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ALCARAZ MARCHES INTO ITALIAN OPEN LAST 16

INBRIEF

OLYMPIC SHOOTING COMPLEX OPENS



The National Olympic Shooting Complex (NOSC) in Muscat was opened under the auspices of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs.

The facility's opening is in line with Oman's ongoing development and modernisation process, with the aim of harnessing capabilities to maintain high national standards.

At the outset of the ceremony, HH Sayyid Shihab unveiled the commemorative plaque, marking the official inauguration of the National Olympic Shooting Complex - Muscat. HH Sayyid Shihab and the attendees then watched a visual presentation on the stages of construction of the NOSC, its facilities, services and its modern technologies and equipment. **DETAILS ON P10**

SAYYID BILARAB VISITS EMUSHRIF



HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the 'Programme of Promising Omani Startups' (POPS), paid a field visit to eMushrif, a leading startup enterprise in the logistics technology sector, on Monday.

The company specialises in providing safe and smart school transportation using the latest technologies related to student safety, in addition to the Internet of Things (IoT) and artificial intelligence (AI). This visit reflects HH Sayyid Bilarab's keenness on supporting and empowering Omani startups and enhancing their role in the national economy. **DETAILS ON P2**

SECOND LARGEST DAM IN OMAN OPENS IN SALALAH



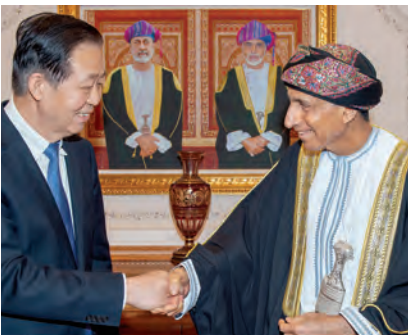
The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources celebrated the opening of Wadi Adawnib Dam in the Wilayat of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar, on Monday.

Having a storage capacity of 83 million cubic metres, the dam figures as the second largest water storage facility of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman. The project, which cost about RO 24 million, also constitutes a step forward in the ministry's efforts to enhance protection against floods. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Maashani, Adviser at the Diwan of Royal Court, and attended by local dignitaries, government officials and representatives of private sector establishments. **SEE ALSO P3**

Oman, China explore ways to enhance trade

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Monday received Xiao Jie, Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, and his accompanying delegation.

The guest conveyed greetings and best wishes of the leadership in China to the leadership in Oman and the Omani people. After welcoming the Chinese official and his delegation,



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said receives Xiao Jie in Muscat. **PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI**

HH Sayyid Fahd emphasised the deep-rooted relations between the two countries, which continue to witness significant development, reflecting both sides' commitment to advancing the interests of their peoples.

The meeting explored ways to enhance economic and trade cooperation, including encouraging more joint investment projects in renewable energy. The meeting also addressed a set of regional and international developments. On his

turn, the Chinese official expressed his pleasure at the visit, which contributes to elevating cooperation between the two nations across various fields. He affirmed China's appreciation for Oman's efforts in supporting domestic development and strengthening friendly relations with countries worldwide. He also praised the constructive discussions held with the Chairman of the State Council and Omani officials, noting their positive impact on advancing Omani-Chinese relations. — ONA

RO 769m deals to boost renewable energy sector

OMAN CENTRE for Net-Zero was inaugurated under the auspices of HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Central Bank of Oman. The centre, which is under the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, will develop and update the national Net-Zero plan, oversee implementation projects, provide advisory support to stakeholders, and refine Oman's 2050 Net-Zero strategy.

The event also witnessed the signing of several agreements and MoUs. OQ signed 13 strategic agreements worth over RO 769 million to boost renewable energy projects, supporting Oman's 2050 carbon neutrality goal.

Organised by Oman Exhibition and Conference Company under the supervision of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Oman Petroleum and Energy Show (OPES) and Oman Sustainability Week 2025, serve as an integrated platform highlighting the importance of energy security and sustainability. It underscores Oman's commitment to a balanced and advanced future, featuring field visits to sustainability projects in Muscat and other governorates to enhance the event's local and regional impact.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, stated that OPES reflects Oman's vision for a sustainable energy future by supporting efforts to reduce carbon emissions and achieve Net-Zero goals. He noted that Oman Sustainability Week aligns closely with Oman Vision 2040 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, playing a pivotal role in advancing the green circular economy and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

He added that these events serve as dynamic platforms for knowledge



HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Central Bank of Oman, inaugurated the Oman Centre for Net-Zero.

exchange, innovation stimulation, and strategic partnerships that enhance national capabilities and economic resilience.

OPES 2025 and Oman Sustainability Week will feature strategic exhibitions, high-level conferences, panel discussions, technical workshops and field visits. By gathering a global community of leaders, innovators, and policymakers, the event accelerates Oman's progress towards economic growth, diversification, climate action and technological advancement — aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the 2050 Net-Zero target, the UN SDGs, and the Paris Agreement.

Together, OPES 2025 and Oman Sustainability Week showcase Oman's achievements, reinforcing its position as a key energy player and regional leader in sustainable progress.

Over 50 countries are participating in OPES, represented by more than 350 exhibitors and 2,400 delegates from diverse global sectors, highlighting Oman's growing role as a hub for international energy and sustainability dialogue.

On this occasion, OQ Exploration and Production inked four contracts exceeding RO 21 million with local firms and SMEs in its concession areas. Additionally, OQ launched the 'Tamayuz' programme, partnering with the Oman Energy Association to train 430 Omani graduates in technical and non-technical fields, enhancing human capital development.

Abraj Energy Services signed a drilling contract with Ara Petroleum for three wells in Concession Area 44, with expected revenues of RO 1.6 million. Drilling is set to begin in Q2 2025. **SEE ALSO P13**

Royal Opera House wins BraVO Music Award

MOSCOW: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) has won the prestigious International BraVO Music Award in the 'Best Opera House for Performance and Music' category.

Hamoud bin Salim al Tuwayah, Oman's Ambassador to the Russian Federation, received the award on behalf of the Royal Opera House. He stated that this achievement reflects the high standards attained by the opera house in arts and culture, marking a culmination of its relentless



efforts to promote global arts.

He added that winning this distinguished award is a testament to Oman's excellence and creativity in cultural and artistic fields, as well as the fruitful and ongoing cooperation between Oman and Russia in various cultural domains. The ambassador affirmed that this accomplishment will further strengthen bilateral relations, particularly in culture and the arts, opening broader prospects for future collaboration.

The BraVO International Music Awards are among the world's most prestigious artistic honours, recognising institutions that enrich the global cultural scene with excellence and innovation, alongside honoring artists. The awards ceremony is held annually in Moscow at renowned venues such as the Bolshoi Theatre.

The purpose of the BraVO Award is to develop classical art, making it closer to a wider audience. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The meeting was held under the chair of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development. — ONA

NATIONAL FAMILY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETS

MUSCAT: The National Family Affairs Committee held its first meeting of the year on Monday under the chair of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development and Chairperson of the Committee, in the presence of several members at the Ministry’s headquarters. The meeting reviewed the latest updates on the Juvenile Accountability Law and discussed the proposed Family Protection Law and amendments to the Child Law. Additionally, the Committee examined the Ministry of Health’s efforts to enforce mandatory premarital screening to mitigate potential health risks affecting couples or their future children.

It is worth noting that the National Family Affairs Committee is responsible for proposing policies and programmes to support Omani families across social, health and cultural fields, ensuring their implementation in coordination with relevant authorities. — ONA

STATE COUNCIL, ASH’SHURA ADDRESS ITEMS OF DISPUTE



MUSCAT: The joint committees between the State Council and the Majlis Ash’shura held a meeting to discuss several disputed articles related to draft laws on combating human trafficking, state revenue collection and real estate regulation, referred by the Council of Ministers.

The meeting was attended by members of both councils and the Secretary-General of the State Council.

The number of disputed articles between the two councils reached 14 related to the anti-human trafficking draft law, 12 concerning the state revenue collection draft law, and 13 in the real estate regulation draft law, in addition to new articles introduced by both councils.

The meeting concluded with the committees reaching consensus on all disputed articles. A report will be submitted for discussion during the joint session between the State Council and the Majlis Ash’shura. — ONA

STATE COUNCIL CHAIRMAN RECEIVES CHINESE OFFICIAL

MUSCAT: Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, on Monday received Xiao Jie, Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC) of China, and his accompanying delegation during their two-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

At the outset of the meeting, Shaikh Al Khalili welcomed the guest and his delegation, wishing them a pleasant stay. He highlighted the historical relations between Oman and China, expressing



his aspiration to further develop bilateral ties across various fields and explore new avenues of cooperation under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan

Haitham bin Tarik.

The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and ways to enhance cooperation, in addition to exchanging views on regional and international issues of mutual interest.

Meanwhile, Tahir bin Mabkhout al Junaibi, Deputy Chairman of the Majlis Ash’shura, received at the Council’s headquarters today Xiao Jie, Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of China, and his accompanying delegation. — ONA

Sayyid Bilarab reviews eMushrif’s solutions

HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the ‘Programme of Promising Omani Startups’ (POPS), paid a field visit to eMushrif, a leading startup enterprise in the logistics technology sector, on Monday.

The company specialises in providing safe and smart school transportation using the latest technologies related to student safety, in addition to the Internet of Things (IoT) and artificial intelligence (AI). This visit reflects HH Sayyid Bilarab’s keenness on supporting and empowering Omani startups and enhancing their role in the national economy.

HH Sayyid Bilarab reviewed the company’s most prominent solutions for student safety on school buses, including equipping them with smart electronic devices that enable parents and service providers to monitor the safety of their children through smartphone applications, IoT technologies, artificial intelligence and big data analysis.

The company reviewed its expansion plans in several regional countries as it has offices and subsidiaries in the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,



the State of Kuwait, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Türkiye.

At the conclusion of the visit, HH Sayyid Bilarab commended the company’s efforts in advanced technologies, its technological progress and its regional expansion. He emphasised the important role played by startups in promoting innovation and building a sustainable economic future.

HH Sayyid Bilarab was accompanied during the visit by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al

Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation; Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) and Eng Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari, CEO, ITHCA Group.

The visit is part of a series of visits by HH Sayyid Bilarab to support startups. It is his second visit, following his visit to Thawani last April to learn about the company’s specialised digital financial solutions and services. — ONA

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN GCC MINISTERS OF INFORMATION MEETING



KUWAIT: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the 28th meeting of the Ministers of Information of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States, held on Monday in Kuwait. The Sultanate’s delegation was led by Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Information. During the meeting, various topics were discussed to enhance cooperation among GCC countries in the media field including joint media efforts, proposed initiatives and projects for the strategic plan for media cooperation among GCC countries (2023-2030), age classifications for electronic games, guidelines and activating media partnerships with regional and international organisations. Additionally, the launch of the joint electronic application for GCC news agencies was announced at the meeting. — ONA

International Nurses Day: Caring for them strengthens economy

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The Sultanate of Oman joined the rest of the world in celebrating International Nurses Day, which this year is themed ‘Caring for Nurses Strengthens the Economy’. Through its advanced nursing policies and initiatives, the Sultanate of Oman affirms that it views nursing as an essential component of health and development strategies, and that caring for and empowering nurses is the path to building a strong health system and a thriving economy.

According to the State of the World’s Nursing 2025 report, published by the World Health

Organisation (WHO), the global nursing workforce has grown from 27.9 million in 2018 to 29.8 million in 2023, but wide disparities in the availability of nurses remain across regions and countries. Inequities in the global nursing workforce leave many of the world’s population without access to essential health services in some countries, which could threaten progress towards universal health coverage (UHC), global health security and the health-related development goals.

“Oman has achieved significant milestones in terms of excellence and many countries too need to ensure the satisfaction of this essential sector. This year’s theme



focuses on nurses’ health and well-being and highlights the critical role of a healthy nursing workforce in supporting the overall healthcare system globally. I believe by implementing nurses’ well-being first, healthcare systems can improve community outcomes and create more sustainable economies

because every day is a Nurses Day,” says Alya al Hasani, a nurse with government healthcare.

Ferdinand Marco B Larena, Founding President of Philippine Nurses Association of Oman, Inc says “I see your strength, I feel your sacrifices, and I celebrate your dedication. Your presence changes lives. You bring healing not only through your hands but also through your spirit — offering comfort in a language beyond words. Let today be a reminder that you are seen, valued, and deeply appreciated. You are not just nurses — you are leaders, caregivers, advocates and lifelines. The world may never fully grasp the depth of your work, but I do, and I

honour you with all my heart”.

Mark Niño Galang, Mental Health Nurse, and Committee Chairperson, Philippine Nurses Association in Oman, Inc International Nurses Day 2025 honours the heart and dedication of nurses around the world with the theme “Caring for Nurses Strengthens Economies.” (International Council of Nurses). This message reminds all of us that when we support and care for us nurses by valuing our work, ensuring fair working conditions, and investing in our professional growth we not only improve lives but also help build stronger, healthier communities and economies.

SHORT TAKES



The event was part of diverse efforts in disseminating awareness.

MOHERI HOSTS RESEARCH AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: The awareness campaign ‘Research and Innovation.. Closer to You’ was launched under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The meetings took place at the Ministry’s headquarters on Monday.

The awareness-raising meeting is part of various and diverse efforts in disseminating awareness and enhancing knowledge, to introduce the Ministry’s different programmes aimed at supporting researchers and innovators, and to highlight the national achievements and outputs.

Abdullah bin Said al Rashdi, Director of the Scientific Publishing and Awareness Department, delivered a speech highlighting the department’s efforts in 2024 including the implementation of the ‘Scientific Expedition programme’, Adil bin Ibrahim al Fazari, Assistant Director of the Department of Scientific Publishing and Awareness, presented a talk about research and innovation programs and projects.

SHURA, HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION DISCUSS TIES



MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash’shura on Monday explored ways to enhance technical cooperation and knowledge exchange with experts from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, alongside discussions on shared issues, particularly those related to developing national legislation in line with international human rights standards.

Dr Ahmed bin Ali al Saadi, Chairman of the Legislative and Legal Committee of the Majlis Ash’shura, praised the OHCHR’s role in supporting global human rights principles. He reaffirmed Oman’s commitment to protecting human rights within its national vision and existing laws.

On their turn, the experts expressed satisfaction with Oman’s legislation. — ONA

SECOND LARGEST DAM IN OMAN OPENS IN SALALAH

SALALAH: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources celebrated the opening of Wadi Adawnib Dam in the Wilayat of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar, on Monday.

Having a storage capacity of 83 million cubic metres, the dam figures as the second largest water storage facility of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman. The project, which cost about RO 24 million, also constitutes a step forward in the ministry’s efforts to enhance protection against floods.

The opening ceremony was



The dam boasts an integrated monitoring system. — ONA

held under the auspices of Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Maashani, Adviser at the Diwan of Royal Court, and attended by local

dignitaries, government officials and representatives of private sector establishments.

The dam boasts an integrated monitoring system that includes wells to check groundwater levels and leaks, sensors to measure water levels in the lake and devices to measure pressure, slope and deviation, in addition to seismic sensors and surveillance cameras. Data collected from the monitoring system is directly transmitted to a control room, enabling authorities to take immediate decisions in emergency situations. — ONA

RO 44m projects to be set up in nature reserves

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MAY 12

AT a cost of more than RO 44 million, nine environmental investment projects are set to be established in seven reserves as the Environment Authority (EA) signed contracts for eco-tourism investment projects in nature reserves at a ceremony held on Monday.

The Environment Authority signed four contracts with the Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) to develop, operate and manage four nature reserves. It also signed two other agreements with the same company to develop and operate the Lajshlion site in the Jabal Samhan Reserve and the Hayur site in the Wilayat of Mirbat.

Additionally, it signed two environmental investment contracts for two sites in the Jabal Shams Starlight Reserve to establish an eco-tourism resort with Madar Resorts Company and a Star Garden project with the Omani Society for Astronomy and Space. The Authority also signed another contract with Al Majal Integrated Establishment to develop the Khor Al Mughsail Reserve in Salalah, Dhofar Governorate.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, stated, “These agreements will pave the way for eco-tourism in the country and further develop the partnership between the Environment Authority and the private sector. The projects are expected to be completed in two to four years. Some nature reserves already have ongoing activities. Once completed, the projects



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The investment activities and packages in nature reserves were selected according to specific controls, standards and general conditions consistent with their management, operation and development plans

could bring job opportunities.” He added that the local community will have opportunities for economic activities. “This is also a way to foster a connection between biodiversity, the local community and visitors,” he said. The official signing ceremony took place under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. The goal is to promote sustainable development, protect ecosystems, promote tourism and environmental education, increase revenues, diversify sources of income, and ensure the sustainability of natural resources for future generations.

