

HIS MAJESTY, PRESIDENT PUTIN HOLD TALKS

TALKS REVIEW

GROWING ECONOMIC RELATIONS

TO BOOST TIES IN ENERGY, AGRICULTURE AND TRADE

OMAN, RUSSIA SIGN 9 MoUS IN VARIOUS SECTORS

MOSCOW GEARS UP TO HOST RUSSIA-ARAB SUMMIT

HM AND PUTIN REVIEW SITUATION IN GAZA STRIP

COUNTRIES
TO FORM JOINT
ECONOMIC
COMMITTEE

HM EXTENDS INVITATION TO PUTIN TO VISIT OMAN

HIS MAJESTY CONCLUDES TWO-DAY STATE VISIT TO RUSSIA



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Vladimir Putin held official talks in the Grand Hall of the Kremlin Palace on Tuesday.

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK left Moscow on Tuesday evening after a two-day state visit to the Russian Federation.

His Majesty the Sultan was seen off at Vnukovo International Airport by Maxim Reshetnikov, Minister of Economic Development, some officials in Russia and members of the Omani Embassy in Moscow.

Upon his departure, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of thanks to President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his

sincere appreciation for the warm
welcome and hospitality.

His Majesty lauded the outcomes of his meeting with the Russian President, as it was an opportunity to enhance areas of cooperation, promote advanced relations and open new vistas for partnership and investment in a manner that serves the joint interests. His Majesty the Sultan wished President Putin success to achieve further aspirations of progress and prosperity for the Russian people.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham

HM RETURNS HOME

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned to the homeland after concluding a two-day state visit to the friendly Russian Federation at the kind invitation of President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation.

bin Tarik expressed his gratitude to President Vladimir Putin for the gracious invitation to visit his country and for the warm welcome and hospitality during their meeting.

His Majesty stated that his discussions with the Russian President focused on building solid relations between the two countries in recent times. The two nations are now marking 40 years of diplomatic relations and are working to elevate these ties into a distinguished and mutually beneficial partnership that serves the interests of their friendly

peoples, His Majesty said.

His Majesty the Sultan commended his meeting with a group of business leaders from the Russian Federation, noting their keen interest in advancing this relationship in energy, agriculture and trade. His Majesty pointed out that many have already begun exchanging visits and establishing commercial offices. His Majesty expressed Oman's aspiration to augment its volume of investments in Russia, with Oman Investment Authority already engaging with relevant Russian entities. **TURN TO P2**

HIS MAJESTY ACCORDED OFFICIAL RECEPTION PROTOCOLS IN RUSSIA



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Vladimir Putin held official talks in the Grand Hall of the Kremlin Palace on Tuesday.

HIS MAJESTY AND PRESIDENT PUTIN HOLD TALKS

FROM P1

At the end of his speech, His Majesty the Sultan extended his thanks and appreciation to the Russian officials who visited Oman recently and expressed his hope that Omani officials would continue their visits to Moscow.

On his turn, President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation welcomed His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Russian capital, Moscow, thanking His Majesty for his state visit to Russia.

RUSSIA-ARAB SUMMIT
President Putin noted that His Majesty the Sultan had made several visits to Russia. He added that in 1985, His Majesty signed the agreement establishing diplomatic relations between the two friendly nations. This year, both countries celebrate the 40th anniversary of these relations, the Russian President said.

He added that the two nations share a robust historical relationship and a record of sustained engagement, emphasising the finalisation of several agreements that will further strengthen the legal foundation of

bilateral relations.

President Putin highlighted the significant potential for expanding trade relations, particularly in mutual investments, transit, transportation, and agriculture, especially as Russia exports agricultural and food products to Oman.

He underlined the interest of Russian companies in boosting energy cooperation with Oman and mentioned the practical matters discussed during the talks.

President Vladimir Putin also underscored the close coordination between the foreign ministries of both countries and noted that Russia is gearing up to host the first Russia-Arab Summit, which, he said, enjoys broad support from friends in the Arab world.

HISTORIC TIES
In furtherance of the bonds of friendship and the historic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation, and in response to the gracious invitation extended by President Vladimir Putin, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik undertook a state visit to the Russian Federation on Monday and Tuesday.

PEACEFUL MEANS
On international affairs, the two leaders reviewed current issues and underscored the importance of resolving conflicts and disputes through dialogue and peaceful means, in full respect of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

They also exchanged views on the Palestinian issue and reaffirmed the necessity of reaching a just solution that ensures the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, based on the two-state solution that establishes an independent and sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The two leaders further expressed deep concern over the tragic situation in the Gaza Strip, affirming their support for international efforts aimed at achieving an immediate and sustainable ceasefire, ensuring the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians, initiating reconstruction efforts, and securing the return of displaced persons to their homes. They stressed the need for a full withdrawal of occupying forces from the Gaza Strip and all other occupied Palestinian territories.

As part of their commitment to strengthening the friendship and enhancing cooperation between their countries, the two leaders welcomed the signing of a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding across various fields of mutual cooperation, the establishment of a Joint Economic Committee, and the mutual exemption of entry visas for citizens of both countries.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik expressed his deep appreciation to President Vladimir Putin, the Government of the Russian Federation, and its friendly people for the warm reception and generous hospitality. His Majesty extended an invitation to President Vladimir Putin to visit the Sultanate of Oman.

In honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation hosted a working lunch at the Kremlin Palace in Moscow on Tuesday.

The banquet was attended by members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan and several Russian officials. — ONA



AN official reception ceremony was held at the Kremlin Palace in Moscow on Tuesday for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the occasion of his state visit to the Russian Federation.

President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation led the



welcoming party for His Majesty the Sultan, wishing His Majesty and the official accompanying delegation a successful visit and a pleasant stay.

Then, the Royal Anthem of Oman and the National Anthem of the Russian Federation were played.

After that, His Majesty shook hands with senior officials from the Russian side, while the Russian President shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan. Then, His Majesty the Sultan and the Russian President held a cordial meeting.

The two leaders then held an official session of talks at the Kremlin Palace in Moscow.

The session discussed the march of the advanced relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Russian Federation, as well as the fruitful cooperation and means of promoting the relations in various spheres to serve the joint interests. The two leaders also exchanged views on a set of issues and global developments.

The session was attended by members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan and several Russian officials. — ONA



HM CONCLUDES RUSSIA VISIT

MOSCOW: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik left Moscow on Tuesday evening after a two-day state visit to the Russian Federation. His Majesty the Sultan was seen off at Vnukovo International Airport by Maxim Reshetnikov, Minister of Economic Development, some officials in Russia and members of the Omani embassy in the Moscow. — ONA

‘Omani-Russian relations witness qualitative leap’

MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), affirmed that the state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Russian Federation underscores the importance of the bilateral relations between the two friendly nations.

