awareness and community involvement.

**A GROWING GLOBAL
RECOGNITION OF
CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

Globally, the focus on child protection has been intensifying over recent decades. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted in 1989, remains the cornerstone of international efforts to define and promote children's rights. Countries across continents have committed to ensuring children grow up in environments free from violence, exploitation and neglect.

However, translating these commitments into meaningful local action remains an ongoing challenge. In many parts of the world, children continue to face threats from abuse, trafficking, forced labour, and gender-based violence. Recognising that the knowledge gap often leaves children vulnerable, national governments and NGOs have increasingly adopted educational strategies to empower young people to understand their rights and safety measures.

Oman's “I Am Aware” booklet exemplifies this approach, aligning national efforts with a global movement that values education as a primary tool for protection. It echoes international best practices, such as Unicef's emphasis on child-friendly materials and interactive learning tools to promote awareness and resilience among children.

**INNOVATIVE APPROACH IN
OMAN'S CHILD PROTECTION STRATEGIES**

Developed by Amal bint Khalifa al Shamakhiyah, a certified human rights trainer associated with the UN Training and Documentation Centre, “I Am Aware”



introduces an innovative and culturally sensitive approach to child protection. Amal's extensive background in children's rights in Oman has shaped a resource that is both educational and engaging, particularly in addressing sensitive issues like harassment and personal safety.

The booklet is designed with colourful illustrations, quizzes and activities—aimed at making complex topics like personal boundaries accessible to young minds. It encourages open dialogue with parents, teachers and caregivers, highlighting the importance of creating safe spaces where children can voice concerns without fear or shame.

This initiative mirrors similar efforts worldwide where organisations are scaling up educational materials tailored for young audiences. For example, in South Africa, projects like “Talking about Abuse” equip children with age-appropriate information, while in Canada, school-based programmes incorporate interactive modules to teach children about consent and boundaries.

The Children First Association views “I Am Aware” as more than a publication; it is part of a larger movement to foster a culture of awareness, respect, and protection throughout Oman. The organisation invites families, schools and communities to use the booklet as a resource for building a safer future for every child.

**TOWARDS A CULTURE
OF AWARENESS AND PREVENTION**

The broader significance of such initiatives lies in fostering a culture that recognises children's agency and rights. By equipping children with knowledge, Oman is aligning with global trends advocating for comprehensive, rights-based approaches to child safety. Such strategies aim not only to prevent abuse but also to empower children to respond confidently if faced with uncomfortable or dangerous situations.

Oman's leadership in this area highlights its commitment to international standards while tailoring solutions to its cultural context. Such efforts are increasingly recognised on the global stage; fostered by partnerships with the UN and other international bodies, Oman's initiatives serve as models for the region.

Oman's launch of “I Am Aware” exemplifies a proactive, culturally sensitive approach to nurturing a global culture of respect, awareness, and safety for children. It underscores the importance of education as a friend rather than a foe in the fight against abuse and exploitation. As nations worldwide strive to meet international standards and uphold their commitments under the UNCRC, Oman's example offers valuable lessons: that safeguarding childhood requires shared vision, concerted action and innovative solutions.