Dr Al Amri explained that these projects include the establishment of eco-tourism resorts, a star park, eco-lodges, eco-tourism camps, visitor centres, interactive exhibitions, restaurants and cafes, viewing trails, safaris, adventure tourism in nature reserves, and an open sea turtle pond and lake. “This investment in eco-tourism aims to protect and preserve

the natural heritage in nature reserves and ensure its sustainability for future generations.”

The investment activities and packages in nature reserves were selected according to specific controls, standards and general conditions consistent with their management, operation and development plans. These include: the ability to prepare, implement and manage tourism and environmental activities or projects; attaching the required plans, documents, designs and explanatory maps; and following best practices.

The projects will be implemented in Jabal Samhan Reserve and Hayur site in the Wilayat of Mirbat, Dhofar Governorate, the Ras Al Shajar Nature Reserve in the Wilayat of Qurayat, Muscat Governorate, the Wetlands Reserve in Al Wusta Governorate, the Natural Turtle Reserve in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, and the Arabian Oryx Reserve in Al Wusta Governorate.

MoH launches EBS project, public health empowerment programme

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Department of Epidemiological Surveillance at the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, on Monday launched the Event-Based Surveillance (EBS) project, along with the graduation of two new cohorts of national professionals from Frontline Public Health Empowerment Programme in Field Epidemiology Training Programme - (Frontline FETP). The event was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs.

Dr Amal al Ma’ani, MoH’s Director-General of Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, emphasised that this achievement comes as part of a national initiative aimed at strengthening the early warning system and rapid response to health events, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040, which places human health and safety at the core of its priorities. She stated that Event-Based Surveillance is not just a



system — it rather represents a qualitative leap towards smart and early detection of unconventional health signals, through integration among the health, environmental and animal sectors, and by activating the ‘One Health’ approach.

Dr Heather Burke, the Regional Director of the Middle East and North Africa for the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, gave a presentation in which she stated: “We are proud to see this system now being implemented across all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman to support the

already well-established Indicator-Based Surveillance system. We are confident that this system will further enhance Oman’s position as a model for early warning and response systems, thereby strengthening epidemic intelligence in the country.”

Dr Adel al Wahaibi, Director of Epidemiological Surveillance in the Ministry of Health, highlighted the Event-Based Surveillance (EBS) project. He discussed its concept, the differences between it and the Indicator-Based Surveillance system and its components. He highlighted

Oman’s efforts to develop this system, which include the creation of a national electronic platform, the preparation of operational manuals and standardised forms, conducting a pilot study in Al Sharqiyah North and Al Dakhiliyah governorates, and training personnel, following the ‘One Health’ approach.

Dr Abdullah al Manji, Epidemiologist at the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, explained that the programme serves as an applied educational platform that combines both theoretical and field-based learning. This programme has resulted in the graduation of four cohorts of national competencies so far, serving as a successful model for enhancing the national readiness to tackle health challenges.

These initiatives aim to enhance early warning capabilities for health threats, particularly in light of growing epidemiological and health challenges at both local and global levels.

The Event-Based Surveillance project represents a strategic transformation in Oman’s epidemiological monitoring system. It is designed to enhance the health system’s capacity for early detection of health threats and effective response.

This project complements the Indicator-Based Surveillance (IBS) programme, reinforcing the concept of “epidemiological vigilance” across Oman. EBS works by collecting and analysing data from a wide range of sources, including health centres, schools and local communities, while leveraging modern technology to improve operational efficiency and the overall effectiveness of the system.

The Field Epidemiology Training Programme (FETP) is designed to strengthen the skills of professionals working in the health sector and related fields by developing their capabilities in disease surveillance, health data analysis and outbreak investigation.

SPOTLIGHT

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 12

THE ADVENT of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly influenced the landscape of creativity in the arts, raising both opportunities and challenges for artists. AI has affected artists’ creativity by providing new tools that can enhance their creative processes, while simultaneously posing threats to traditional artistic practices and livelihoods. The art scene in the Sultanate of Oman is going through a critical phase that requires serious attention from all stakeholders, as signs of decline have begun to emerge in both the visual arts and music sectors despite the presence of educational institutions, art exhibitions and young talents. According to renowned Omani artist Fahad al Zadjali, AI, which has shifted from being a supportive tool to a worrying substitute for genuine artists, is to blame.

Al Zadjali believes that the excessive and unconscious reliance on AI has led to the spread of what he describes as “automated copying”, lacking creativity and cultural identity. He explains that AI should be limited to serving as an assistive tool for artists, not a replacement. “A true artist begins with an idea and builds the work with effort and emotion — not by simply generating images from the Internet,” Al Zadjali says. He further highlights the growing trend of printing artworks, colouring them and selling them as if they were authentic fine art. He considers this a form of “visual commerce” that reduces art to a cheap commercial product, stripping exhibitions and artistic initiatives of their cultural value and message. The decline is not limited to visual arts; Omani music is also struggling to reach international audiences as music from around the world continues to flood into Oman. Al Zadjali questions, “Where is Omani music on the global stage? Why isn’t it presented as a cultural identity on international platforms like African or Eastern music?” He attributes this gap to the lack of promotion by relevant institutions.

When asked about the lack of young artists continuing the artistic journey, Al Zadjali identifies the gap as stemming from weak foundational education and early-stage encouragement. Despite the existence of art classes in schools and university specialisations, he argues that this is not enough to produce real artists unless accompanied by a comprehensive support system, including competitions, workshops and international exposure.

Al Zadjali stresses that saving Omani art requires a holistic set of solutions. These should start with rebuilding the art education system from schools and universities, moving beyond theoretical lessons to include competitions and workshops that discover and refine talents early on. He also calls for empowering young artists by supporting their participation in international exhibitions and events to showcase their work and expand their professional horizons. He emphasises that major cultural institutions, such as the Royal Opera House Muscat, should play a greater role in promoting Omani arts and featuring them in their programmes. He also suggests organising local exhibitions and events that focus on creativity and originality rather than mere commercial gain.

Moreover, Al Zadjali highlights the need to raise public awareness about distinguishing between genuine art and commercial products. He encourages the use of AI as a supportive tool, not a replacement for authentic creative work, to help restore Omani art’s cultural role and spirit.

Al Zadjali stresses that reviving the artistic movement requires more than developing education or hosting exhibitions. It also demands genuine appreciation and motivation for Omani artists, both financially and morally. “One of the most impactful forms of recognition is acquiring and displaying the works of Omani artists in hotels and government buildings. Currently, most displayed works belong to non-Omani artists. Offering this kind of support could significantly help promote Omani identity and culture through authentic, locally produced art,” he said.

Al Zadjali believes that launching art competitions under government or private sector sponsorship, even with symbolic prizes, would motivate new generations to emerge and participate.

Is AI affecting authenticity of artists’ creativity



SHORTTAKES



During the event, HH Sayyid Dr Fahd honoured Abdullah al Rawas, in recognition of his efforts in organising numerous workshops.

SQU MARKS ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF UNIVERSITY DAY 2025

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) recently concluded its annual celebration of University Day 2025, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU. The celebrations honoured a number of members in recognition of their efforts during the 2024/2025 academic year and to motivate them towards a future filled with giving and achievement.

The ceremony included a number of distinguished students, including the head of the Student Tourism Group, which is affiliated with the Department of Tourism at Sultan Qaboos University. The group’s role is to spread tourism awareness to the largest possible audience inside and outside the university, and to promote the group’s name and influence within the community through organising and participating in a number of events and seminars related to tourism in the Sultanate of Oman.

During the event, HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU, honoured Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Student Tourism Group, in recognition of his efforts in organising numerous events and workshops both inside and outside the university.

Al Rawas, speaking at the event, said, “I feel proud and honoured to be among those who excelled in academic activities this year, especially since this honour bears the name of Sultan Qaboos University. It also marks the end of my university career as a badge of honour for me and the group, which will certainly have a significant impact on my personal and professional life.”

QURAN COMPETITION WINNERS FETED



ADAM: The Department of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate on Monday held a ceremony honouring participants in the second edition of the Holy Quran memorisation competition in the Wilayat of Adam, which saw 216 participants. The competition, held at Al Bashair Club Hall, included five levels: memorising five parts in the first level, four parts in the second level, three parts in the third level, two parts in the fourth level and one part in the fifth level. — ONA

Omani author redefines concepts of national security

LONDON: Recently published by Al Falag Publishing and Distribution in the United Kingdom, a new book by Omani author Dr Abdunnasser bin Ahmed al Abri, titled “Security and International Relations: A Strategic Vision”, marks a qualitative addition to the Arabic library in the fields of security and international studies.

In his latest work,



the author redefines the concept of national security within a comprehensive analytical framework that takes into account the rapid transformations in the global geopolitical and technological landscape.

The publication is issued amid a volatile international reality characterised by shifting power balances and the rise of non-traditional threats such as cybersecurity,

cross-border terrorism, global pandemics, and climate change — making the re-examination of national security critically important for policymakers and strategic analysts.

The book offers a thorough treatment of national security concepts by integrating theoretical and practical dimensions, while also reviewing modern international relations theories and analysing a set

of geopolitical crises shaping the contours of the new world order. It particularly focuses on the challenges faced by developing nations, especially in the Global South, amid the competition between major powers.

In the book’s introduction, the author states: “National security is no longer confined to military defence; it now intersects with issues of economy, technology,

health and the environment, necessitating a comprehensive revision of strategic analysis tools in an increasingly complex world.” He added that the book is aimed at academics, researchers and students in political and strategic studies, as well as policymakers, with the goal of fostering an integrated understanding of international interactions and their impact on state stability and national security. — ONA

OMAN MARKS INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PLANT HEALTH

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman joins the world in celebrating the International Day of Plant Health, observed annually on May 12. This year’s event is held under the theme “The Importance of Plant Health for a One Health Approach”. The occasion highlights the critical role of plant health as a cornerstone of food security, closely linked to human and animal health as well as environmental sustainability. Healthy plants provide nutrient-rich food systems for humans and livestock while contributing to ecological balance.



The International Day of Plant Health aims to raise global awareness about protecting plants and crops from pests and diseases, preserving natural resources and enhancing plant health. These efforts support global food security, environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, pollution reduction, safe trade and socio-economic development.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and regional bodies such as the Near East Plant Protection Organization are organising

scientific events to mark the occasion, promoting awareness of plant health’s significance and its role in global economic development.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources continues to monitor laboratory test reports and pest risk analyses based on epidemiological data from exporting countries. Additionally, the ministry is enhancing workforce training to improve efficiency in line with global advancements in plant health. — ONA

Real estate conference key platform for developers

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 12

THE Sultanate of Oman is all set to launch the 20th edition of the Oman Real Estate Conference and Exhibition next week, coinciding with Design and Build Week, scheduled to take place from May 19 to 24 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The event is organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in collaboration with the Oman Real Estate Association.

The conference serves as a key strategic platform that attracts elite developers, investors, and both local and international experts, as Oman continues its efforts to strengthen its regional position as a leading hub for sustainable urban investment.

Speaking at the media briefing on Monday, Jamal al Hadi, Media Adviser to the Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, confirmed that the conference aligns with national priorities aimed at achieving integrated urban development and enhancing Oman’s global presence as an attractive investment destination. He highlighted that the “Invest in Oman” identity and global promotional initiatives are in line with these efforts to strengthen Oman’s image in regional and international markets.

Al Hadi explained that the real estate sector is now a fundamental pillar in supporting the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and enhancing the national economy. He noted that the conference brings together all stakeholders in the real estate ecosystem under one roof including investors, developers, individual beneficiaries and financial institutions led by Oman Housing Bank, which provides integrated financing solutions.

FUTURE CITIES

The conference reflects the government’s direction towards developing smart cities and sustainable urban communities, with the announcement of landmark projects that mark



Jamal al Hadi stated that the conference aligns with national priorities aimed at achieving integrated urban development.

The conference reflects the government’s direction towards developing smart cities and sustainable urban communities, with the announcement of landmark projects that mark a qualitative leap in the urban investment landscape

a qualitative leap in the urban investment landscape, including the Sultan Haitham City, the Future City of Salalah and Al Khuwair Downtown project.

The conference will witness the signing of new agreements under the “Sorouh” initiative, one of the leading programmes aimed at providing integrated residential options that meet the aspirations of citizens. The initiative includes 18 projects distributed across 10 governorates, with over 90 per cent of the first phase already sold.

Al Hadi pointed out that the ministry aims to reach 60 residential projects by 2030, as part of an ambitious vision to cover various wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman. He explained that these projects have contributed to creating hundreds of jobs and supporting small and medium enterprises, while achieving more than a 45-per cent reduction in infrastructure costs through integrated planning and optimised urban density.

OVER 40 SPEAKERS, 180 EXHIBITORS

The conference will host more than 40 international speakers participating in 10 discussion panels addressing global trends in urban

planning, real estate investment and smart cities. The event will also feature 180 exhibition booths covering an area of over 13,000 square metres.

The accompanying exhibition offers a comprehensive platform to showcase the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning’s major projects, including the Sultan Haitham City, the Oman Mountain Destination and Al Khuwair Downtown project. The conference programme is rich with diverse activities and interactive sessions, including live presentations of future urban projects, specialised workshops on design and urban planning, as well as an investment forum, a youth forum, and a series of panel discussions that highlight challenges and showcase solutions, best practices, and international expertise in urban development and real estate investment.

The conference will also address the adoption of smart and sustainable city models that focus on multi-resource development, improving quality of life, and enabling digital transformation and property technology (PropTech) by leveraging the latest technologies in planning, management and marketing.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte

DUTERTE WINS MAYORAL RACE FROM HAGUE CELL

MANILA: Former Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, detained at the International Criminal Court for alleged crimes against humanity, regained the mayorship of family stronghold Davao city in a landslide vote on Monday, an initial tally showed.

With over 60 per cent of returns in, Duterte had built an insurmountable lead of 405,000 votes to 49,000 for his nearest competitor, results from the Commission on Elections (Comelec) released by local media showed.

But what role, if any, Duterte will play in governing the city of nearly 1.8 million from his cell in the Netherlands is unclear. His daughter, impeached vice president Sara Duterte, told reporters after casting her vote earlier in the day that plans were already under way to ensure he would officially become mayor.

“His ICC lawyers and his Filipino lawyers are discussing how to have him take his oath of office as winner of the mayoral contest here in Davao city,” she said, noting they had until June 30.

ALBANIA PM ON COURSE FOR FOURTH TERM



A man votes during parliamentary election in Tirana, Albania, on Sunday. — Reuters

TIRANA: Albania’s incumbent Prime Minister Edi Rama was on track to win his fourth term as his Socialist Party won most of the seats in weekend elections, partial results indicated on Monday.

Albanians cast their ballots on Sunday, in legislative elections seen as key for the Balkan nation’s bid to join the European Union. The vote was dominated by the contest between three-time premier Rama, who focused his campaign on EU integration, and right-winger Sali Berisha, from the Democratic Party of Albania.

The two campaigned mainly on economic issues such as pensions, wages, infrastructure and tourism.

But there were bitter exchanges too on the fight against corruption and organised crime, both of which are seen as essential requirements for Albania’s EU aspirations.

Rama’s Socialist Party won 52.6 per cent of the vote and the Berisha-led alliance of around 20 opposition parties promising a “great Albania” 34.1 per cent, according to the results based on more than 40 per cent of the ballots counted and published by the Central Election Commission.

PROBE SAYS OUSTED HASINA BEHIND DEADLY CRACKDOWN

DHAKA: Bangladesh’s former prime minister Sheikh Hasina masterminded a deadly crackdown on mass protests that prompted her ouster last year, prosecutors at a domestic war crimes tribunal said on Monday.

Up to 1,400 people died in July 2024 when Hasina’s government launched a brutal campaign to silence the opposition, according to the United Nations. Hasina lives in self-imposed exile in India, where she fled by helicopter, and has defied

an arrest warrant from Dhaka over charges of crimes against humanity.

“The investigation team has found Sheikh Hasina culpable in at least five charges,” Mohammad Tajul Islam, chief prosecutor at Bangladesh’s domestic International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), told reporters.