These relations are built on foundations of mutual respect and understanding, explained the minister.

He emphasised that relations between the two countries have seen remarkable development over the years, reflected in the growth of cooperation. This embodies the shared desire to strengthen partnership ties and expand their scope to include more diverse and innovative horizons, he added.

He noted that Omani-Russian relations have undergone a qualitative leap in recent years, culminating in Oman’s participation as a guest of honour at the 2023 St. Petersburg International Economic Forum — a historic milestone that

The Russian Federation is a key strategic partner for Oman, and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion is committed to building on this shared legacy

provided a vital platform to showcase Oman’s economic and cultural strengths. The event facilitated high-level meetings with Russian institutions and companies, further enhancing cooperation across various sectors.

Al Yousef added that any discussion of Omani-Russian relations must acknowledge the cultural dimension, which serves as a crucial bridge between the two peoples. He said: “This aspect is rooted in knowledge and artistic exchange, as well as mutual participation in cultural events and international exhibitions. Such cooperation reflects the depth of both nations’ civilisational heritage, fosters human understanding and strengthens dialogue between institutions and societies.”

He pointed out that the Russian Federation is a key strategic partner for Oman, and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion is

committed to building on this shared legacy.

He stressed that this historic visit marks a pivotal milestone in bilateral cooperation, opening new avenues to elevate economic relations to more integrated levels. This, said the minister, will be achieved by activating partnerships in priority sectors such as industry, logistics, tourism, food security, energy, modern technologies and manufacturing.

He reiterated Oman’s commitment to deepening cooperation in innovation and technical knowledge exchange to enhance competitiveness and achieve sustainable growth.

The visit, he explained, crowns continuous efforts at both governmental and private-sector levels, with several agreements and memoranda of understanding signed.

These include an Economic and Technical Cooperation Protocol, the establishment of

a Joint Economic Committee, and MoUs on climate change, low-carbon development, transport and transit.

These agreements strengthen the institutional framework for cooperation and provide real platforms for the private sector to capitalise on investment opportunities in both countries.

In light of global economic challenges, he reaffirmed Oman’s commitment to fostering an attractive and secure investment environment that supports entrepreneurship, boosts trade exchange and achieves balanced economic growth.

Concluding his remarks, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef expressed confidence that this auspicious visit will herald a new phase of close cooperation, reinforcing Oman’s position as a promising investment destination and a reliable international partner under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan. — ONA



COMMEMORATIVE
STAMP FEATURING
OMAN-RUSSIA TIES
UNVEILED



The stamp’s design draws inspiration from the shared maritime heritage of both nations. — ONA

MOSCOW: Oman Post, in collaboration with Russian Post, announced an initiative to issue a joint postage stamp in celebration of the enduring historical ties between the two friendly nations. The move comes within the context of the current state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the Russian Federation. This effort aims to strengthen cooperation and expand partnership opportunities in areas of mutual interest.

Additionally, Oman Post unveiled a commemorative stamp featuring a distinctive artistic design to mark four decades of diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Russian Federation. The stamp highlights the robust economic and cultural bonds between the two countries, symbolising friendship and mutual understanding.

The stamp’s design draws inspiration from the shared maritime heritage of both nations, depicting two prominent 15th-century figures who undertook pivotal roles in advancing navigation and geographical knowledge, namely the renowned Omani explorer Ahmed bin Majid al Saadi, who made pioneering contributions to the study of seas and geographic locations — including the Caspian Sea and the city of Derbent — and the Russian merchant and traveller Afanasy Nikitin, the first Russian to visit the Arabian Peninsula. Nikitin documented his attendance of an Easter Mass in Muscat, reflecting the religious tolerance and cultural openness for which Oman has been known throughout history.

This initiative underscores both nations’ commitment to enhancing cooperation in postal services and related activities, contributing to deeper bilateral relations and opening new avenues for joint collaboration. — ONA

HM, Russian President
grace signing of pacts



MOSCOW: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation on Tuesday graced the signing of an agreement, a protocol and 9 memoranda of understanding at the Kremlin Palace in Moscow, during His Majesty’s state-visit to the Russian Federation.

The pacts covered several areas, including a mutual visa waiver agreement, an economic and technical cooperation protocol — a proposal of establishing a joint economic committee between the governments of Oman and the Russian Federation — and MoUs on climate change and low-carbon development, transport and transit, and cooperation in combating money laundering and terrorist financing between Oman’s National Centre for Financial Information and Russia’s Federal Financial Monitoring Service.

Additional MoUs were signed on fisheries cooperation between Oman’s Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Russia’s Federal Agency for Fisheries; news and information exchange between Oman’s Ministry of Information (represented by Oman News Agency) and Rossiya Segodnya media group; diplomatic cooperation between the Diplomatic Academy of Oman and the Diplomatic Academy of Russia; media cooperation between the Ministry of Information and Russia Today TV; partnership between Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Russia’s Roscongress Foundation; and administrative collaboration between the Royal Academy of Management and the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration.

The pacts were signed on behalf of the Omani government by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Salim bin Hamood al Tuwaya, Oman’s Ambassador to Russia; and Colonel Abdulrahman bin Amer al Kiyoumi, CEO of the National Centre for Financial Information. Meanwhile, they were signed on behalf of the Russian government by Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister; Maxim Reshetnikov, Minister of Economic Development; Roman Vladimirovich Starovoit, Minister of Transport; and several other Russian officials. — ONA

‘Tales of Morocco’

A Moroccan culinary week
highlighting Chef Mansour Benali’s
specialities at Shangri-La Al Husn

From 23rd of April to 1st of May, Shangri-La Al Husn invites guests on a mesmerizing journey through the heart of Morocco with **Tales of Morocco**, a vibrant week-long culinary experience that celebrates the kingdom’s rich flavours, traditions — and the captivating art of belly dancing.

At the heart of this exclusive pop-up is **Chef Mansour Benali**, a Casablanca native whose signature style blends the deep roots of Moroccan culinary heritage with contemporary finesse. Known for his soulful cooking and elegant presentations, Chef Mansour will showcase an exceptional array of Morocco’s most cherished dishes — from tagines and fluffy couscous to smoky kebabs and delightful dessert.

Evenings come alive with the rhythmic charm of live belly dancing performances, adding a cultural sparkle to every dinner service. This immersive element transforms each evening into a true Moroccan celebration, echoing the spirit of traditional souks feasts, and festive gatherings.