“They have brought charges of abetment, incitement, complicity, facilitation, conspiracy, and failure to prevent mass murder during the July uprising.”

Tajul Islam said the prosecution had submitted its first report to be presented at the court set to try Hasina and two of her aides — former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and ex-police chief Abdullah Al Mamun.

“Sheikh Hasina directly ordered law enforcement agencies and auxiliary forces aligned with her party to kill and maim, and to burn corpses and even people who were still alive at certain points,” he added. — AFP

President Putin is serious about Ukraine peace talks

THE Kremlin said on Monday that Russian President Vladimir Putin was serious about trying to find peace at talks he has proposed in Türkiye but his spokesman said he could say no more about the talks after Ukraine demanded the Kremlin chief attend.

Putin on Sunday proposed direct talks with Ukraine aimed at ending the war, and, after US President Donald Trump publicly told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to accept, Zelensky said he would but that Putin should attend in person.

“We are committed to a serious search for ways of a long-term peaceful settlement,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, referencing the failed 2022 talks between Russia and Ukraine.

Peskov said many leaders had welcomed Putin’s approach.

“This approach, aimed precisely at finding a real diplomatic solution to the Ukrainian crisis, eliminating the root causes of the conflict and establishing lasting peace, has met with understanding and support from the leaders of many countries.”

He cited positive reactions from US President Donald Trump, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan as well as from countries in the BRICS group and from countries in the former Soviet Union.

Before reporters could ask any more questions about the proposed talks, Peskov said: “That’s all. I’ve said everything I could about this story.”

Putin and Zelensky have not met



Britain’s Defence Secretary John Healey, European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas and Britain’s Foreign Secretary David Lammy pose for pictures following talks of the “Weimar+” group focused on Ukraine and the future of European security at Lancaster House in London on Monday. — AFP

Ukraine says Russia ‘completely ignoring’ ceasefire proposal

since December 2019 and make no secret of their contempt for each other.

Putin’s proposal for direct talks with Ukraine came hours after major European powers demanded on Saturday in Kyiv that Putin agree to an unconditional 30-day ceasefire or face “massive” new sanctions.

Germany’s government said on Monday that European countries will start preparing new sanctions on Russia unless the Kremlin by the end of Monday starts abiding by a 30-day ceasefire.

“The language of ultimatums is unacceptable for Russia, it is not suitable. You can’t use such language with Russia,” Peskov said when asked about the German and other European warnings.

Meanwhile, British Foreign Secretary David Lammy said on

Monday that Vladimir Putin must “get serious” about engaging in peace talks.

The British foreign secretary commended Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky for his “willingness to engage in talks” as European foreign ministers gathered in London for discussions about the continent’s security.

Zelensky has challenged his Russian counterpart to meet him face-to-face for negotiations to end the war in his country on Thursday in Türkiye. Putin faces the challenge after he said he wanted to hold direct talks with Kiev.

Urging the Russian leader to step up to the table, Lammy said: “This is the time for Vladimir Putin to get serious about peace in Europe, to get serious about a ceasefire, and to get serious about talks.”— Agencies



\$2.22 BILLION DEAL SIGNED

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis shake hands, in Rome, Italy, on Monday. Terna and its Greek counterpart have signed a deal worth around 2 billion euros (\$2.22 billion) to double the capacity of the electricity interconnection between Italy and Greece, Giorgia Meloni said. The deal came after a huge blackout hitting Spain and Portugal last month raised questions over the resilience of the European power grid, prompting nations to seek to diversify routes and supplies. The new high-voltage link, named GRITA 2, will have a transmission capacity of up to 1,000 MW and span approximately 300 km in total. — AFP

MAIDEN VISIT

Merz to attend inauguration of Pope Leo



Germany’s newly-minted Chancellor Friedrich Merz is set to attend the ceremonial inauguration of Pope Leo XIV in Rome, government spokesman Stefan Kornelius said on Monday.

Merz is also planning to meet Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on the sidelines of the visit in what would be his first meeting with the Italian leader since he took office last week.

Merz and Meloni have known each other for a long time.

CELEBRITY TRIAL

Kim Kardashian testifies in robbery trial



A-list celebrity Kim Kardashian is to testify in a Paris court on Tuesday, an eagerly awaited appearance nearly a decade after being robbed of millions of dollars of jewellery during the French capital’s fashion week.

Ten suspects have been on trial since late April over the armed robbery in 2016, which saw jewellery worth some \$10 million stolen from the reality TV star and influencer. The trial has attracted huge media attention.

NO SHOW

Syria leader to miss Arab summit



Syria’s interim president, Ahmed al Sharaa, will not attend an upcoming Arab League summit in Baghdad, an Arab diplomatic source said on Monday, as powerful Iraqi politicians have rejected hosting him. The Iraqi government has invited Sharaa for the meeting planned for Saturday, but he “will not attend the Arab Summit”, the diplomatic source said. Instead, Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani will lead the Syrian delegation.

SHORT TAKES



A French police officer poses with an anti-drone rifle during an exercise to test out anti-drone defence equipment near Paris. — Reuters file photo

NATIONS MEET AT UN FOR ‘KILLER ROBOT’ TALKS

GENEVA: Countries are meeting at the United Nations on Monday to revive efforts to regulate the kinds of AI-controlled autonomous weapons increasingly used in modern warfare, as experts warn time is running out to put guardrails on new lethal technology. Autonomous and artificial intelligence-assisted weapons systems are already playing a greater role in conflicts from Ukraine to Gaza. And rising defence spending worldwide promises to provide a further boost for burgeoning AI-assisted military technology.

Progress towards establishing global rules governing their development and use, however, has not kept pace. And internationally binding standards remain virtually non-existent.

Since 2014, countries that are part of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) have been meeting in Geneva to discuss a potential ban fully autonomous systems that operate without meaningful human control and regulate others. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has set a 2026 deadline for states to establish clear rules on AI weapon use. But human rights groups warn that consensus among governments is lacking.

HAMAS RELEASES US-ISRAELI CAPTIVE, NO TRUCE IN SIGHT

GAZA CITY: Hamas said it had freed an Israeli-American captive as fighting paused in Gaza on Monday but there was no agreement on a wider truce or release of captives as a global hunger monitor warned of famine in the devastated enclave.

Israel’s military said it had been informed by the Red Cross that a captive had been handed over without naming Edan Alexander, the last American held by Hamas.

Al Jazeera television showed a photograph of him standing next to masked fighters and a Red Cross official. Unlike in previous releases, he was wearing civilian clothes.

Fighting stopped at midday in Gaza after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would pause its operations to allow safe passage for the release. Hamas said it was releasing Alexander as a goodwill gesture to US President Donald Trump, who is visiting the region this week. However, Netanyahu has said there would be no ceasefire and that plans to intensify military action in Gaza continued.

SNOW COVER OF SWISS GLACIERS BELOW AVERAGE THIS YEAR: STUDY

GENEVA: The amount of snow covering Swiss glaciers at the end of the winter this year was 13 per cent below the 2010-2020 average, said a group of glacier monitoring experts on Monday.

Each spring, when snow cover reaches its peak, Matthias Huss, head of the Glacier Monitoring Switzerland (Glamos), and his team take measurements on several Swiss glaciers.

This year, the Glamos team measured snow depth at 21 glaciers

and found densities ranging between 1 and 4 metres, or between 0 and 52 per cent below the reference value.

The extrapolation of these measurements to all 1,400 registered Swiss glaciers shows a “winter snow deficit” that is 13 per cent below the 2010-2020 period, their report said.

“This value is less negative than in the very dry winters of 2022 and 2023,” the experts said.

The measurements examine both the depth and density of the

snow, providing useful data to evaluate the upcoming summer melting season. “Overall, snow measurements on glaciers indicate another dry year with significant repercussions on melting in the coming summer,” Huss said on X. “Another difficult year for glaciers ahead,” he added.

Snow cover is vital for glaciers as it allows them to “recharge” their mass, while protecting them from heat and sunlight in spring and summer. — AFP

Strong response to any future terror attack: Modi

INDIAN Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday vowed to respond strongly to any future “terrorist attack”, and warned that New Delhi would not tolerate “nuclear blackmail” in the event of further conflict with Pakistan. A weekend ceasefire which US President Donald Trump said he brokered appeared to be holding on Monday after four days of intense jet-fighter, missile, drone and artillery attacks — the worst violence between the two nuclear-armed neighbours since 1999. Trump said on Monday that US intervention had prevented a “bad nuclear war”.

“We stopped a nuclear conflict... millions of people could have been killed. So I’m very proud of that,” he told reporters at the White House.

Modi, in a televised address to the nation — his first since hostilities began last Wednesday — said Pakistan has chosen to attack rather than help it fight “terrorism”.

“If another terrorist attack against India is carried out, a strong response will be given,” he said.

The conflict followed an April 22 attack on tourists in Indian-administered Kashmir which killed 26 civilians.

The alarming spiral towards all-out war began before dawn on Wednesday, when India launched missile attacks destroying what it called “terrorist camps” in the Pakistan-administered part of Kashmir.

Each side then accused the other of launching waves of warplane and drone strikes, as well as missile and artillery bombardments that killed at least 60 people on both sides.

“If Pakistan wants to survive, it will have to destroy its terror infrastructure,” Modi said on Monday.

“India will strike with precision and decisiveness against the terrorist groups thriving under the cover of nuclear blackmail.

“India’s stand is very clear. Terror and talks cannot go together... Terror and trade cannot go together... Water and blood cannot flow together.”

His address came after the Indian army reported the “first calm night in recent days”



A man watches on a mobile phone in the old quarters of Delhi as Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivers an address to the nation on Monday. — Reuters

in Kashmir and along its western border with Pakistan.

The flare-up in violence was the worst since the two countries last open conflict in 1999 and sparked global shudders that it could spiral into full-blown war.

Top India and Pakistan military officials held briefings late on Sunday with each claiming the upper hand and warning they were ready to respond if there were fresh attacks.

“We have delivered the promise we made to our people”, Pakistan’s military spokesman Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said, calling it a “success on the battleground”.

“We have thus far exercised immense restraint so far and our actions have been focused, measured and non-escalatory,” said Indian Lieutenant General Rajiv Ghai.

On Monday, people were trickling back

to Poonch, a frontier town in Indian-administered Kashmir and one of the worst-hit places.

But thousands of schools remained closed across Pakistan-administered Kashmir as areas were cleared of debris from strikes and firing, said local official Naveed-Ul-Hassan Bukhari.

India, meanwhile, reopened 32 airports on Monday that had been closed due to the conflict, authorities said.

Senior officers from Pakistan and India were reported to have spoken on Monday in order to further secure the ceasefire.

Abdul Basit at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore said it would be about modalities of the ceasefire and not policy decisions. The aim is to “avoid any miscalculations, because right now one spark could quickly move towards a nuclear catastrophe,” Basit said. — AFP

Pope Leo tells media to shun divisions; free jailed reporters

VATICAN CITY: Pope Leo XIV, in his first address to the media, urged journalists on Monday to focus on reporting the truth instead of engaging in partisan debates and called for the release of reporters jailed for doing their jobs.

“The way we communicate is of fundamental importance: we must say ‘no’ to the war of words and images, we must reject the paradigm of war,” Leo told thousands of journalists who covered his election and the death of his predecessor, Pope Francis.

He also spoke up for jailed journalists who, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, numbered 361 at the end of last year.

“The suffering of these imprisoned journalists challenges the conscience of nations and the international community, calling on all of us to safeguard the precious gift of free speech and of the press,” said the pope.

Leo, the former Cardinal Robert Prevost, is the first pope born in the US. He was elected as the new Catholic pontiff on May 8 and is a relatively unknown figure on the global stage, spending most of his career as a missionary in Peru.

The pontiff also told the journalists they must act responsibly in using artificial intelligence in their work, asking them to “ensure that it can be used for the good of all, so that it can benefit all of humanity.”

“Let us disarm communication of all prejudice and resentment, fanaticism and even hatred, let us free it from aggression,” said the pope.

Monday’s meeting was Leo’s first audience with a large group of people at the Vatican. Coming into the Vatican’s large audience hall, he was greeted with applause from reporters.

The pope spoke mainly in Italian,



Pope Leo XIV holds an audience with representatives of the media in Paul VI hall at the Vatican on Monday. — Reuters

but opened with a joke in English about the clapping.

“Thank you for this wonderful reception,” said Leo. “They say that when they clap at the beginning, it doesn’t matter much.

If you’re still awake at the end and still want to applaud, thank you very

much.”

After his address, Leo walked off the stage to greet journalists in the audience, and engaged in banter with a few of them. The pope indicated he would continue with Francis’ plan to take a trip to Türkiye this year to celebrate the 1,700th anniversary of an early Church council, held in Nicaea, now the modern day town of Iznik.

But when an American reporter asked the pope, born in Chicago, if he would be returning for a visit home soon, Leo responded: “I don’t think so.”

Leo showed signs that he was not yet used to the rhythms and practices of being pope. At one point, he asked an aide if it was he or an usher who was supposed to give rosary beads to people after greeting them.

People meeting the pope are often given a small set of rosary beads blessed by the pontiff, usually distributed by a papal attendant. One reporter also asked the pope, who is a tennis player, if he would like to play against Andre Agassi. Leo responded, “just don’t bring Sinner,” making a Catholic pun about the last name of Italian champion Jannik Sinner. — Reuters

OPINION

Oman’s role in fostering peace in the region



THE recent phone call between His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres highlights the significant role the Sultanate of Oman plays in fostering peace in the region, particularly concerning the ongoing conflicts in Yemen and the nuclear negotiations involving Iran.

Guterres commended Oman for its constructive diplomacy, which has been pivotal in reducing tensions and facilitating dialogue among conflicting parties.

Oman’s diplomatic initiatives have earned it recognition from the UN as an essential player in promoting peace within the tumultuous landscape of the Middle East.

Its approach emphasises dialogue over conflict, positioning Oman as a vital mediator capable of bridging divides among various stakeholders. Oman’s involvement in Yemen has been characterised by a commitment to peaceful resolution rather than military intervention.

As a neighbour of Yemen, Oman has maintained open borders to provide

humanitarian assistance and has hosted various diplomatic discussions aimed at ending hostilities.

The UN Secretary-General specifically praised Oman’s efforts that contributed in restoring maritime navigation in the Red Sea and cessation of hostilities between the United States and Yemeni authorities.

Furthermore, Oman’s mediation regarding the nuclear talks between Iran and the US underscores its strategic position as a facilitator of dialogue.

This role is crucial not only for regional stability but also for international security, as tensions surrounding Iran’s nuclear issue have far-reaching implications.

His Majesty reaffirmed that Oman’s diplomatic efforts are rooted in a commitment to promote peace and stability for all nations involved, reflecting a broader vision of cooperation and harmony.

Oman’s commitment to fostering an inclusive political process -- one that involves all stakeholders -- is crucial for any sustainable resolution of conflicts.

As articulated by Omani officials, there

His Majesty reaffirmed that Oman’s diplomatic efforts are rooted in a commitment to promote peace and stability for all nations involved, reflecting a broader vision of cooperation and harmony

is an emphasis on forming an inclusive national government that represents diverse interests within Yemen. This vision aligns with broader goals of stability not just within Yemen but throughout the Gulf region.

Oman’s mediation efforts have been instrumental in promoting peace initiatives concerning both Yemen’s internal strife and broader regional tensions involving Iran.

Its unique position allows it to navigate complex relationships while prioritising humanitarian needs -- a model that could serve as a blueprint for future diplomatic engagements across similarly volatile regions.

Oman has continued its role as a peacemaker under His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, maintaining a diplomatic stance that emphasises neutrality and mediation in regional conflicts.

His Majesty the Sultan has committed to upholding the principles of Oman’s foreign policy of peaceful coexistence and non-interference in the affairs of other nations. This approach is crucial in a region marked by tensions.

UK GOVERNMENT UNVEILS NEW IMMIGRATION PLANS

JAMES PHEBY AND PETER HUTCHISON

Prime Minister Keir Starmer vowed on Monday to “finally take back control” of Britain’s borders as his government unveiled policies designed to reduce immigration and fend off rising support for the hard right.

Labour leader Starmer announced he was ending an “experiment in open borders” that saw net migration rise to nearly one million people under the previous Conservative government, which lost last year’s election.

The government’s Immigration White Paper policy document was to be presented to parliament later on Monday.

Starmer said it would “finally take back control of our borders and close the book on a squalid chapter for our politics, our economy and our country”, recalling the pro-Brexit slogan at the height of the campaign to leave the European Union. Labour vowed in its general election manifesto last year to significantly reduce net migration, which stood at 728,000 in the 12 months to last June.

He is under renewed pressure to tackle the issue following the anti-immigration Reform party’s win in recent local elections. They are riding high in the polls, as Labour struggles.

Starmer told reporters during a press conference in Downing Street that it was his “promise” that migration will fall. Under the new plans, people will have to live in the UK for 10 years before qualifying for settlement and citizenship, up from five years currently. English language rules will also be strengthened, with all adult dependents required to demonstrate a basic understanding.

“When people come to our country, they should also commit to integration and to learning our language,” Starmer said. “Every area of the immigration system, including work, family and study, will be tightened up so we have more control,” he added, saying “enforcement will be tougher than ever”.

Interior Minister Yvette Cooper, who will present the white paper to parliament, said on Sunday the plans would include new powers to deport foreign criminals committing offences in the UK.

Currently, the government is only informed of foreign nationals who receive prison sentences. Deportation arrangements generally focus on those sentenced to more than a year in prison.

Under the new arrangements however, all foreign nationals convicted of offences will be flagged to the government, which will have wider removal powers, said the interior ministry.

“The system for returning foreign criminals has been far too weak for too long,” said Cooper. “We need much higher standards.” — AFP

Pilot project helping reclaim Lankan farms

A commando in an elite Sri Lankan police unit, Sameera Dilshan has an unusual mission — to reclaim farms poisoned by salt, a long-standing problem now accelerating due to climate change.

Increasing salinity is slowly and steadily swallowing traditional rice paddies along the island’s coastline, taking away the livelihood of generations of farmers. Two hours’ drive south of the capital Colombo lies Katukurunda — one of the camps of the formidable Special Task Force (STF), an elite force created four decades ago to fight Tamil rebels.

While his colleagues train for riot control under the humid heat of the nearby Indian Ocean, the 35-year-old non-commissioned officer and his “commando-farmer” team are hoeing, weeding and watering.

Their goal? To grow coconut palms and a wide variety of fruits and vegetables in a paddy declared dead 40 years ago due to salt water contamination. “This plantation was launched in 2022 as part of a government initiative to improve food security,” Dilshan said, with local authorities allocating out land parcels. The method — known as “sorjan”, is similar to techniques used in Thailand and Indonesia.

It reshapes flood-prone land by digging ponds where rice can be grown or fish raised, with more saline-tolerant coconut trees planted. Embankments around these ponds are used for more delicate crops.

“We’re tending to 360 coconut trees planted here... along with pumpkins, gourds and cucumbers,” said Dilshan. “In two and a half years, we’ll know if it’s a success or not.”

“It’s an efficient and climate-resilient production system that optimises land use and productivity, and increases farmers’ profits,” said Buddhi Marambe, from the University of Peradeniya.

The UN Food and Agriculture



A Sri Lankan Special Task Force soldier holds a pumpkin at a plantation in their farm at Katukurunda. — AFP



PHILIPPE ALFROY

The writer is a journalist with AFP

Organization (FAO) said in a 2024 report that saltwater from seas and oceans affects 10.7 per cent of the earth’s land, making it uncultivable in some cases. It travels up rivers with the tides, seeps into soil through evaporation and contaminates groundwater used for irrigation.

Climate change — which dries out the soil, reduces water resources, or raises sea levels — is expected to increase the proportion of such “salty” land from 24 per cent to 32 per cent of the world’s surface area by the end of the century, the FAO warns. These trends “threaten agricultural productivity and reduce crop yields in affected zones”, it warns. Sri Lanka is no exception. Marambe estimates that 223,000 hectares (551,000 acres), half of which are rice paddies, are impacted by salinity — nearly eight per cent of the country’s total arable land. South of the pilot plantation lies the village of Parappuwa, surrounded by abandoned land.

Here, just a few kilometres from the sea, only a tiny portion of the paddy fields is still in use.

“Everything is polluted by salt

that comes up during high tide,” said Gamini Piyal Wijesinghe, 46, a farmer’s son who, after he left the army, went into the restaurant business instead.

He pointed to a small stream, where 18 small dams were built to stop the seawater. “They weren’t constructed properly,” he said. “The water seeps through.”

Other former rice farmers have turned to cinnamon or rubber cultivation. “Cinnamon is doing fairly well, but our income has significantly dropped since we stopped growing rice,” said W D Jayaratne, 50, head of the local farmers’ association. The future is gloomy. “Salinity in the water is increasing and threatening our farmland,” he added. “There are also insects. Everywhere you look, there are problems.”

In this district of Kalutara, local authorities are offering abandoned land to farmers to bring it back under cultivation, mostly with coconut trees.

“We’ve already allocated 400 hectares and plan to increase that to 1,000 in the next two years,” said the district chief Janaka Gunawardana.

Don’t let the good moments spill over



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

THERE is a reason why something happened the way it did - it is not just a reasoning to make one feel better.

“Whatever will be, will be” is not just a line from a popular song. It can be an attitude.

It was in 1956 when Doris Day released the song ‘Que Sera Sera, whatever will be, will be,’ and it turned out to be a classic hit.

She reflects in the song how, as a little girl, she had asked her mother, What will she be when she grows up?

“Will I be pretty, will I be rich?”

And her mother replied, “Que Sera Sera, whatever will be, will be.”

In 2025 the song is still relevant.

We were asked when we were young, What would you like to be when you grow up?

Once grown up, we now ask other children what they would like to be when they grow up.

We can strive and work hard, but what might come our way may not be what we want or expect. What happens then?

Do we go down with disappointment?

What we must try is to cope and excel.

There is no point in delving into the past by looking at dreams. When we are younger, we tend to engage our energy in this aspect. But it is not to say that we do not try again. As they say, when the time is right, what is

meant for you will come. What we have to be careful of is not to lose touch with the present moment.

If we observe successful sports personalities, we can learn how they try not to carry the impact of a previous game onto the next one. And if they do, they lose concentration.

Watch the hourglass, and we will know the lesson it can convey. We might be able to turn over the hourglass and see the sand sieve through the tiny hole and fill the other side. But with it, those precious moments have gone forever.

It is not just time; along with it go people and opportunities. If we have lost one opportunity, then we must be in the right frame of mind to try the next one. But if our mind is stuck with what we have lost, there is absolutely no space to comprehend what is flowing in. Can a cup that is full take more coffee? The coffee has no choice but to spill over.

If we do not utilise today in the right spirit, we might miss out on life. It is just like missing out on many days of news, and then one fine day you pop in and find out many things have changed and the news headlines are different. As in the case of skill, if we do not keep up, we might end up being outdated.

But that is not how the youngsters feel because when we are young, we feel we are

There is no point in delving into the past by looking at dreams. When we are younger, we tend to engage our energy in this aspect. But it is not to say that we do not try again

the ones who know it all or know it better.

When we are young we might know the ‘now’, but the elders know the basics and are richer with their own experience. It is the combination that makes an organization well balanced. There is, however, one aspect that can affect both the old and the young, and that is change. If we cannot adapt to change, we are defenceless.

More than anything else, when we are stuck in emotions and crying over spilt milk, there is also a danger of losing people. When we hold onto grudges, what we do not realise is the fact that time also takes away people. It may not give us the opportunity to express what we want to convey in terms of gratitude.

So you might argue that if we can forget the past, we can forget the good moments too. But here is the catch: when we relive the good memories, it has a good impact on our body and mind, and so on health.

Psychology Today writes, “Studies have shown that intentionally recalling happy experiences can help to disrupt negative thought patterns, alleviate anxiety, and even lower cortisol levels. This practice has been particularly effective in young people who are at risk of depression due to stress, as it promotes a more positive self-image.”

Nostalgia is a good thing. So make sure to collect good memories and enrich them with the right people.

WEST BANK BYPASS RAISES FEARS OF ISRAELI ANNEXATION

ALICE CHANCELLOR

A creeping Israeli presence is nothing new for the Bedouins who inhabit the arid hills east of Jerusalem, but a recently approved road in the area means the spectre of annexation now looms large.

Israeli authorities in March green lit the construction of a separate route for Palestinian vehicles to bypass a central stretch of the occupied West Bank -- one of the territory’s most disputed parcels of land.

Israel has promoted the project as a way to further facilitate settlement expansion in the area near Jerusalem, which it considers its “eternal and indivisible” capital. But Palestinians warn the move threatens to further isolate their communities and undermines hopes for a contiguous future state with east Jerusalem as its capital.

“If they open a road there, that’s it, this area will be annexed,” said Eid Jahaleen, who lives in the Bedouin village of Khan al Ahmar.

The village, a cluster of shacks and tents some 10 km from Jerusalem’s Old City, sits surrounded by Israeli settlements. “It’s going to be hard to reach out to the outside world. No Palestinian services will be allowed to get in here,” he said.

“If you want clothes, food for your home, (Israel) will be the one to open the gate.”

Israeli settlements are considered illegal under international law.

Outposts — unauthorised structures under Israeli law that often precede the establishment of a settlement — have spread rapidly across the West Bank since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned to power in late 2022, leading a hardline, pro-settler coalition.

After a new outpost appeared just 100 metres away, Jahaleen said he has “settlers on all sides”.

Israel heavily restricts the movement of West Bank Palestinians, who must obtain permits from authorities to travel through checkpoints to cross into east Jerusalem or Israel.

Far-right ministers have in recent months openly called for Israel’s annexation of the territory.

The alternative bypass would mean Palestinian vehicles driving north-south through the West Bank could travel directly between Palestinian towns rather, without passing the large Israeli settlement of Maale Adumim.

Israel has hailed the move as enabling settlement development between Maale Adumim and Jerusalem on a super-sensitive land corridor known as E1. Israel has long had ambitions to build on the roughly 12 square kilometres, but the international community has repeatedly warned it could deal a fatal blow to a future Palestinian state.

Maale Adumim’s Mayor Guy Yifrach said the Palestinian bypass would reduce congestion on the current highway between the settlement and Jerusalem and “allow for a natural urban continuity” between the two. — AFP

South Korea’s presidential campaigns kick off

CONTENDERS

for South Korea’s presi-dency

kicked off their campaigns on Monday, vowing to unify a deeply polarised society and spur economic growth while navigating trade negotiations with the United States.

Asia’s fourth-largest economy will hold a snap presidential election on June 3 to choose Yoon Suk Yeol’s successor after the conservative leader was ousted over his shock martial law order that plunged the country into a political crisis. Surrounded by a huge crowd of supporters dressed in blue, frontrunner Lee Jae-myung from the liberal Democratic Party rallied in the centre of the capital Seoul.

Some supporters danced to campaign songs while others chanted “Lee Jae-myung, President!”.

“Will you join the journey to a new start, a new path to hope?” Lee told the crowd, changing into a pair of sneakers onstage to signal his hard work during the race.

Lee, who lost the previous presidential polls to Yoon, is now riding a wave of popular support after overcoming a knife attack, standing up to the martial law order and contesting criminal charges that have threatened to disqualify him from the race.

His ongoing trials on matters ranging from bribery to charges mostly linked to a \$1-billion property development scandal have been pushed back to after the polls. Lee, wearing a bulletproof vest due to threats to his safety, promised to become the leader of unity and weather a trade crisis triggered by trade tariffs imposed by the administration of US President Donald Trump.

His party’s major policy proposals involve growing the economy with a focus on artificial intelligence and K-pop culture industries.

If elected, Lee would seek to restore soured relations with North Korea, which is technically at war with the South, while expanding the country’s diplomatic sphere into Europe, according to the party’s policy pledges.



Supporters gesture during a campaign event of South Korea's Democratic Party's presidential election candidate Lee Jae-myung in Seoul on Monday. — AFP



JU-MIN PARK

The writer is a senior correspondent with Reuters

Kim Moon-soo, Lee’s conservative rival, began his campaign at a public wholesale market in Seoul, eating a Korean sausage soup with merchants and promising to revive small businesses in the slowing economy.

After a tumultuous week that required merging his campaign with a former prime minister who was also scheduled to run, the former labour minister has officially become the presidential candidate from the major right-wing People Power Party. Yoon publicly endorsed Kim on Sunday to fight “the giant opposition party”, but his support has garnered criticism from some PPP members who want the party to kick out the ousted leader.

Job creation and a business-friendly environment are Kim’s key policy proposals. If elected, he has proposed an immediate summit meeting with Trump to negotiate tariffs.

Kim said he would focus on strengthening the security alliance with the United States but also seek a path for the country to potentially

pursue nuclear armament by securing the right to reprocess nuclear fuel, a major step towards building atomic weapons.

Earlier, South Korea’s People Power Party registered former labour minister Kim Moon-soo as its official presidential candidate on Sunday, a day after it attempted to cancel his candidacy.

The ruling People Power Party (PPP) has been in turmoil since former president Yoon Suk Yeol was ousted after he declared martial law in December.

Last week, Kim won the PPP’s primary to run as its candidate in presidential elections on June 3.

But before dawn on Saturday, his nomination was cancelled and the party moved to replace him with ex-prime minister Han Duck-soo, who had resigned to contest the race initially as an independent.

The attempt however failed when party members voted down a motion to switch the presidential candidate from Kim to Han — automatically reinstating Kim as the nominee.

SPORTS

ASIANHANDBALL



Oman player attempts a shot at Saudi goal.

OMAN BLANK SAUDI TO LEAD GROUP A, IRAN TOP GROUP B

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 12

Oman’s national beach handball team led Group A at the conclusion of the group stage in the 10th Men’s and Women’s Asian Beach Handball Championship ‘Muscat 2025’ which also acts as a qualifier for the 2026 Beach Handball World Championship. Oman team, coached by Hamood al Hasani, earned full six points from three games including the last victory over Saudi Arabia 2-0 in the final group match besides the two victories over Maldives and Hong Kong.

Saudi Arabia ended in second place with four points followed by Hong Kong in third with two points and Maldives in fourth place with no points. Oman’s Assad al Hasani, Said al Hasani and their teammates delivered a top match against Saudi Arabia as they entered to the second stage of the tournament with high morale to go further.

In Group B, Asian heavyweights Iran claimed the top spot with eight points after a convincing 2-0 win over the Philippines in the concluding round. Jordan came in second with six points, Pakistan third with four points, while the Philippines and India followed with two and nil points respectively. In the women’s competition, two key matches will take place on Tuesday at the sand court of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The Philippines will face India at 6 pm and it will be followed by Vietnam clash against Hong Kong at 7 pm. The women’s competition is being held in a double round-robin format with the top two teams qualifying for the 2026 IHF Beach Handball World Championship. Vietnam currently are leading the group standings by six points and followed by the Philippines with four points and then India with two points while Hong Kong with no points are at the bottom.

FULL EFFORT
Oman’s Asaad al Hasani said the team will deliver their full efforts in the forthcoming round after beating Saudi.

“The match started strongly from both teams and we lost the focus in the beginning of the first half but we managed to return to the match before end of the opening set. In the second half, we dominated and reached to the opponent’s danger area and earned the required points to end the match on a victory note,” he said.

Saudi team manager Othman Ahmed praised his players’ impressive show at the group stage. “Thanks to the players for their outstanding performance in the group stage. Now, our target is to focus in the next match against Pakistan in quarterfinals (which took place on Monday night). The coaching staff reviewed the opponent’s strength and weak points. Our main objective is secure one of the slots for the 2026 IHF Beach Handball World Championship,” he said.

Responding to an inquiry on the tight match schedules, he said: “All players were trained accordingly to play many games within one week time. Also, our last presence in the GCC Beach Games in Muscat was an advantage for the team as it was a good preparation and we adopted with the environment ahead of the Asian event,” he added.

National Olympic Shooting Complex inaugurated

THE NATIONAL OLYMPIC SHOOTING COMPLEX (NOSC) in Muscat was opened on Monday under the auspices of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs.

The facility’s opening is in line with Oman’s ongoing development and modernisation process, with the aim of harnessing all capabilities to maintain high national standards.

At the outset of the ceremony, HH Sayyid Shihab unveiled the commemorative plaque, marking the official inauguration of the National Olympic Shooting Complex - Muscat. The attendees then watched a visual presentation on the stages of construction of the NOSC, its facilities, services and its modern technologies and equipment.