Guests will enjoy a specially curated set menu at OMR 29 net per person, featuring classic appetisers, soup, a choice of hearty mains — including Chef Mansour’s signature lamb or chicken tagines — and the traditional “Mhencha” dessert, served with Moroccan mint tea and cookies.

The evening is designed to transport you — from the warm spices and rich aromas to live Moroccan entertainment, traditional performances, and captivating belly dancing, all set against the stunning backdrop of Shangri-La Al Husn.

This exclusive pop-up is available from 23rd of April to the 1st of May from 7pm to 10.30pm and is open to guests aged 13 and above. With the spiced aromas, lively performances, and culinary artistry, Tales of Morocco promises a multi-sensory experience that’s as unforgettable as it is delicious.

Advance bookings are recommended through 2477 6565 or via WhatsApp at +968 7926 9247.



FIVE-DAY MUSANDAM CARNIVAL BEGINS TODAY

BUKHA: Hil Beach in the Wilayat of Bukha will host on Wednesday the launch of the third edition of the Musandam Carnival, organised by the Office of the Governor of Musandam in collaboration with a number of public and private institutions. The event will run for five days as part of the ongoing entertainment activities.

The opening ceremony, held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Nawaf bin Barghash al Said, will feature artistic and entertainment performances, various shows and unique competitive contests. Abdullah bin Ahmed al Shehhi, Assistant

Head of the Musandam Governor’s Office, stated: “This carnival comes as part of the activation of various activities and events in the governorate. It aims to boost tourism promotion and enrich local tourism in Musandam. The carnival will offer a wide and diverse range of exciting recreational programmes and activities targeting all segments of society.” He added: “The carnival is considered one of the most unique tourism events in the governorate, offering an opportunity for small and medium enterprises and home-based businesses to showcase their products.”

Promoting stable and healthy marriages

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

BASED on the importance of the family in the socialisation process, the Ministry of Social Development is training marital guidance trainers for those preparing to get married.

The marital guidance trainers receive training that equips them with effective communication, presentation and dialogue skills, as well as modern presentation techniques. They are also introduced to the concepts and fundamentals of marital guidance for those preparing to get married, enabling them to take on their family responsibilities and build a safe and stable family.

Saeed bin Rashid al Maktoumi, Head of the Family Counseling Section at the Family Guidance and Counseling Department, stated that the training programme for marital guidance trainers aims to provide the team of trainers in the regional directorates in the governorates with the necessary knowledge, skills, and topics related to successful marital life. This will help reduce the occurrence of problems and disputes that could ultimately lead to divorce and family breakdown.

Samra al Maashari, a psychologist at the Family Guidance and Counseling Department, said, “Trainers acquire many skills, including effective communication. This involves using thoughts,



SAEED BIN RASHID AL MAKTOUNI



SAMRA AL MAASHARI

The ministry emphasises the importance of marital compatibility in organising family planning based on family affairs

sounds, signals, or behaviour to exchange information or express ideas, feelings, or other things to another party. This includes understanding one’s life partner in terms of representational systems and employing them in effective communication using visual, auditory, digital and kinaesthetic modes.”

The Ministry of Social Development, represented by the Family Guidance and Counseling Department, recently organised a training programme for marital counseling trainers.

This programme is part of the national project to prepare those getting ready for marriage in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The programme involved 37 participants from various directorates and departments affiliated with the Ministry across the Sultanate of Oman. The importance of this training stems from the family’s crucial role in the socialisation process and its connection to the stability of society and the effectiveness of its members.

The ministry emphasises the importance of marital compatibility in organising family planning based on family affairs.

Family planning includes various types such as financial planning, reproductive planning, managing internal and external family relations, effective parenting and fatherhood, continuous learning and promoting entertainment.

Campaign to promote hygiene launched in Al Sharqiyah South

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

Under the slogan ‘We Cooperate to Make It Cleaner’, the Municipality of Al Sharqiyah South launched a comprehensive awareness campaign aimed at maintaining public hygiene across the various wilayats of the governorate. The initiative comes within the broader framework of efforts to enhance environmental standards and foster a stronger culture of community responsibility towards maintaining a clean and healthy environment.

The campaign focuses on promoting positive behaviour among citizens and residents, encouraging them to adopt environmentally sound practices such as the proper disposal of waste and the maintenance of cleanliness across beaches, residential neighbourhoods, public parks and facilities. By addressing both individual and collective responsibilities, the campaign aspires to instil sustainable habits that contribute to long-term environmental preservation.

The Director of the Events and Awareness Department emphasised the critical role of collaborative community action in achieving a clean and sustainable environment. He noted that maintaining cleanliness is a shared responsibility that requires the active participation of all segments of society, highlighting the importance of community partnerships in reaching the campaign’s objectives.



The campaign features a wide range of activities designed to reach various segments of society and ensure the message of public hygiene resonates broadly. — ONA

The campaign features a wide range of activities designed to reach various segments of society and ensure the message of public hygiene resonates broadly. These activities include the distribution of informative leaflets in public areas, organisation of clean-up events in beaches and residential neighbourhoods, and leveraging the power of social media platforms to disseminate targeted awareness messages. Participants are encouraged to view cleanliness not merely as a personal obligation, but as a collective commitment to the well-being of the entire community. A defining feature of this campaign is its emphasis on community engagement and partnership.

Ministry of Health
(Announcement)

The Ministry of Health would like to note the amendment in the dates of the **(Auction No.1/2025)** for Renting of Cafeteria in the central laboratory in Al-Khoud area in Muscat Governorate.

Interested Companies and establishments may collect the documents and specifications of this Auction from the Directorate of Purchase & Tenders at General Directorate of Financial Affairs at Ministry’s Headquarters in Al Khuwair. The fee for the documents is 25 O.R. and can be collected during official working hours (8:30 AM - 12:30 PM) until Thursday, May 1st, 2025.

The offers must be enclosed in sealed envelopes duly signed and stamped in the original form shall be addressed to H.E. the Chairperson of the Tender Committee, clearly stating the title: **(Auction No.1/2025)** for Renting of Cafeteria in the central laboratory in Al-Khoud area in Muscat Governorate, The offers must be valid for 90 days. Envelopes shall not bear any sign that refers to bidder’s name or identity.

The Offers shall be deposited at the Purchase and Tender Department in Directorate of Financial Affairs by 10:00 am on Wednesday, May 21, 2025. Offers submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

The Ministry reserves the right to reject any bids without providing reasons.