Then, HH Sayyid Shihab toured the facilities of the NOSC and listened to a briefing about every shooting range and its supporting units. On this occasion, HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, Chairman of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC), said that the National Olympic Shooting Complex - Muscat constitutes a sporting accomplishment. He pointed out that the NOSC serves as a leading destination for sports talents, an incubator for marksmanship and a podium for hosting local and international events.

“This achievement reflects constant support to the sports sector by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and highlights the vital role of sports as a fundamental pillar of sustainable development in the Sultanate of Oman,” HH Sayyid Azzan added.

Vice-Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF), Chairman of Oman Shooting Association, said that the National Olympic Shooting Complex - Muscat is an achievement that consolidates the Sultanate of Oman’s position as an incubator for sporting excellence. He said the facility serves as home for competencies and skills and a spacious arena for crowning Olympic champions and embracing achievements.

He added that the NOSC boasts advanced facilities and features a strategic vision that elevates the status of human resources under the Royal patronage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, who places the advancement of sports among top priorities of comprehensive development, in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The NOSC was built in accordance with the highest international



HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said tours the National Olympic Shooting Complex in Muscat.



The shooting facility at the National Olympic Shooting Complex.

specifications and standards approved by the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF), to meet the technical and organisational requirements that are required by the Olympic sport of shooting.

The NOSC stands out as a comprehensive edifice for all shooters in Oman, embracing their ambitions and providing them with the best environment for training, competition and excellence. It is a milestone in the march of Oman Modern Renaissance and a clear symbol of the progress achieved by the Sultanate of Oman in the field of sports infrastructure. The NOSC is an embodiment of the Royal vision for empowering human resources and backing Omani sports at regional, continental and international levels.

SHOOTING RANGES
The complex’s main building extends over an area of 2,400 square metres and it includes a spacious open hall, administrative offices, a warehouse for weapons and a store for ammunition, in addition to a restaurant and a media broadcasting room that keeps pace with the aspirations of digital and visual coverage of tournaments and events.

The NOSC also includes a 10-metre shooting range that occupies an area of 2,700 square metres, includes 80 targets and accommodates 80 shooters at one time. It also includes a 25-metre shooting range that occupies an area of 2,900 square metres and includes 50 targets that can accommodate 50 shooters at the same time.

The facility also includes a 50-metre shooting range that occupies an area of 2,600 square metres, comprising 80 targets that can accommodate 80 shooters at one time.

This makes the NOSC one of the most prominent shooting ranges in the region. The facility also has a large hall designated for final competitions.

The hall occupies an area of 1,600 square metres and it can accommodate 10 shooters. The opening ceremony was attended by government officials, the chairman of Oman Shooting Association, senior officers of the SAF and other military and security services and members of Oman Shooting Association. — ONA

Al Manar’s Al Zubair eyes success on Zandvoort debut

MUSCAT: Al Manar Racing by Team WRT’s Al Faisal al Zubair teams up with Jens Klingmann again to make his racing debut at the Dutch Zandvoort circuit at the second round of the 2025 GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Sprint Series this weekend (May 16-18) in the Netherlands.

Fresh from winning the second of the two one-hour races at Brands Hatch in England two weeks ago that has firmly put the Omani and his German team-mate into early title contention, the pair again lay faith in the Al Manar Racing by Team WRT BMW M4 GT3 EVO as they chase Gold Cup honours.

Al Manar Racing by Team WRT currently holds second place in the Teams’ Championship, just half a point behind CSA Racing,



Al Faisal al Zubair teams up with Jens Klingmann to make his racing debut at the Dutch Zandvoort circuit.

and are third in the Drivers’ Championship (41.5 points) behind Thierry Vermeulen/Chris Lulham (54.5 points) and Arthur Rougier/James Kell (42 points).

Al Zubair said: “Looking forward to the weekend in Zandvoort. Like the first round, it is going to be a very difficult track. I have never personally raced there before. Luckily, we tested there in March, so a bit of track time definitely helps.

“After a good weekend at Brands Hatch, we go straight to the second round here. We need to keep the ball rolling, keep it consistent and go for the points. That will be important at the end of the championship and that is the target for us.”

Bronze Cup entrants bolster the Zandvoort grid to a record 41 cars and join forces with the Pro, Gold and Silver Cup entrants. This is only the third time in Sprint Cup history that the number has exceeded 40. The race weekend will also be

shared with competitors in the GT2 and GT4 European Series and the GB3 Championship.

Competition for Al Manar Racing by Team WRT comes from the Sainteloc Racing and Tresor Attempto Racing Audi R8 LMS GT3, the Emil Frey Racing’s Ferrari 296 GT3 and the CSA Racing and Garage 59 McLaren 720S GT3s.

Free practice takes place on the Dutch coastal track from 10.20hrs on Friday (May 16) and precedes an hour of pre-qualifying from 15.10hrs. The first qualifying session fires into life at 10.0hrs on Saturday (May 17) and the first of the one-hour races gets underway at 15.00hrs.

Sunday’s action sees the second qualifying session start at the earlier time of 09.00hrs with race two getting the green light from 14.45hrs.

OQ Exploration & Production Trains 430 Omani Graduates in Engineering, Technical, and Administrative Fields

Muscat, Oman – May 2025

OQ Exploration & Production SAOG, the leading energy company, has announced the launch of «Tamayuz», a specialized training and development program aimed at equipping 430 Omani graduates with essential skills in engineering, technical disciplines, and administrative fields. As part of this initiative, OQEP has signed a collaboration agreement with the Oman Energy Society (OPAL) to oversee the program's implementation, reinforcing OQEP's commitment to human capital development and

enhancing graduate competencies across various sectors.

The Memorandum of Cooperation was signed by Eng. Ahmed bin Said Al Azkawi, CEO of OQ Exploration & Production, and Eng. Mohammed bin Hamood Al Naabi, CEO of OPAL, during OQEP's participation in the Oman Petroleum & Energy Exhibition.

The Tamayuz program is designed to develop national competencies, build expertise, and enhance employability. It features a series of specialized professional training programs

ranging from six months to two years, ensuring graduates are industry-ready and equipped with internationally recognized certifications upon completing the program's requirements.

By aligning training outcomes with the evolving needs of the energy sector, «Tamayuz» plays a crucial role in supporting Oman's Vision 2040, fostering innovation, and strengthening the country's talent pool in critical industries.

Commenting on the initiative

As a pioneering initiative, Ta-



mayuz bridges the gap between training and real-world employment opportunities, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared

to compete for specialized, industry-driven roles. By focusing on hands-on training and professional certification, the program

strengthens Oman's workforce readiness and contributes to the broader development of the national economy.

OQEP signs over OMR 21 Million in contracts with local companies and SMEs



Muscat, Oman – May 12, 2025

OQ Exploration & Production S.A.O.G, the leading exploration and production company listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, has announced the signing of four major contracts exceeding OMR 21 million during its participation in the Oman Petroleum & Energy Exhibition and Conference. These agreements with local companies and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Oman's concession areas reflect OQEP's dedication to enhancing In-Country Value (ICV), empowering Omani talent, and reinforcing its commitment to community-based businesses and service providers.

Strategic Agreements to Strengthen Local Engagement

OQEP signed a contract with Technical Services Company to develop a fully integrated residential camp within the Bisat Project at Block 60. The contract encompasses engineering, manufacturing, procurement, installation, and operational services, with completion slated for June 2026. The facility, accommodating 360 to 460 individuals, is designed to directly support Bisat field opera-

tions while contributing to Omanization goals.

Additionally, OQEP finalized a two-year agreement with Shalim Oil Company, with an optional extension for an additional two years. This strategic move ensures the sustainable employment of over 80 former Shalim employees, reinforcing OQEP's commitment to workforce stability and long-term local engagement in its oil fields. Shalim, a recognized local service provider, specializes in light land drilling rigs for Block 60, OQEP's principal hydrocarbon concession.

A third contract was signed with Rimal Al Sahra Oil & Gas to supply casing materials for Blocks 60 and 48 under a four-year agreement, with an optional two-year extension. This collaboration highlights OQEP's expanding capabilities in providing core well construction components, while supporting local sourcing and reducing reliance on imports. Rimal Al Sahra is known for its dedication to skill development, reliance on local procurement and advancing Omani industry standards.

The fourth contract was awarded to Shuram LLC, an Omani SME holding Riyadh card, for essential



analytical services across Blocks 60, 48, and 8. As Oman's sole specialized laboratory service provider for the oil sector, Shuram's partnership with OQEP underscores the company's commitment to fostering high-performing SMEs and strengthening in-country expertise.

Boosting Economic and Social

Development

These agreements not only create new business opportunities for Omani enterprises but also deliver broad socio-economic benefits, including job creation for Omani nationals by securing long-term employment for skilled professionals, strengthening local supply chains



to reduce dependency on imports, and enhancing workforce skills and leadership development to promote a more dynamic and self-sufficient national economy.

Leadership Commentary

Commenting on the milestone agreements, Jaber Al-Namani, Chief Financial Officer at OQEP, stated: «These contracts reaffirm OQEP's unwavering commitment to ICV by forging strategic partnerships with local businesses and enabling Omani talent across all operational levels. We believe that investing in human capital and local infrastructure is key to achieving sustainable economic growth and elevating Oman's energy sector's competitiveness in the long run.»

«By signing these agreements with SMEs in concession areas, we are reinforcing their role in driving national economic contributions while supporting private-sector development and workforce empowerment», he added.

About OQ Exploration & Production SAOG

Founded on May 20, 2009, OQEP was initially registered in Oman as

a limited liability company before transitioning into a public joint-stock company (S.A.O.G) on July 15, 2024. Its shares were officially listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange on October 28, 2024, making it a publicly traded entity.

OQEP's core operations include crude oil and natural gas extraction, well drilling, field exploration, and oil and gas production services.

OQ Exploration and Production SAOG (OQEP) is the Sultanate of Oman's largest pure-play oil and gas exploration and production company. As one of Oman's largest exploration companies, OQEP holds one of the country's most significant hydrocarbon reserves, producing an estimated 221.2 thousand barrels of oil equivalent per day in Q1 2025.

The company's mission focuses on safe and efficient hydrocarbon exploration, ensuring commercially viable opportunities while maintaining financial sustainability to support its long-term growth ambitions. OQEP's exploration program is structured to replenish reserves and secure its future expansion.

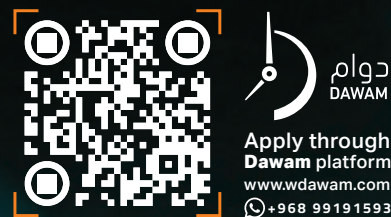
For more details, visit OQEP's official website.



الجمعية العمانية للطاقة
Oman Energy Association

OQ Exploration and Production SAOG, in collaboration with the Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL), is pleased to offer **430** specialized training opportunities as part of the **(TAMAYUZ)** development training program with its contractor partners in the energy sector. These opportunities are dedicated to graduates holding General Diploma, Diploma and Bachelor's degrees.

- III The program targets Omani graduates of both genders who are registered with the Ministry of Labour.
- III The training period ranges from 6 months to 2 years depending on the program.
- III Trainees will receive a monthly allowance throughout the training period.
- III Candidates who do not meet the requirements outlined in the announcement will be excluded from the selection process.
- III The deadline for registration is 26/05/2025.



Empowering Today's Talents,
To Unlock Tomorrow's Potential



SPORTS

HOCKEYLEAGUE



Ahli Sidab and Seeb players fight for the ball.

AHLI SIDAB BOOST
LEAD WITH BIG WIN
OVER SEEB

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 12

Ahli Sidab continued their strong performance in the Oman Hockey League after securing a commanding 6-1 victory over Seeb in the third-round match of the preliminary stage, held at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat on Sunday.

Ahli Sidab started the match strongly, with Rashad al Fazari opening the scoring in the seventh minute, ending the first quarter with a 1-0 lead. In the second quarter, Ahli Sidab maintained their dominance, with Haitham al Wahaibi adding the second goal. Ammar al Shaibi extended the lead with a third goal from a penalty corner in the 18th minute, closing the first half at 3-0.

In the third quarter, Ahli Sidab kept up the pressure, with Sanad al Fazari scoring the fourth goal from a penalty corner in the 36th minute, ending the quarter at 4-0. In the final quarter, Aseel al Muaini scored the fifth goal in the 45th minute, and Ammar al Shaibi returned to complete the six-goal tally with another penalty corner. Seeb's Khalid al Hasani scored their only goal from a penalty corner in the 56th minute, ending the match 6-1 in favour of Ahli Sidab.

AL AMERAT BLANK SALALAH

In the second match, Al Amerat defeated Salalah 3-0. Adnan al Husaini opened the scoring in the seventh minute following a quick counter-attack, ending the first quarter with Al Amerat leading 1-0. Despite Salalah's attempts in the second and third quarters, Al Amerat's defence successfully held their ground. In the final quarter, Elias al Nofali doubled the lead in the 46th minute, before Ali al Zadjali sealed the win with a third goal from a penalty corner, securing a 3-0 victory.

SEEB EARN FIRST WIN

Seeb achieved their first win with a convincing 4-0 victory over Al Nasr at the Hockey Oman Stadium.

Seeb started with offensive pressure in search of their first win, with Mahmoud al Hassani opening the scoring in the 12th minute, ending the first quarter 1-0. The second quarter remained goalless.

In the third quarter, Seeb strengthened their lead with two quick goals by Qasim Moosa in the 35th minute and Mohammed al Lawati in the 38th minute, closing the quarter at 3-0.

Seeb continued their dominance in the final quarter, with Qasim Moosa scoring the fourth goal in the 58th minute, sealing a 4-0 victory.

With these results, Ahli Sidab solidified their position at the top of the group with nine points, achieving a perfect record of three wins. Al Amerat follow in second place with six points, while Salalah and Seeb are tied with three points each. Al Nasr remain at the bottom with no points after two straight losses.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz in action during his round of 32 match against Serbia's Laslo Djere in Rome. — Reuters

Alcaraz, Zverev march
into Italian Open last 16

CARLOS ALCARAZ joined reigning Italian Open champion Alexander Zverev in the last 16 in Rome after seeing off Laslo Djere 7-6 (7/2), 6-2 on centre court on Sunday.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Alcaraz reached the fourth round at the Foro Italico for the first time after a battle with spirited Djere. In the next round, Alcaraz will face Karen Khachanov who knocked out Italian wild card entrant Francesco Passaro 6-3, 6-0.

Alcaraz was playing in his second match since suffering a thigh injury in his Barcelona Open final defeat by Holger Rune last month. And the Spaniard was not at his best against Djere whose three career tournament wins have all come on clay, his most recent title in March, at the Chile Open in Santiago.

The 22-year-old was broken twice in the first set which looked like going either way until he took control in the eventual tie-break, before sweeping Djere aside in the second.

"I just thought that I had to stay there mentally strong, waiting for my chances because I was playing great," said Alcaraz.

"I was playing great, moving, hitting the ball. It was just a few mistakes that I made."

Zverev meanwhile barely broke a sweat against Lithuanian qualifier Vilius Gaubas, easing to a 6-4, 6-0 win to set up a last-16 clash with France's Arthur Fils.

The world number two took one hour and 26 minutes to see off Gaubas, suggesting that the burn-out he said he was suffering earlier



Germany's Alexander Zverev in action during his round of 32 match against Lithuania's Vilius Gaubas. — Reuters

in the year might be behind him.

Zverev is hoping a good defence of his Rome crown will set him up to go one better than last year at the French Open and be crowned champion.

But he will face a much tougher test against Fils, who beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 2-6, 6-4, 6-2, than the one put up by Gaubas.

It was a good day for French players in the men's tournament with Fils' win and world number 83 Corentin Moutet shocking Holger Rune 7-5, 5-7, 7-6 (7/4) to claim his first ever win over a top-10 player and line up fifth seed Jack Draper in the next round. Daniil Medvedev will face home hope Lorenzo

Musetti after making no mistake against Alexei Popyrin, winning 6-4, 6-1.

SABALENKA THROUGH

Aryna Sabalenka came through a tough match with former Australian Open winner Sofia Kenin to set up a clash with Marta Kostyuk, who beat Leylah Fernandez 6-4, 6-2.

World number one Sabalenka has reached the final of her last four tournaments, winning in both Miami and Madrid, and is now hot favourite at the Foro Italico even after Sunday's below-par display.

Last year's losing finalist was not at the races in the first set, consistently misplacing her backhands before appearing to complain about the surface on centre court.

"I was completely off, and I'm really glad I was able to cool myself down and... start focusing on the game and the right things," Sabalenka told reporters.

Belarusian Sabalenka has a great opportunity to claim her third 1000 series crown of the season, after three-time winner Iga Swiatek was dumped out by Danielle Collins on Saturday. "She's facing really tough challenges I believe, on and off the court," added Sabalenka of Swiatek.

"Maybe needs some time off and then she's going to get back on top of her game because the level is there. She's a champion."

One of Sabalenka's key rivals for the women's title, Coco Gauff, cruised past Magda Linette in straight sets 7-5, 6-3 and will be expected to see off Emma Raducanu in the next round. — AFP

India great Kohli retires from Tests ahead of England tour

NEW DELHI: Batting great Virat Kohli announced his immediate retirement from Test cricket on Monday, just days before India name their squad for a tour to England.

Kohli, who scored 9,230 runs in 123 matches at an average of 46.85, posted his decision on Instagram five days after India captain Rohit Sharma called time on his own Test career.

Since making his debut in 2011, Kohli struck 30 hundreds and 31 fifties with a highest score of 254 not out, mainly batting at number four in the order. "It's been 14 years since I first wore the baggy blue in Test cricket," the 36-year-old Kohli posted on his official feed, which has 271 million followers.

"Honestly, I never imagined the journey this format would take me

on. It's tested me, shaped me, and taught me lessons I'll carry for life. "As I step away from this format, it's not easy — but it feels right. I've given it everything I had, and it's given me back so much more than I could've hoped for."

An inspirational figure, Kohli was India's most successful Test captains with 40 wins and 17 defeats in 68 matches before stepping down from the role in 2022.

The next best are Mahendra Singh Dhoni with 27 wins from 60 and Sourav Ganguly with 21 from 49.

"I'm walking away with a heart full of gratitude — for the game, for the people I shared the field with, and for every single person who made me feel seen along the way," Kohli said.

"I'll always look back at my Test



career with a smile." The fiercely competitive Kohli's declining form in the five-day game may have prompted his decision to call it a day.

After averaging close to 55 at his peak between 2011 and 2019, he could muster only 32.56 over the past 24 months.

LION'S PASSION

Kohli's last Test was in Sydney in January when India lost the match and with it the series 3-1 to Australia.

Apart from an unbeaten century in the second innings of the first Test in Perth, Kohli managed just 90 runs from eight innings in the five-Test series. The 36-year-old Kohli was part of the 'Fab Four' quartet of batting greats who dominated Test cricket over the past decade, alongside Steve

Smith of Australia, Kane Williamson of New Zealand and Joe Root of England. Nicknamed 'King Kohli', he was India's batting backbone across three international formats and ended his Twenty20 career with a match-winning innings in his team's World Cup final victory in Barbados last year.

Kohli then walked away from the shortest format along with Rohit.

The hugely popular Kohli's retirement statement had within an hour of being posted generated more than six million 'likes' and in excess of half a million comments on social media as fans and fellow cricketers paid tribute. India cricket coach Gautam Gambhir called Kohli: "A man with lion's passion!" on X, adding "Will miss u cheeks...". — AFP

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The three-day event brings together officials from WTO member and aspiring countries to strengthen multilateral trade engagement.

OMAN HOSTS KEY WTO ROUNDTABLE TO BOOST ARAB TRADE INTEGRATION

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman kicked off the 13th China Roundtable Meeting on WTO Accession in Muscat under the theme “Advancing Arab Economies: From Strategic Accession to Global Trade Integration.”

Held in cooperation with the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Government of the People’s Republic of China, the three-day event brings together officials from WTO member and aspiring countries to strengthen multilateral trade engagement.

Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, said Oman’s hosting of the event underscores its commitment to constructive dialogue and international cooperation within the multilateral trading system.

He highlighted Oman’s instrumental role in supporting developing nations – such as Seychelles and the Comoros – in their WTO accession by offering both technical and financial assistance.

Masan noted that Oman looks forward to the roundtable promoting new avenues for trade and economic cooperation, further easing accession pathways for aspiring WTO members, and contributing to a more inclusive global trading framework. — ONA

Net Zero Centre launched

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MAY 12

THE activities of the Oman Petroleum and Energy Show and Oman Sustainability Week for 2025 were officially launched at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday, May 12, 2025.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Central Bank of Oman, with the presence of several distinguished ministers, ambassadors, senior officials and representatives from various concerned entities, highlighting the growing national interest towards a sustainable and balanced future.

A key highlight of the opening session was the formal inauguration of the Oman Net Zero Centre, which operates under the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. The Centre focuses on several key areas, particularly the preparation and continuous updating of the national plan to achieve net-zero emissions.

It also oversees the implementation of relevant projects and initiatives, offering support and consultation to institutions and stakeholders to help achieve national net-zero targets.

In addition, the Centre is



Dignitaries pictured at the opening of OPES and OSW events in Muscat.

responsible for defining and updating Oman’s national strategy to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. It provides technical guidance and support to both government bodies and private sector organisations on net-zero transition and energy efficiency.

The Centre also monitors progress, promotes awareness and builds capacity to ensure the effective implementation of related programmes and initiatives. These efforts reflect a firm belief in addressing climate change and advancing clean, renewable energy solutions.

The initiative aligns with the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, and have also accelerated the development of the renewable energy sector, created supportive legal frameworks and policies, and introduced

incentives to attract foreign investment, support local industries, and localise clean energy technologies.

OPES and OSW, held under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, has been organised by CONNECT (Oman Exhibitions Organising Company) and hosted by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

They serve as an integrated platform, highlighting the importance of securing and sustaining energy while showcasing Oman’s commitment to achieving a balanced and progressive future.

Commenting on the significance of the events, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, stated: “Having multiple conferences and activities under one roof allows us to send a unified message to the world: Oman

is fully committed to cleaner energy, without compromising its core capabilities in oil and gas production.”

The minister also highlighted the country’s major strides in renewables and green hydrogen. “Earlier this year, we inaugurated two major renewable energy plants with a combined capacity of 1,000 megawatts. The output from each plant has already exceeded expectations, delivering over 500 megawatts each,” he said. “This proves that with the right partnerships and execution, Oman can lead in clean energy generation.”

In another landmark development, Oman launched its first green hydrogen production, storage and refuelling station – a pioneering project that now powers a fleet of more than 15 vehicles, including Muscat airport taxis.

Postal Prosperity Zone Oman project to launch this month

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 12

A landmark initiative to integrate the Sultanate of Oman into the Postal Prosperity Zone (PPZ) – a global innovation programme promoted by the Universal Postal Union (UPU) – formally get underway this month.

Overseeing the delivery of the PPZ Oman project is the partnership of Oman Post, part of Asyad Group, and UPU member Logistic-Natives, an international logistics infrastructure network for modern commerce. “The PPZ Oman project, designed and managed by Oman Post and UPU CC member Logistics Natives, will start in May 2025, positioning Oman as a strategic node in a future-oriented, postal-driven e-commerce superhighway,” Berlin-based Logistic-Natives announced in a post on Monday.

Plans for the establishment of the a



The PPZ Oman project will position the country as a strategic node in a future-oriented, postal-driven e-commerce superhighway.

PPZ project in Oman – the first in Asia and the Gulf region – were first unveiled last month during a visit by a high-level delegation from the Universal Postal Union (UPU), its Consultative Committee (UPU CC), and representatives from the World

Customs Organization (WCO), government institutions, and global e-commerce stakeholders including Cainiao, SF Express and YTO.

The underlying objective was to firm up plans for the establishment of the Middle East’s first PPZ in the Sultanate of Oman. The PPZ initiative aims to enhance the integrated logistics network by establishing seamless digital links between Oman Post and international e-commerce platforms.

It supports the development of modern customs systems and strengthens Oman’s global transport competitiveness. The project focuses on real-time data exchange between postal and customs services, unifying labelling and tracking procedures, and optimising the movement of goods across air, sea, rail and road networks. Logistic-Natives, an association representing the interests of over 30,000 companies in the

logistics industry, has described the PPZ initiative as a “model for seamless cross-border e-commerce”. “The PPZ initiative is a global innovation programme initiated by the UPU CC,” the German infrastructure network noted in its post.

“Fully aligned with UPU and WCO standards and regulations and based on existing UPU IT infrastructure, it facilitates cross-border e-commerce by (1) Establishing direct IT connectivity and integration between national posts and commercial senders (e.g. marketplaces); (2) Upgrading customs clearance flows and related infrastructure to meet global benchmarks and best practices; and (3) Optimising the digital and operational capabilities of national posts to provide competitive e-commerce delivery solutions and services which meet the requirements of commercial senders.”

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KEYPLAYER



CCED reaffirms its role as a key player in Oman’s energy transition and sustainability efforts.

CCED REINFORCES COMMITMENT TO OMAN’S ENERGY AND SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

MUSCAT: CC Energy Development (CCED), a leading independent upstream oil and gas company, has participated in the 2025 editions of the Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES) and Oman Sustainability Week (OSW). These prestigious events, held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) from May 12 to 14, were co-located for the first time — emphasising the growing intersection between energy and sustainability in today’s evolving global landscape. By showcasing its latest advancements and long-term strategies at these parallel events, CCED reaffirms its role as a key player in Oman’s energy transition and sustainability efforts. OSW 2025 is Oman’s foremost platform for developments in future energy, power, water, waste, mobility and environmental solutions. For CCED, this event presents an opportunity to spotlight its progress towards Oman’s sustainability, decarbonisation and Net-Zero targets.

At OSW, CCED’s visually striking exhibition booth will feature its groundbreaking gas-to-power project — an initiative central to its decarbonisation strategy. Launched in 2023, this project has introduced power plants in Blocks 3 and 4, supported by an extensive overhead power distribution network designed to curb diesel consumption and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This project stands as a cornerstone of CCED’s zero-flaring programme. The company has set ambitious targets, aiming to reduce diesel emissions by 60% by 2025, eliminate cold venting by 2027 and achieve a 50% overall emissions reduction by 2030, while also committing to end routine flaring and enhance asset integrity by 2030.

Beyond its emissions reduction goals, CCED is driving sustainability within the energy sector by aligning its strategies with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).

The company integrates cutting-edge technologies to minimise environmental impact while optimising operational efficiency. CCED’s efforts also extend to innovative resource management.

Its approach to produced water involves reducing reliance on evaporation ponds by reinjecting the water into underground reservoirs, a method that safeguards Oman’s freshwater aquifers. Simultaneously, the company is advancing its waste management strategy by focusing on recycling, reusing and remediating wastes, while also minimising non-physical waste to enhance operational efficiency.

Make journeys rewarding with Toyota Camry

SINCE its global debut in 1982, the Toyota Camry has become a true icon evolving over nine impressive generations to deliver the perfect blend of performance, design and reliability. Today, the Camry redefines refinement with a striking new look, intelligent hybrid power and next-generation features that make every drive feel exceptional. At the heart of the new Camry is Toyota’s advanced Hybrid System and cutting-edge TNGA-K platform. This dynamic foundation enhances agility and stability with a lower centre of gravity and increased body rigidity, ensuring a drive that feels more connected, responsive and rewarding.

Whether you are cruising in the 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine with 201 hp or opting for the electrified hybrid delivering a total of 226 hp, the Camry gives you power to move and precision to enjoy, backed by an eight-speed automatic or smooth ECVT transmission.

Drivers can tailor their drive with selectable modes like Normal, Eco and Sport, while Hybrid Electric Vehicle (HEV) drivers gain the added flexibility of EV mode ideal for quiet, efficient urban driving. This personalisation brings a whole new level of engagement behind the wheel.

On the outside, the new Camry turns heads with its sleek, confident stance. The bold Hammer Head front design and wide lower grille



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create a dynamic first impression, while advanced Bi-LED and multi-eye LED headlamps add both beauty and brightness perfect for enhancing night time visibility. Step inside, and the Camry greets you with a cabin crafted to delight. Designed with a sporty, driver-focused layout, the interior is elevated by premium materials, tasteful metallic accents and a harmonious layout that blends comfort with sophistication. Choose from refined fabric or luxurious leather in a range of colours that complement the Camry’s stylish exterior. Technology meets elegance in the Camry’s thoughtfully appointed interior. A high-definition 12.3-inch

touchscreen multimedia system with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto makes connectivity effortless. Other standout features include a full-colour head-up display, wireless smartphone charging, a digital rear-view mirror and immersive audio systems, either a 9-speaker JBL surround sound system or a 6-speaker option. The panoramic roof, ventilated and power-adjustable front seats, dual-zone climate control with rear vents and 60/40 split-fold rear seats ensure every journey is as comfortable as it is convenient. Safety, a core Toyota promise, is more advanced than ever in the new Camry. The latest Toyota Safety Sense suite includes a Pre-Collision System with extended detection for pedestrians, cyclists and even motorcycles. It also features Intersection Collision Avoidance, Emergency Steering Assist and low-speed Acceleration Suppression. Dynamic Radar Cruise Control now responds faster and more intuitively, while Lane Tracing Assist, Lane Departure Alert and Automatic High-Beam systems add even more driving confidence. To protect what matters most, the Camry also comes equipped with Safe Exit Assist using Blind Spot Monitoring, plus six SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control, Hill-start Assist Control, Rear Camera Detection and a Panoramic View Monitor.

OETC wins gold award at OSW Awards 2025

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its strong commitment to the sustainability principles and their integration across all operational plans and projects, the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) has been awarded the Gold Award at the Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) Awards ceremony.

The event was held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, on Sunday, May 11, 2025 and attended by a distinguished group of CEOs and representatives from public and private sector institutions.

This recognition came as part of Oman Sustainability Week 2025, which aims to showcase national efforts in sustainability, support initiatives that enhance quality of life, foster community development, protect the environment, and develop policies and frameworks aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the UN Sustainable Development



The award highlights collective efforts, celebrates achievements and underscores the commitment to sustainable development targets.

Goals; and global trends and goals on emissions reduction, environmental balance and sustainability. OETC received the Gold Award in the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) sustainability category, competing alongside more than 29 institutions from both public and private sectors, who got shortlisted to the finals after successfully passing the required evaluation according

to the framework approved by the Center for Sustainability and Excellence in Chicago, USA. The award highlights collective efforts, celebrates achievements, and underscores the commitment to national and global sustainable development targets. Commenting on the award, Eng Saleh Nasser al Rumhi, OETC’s CEO, emphasised the company’s full dedication to advancing sustainability and aligning all its strategies

accordingly. He noted that OETC has taken significant steps to embed sustainability into all its operations in line with both national directions and global priorities. He added: “We recognise the importance of working within a clear framework guided by Oman Vision 2040, which places sustainability at the forefront to ensure inclusive and long-term development. At OETC, we are committed to realising this vision by reducing carbon emissions, implementing strategic projects, enhancing operational efficiency, supporting community development; and preserving environmental safety and sustainability, while also enabling economic growth and fostering a robust business environment”. Al Rumhi further stated that this recognition is a powerful motivation for OETC to continue positioning itself as a regional leader in sustainability.

Amouage debuts ‘Royal Touch’ spa experience at Mandarin Oriental

MUSCAT: Amouage, the Omani High Perfumery House, has introduced its first spa experience at Mandarin Oriental, Muscat. Called “Royal Touch by Amouage”, this exclusive collaboration brings together the House’s olfactive craftsmanship and the hotel’s signature approach to wellness, curating a sensory encounter that reflects the depth of Oman’s rich heritage, referencing the reputation of

the House known as the Gift of Kings. The journey begins with a personalised scent consultation, featuring eleven of Amouage’s purest Attars (including Attars available exclusively in Oman), each selected to reflect the diversity of Oman’s eleven governorates and echo the eleven blades of the iconic Mandarin Oriental fan emblem. From Rose Aqor to Santal



The journey extends beyond the treatment, as guests are invited to discover unique layering combinations with select Amouage perfume pairing recommendations.

Sohar and Amber Sogara, each attar evokes a distinct mood, allowing guests to select a scent that resonates with their sense of self. Once chosen, the scent is then gently incorporated into the treatment, enriching the experience with a layer of depth that lingers. The spa experience concludes with a tactile and sensory hand massage, a lasting, soft and scented connection inspired by the

timeless elegance and warm hospitality of Oman and reminiscent of the Mandarin Oriental, Muscat. The journey extends beyond the treatment, as guests are invited to discover unique layering combinations with select Amouage perfume pairing recommendations. The full range of Attars and perfumes are available at the Amouage Boutique at Mandarin Oriental, Muscat

for a deeper immersion into the House’s artistry. The Spa at Mandarin Oriental, Muscat blends Mandarin Oriental’s award-winning Asian inspired treatments with local healing traditions. Set in a serene urban oasis, The Spa is filled with natural daylight and offers breathtaking sea views, creating a tranquil environment for relaxation and renewal.