PURSHOTTAM KANJI EXCHANGE CO LLC PO BOX NO. 41, MUSCAT - 100, SULTANATE OF OMAN					
SUMMARY OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2024 (In RO '000)					
ASSETS	31.12.2024	31.12.2023	LIABILITIES	31.12.2024	31.12.2023
1. Cash in hand	2,365	1,833	1. Capital and Reserves	4,582	5,332
2. Deposits with Central Bank of Oman	190	190	2. Borrowings from Banks	-	559
3. Precious Metals	58	12	3. Balances due to Branches	-	-
4. Balances due from Banks	1,823	969	4. Balances due to Money changers	421	396
5. Balances due from Branches	-	-	5. Loans and Advances payable	1,750	-
6. Balance due from money changers	-	-	6. Cheques and Drafts issued and outstanding	-	-
7. Cheques and drafts purchased	-	-	7. Other Liabilities	793	5,293
8. Loans and Advances	-	-			
9. Investments	-	-			
10. Fixed Assets	445	499			
11. Other Assets	2,664	8,075			
TOTAL	7,546	11,579	TOTAL	7,546	11,579
SUMMARY OF INCOME AND EXPENSES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2024					
EXPENSES	31.12.2024		REVENUE	31.12.2024	
1. Operational, General & administrative expenses	2,533		1. Commission, foreign exchange and bullion trading income		2,152
2. Finance cost	196				
3. Depreciation and Amortization	199				
4. Management fee	5		2. Other Income		31
5. Income tax	-				
Net Profit/Loss for the year	(750)				
TOTAL	2,183		TOTAL		2,183
BDO LLC			PURSHOTTAM KANJI EXCHANGE CO LLC		

TENDER NOTICE

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

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

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
236/2025/ MAFWR/ HQ-26	SUPPLY OF WHEAT THRESHERS AND GRAIN CROPS	Tuesday 15/4/2025	Monday 5/5/2025	Monday 26/5/2025	Specialized companies registered with Excellent, First Second, Third, Fourth grades	(45/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
246/2025/ MAFWR/ HQ-27	SUPPLY OF ELECTRIC FORKLIFT	Thursday 17/4/2025	Wednesday 7/5/2025	Tuesday 27/5/2025	Specialized companies registered with for SMEs	(10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (In the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: **+968 24402200** or etenderhd@gstb.gov.om

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The meeting assessed stages of various technical initiatives. — ONA

INTERIOR MINISTRY
REVIEWS DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATION
PROJECTS

MUSCAT: The Supervisory Committee for Digital Transformation at the Ministry of Interior held its second meeting of 2025, chaired by Sayyid Khalifa bin Al Murdas al Busaidy, Secretary-General of Governorates Affairs at the Ministry of Interior and Chairman of the Committee.

The meeting discussed several agenda items, most notably tracking progress rates in digital transformation projects under the current operational plan, reviewing implementation challenges and assessing the stages of various technical initiatives.

The committee also examined the results of the first semi-annual evaluation of excellence in government digital transformation and addressed several topics related to developing e-service systems and enhancing digital efficiency within the ministry. These efforts support the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and advance the transition towards a smart government. — ONA

OMAN PARTICIPATES
IN RABAT BOOK FAIR



RABAT: The Sultanate of Oman is participating in the 30th International Book and Publishing Fair held in Rabat. The event will run until April 27, 2025. The participation aims to augment Oman's presence in international book fairs, promote Omani intellectual output, and introduce it to a wider audience.

This year, Oman's pavilion features a collection of recent publications from the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, as well as works by various government units and civil society organisations.

Since its opening, the Omani pavilion has attracted significant attention from visitors and notable media coverage from various outlets.

The pavilion offers a carefully curated selection of publications spanning history, literature, linguistics, medicine, culture, jurisprudence, media, heritage and tourism, catering to readers of all ages and intellectual interests.

This participation reinforces cultural cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Morocco, highlights Omani literary and intellectual works, and promotes cultural and professional exchange in authorship, publishing, and book production. It also introduces Omani writers and publishers to their counterparts across the Arab world. — ONA

BRYDE’S WHALE SPOTTED
IN MUSANDAM FOR FIRST TIME



The Bryde's whale is a medium-sized baleen whale, characterised by its long, streamlined body and bluish-gray colour. — ONA

MUSANDAM: The Environment Authority has recorded its first-ever sighting of a Bryde's whale in Musandam Governorate since the launch of the Marine Mammal Species Survey Project in 2023. The survey project has continued through five different phases.

Aida al Jabri, the project head, stated that this sighting marks a significant step in understanding the distribution of rare or previously undocumented marine species in Musandam, emphasising the importance of ongoing environmental surveys to protect Oman's biodiversity.

She added that the project represents a pioneering initiative that bridges fieldwork and

scientific research, contributing to the development of a national database that supports Oman's efforts in marine conservation and sustainability for future generations.

The Bryde's whale is a medium-sized baleen whale, characterised by its long, streamlined body, bluish-gray colour, and three distinct ridges on its rostrum, distinguishing it from other whale species.

Known for its elusive behaviour and swift movements, this whale prefers warm waters and feeds on small fish and plankton using a "lunge-feeding" technique. It is typically seen alone or in small groups. — ONA

Non-Communicable
Diseases Survey launched

THE SECOND phase of the National Non-Communicable Diseases Survey in the Sultanate of Oman was launched on Tuesday on the sidelines of the First Health Committees Forum 2025.

The forum is organised by the Matrah Health Committee in Muscat Governorate. The event was held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat. The survey targets citizens and residents aged 15 and above, both male and female. It aims to assess the burden of non-communicable diseases, establish a comprehensive database, and support effective health planning.

The survey will be conducted in three phases: the first involves updating household maps for Omani and expatriate families, the second focuses on data collection through two visits per household, and the third phase will cover data analysis, publication, and dissemination of results.

Dr Yousef bin Mohammed al Farsi, Director-General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate, stated in his address that the First Health Committees Forum represents a national event with shared responsibilities extending beyond institutions to the core of the community. He emphasised



The forum, organised by the Matrah Health Committee, was held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat. — ONA

The forum highlighted effective strategies and best practices to combat drugs and psychotropic substances, reinforcing community awareness and encouraging cross-sector collaboration in prevention efforts.

the forum's role in fostering partnerships and integration to enhance individual and public health.

Al Farsi added that health committees firmly believe in their role as a platform for collaboration between the health sector and other service sectors to promote public health, serving as a cornerstone in community health initiatives.

Dr Yousef bin Mohammed al Farsi, Director-General of Health Services in Muscat Governorate said that among the key initiatives adopted by the health committees is the National Competition for Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. This initiative is a platform to raise awareness and

demonstrate national solidarity in confronting one of the most serious threats to the youth and society. He also stressed that drugs are not just a security or health issue but a societal challenge affecting every home, family and sector.