BUSINESS

LOCAL OPPORTUNITY



Officials of OQEP and OPAL at the agreement signing on Monday.

KEY TRAINING PROGRAMME TO BENEFIT 430 OMANI GRADUATES

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MAY 12

OQ EXPLORATION and Production (OQEP), Oman’s leading oil and gas company, announced on May 12, 2025, that it has launched a nationwide training programme designed to equip 430 young Omanis with vital technical and non-technical skills.

The initiative, titled ‘Tamayuz’, attempts to bridge the gap between theoretical education and practical needs of the energy sector. On the initiative’s terms, OQ signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Oman Energy Association (OPAL), assigning the body to manage the all-encompassing training programme.

The signing was formally carried out by Eng Ahmed bin Said al Azkawi, CEO of OQ Exploration and Production; and Eng Mohammed bin Hamoud al Naabi, CEO of OPAL, during OQ’s participation at the Oman Petroleum and Energy Exhibition (OPES) in Muscat.

To work for six months to two years, the ‘Tamayuz’ programme will offer specialised vocational training which will respond to the evolving needs of the energy industry. The trainees will undergo rigorous readiness testing and, upon passing, be awarded accredited professional certificates.

Eng Al Azkawi commented, “This programme reflects OQ’s steadfast commitment to nurturing Oman’s national competencies,”. He furtherly stated, “By equipping young Omanis with practical training and specialised technical skills, we are making a meaningful investment in their futures while strengthening the overall resilience of the national workforce.”

He went on to highlight the strategic importance of partnering with OPAL, describing the association’s industry expertise and technical acumen as instrumental to the programme’s success. ‘Tamayuz’ is also considered a pillar under OQ’s broader drive to align workforce development with Oman Vision 2040, Oman’s national strategy for economic diversification and sustainable growth. Through skills gap filling and employability, the initiative is expected to enhance the competitiveness of Omani professionals in an increasingly specialised labour market.

Speaking to the Observer, Sultan al Rumhi, Supervisor of Vision Offices and Strategic Partnerships, Unit for Monitoring the Implementation of Oman Vision 2040 stated, “We celebrate today a step in the right direction towards empowering Oman’s youth to apply useful training in the energy sector — a reflection of OQ Exploration & Production’s commitment to building a bright future for Oman’s citizens and developing their capabilities and expertise.”

He furtherly noted “We are pleased to announce the ‘Tamayuz’ training-for-development programme in association with the Oman Energy Association, under which we intend, in its first phase, to train 430 Omani graduates of engineering, technical and administrative disciplines during training sessions ranging from six months to two years.”

NEW PRICING

Trump says he will cut drug prices by 59%



US President Donald Trump said he would cut prescription drug prices by 59 per cent, but gave no further details about his plan to lower medicine costs ahead of a health-related event at the White House later on Monday.

“Drug prices to be cut by 59 per cent” US President Donald Trump wrote on his social media platform as global pharma shares traded lower on Monday morning. — Reuters

ASYAD GROUP ADOPTS GLOBAL IMPACT DISCLOSURE FRAMEWORK

MUSCAT: Asyad Group announced the launch of its “Global Impact Disclosure Framework”, marking it as the first Omani company and second global logistics provider to disclose its sustainability impact through the global framework established by the Impact Disclosure Taskforce, in collaboration with J P Morgan’s Development Finance Institution.

As one of the first logistics providers in the region to adopt this advanced global framework, Asyad is setting new standards for evaluating the impact of its development projects in relation to

the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This disclosure bolsters global financial market confidence and catalysis more green investments in Oman.

The launch was announced during Asyad Group’s participation in the Oman Sustainability Week 2025, where Asyad was also awarded the Platinum Award in ESG, for the second consecutive year, in recognition of its leading role in embedding sustainability standards across its operations and their innovative green logistics solutions that contribute to Oman’s Net-Zero

2050 goals.

Essam al Sheibany, Vice President of Sustainability at Asyad Group, emphasised that this disclosure reflects the Group’s deep commitment to sustainable development and effective governance, stating: “We believe that transparency is the foundation of real progress.

This framework provides clearer visibility into the environmental and social impact of our logistics investments, enabling stronger partnerships and reinforcing our role in shaping a low-emissions, future-ready logistics sector.

OQEP accelerates upstream investments, LNG growth

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 12

OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP), one of Oman’s leading oil and gas operators, has made strategic headway in expanding its upstream portfolio and diversifying energy assets during the first quarter of 2025, setting the stage for long-term production growth and low-carbon energy initiatives.

With a robust portfolio of 14 upstream assets across the Sultanate of Oman — nine of which are producing — OQEP operates or partners in a range of concessions at various stages of development.

The company’s recent activities underscore its dual strategy of optimising oil and gas production while opening new frontiers for exploration and sustainable energy.

UNLOCKING NEW INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES A key development in Q1 2025 was OQEP’s collaboration with



OQEP accelerates upstream investments and LNG growth in Q1

the Ministry of Energy and Minerals; and global investment bank Scotiabank to market Blocks 36, 43A and 66. These are part of a broader set of 11 blocks the Ministry plans to offer to investors through 2025–2026. OQEP’s central role in this effort reinforces its position as a gateway for upstream investment into Oman’s petroleum sector.

In March, OQEP signed an Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) for Block 54 with the Ministry and London-listed Genel

Energy. Under a joint operating agreement, OQEP will lead operations with a 60% stake, while Genel holds the remaining 40% as a non-operator. This marks Genel’s first venture into Oman, lured by the country’s stable regulatory environment.

The Karawan Concession, spanning 5,632 km² in the South Oman Salt Basin, is underexplored but adjacent to productive fields. Both parties plan to invest up to \$25 million in early-phase activities including seismic surveys and well testing over the next three years.

ADVANCING EXPLORATION IN BLOCK 47 Another significant milestone was the extension of Phase 1 exploration at Block 47, jointly operated with ENI Oman BV.

The Najid-1 exploration well, spudded in February 2025, is expected to determine the commerciality of promising gas prospects.

The six-month extension, agreed with the Ministry in April, will allow for deeper evaluation and, if successful, may lead to a second development phase.

BOOSTING OIL OUTPUT FROM BLOCK 60 OQEP also reported 86% progress in the Bisat C Expansion at Block 60 — its flagship oil asset, contributing 17% of the company’s Q1 production. Once completed, the expansion will add 37,000 barrels per day (bpd) in oil processing capacity and 400,000 bpd in water treatment.

Commissioning is targeted for Q3 2025, solidifying Block 60’s role as a core revenue generator.

Austria’s regulator calls for ‘greater market responsibility’ as PV boom reshapes energy systems

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 12

AUSTRIA’S top energy regulator has warned that the surge in solar photovoltaic (PV) installations, while vital to the energy transition, is straining electricity markets and grid infrastructure — calling for urgent reforms to ensure producers assume greater market responsibility.

Speaking at the 22nd Annual Conference of the Energy Regulators Regional Association (ERRA), held in Muscat, Harald Proidl, Director of Renewables and Energy Efficiency at Austria’s E-Control, said the country’s PV boom has reshaped both generation capacity and regulatory oversight.

“In Austria, PV is no longer a marginal player — it accounts for around 25% of total installed capacity,” Proidl told the gathering of regulators and policy experts. “But this growth has come with challenges: oversupply, negative pricing and



The Muscat conference brought together delegates from over 40 countries.

grid instability.”

Between 2020 and 2024, Austria tripled its PV installations from 150,000 to 500,000 systems, raising installed capacity from 2 GW to 8.4 GW. This was spurred by billions of euros in public subsidies, rising energy prices and concerns over energy security.

But Proidl warned that while subsidies have helped scale deployment, many PV owners do not face balancing obligations. “They can export excess energy to the grid without taking on system responsibility,” he said. “This is not sustainable.”

Austria recently raised network tariffs by 25% — partly due to PV-related costs — and is expanding energy-sharing models to decentralise consumption. “We now have over 1,650 energy communities with 30,000 participants. We expect that to double by 2025,” Proidl noted.

Despite these innovations, only 30% of PV power is self-consumed in Austria. The rest is injected into the grid, often creating localised oversupply and price volatility. “Ideally, 100% of PV electricity should be used where it is produced,” he added.

E-Control is urging policy shifts to reduce reliance on grid exports, expand incentives for local use; and apply smarter pricing and digital tools.

LOCAL SOURCE

Shipments of foreign-branded phones drop



Chinese shipments of foreign-branded cellphones, including Apple Inc’s iPhones, dropped by 49.6% year on year in March, according to data released on Monday by a government-affiliated research company.

Calculations based on the data from the CAICT showed that March shipments of foreign-branded phones in China decreased to 1.887 million units from 3.747 million a year earlier. — Reuters

TOTAL LAYOFFS

Nissan to cut over 10,000 more jobs globally



Nissan Motor will additionally slash more than 10,000 jobs globally, bringing the total cuts including previously announced layoffs to about 20,000 or 15 per cent of its workforce, Japan’s public broadcaster NHK reported on Monday.

The struggling Japanese automaker warned last month it would likely book a record 700 billion yen to 750 billion yen net loss in the financial year that ended in March. — Reuters

OPINION

Glimpse of the unified cybersecurity foundations at GISEC 2025



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman

LAST week, I had the chance to attend GISEC Global 2025, the Middle East and Africa’s largest cybersecurity event held at the Dubai World Trade Centre. Approximately a week of professional meetings that includes a gathering at the event that brought together more than 25,000 cybersecurity fanatics from over 160 countries, exploring how artificial intelligence (AI), 5G, and cloud technologies are reshaping the security landscape altogether.

From executive roundtables to live demos and tech showcases, the focus was very clear: how do we build resilience in an increasingly AI-driven world? No, it was not just about deepfake videos but everything to secure today and our future with the AI revolution.

Truth be told, I was quite impressed by how one of the leading solutions providers in the world presented itself during the event, Huawei, who was also the lead strategic partner of the event. Huawei championed the concept of a Unified Cybersecurity Foundation, highlighting how it works towards building a unified and consistent security solution.

It was not just like any other tech demo that was presented within the massive 8 halls of the conference. It was, in fact, a blueprint for how to protect the digital and intelligent world we are living in today.

During one of the sessions I attended, Dr Zhu Shenggao, who leads Huawei’s Cloud Middle East and Central Asia, stated that cybersecurity and privacy protection are the cornerstones of development in the digital and intelligent world. He stated that

Huawei’s approach integrates protection across cloud, network, edge, and endpoint environments to provide the comprehensive security foundation that organisations need to innovate with confidence. In simple words, deep integration is the foundation they are building upon.

Huawei has built a layered security approach that covers every digital surface. At the heart of this is SecMaster, an AI-powered security operations centre that delivers over 99% threat detection accuracy, cuts investigation time by 83%, and traces attack sources 95% faster, according to the organisation’s claim.

Another solution known as “Xinghe Intelligent SASE” brings cloud, network, edge, and endpoints together with an AI security brain capable of handling 99% of security alarms automatically, as noted by Richard Wu, who is presently the President of Huawei’s Security Product Domain.

With ransomware threats skyrocketing, causing global losses of USD \$42 billion in 2024, Huawei’s multi-layer ransomware defense stood out by boasting a 99.99% detection rate, actively defending against threats, and leveraging its AI-powered endpoint protection that backs up files as soon as suspicious encryption is detected.

Richard Wu emphasised that in today’s increasingly complex threat landscape, where cyber-attacks are more frequent, automated, and covert, cybersecurity must evolve from reactive to proactive threat containment.

Another interesting solution that was showcased during the event was the

From executive roundtables to live demos and tech showcases, the focus was very clear: how do we build resilience in an increasingly AI-driven world? No, it was not just about deepfake videos but everything to secure today and our future with the AI revolution

“OceanProtect E8000”, an all-in-one backup and recovery data protection system that can restore 1TB of data in just 20 seconds, and its high-density design saves up to 90% rack space. According to the presenter, the OceanProtect E8000 provides comprehensive protection and rapid recovery capabilities in a single integrated system that dramatically reduces complexity while enhancing security.

Last year (in 2024),Huawei invested \$24.6 billion in Research and Development (R&D), about 20.8% of its total revenue. Over the past decade, that adds up to approximately \$171.1 billion, with 3,000+ cybersecurity researchers on staff and 5% of all R&D focused specifically on cybersecurity. This is a crystal clear commitment to innovation.

Furthermore, their approach goes further than releasing products but also focuses on the design. You may note this on the quality consumer products they keep releasing in the market. Exclusive led workshops, from AI-driven threat management and ransomware protection to supply chain security and global cybersecurity legislation, were organised during the event. Illustrating a secure digital future together was the chief goal in a world where attacks are more sophisticated, automation is widespread, and data is the new gold. Cybersecurity is no longer an activity or task done by an IT department of an organisation. No, it’s in fact a foundational pillar of the digital transformation of any organisation. The unified cybersecurity foundation presented and illustrated during GISEC isn’t just a solution; it’s indeed a strategy for the future.

ULTRA-RICH SHOPPERS WIELD PERVERSE ECONOMIC AEGIS

SEBASTIAN PELLEJERO

Ritzzy brands are expressing more confidence and pricing power than Main Street counterparts grappling with tariffs and anxious shoppers. This divergence suggests that the ultra-rich could buttress an economic slump, at least for a while, but also betrays a shaky system.

The tippy top of the opulence pyramid has been insulated from the disquiet so far. Italian sports car manufacturer Ferrari bucked a trend of companies yanking financial guidance and stuck with its 2025 outlook.

Hermes CFO Eric du Halgouet said his company would simply charge more for its silk scarves to offset US import duties.

Cashmere merchant Brunello Cucinelli expects 10% sales growth both this year and next. By contrast, Kering and Moet Hennessy Louis Vuitton, whose closets house more accessible luxury items, were less optimistic.

It’s a reminder that scarcity and craftsmanship help justify ever-higher prices. Ferrari limits production, Hermes customers wait years for Birkin bags and Cucinelli’s artisans command \$8,500 for a coat.

An index tracking Europe’s biggest luxury stocks has outperformed the S&P 500 Index by about 80 percentage points over the past decade.

This pattern extends beyond fashion and autos. Posh hotels have generated 6% more revenue per room this year, while other lodging suffered declines, according to hospitality research outfit STR. At \$7 billion Life Time, whose upscale gym memberships start at \$200 monthly, the company’s share price is up 85% since its initial public offering in October 2021.

Over the same span, \$8 billion discount chain Planet Fitness’ gained just 28%. Such examples also reflect a widening divide. The top 10% of American earners increased their spending 58% in the four years through September 2024, Moody’s Analytics found. Consumption growth from everyone else barely outpaced 21% inflation recorded over the period.

Elite purchasing power is expanding, too, with the top decile’s net worth up 40%, or more than \$30 trillion, from 2019 through 2024, US Federal Reserve data shows. More pointedly, UBS research shows that the richest 1.5% of the population holds \$214 trillion, or about half, of the world’s lucre, while the bottom 40% claims just \$2.4 trillion.

It’s no wonder mass-market retailers from Target to Macy’s say shoppers are already trading down for cheaper goods. — Reuters

Oman’s circular economy: Wealth from waste

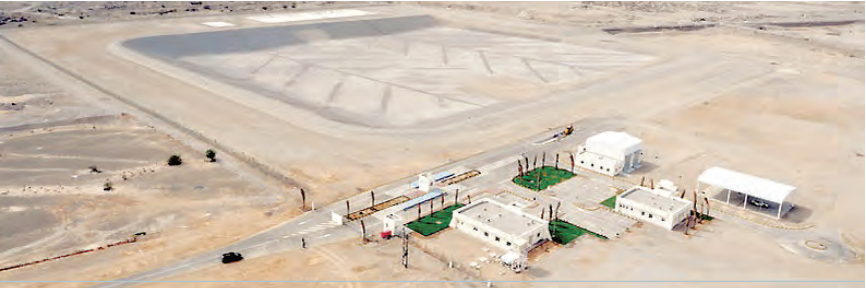
AS the global community grapples with intricate sustainability challenges, the Sultanate of Oman is charting a distinctive course rooted in the transformative principles of the circular economy. Guided by the tenets of its ambitious Vision 2040 blueprint, Oman is strategically converting its waste streams into tangible economic opportunities, constructing resilient infrastructure designed for resource efficiency, and actively fostering global partnerships to accelerate the adoption of circular practices and secure long-term prosperity for the nation.

In line with its broader sustainability goals, Oman has committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050—a target that necessitates a comprehensive overhaul of existing resource management practices.

Central to this transformation is the development of robust waste management infrastructure, with strategic initiatives such as the National Waste Management Strategy and the establishment of be’ah (Oman Environmental Services Holding Company) laying the groundwork. These initiatives aim not only to enhance the nation’s waste recovery capacity but also to redefine waste itself as a valuable input into new economic cycles.

The progress made thus far reflects Oman’s seriousness in embracing this new paradigm. In 2023, for instance, the nation processed 470 tonnes of automotive batteries and managed to recycle over 31% of its collected waste through 67 dedicated facilities.

Key installations such as the Suhar Industrial Waste Handling and Treatment Facility, one of the largest hazardous waste management centers globally, and the Barka



be’ah is leading in proactive planning for emerging waste streams associated with renewable energy infrastructure.



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engineered landfill demonstrate the country’s commitment to building sophisticated systems capable of supporting its circular ambitions.

Efforts to reduce environmental impact are not limited to solid waste.

Oman has also achieved remarkable milestones in wastewater management. In the same year, over 96 million cubic meters of treated wastewater were produced, with 51% being reused across agriculture, industry, and other sectors. This not only conserves vital freshwater resources in

a water-scarce region but also contributed to a reduction of approximately 291,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions, underscoring the climate mitigation benefits of effective water reuse strategies.

Furthermore, Oman is rapidly expanding the circular economy model across its special economic zones, including Duqm, Salalah, Sohar, and Al Mazunah. These zones are being transformed into hubs of sustainable industrial practices and resource efficiency.

The private sector has emerged as a dynamic partner in this national endeavor.

In Salalah, the Evergreen Gulf Recycling Hub utilizes artificial intelligence-based technologies to process 20,000 tonnes of electronic waste annually. In Ghala, Golden Future Recycling leverages hot-wash technology to transform plastic waste into high-quality polyethylene terephthalate (PET) granules.

In Saham, Global Recycle LLC recycles 6,000 tonnes of end-of-life tires annually into rubber, steel, and fiber—highlighting the potential for value creation from previously discarded materials. The economic potential of these initiatives is significant. According to Be’ah, Oman’s circular economy could generate more than 2,300 new jobs and contribute up to USD 1 billion to the national economy. To support the circularity of water use, Oman is also making

long-term investments in infrastructure.

The US\$7 billion National Strategy for Tertiary-Treated Wastewater aims to reach a capacity of 1 million cubic meters per day by 2040.

Projects such as the Sahalnout sewage network and the Sohar Port water recycling plant, operated by Majis Industrial Services, exemplify the integration of industrial water reuse systems that enhance both sustainability and operational efficiency.

Looking ahead, Oman is charting new territory with future-oriented projects.

The Barka Waste-to-Energy facility is expected to reduce landfill waste significantly while generating clean energy. Simultaneously, the Sultan Qaboos University Biogas Plant seeks to extract renewable energy from organic waste, contributing to both energy diversification and organic fertilizer production.

Constructed wetlands in Dhofar represent nature-based solutions for wastewater treatment, blending ecological enhancement with functional infrastructure. be’ah is also leading in proactive planning for emerging waste streams associated with renewable energy infrastructure.

In collaboration with Nafas International, it is preparing for the management of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and wind turbine waste, anticipating a rise in such materials between 2040 and 2045.

This anticipatory approach highlights Oman’s readiness to manage environmental challenges before they become liabilities and reinforces the integration of lifecycle thinking in infrastructure development.

A number of thematic initiatives are shaping Oman’s circular journey.

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SCIENCE

It Took a Century to Find This Colossal Squid



IN MARCH, Kat Bolstad returned from an Antarctic expedition where she tested a new camera system designed to locate the elusive colossal squid. Despite her efforts, she did not spot one during her voyage. This creature, long regarded as one of the deep's greatest mysteries, has remained unseen in its natural habitat.

However, on the day she disembarked, Bolstad received news about a recent sighting from 9 March near the South Sandwich Islands. A team using a remotely operated submersible, supported by the Schmidt Ocean Institute, had come across a tiny cephalopod and sought Bolstad's expertise to identify it. The juvenile specimen was about 30 centimetres long—less than a foot—and had a transparent body, delicate arms, and brown spots. After viewing the footage, Bolstad recognised it as a juvenile colossal squid.

Bolstad, a cephalopod biologist at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand, explained that she initially thought it was highly likely to be a colossal squid. The species was first described scientifically nearly a century ago. Adults can grow to 6 or 7 metres—about 23 feet—and are bigger than any other invertebrate, including the giant squid. The first real observation of the species came in 1925, from arm fragments recovered from sperm whales. It's believed that mature colossal squids inhabit the deep ocean, rarely surfacing.

Sometimes, adult squids are glimpsed near the water's surface, often by fishing boats "chewing on" hooked fish. Juveniles have also been found caught in trawl nets. Yet, this recent footage marked the first time humans had recorded a colossal squid swimming freely in its natural environment. Their rarity is partly explained by their vast, deep habitat and their ability to evade predators like sperm whales, which can dive over two kilometres deep.

The squid's enormous eyes—bigger than a basketball—help it detect faint light in the darkness. Its arms and tentacles are equipped with a mixture of suckers and hooks, aiding in prey capture and defence. The footage, captured by the submersible SuBastian, was part of a joint project to explore deep-sea biodiversity.

Bolstad described the discovery as "very exciting," and she hopes to witness a fully grown colossal squid in its natural habitat someday. —NYT

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



HERITAGE

A woman poses for a photo shoot at the Luoyi ancient city scenic spot in Luoyang, China's Central Henan province. — AFP



MUSIC

Icelandic duo Vaeb representing Iceland with song 'Roa' poses on the turquoise carpet next to the Basel Town Hall during the opening ceremony of the Eurovision Song Contest 2025 in Basel. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A pigeon flies in front of the bas-relief from the Soviet Union time at the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War, amidst Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv, Ukraine. — Reuters

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Deep In Thoughts



Gentle Giants of the Sea

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Disney plans first theme park in Middle East



The Walt Disney Company and Miral, a leading developer in Abu Dhabi, on Wednesday announced plans to build a new Disney theme park and resort on Yas Island, marking Disney’s seventh global destination and its first in the Middle East.

According to a statement by both groups, the new resort will be located on the island’s waterfront and will combine Disney’s iconic stories and characters with the rich cultural heritage and modern architecture of Abu Dhabi.

The project aims “to serve as a global hub for family entertainment,” the statement said.

It added that Miral will fully develop and operate the resort, while Disney Imagineers will lead creative design and provide operational oversight.

The destination will feature themed attractions,

restaurants and shops, and accommodation inspired by Disney storytelling, the statement said.

“This resort will be authentically Disney and distinctly Emirati,” said Disney boss Robert A. Iger.

Mohamed Khalifa al Mubarak, chairman of Miral, said the project “demonstrates the power of visionary leadership and will create a whole new world of imagination.”

Having a Disneyland in a region boosts tourism, generates jobs, and stimulates economic growth. It attracts visitors from around the world, increasing revenue for local businesses.

Additionally, it enhances the area’s global profile and provides entertainment and cultural opportunities for residents. Overall, Disneyland acts as a major catalyst for development and prosperity in its locality. — dpa



Verdi’s La Traviata, a tragedy of star-crossed lovers

BY GEORGINA BENISON
PHOTOS BY KHALID AL BUSAIDI

A FULL house welcomed Plácido Domingo to the Royal Opera House Muscat, where Giuseppe Verdi’s “La Traviata” was performed for the third time. Following successful productions in 2018 and 2022, this staging was presented by the Orchestra and Chorus of Teatro Carlo Felice di Genova, offering a vibrant interpretation of Verdi’s 1853 opera. Based on Alexandre Dumas’ novel “La Dame aux Camélias”, the opera explores deep themes of love, morality, sacrifice, and societal judgement. Set in 19th-century Paris, it depicts the tragic life of

sophistication. Violetta’s character demands significant dramatic range, from flirtatiousness to poignant tragedy. Armenian soprano Juliana Grigoryan portrayed her masterfully, capturing both vocal finesse and emotional depth. Opposite her was Azerbaijani tenor Yusif Eyvazov as Alfredo. Their chemistry was palpable, especially during “Un di, felice, eterea”, where Eyvazov’s warm tone and lyrical delivery conveyed Alfredo’s love passionately. His spectacular unaccompanied cadenza at the end of the duet left the audience enthralled. Violetta’s “Sempre Libera” showcased Grigoryan’s impressive upper register and her ability to convey inner conflict. Her soaring colouratura and repeated high Cs

conveying complex emotion. Later, Violetta writes a farewell letter and calls Alfredo “Amami”, pleading for love before rushing off stage. Germont then persuades Alfredo to return home via “Di Provenza il mar, il suol”, performed with paternal tenderness by Akgün. Scene 2 at Flora’s salon is a dazzling highlight, bathed in red tones. Gypsy dancers from Antonio Gades’ company perform a captivating dance, miming a bullfight with flamenco flair. Violetta arrives in a black sparkly dress and joins a card game with Alfredo — who wins repeatedly — and Baron Douphol, sung with charisma by Omar Kamata. Tensions rise when Alfredo insults Violetta; Germont intervenes to rebuke Alfredo, stressing the importance of honour.



Violetta, a courtesan suffering from tuberculosis — a deadly, contagious disease that echoes Mimi’s fate in Puccini’s “La Bohème”. At its core, the story examines love’s resilience amidst social pressure and the personal cost of sacrifice. The performance began with a stirring Overture, conducted by Maestro Domingo, highlighting memorable string melodies. The curtain rose on an ornate garden scene designed by Giovanni Agostinucci, set in 1847. Violetta, the Parisian socialite, dazzled in a white gown adorned with jewellery as she hosted a lively party. The chorus of fifty singers and the 75-piece orchestra created a rich, vivid atmosphere — resembling a grand ball filled with vitality and

marked a powerful moment, as her character dreams of freedom yet remains committed to love. Act 2 opens in Violetta’s country estate, with plush Louis IV decor. Alfredo’s father, Germont — a moving presence played convincingly by Caner Akgün — enters to persuade Violetta to abandon Alfredo, claiming her corruption damages their family’s honour. Akgün’s emotional performance of “Pura siccome un angelo” was particularly compelling. Marta Ornelas’s understated direction heightened the intimacy of the scene. Violetta pours her heart out about her love and impending death from tuberculosis. The act concludes with a striking a cappella coda, as she and Germont draw closer without touching,

The climax occurs in Act 3, set in Violetta’s sombre green bedroom where she lies dying. Dr Grenvil (Dario Russo) offers grave comfort, while Violetta reads a farewell letter from Germont. Her haunting rendition of “Addio del Passato” is a poignant farewell. Alfredo arrives, and they sing “Parigi o cara”, dreaming of future happiness. The act ends with a quintet, culminating in Violetta’s death accompanied by a mysterious violin theme from the first act, leaving the audience moved. The curtain call featured soloists and Domingo himself, who performed a ten-minute encore. Rumour has it he will return to Royal Opera House Muscat with the International Operalia Festival in 2027 — an event worth waiting for.

FEATURES



WADI DHAM

Wadi Dham, situated near the Unesco World Heritage Site of the Beehive Tombs of Al Ayn, offers a tranquil yet scenic retreat. The access route involves a short, easy hike from the parking area to a dam and surrounding geological formations. Notable for its striking white-striped rocks that resemble snakeskin, this wadi presents smooth, sunbathing-friendly slabs and deep pools suitable for swimming. A key feature is a modest drop that requires minor climbing or hoisting with a rope, leading to arguably the most beautiful section of the wadi. Despite its relatively remote location, Wadi Dham's peaceful atmosphere and unique geology make it a favourite for relaxing strolls and photography. The pools, often cold during dry seasons, invite visitors to take a dip, although caution is advisable due to slippery rocks. The warm hospitality of local families enhances the sense of authentic Oman experience.

limestone canyon with winding waterways that promise some of the best swimming experiences in the country. The pools vary in size and depth, offering options for all ages and skills, with a natural waterslide creating an added thrill. Early mornings or weekdays tend to be quieter, providing secluded spots away from crowds. The facility's infrastructure makes it easy for visitors to enjoy the scenic beauty comfortably. Wadi Bani Khalid's combination of accessibility, natural beauty and recreational facilities make it an ideal destination for a relaxed summer day out in Oman.



WADI SHAB

Wadi Shab captivates visitors with its dramatic landscape, blending rugged canyon scenery with well-maintained trails and a sense of adventure. Located near the Muscat-Sur highway, it features a short boat ride across a river, followed by a scenic trek through the canyon. The journey reveals hidden pools, lush vegetation and a famous waterfall with a swimming cave at the end. Most of the pools are suitable for wading or swimming, with the deeper sections perfect for exploring the small tunnel and cave beyond. The area requires about a fifteen-minute hike from the hunting car park and early visits are recommended to avoid crowds. Wadi Shab offers a balanced mix of adventure and accessibility, making it one of Oman's top destinations for visitors seeking striking natural beauty and a sense of exploration. Its well-maintained path and scenic stops ensure a memorable experience suited for all ages.



WADI HOPPING:
FIVE NATURAL
WATER PARKS
TO EXPLORE
THIS SUMMER

BY YERU EBUEN

IN OMAN, a wadi refers to a valley or dry riverbed that often transforms into lush, water-filled corridors during the rainy season. These natural wonders are recognised as some of the most picturesque and adventurous destinations in Oman. As the temperatures soar during summer, exploring wadis offers a refreshing escape from the heat, with cool pools and rugged landscapes providing perfect outdoor activities. Unlike man-made water parks with built-in pools and rides, Oman's wadis are natural water parks offering a more organic experience, allowing people to swim, splash, or relax in pristine, scenic environments created by nature. The country boasts a wide variety of wadis, each with its unique charm. Some are easier like Wadi Qurai while some are more challenging like Wadi Hawir. Whether seeking family-friendly swimming spots or adrenaline-pumping canyoning, wadi hopping in Oman promises memorable summer experiences amidst stunning natural settings.



WADI AL HOQAIN

Al Hoqain is a remote settlement renowned for its abundance of mineral springs, waterfalls and lush pools that create an oasis amidst the surrounding arid hills. Located a half-hour drive from Al Rustaq, the town is dominated by the ruins of Al Hoqain fort and offers a unique combination of natural beauty and historical significance. The main attraction is Wadi Al Hoqain, a vibrant stream that scythes through granite rock, forming picturesque waterfalls and cool, inviting pools ideal for splashing or relaxing. The wadi is supplied by numerous mineral springs, some emerging directly from the rocky substrata, which remain refreshingly cool even in summer. The area also features ancient sites, including pre-Islamic graves and conical stone structures believed to be observation posts for trade routes. Visitors can explore the verdant countryside, camp beside clear streams and enjoy an authentic, rustic experience immersed in Oman's rich history and natural wonder.

WADI BANI KHALID

Wadi Bani Khalid *[leftmost photo]* is arguably the most popular and accessible wadi in Oman, well-equipped with facilities such as a large parking area, snack bars and pedestrian bridges. Its striking, emerald-green pools attract visitors from all over, particularly families. The main highlight is the "upper pool," a narrow,

LITTLE SNAKE CANYON

Little Snake Canyon is part of Wadi Bani Awf and is recognised as one of Oman's most scenic and adventurous wadis. Accessible via a rugged, fifteen-minute off-road drive, it offers an exhilarating canyoning experience. The narrow, dramatic gorge is surrounded by steep cliffs and features rocky pools ideal for swimming and clambering over boulders. Visitors should prepare for a challenging trek, including scrambling and consider guided tours for safety, as the canyon's narrowness makes it susceptible to flash floods. Abseiling at certain sections adds to the adventure. Due to its treacherous terrain, this canyon is not suitable for complete beginners. It's advised to visit with professional guides, especially if canyoning, for safety and to fully appreciate its breathtaking vistas. The area is often deserted, providing solitude and an unmatched sense of wilderness, making it ideal for those seeking a thrill in a stunning natural setting.