He noted that since its launch in 2015, the Ministry of Health has spearheaded this competition through health committees, which have undertaken an active role in adopting community projects offering innovative solutions to drug-related issues. The committees in Muscat Governorate have achieved outstanding results and advanced rankings in the competition.

The forum also highlighted effective strategies and best practices to combat drugs and psychotropic substances, reinforcing community awareness and encouraging cross-sector collaboration in prevention efforts.

The National Non-Communicable Diseases Survey is a confident step toward a healthier society, a more aware environment and a brighter future. With its rich heritage and deep-rooted commitment to health, Muscat Governorate stands as a key hub in the survey's second phase, implemented as part of national efforts to improve public health in Oman. — ONA

Over 19,000 tenders awarded through ‘Esnad’ platform

MUSCAT: The Secretariat General of the Tender Board announced that the number of companies registered on the ‘Esnad’ platform reached 17,523 by mid-April 2025, including 9,717 local companies and 3,371 international firms.

Additionally, 4,352 registered companies were small and medium enterprises (SMEs), along with other entities such as property owners.

A total of 3,510 tenders were

floated on the platform by mid-April, comprising 2,145 local tenders, 90 international tenders and over 1,127 tenders exclusively for SMEs.

Since its launch, the platform has awarded more than 19,000 tenders, including 1,564 awarded from the beginning of 2025 until mid-April. Local companies secured 818 tenders, while international firms won 6 tenders. SMEs were awarded 740 tenders.

Turki bin Sulaiman al Hasani, Director-General of Statistics and Information Systems, stated that “Esnad” serves as an integrated national platform that accelerates procedures, reduces change orders and ensures compliance with approved budgets, enhancing the quality of government project implementation.

Al Hasani emphasised that the platform maximises the efficiency of government spending by

adopting best local, regional and international practices, optimising financial resources and supporting sustainable economic development goals. Eng Said bin Hamad al Amri, Director-General of Tenders, added that the Tender Board awarded tenders worth a total of RO 203 million by the end of March 2025. He noted that 26 tenders were floated in the first quarter of 2025, with a total value of RO 400 million. — ONA

Oman marks Earth Day under the theme ‘Our Power, Our Planet’

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is joining global celebrations of Earth Day, observed annually on April 22, under the theme “Our Power, Our Planet”, emphasising collective efforts to drive change and protect the Earth as a shared responsibility.

This occasion brings together over 190 countries to raise awareness among individuals, communities and organisations about the importance of safeguarding the environment, its natural resources and the ecological challenges facing the planet. It also aims to promote sustainability

values and advance climate action.

In this context, the Environment Authority is implementing sustainable environmental policies with a growing focus on protecting ecosystems through natural reserve management, pollution control and climate change adaptation.

The Authority is also developing strategic plans, projects and qualitative initiatives, including programmes for ecosystem restoration, clean energy innovation and scaling up carbon capture projects.

Efforts are underway to boost



investment in natural reserves, green hydrogen, blue carbon and the enforcement of environmental policies.

These measures seek to balance modern demands for environmental, economic and social projects — such as reducing carbon emissions and expanding green spaces — to secure a prosperous and sustainable future, prioritising environmental and natural resource conservation.

Oman aims to make significant progress in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index, currently

ranking first among Arab countries and 22nd globally for least polluted nations in 2025, according to Numbeo.

Earth Day serves as a global call to unify international efforts in environmental protection and addressing climate challenges threatening the planet. It also inspires action towards a cleaner, fairer and more sustainable future by accelerating renewable energy adoption, transitioning to green and circular economies, and raising awareness about the necessity of environmental commitments. — ONA

SHOCKFIRE



An Indian Army personnel stops a car for inspection near Pahalgam, south of Srinagar. — AFP

AT LEAST 24 KILLED IN KASHMIR ATTACK ON TOURISTS

PAHALGAM: At least 24 people were killed in Indian-administered Kashmir when gunmen opened fire on tourists on Tuesday, a senior police officer said, with authorities calling it the worst attack on civilians in years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi decried the “heinous act” in the summer retreat of Pahalgam, pledging the attackers “will be brought to justice”.

A tour guide said that he reached the scene after hearing gunfire and transported some of the wounded away on horseback. “I saw a few men lying on the ground looking like they were dead,” said Waheed, who gave only one name.

The attack targeted tourists in Pahalgam, which lies about 90 kilometres by road from the key city of Srinagar. The senior police officer in the region, speaking on condition of anonymity, described a massacre in which at least 24 people had been killed.

The killings come a day after Modi met US Vice-President JD Vance, who is on a four-day tour of India with his wife Usha and children. Vance offered his and Usha’s condolences to the ‘victims of the terrorist attack’

The killings come a day after Modi met with US Vice-President JD Vance, who is on a four-day tour of India with his wife Usha and children. Vance offered his and Usha’s condolences to the “victims of the devastating terrorist attack in Pahalgam”. “Our thoughts and prayers are with them as they mourn this horrific attack,” he wrote on X.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said that “the attack is much larger than

anything we’ve seen directed at civilians in recent years”, with the death toll “still being ascertained”. “This attack on our visitors is an abomination,” he said in a statement. “The perpetrators of this attack are animals, inhuman and worthy of contempt.” A reporter at Pahalgam spoke to another witness of the shooting who asked not to be identified. “The militants, I can’t say how many, came out of the forest near an open small meadow and started firing,” said the witness, who cares for the horses that are popular with tourists in the area. “They were clearly sparing women and kept shooting at men, sometimes single shot and sometimes many bullets, it was like a storm.” The witness said dozens of people fled as the gunmen opened fire.

India’s Home Minister Amit Shah flew to Kashmir and vowed those responsible would be caught. “Those involved in this dastardly act of terror will not be spared, and we will come down heavily on the perpetrators with the harshest consequences,” Shah said in a statement. One security source said that foreign tourists were among those shot, but there was no official confirmation. — AFP

UNIVERSITIES ISSUE LETTER CONDEMNING TRUMP’S OVERREACH

WASHINGTON: More than 100 US universities and colleges, including Ivy League institutions Princeton and Brown, issued a joint letter on Tuesday condemning President Donald Trump’s “political interference” in the education system. The move comes a day after Harvard University sued the Trump administration, which has threatened to cut funding and impose outside political supervision. “We speak with one voice against the unprecedented government

overreach and political interference now endangering American higher education,” the letter read. “We are open to constructive reform and do not oppose legitimate government oversight. However, we must oppose undue government intrusion,” it said, adding: “We must reject the coercive use of public research funding.”

Trump has sought to bring several prestigious universities to heel over claims they tolerated campus racism, threatening their

budgets, tax-exempt status and the enrolment of foreign students. The letter said the universities and colleges were committed to serving as centres where “faculty, students and staff are free to exchange ideas and opinions across a full range of viewpoints without fear of retribution, censorship, or deportation.” Trump’s war against universities has seen him threaten to cut federal funding over policies meant to encourage diversity among students and staff. — AFP

World leaders expected for Pope Francis’ funeral

POPE

Francis’s funeral will be held on Saturday, the Vatican announced, as world leaders from US President Donald Trump to Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelensky said they would attend to honour the Catholic leader. The Argentine pontiff, 88, died on Monday from a stroke, less than a month after returning home from five weeks in hospital battling double pneumonia. His funeral, which is expected to draw huge crowds, will take place at 10:00 am (0800 GMT) on Saturday in the square in front of St Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican.

Francis’s coffin — which he previously ordered should be of wood and zinc — will then be taken inside the church and from there to the Rome basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore for burial. The first so-called “general congregation” of cardinals took place on Tuesday morning, kicking off a centuries-old process that culminates in the election of a new pontiff within three weeks. The Vatican published the first images of the pontiff in his open coffin, wearing his red papal vestments, a mitre on his head and had a rosary between his fingers.

The pope’s body was photographed during a service on Monday evening in the chapel of Casa Santa Marta, the Vatican residence where he lived during his 12-year papacy, and where he died. It will be transferred to St Peter’s Basilica on Wednesday at 9:00 am, to lie in state. Sister Nathalie Becquart, under-secretary to the synod of bishops, told journalists she was “very moved” after paying



Pilgrims walk following a cross with St. Peter’s basilica in the background at the Vatican. — AFP

her respects. She said she had felt “both sadness and gratitude for everything he gave”.

The Holy See’s official media Vatican News released details about Francis’s last hours. The pontiff started feeling ill on Monday at around 5.30 am, less than 24 hours after he greeted a crowd of faithful in St Peter’s Square on Easter Sunday. Before falling into a coma, he waved to his personal nurse Massimiliano Strappetti from his bed, in what Vatican News described as “a gesture of farewell”. On Sunday, he had thanked Strappetti for encouraging him to take what would become his last tour of St Peter’s Square in his popemobile. “Thank you for bringing me back to the Square,” Francis was quoted as saying. He was pronounced dead at 7:35 am on Monday. “He did not suffer. It all happened quickly,” Vatican News said, citing people

who were with the pontiff in his final moments.

Tributes have poured in from around the globe for Francis, a liberal reformer who took over following the resignation of German theologian Benedict XVI in 2013. His home country, Argentina, prepared for a week of national mourning while India began three days of state mourning on Tuesday -- a rare honour for a foreign religious leader in the world’s most populous nation.

Heads of state and royalty are expected for his funeral, with Trump and France’s Emmanuel Macron the first to announce they would attend even before a date was confirmed. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, Germany’s outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Ukrainian President Zelensky will also attend. Cardinals of all ages are invited to the general congregations. — AFP

The first so-called “general congregation” of cardinals took place on Tuesday morning, kicking off a centuries-old process that culminates in the election of a new pontiff within three weeks



PALESTINIANS HEAD TO CAIRO FOR TALKS

GAZA: A Hamas delegation left for Cairo to discuss “new ideas” aimed at securing a Gaza ceasefire, an official from the group said, as Israeli air strikes killed 26 people across the territory. The renewed effort follows Hamas’s rejection last week of Israel’s latest proposal to secure the release of hostages still held in Gaza. Talks have so far failed to produce any breakthrough since Israel resumed its air and ground assault on Gaza from March 18, ending a two-month ceasefire. “The delegation will meet with Egyptian officials to discuss new ideas aimed at reaching a ceasefire,” the Hamas official said, adding the team included the group’s chief negotiator Khalil al Hayya. — AFP

WIDESPREAD DEPORTATION

Over 100,000 Afghans left Pakistan in April



More than 100,000 Afghans have left Pakistan in the past three weeks, the interior ministry said on Tuesday, after Islamabad announced the widespread cancellation of residence permits. The interior ministry said that “100,529 Afghans have left in April”. Convoys of Afghan families have been heading to the border since the start of April when the deadline to leave expired, crossing into a country mired in a humanitarian crisis. — AFP

CANOE TRAGEDY

12 children, teens drown in I Coast capsizes



A boat overturned during a church outing for Easter on a lagoon near the city of Abidjan in Ivory Coast, killing 12 children and teenagers, a government minister said. “Twelve bodies have been recovered and are being taken to the morgue,” said Sports Minister Adje Silas Metch. The bodies are “of children and adolescents”, he added, saying one was a youngster who was not from the church but had joined the boat crossing. — AFP

REHABILITATION PROCESS

Myanmar extends post-earthquake truce



Myanmar’s junta on Tuesday prolonged a ceasefire declared after last month’s devastating earthquake to April 30, after aid groups and international mediators called for an extension to ease relief efforts. The junta said it would cease attacking its myriad armed opponents following the magnitude-7.7 quake which has killed more than 3,700. The ceasefire was extended to April 30 “aiming to continue the rebuilding and rehabilitation process with momentum”. — AFP

OPINION

Becoming conscious of our unconscious biases



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and NLP practitioner based in Muscat

THERE are the beliefs, the philosophies we consciously choose - and there are the ones that quietly choose us. They work in the background, unseen, deeply shaping how we feel, think and act.

Unconscious bias lives quietly behind the things we know and the assumptions we don't even realise we are making. It hums beneath our awareness, shaping perceptions, decisions and our interactions.

At its core, it is part of the human condition. Our brains are wired to make quick decisions. Every second, we are processing an overwhelming amount of information, but consciously, we can only handle a fraction of it. To bridge that gap, the brain uses shortcuts, drawing from memory, culture and experience to fill in the blanks. However efficient it is, these patterns are built on stereotypes or ingrained prejudices. They don't just distort our thinking, they also limit our hearts.

Bias isn't something we just carry. It is something that carries us - away from connection, from understanding and from growth. When we choose to question and to unlearn, we begin the work of reimagining not just how we see others, but how we see the world itself. We begin relearning and forming new neural pathways in our thinking and feeling.

Bias is often a reflex, born from familiarity. The comfort of what is known, the ease of what feels safe. It's favouring what is familiar and dismissing what is different - whether it's a person, a decision, or an idea. These biases are often invisible to us, making them all the more powerful. We shrink the vastness of human potential into neat little boxes.

Unconscious bias doesn't just affect how we see the world. It shapes how the world sees us, and how we move through it. It creates boundaries where there should be bridges. It builds walls where there should be open doors.

By becoming conscious of our unconscious

Unconscious bias doesn't just affect how we see the world as it creates boundaries where there should be bridges and builds walls where there should be open doors

biases, we begin to loosen their hold on us. We create space between reaction and response. We interrupt the autopilot, to notice our internal retorts, to question their origin and to choose with intention. To recognise our bias is not to confess wrongdoing. It is to reclaim our capacity for choice. It is to respond rather than to react. It leads with discernment, not default.

Let's allow curiosity to replace assumption, pause where judgement used to be and notice the pattern in our preferences. This is not a call to perfection. It is a call to presence. To awareness. To humility. The real gift lies not in being right, but being willing to see what we have never noticed before.

The more we observe, the more we begin to change the way we engage with others, and the more we allow others to change us. It's not enough to want to change. We must choose it, moment to moment.

It is in this choosing that we may finally be able to see the world with its infinite possibility.

GATWICK WORST UK AIRPORT FOR FLIGHT DELAYS

NEIL LANCEFIELD & IAN JONES

Gatwick Airport has retained its position as the UK's worst airport for flight delays, as it continues to suffer from air traffic control (ATC) disruption.

Departures from the West Sussex airport were an average of more than 23 minutes behind schedule in 2024, according to analysis of Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) data by the PA news agency. This represents an improvement from nearly 27 minutes during the previous 12 months but is longer than at any other UK airport.

Gatwick, which is the UK's second busiest airport, was badly affected by ATC staff shortages across continental Europe in 2024, and suffered the same problem in its own control tower.

Flights from Birmingham airport had the second poorest punctuality record last year, with an average delay of more than 21 minutes.

In third place was Manchester airport, with 20 minutes. Flight delays are often caused by issues outside the control of airports.

Julia Lo Bue-Said, chief executive of Advantage Travel Partnership, a network of independent travel agents, said many holidaymakers 'save all year' for their trips, so flight disruption can cause an 'emotional toll' as people feel 'their time and investment aren't being respected'.

She went on: "Passengers expect and deserve not to spend hours stuck in terminals with little information or support.

"Reliable service, clear communication and efficient operations should be the standard, not the exception, and airports must take this responsibility seriously.

"This summer is set to be exceptionally busy, therefore it is essential airports and airlines do all they can to ensure consumer confidence to travel remains high."

Belfast City (George Best) airport recorded the best punctuality performance in the UK for the second year in a row, with a typical delay per flight of less than 12 minutes.

The analysis took into account scheduled and chartered departures from the 22 commercial UK airports with at least 1,000 outbound flights last year. Cancellations were not included.

The average delay for all these flights last year was 18 minutes and 24 seconds, down from 20 minutes and 42 seconds in 2023.

ATC issues are considered to be an 'extraordinary circumstance', meaning affected passengers are not entitled to payouts.

Selina Chadha, a director at the CAA, which has consumer advice on its website, said: "The industry works hard to ensure flights are punctual, but sometimes delays occur. "What is important to us is what airlines and airports do to minimise disruption, as well as comply with their legal obligations to look after passengers if something happens to their flight. — dpa

Why we need a mental health revolution today

IMAGINE waking up every morning to a barrage of headlines about wars, economic collapse and environmental ruin, all live-streamed to your pocket. This isn't another Netflix movie; it's 2025.

While our ancestors faced crises in isolation, we're drowning in a 24/7 feed of global threats: A US-China trade war destabilising economies, a devastating genocide in Gaza and Yemen described by many as a modern-day holocaust and escalating US-Iran tensions narrowly averted by mediators like the Sultanate of Oman.

The toll? A mental health epidemic hiding in plain sight. Our ancestors feared 'surviving' crises, we're crumbling under the weight of 'watching' them.

We are the first generation to witness global catastrophes in real time, not as distant headlines but as visceral, algorithm-fuelled content.

The psychological cost is staggering. A 2023 American Psychological Association study found that 78 per cent of adults now cite news consumption as a 'significant stressor', while Unicef warns that 1 in 5 young people globally show symptoms of anxiety or depression linked to 'doomscrolling'. Worse, research in 'Nature Human Behaviour' reveals that constant exposure to suffering triggers 'compassion collapse' - numbness to human pain.

Yet mental healthcare remains frozen in time. Traditional therapy can't scale to meet demand, stigma silences millions, and Western-centric models fail diverse cultures. In low-income countries, 75 per cent of people lack access to care (WHO). Refugees in Jordan, for example, often reject clinical therapy, seeking community-based healing instead. Our systems are Band-Aids on bullet wounds.

Mental health innovation, like health-tech, has lagged far behind the pace of crises. Apps like Nafas, Calm or crisis hotlines



A mental health epidemic hiding in plain sight.



KHALID ALSAFI AL HURAIBI

The writer is an innovator and an insights storyteller

offer temporary relief but ignore systemic roots: collective trauma, economic despair, and the isolation of digital life.

Meanwhile, social media algorithms profit from our despair, pushing polarising content that deepens divides. We're stuck in a loop - treating symptoms while the world burns.

To survive this age, we need mental health solutions as dynamic as the threats we face. Here's what a revolution looks like:

- AI that heals, Not hurts

Imagine AI platforms trained to crowdsource resilience strategies from trauma survivors worldwide. Rwanda's 'Ubuntu AI' pilot does exactly this, generating culturally tailored coping tools for refugees. Instead of algorithms that feed rage, we need ones that foster collective healing.

- Teletherapy for the masses

When Türkiye-Syria's 2023 earthquake struck, free teletherapy apps saw a 300-per cent surge in users. This proves scalable digital care works, but only if made affordable and multilingual.

- Decolonising mental health

South Africa's 'Healing Through Heritage' programme slashed PTSD rates by 40 per cent by blending traditional rituals with clinical therapy. Solutions must respect cultural roots, not impose foreign frameworks.

- Policy as prevention

New Zealand's 2019 'Wellbeing Budget' ties mental health funding to real-time crisis data. Governments must treat mental health like infrastructure - critical, urgent and lifesaving.

The chaos won't stop, but we can rewire how we respond. This isn't about 'self-care' - it's about societal care. Tech giants must redesign algorithms to prioritise hope over harm. Schools and workplaces need 'mental health first aid' training to spot crises early. Communities must revive ancestral wisdom, like Oman's mediation ethos, which bridges divides through dialogue.

We're at a crossroads: perpetuate a broken system or build one that turns collective trauma into collective strength. The next crisis is already trending. Will we be ready?

Let us live on a healthy earth...



SAMUEL KUTTY

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

DON'T you feel that the environmental crisis that we are facing today is terrifying? That the air we breathe is polluted and the water that we drink is contaminated? Whoever does not see these signs now will probably never have the eyes for what lies ahead!

The answer lies in what Robert Swan, the first person to walk to both poles, said: “The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it.”

Whether climate change is an effect that is caused by natural processes, manmade activity or the combination of the two, what is visible is that changes are happening to the Earth's climate. And this is creating a strain on our environment.

I am not an environmental expert, nor am I mindfulness professional. But still, there is ample scientific evidence that the climate is changing and that the change is being influenced by a host of human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation.

The only thing I can say, as a layman, is the changing weather patterns are going to force us to make more immediate and drastic changes to our existing infrastructure.

It is clear that climate change, biodiversity loss, and other environmental issues are threatening the very foundation of our

existence. So saving the earth is not merely the need of the hour but much more.

Unfortunately, the only home we have is at a breaking point. It is even messier. We have damaged two-thirds of the earth's oceans and three-quarters of its land.

These man-made changes to nature, as well as crimes that disrupt biodiversity, have gathered more pace, leading to the destruction of the planet. The final result is that millions of people are affected by extreme heat, wildfires, and floods.

So saving the earth is not merely the need of the hour but much more. We need a healthier plant. We need nature more than it needs us. Our world has been changing and will continue to change — with or without us. Saving biodiversity and ecosystem by ecosystem, is the only way to save ourselves!

April is Earth Month, a time when many people around the world come together to celebrate and raise awareness about environmental issues and take action to protect our planet. While Earth Month started as a movement in the 1960s, the first Earth Day was organised on April 22, 1970.

Unlike any other annual event, Earth Day serves as a yearly ‘wake-up call,’ shaking us out of complacency and urging us to confront the harsh reality of our impact on the planet. Climate change, pollution, deforestation and biodiversity loss are no longer distant threats.

Whether climate change is an effect that is caused by natural processes, manmade activity or the combination of the two, what is visible is that changes are happening to the Earth's climate. And this is creating a strain on our environment

Planting one single tree a year is a simple way to contribute to the environment because we believe that trees are nature's soldiers in the fight against global warming.

In this context is The Overstory, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by American novelist Richard Powers. Though I may be one of the last to put my hands on the book so late, it reminded me of what I had forgotten — the wordless understanding I had about trees. Rather, it is a reminder of our environmental consciousness.

The humans are not the important part of this book. It's the idea of how we relate to trees and nature itself. It's about the realisation that trees will find a way, with or without us. The novel provides an intimate case study of environmentalism.

The novel stresses the need for co-existence of humans and non-humans this planet.

“All around the house, the things they’ve planted in years gone by are making significance, making meaning, as easily as they make sugar and wood from nothing, from air, and sun, and rain. But the humans hear nothing,” Powers writes.

The Overstory inspires its readers to do more, act more for their planet. As the world still celebrating the Earth Month, let this novel be an inspiration to contemplate our relationship with nature.

GLOBAL WARMING IS A SECURITY THREAT, ARMIES MUST ADAPT

KELLY MACNAMARA

From responding to weather disasters to rising competition in the fast-warming Arctic, militaries are exposed to climate change and cannot let it become a strategic “blind spot”, security experts say. Concerns have grown recently that climate action is being sidelined as Europe beefs up defence and the US retreats from allies and its green commitments. But defence departments have already underscored that a warming planet poses major national security challenges, and militaries need to adapt to respond to these evolving threats.

“You can’t escape this. Climate doesn’t care who’s president or what your political goals are at the moment,” said Erin Sikorsky, director of the Washington-based Center for Climate & Security.

“It is coming, and militaries need to be prepared,” she said.

In the US, where President Donald Trump’s administration has scrubbed global warming from government websites, the latest intelligence threat assessment made no mention of climate change.

Sikorsky said this leaves crucial strategic gaps, particularly when it comes to renewable energy superpower China and the race for supremacy in the Arctic, where the loss of sea ice is opening up shipping lanes and access to resources.

“What I worry about, as someone who worked in national security for a long time, is this blind spot puts the US at risk,” she said.

In Europe, Russia’s war with Ukraine sparked energy security fears and accelerated many countries’ renewables ambitions. But in recent months countries have slashed international development aid, throwing climate budgets into question as spending priorities turn to defence and trade. German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock last month acknowledged the “extremely challenging” geopolitical situation but insisted that climate action remained a “top security policy”. The country plans a half trillion dollar spending “bazooka” for military and infrastructure, coupled with 100 billion euros for climate measures.

“Anyone thinking about security needs to think about climate as well. We are already living in the climate crisis,” said an assessment commissioned by Germany’s foreign and defence ministries in February. It said climate challenges were emerging over “the entire range of military tasks”, with increased risks including large-scale crop failures, conflict and instability.

In a September report, the UK’s Ministry of Defence said humanity’s impact on climate and the environment “continues to have far-reaching consequences, putting significant pressure on societies and economies and threatening the very existence of some states”. Militaries are increasingly being called in following floods, storms and wildfires, stretching the capacity of some forces, said Sikorsky, whose organisation has tracked more than 500 such emergency responses across the world since 2022. — AFP

America is becoming the world’s largest tax haven

DONALD

Trump is quickly turning the United States into the greatest tax

haven in history. One need only note the Treasury Department’s mandate to withdraw from the transparency regime that shares the real identities of company owners; the administration’s withdrawal from negotiations to establish a UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation; its refusal to enforce the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act; and massive crypto de-regulation.

This seems to be part of a broader strategy to undermine 250 years of institutional safeguards. The Trump administration has violated international treaties, ignored conflicts of interest, dismantled checks and balances, and impounded congressionally allocated funds. The administration isn’t debating policy; it’s trampling the rule of law.

But Trump does love one tax: import tariffs. He appears to believe that foreigners are footing the bill, thereby providing the money to cut taxes for billionaires. He also seems to believe that tariffs will eliminate trade deficits and return manufacturing to the US. Never mind that tariffs are paid by importers, driving up domestic prices, and are being levied at the worst time possible, just as the US is recovering from an inflationary episode.

Moreover, elementary macroeconomics shows that multilateral trade deficits reflect the disparity between domestic savings and domestic investment. Trump’s tax cuts for billionaires will widen the gap, because deficits subtract from domestic national savings. So, ironically, policies like tax cuts for billionaires and corporations increase the trade deficit.

Since Ronald Reagan, conservatives have claimed that tax cuts pay for themselves by boosting economic growth. But it didn’t work that way for Reagan, and it didn’t work that way for Trump during his first term. Empirical research confirms that tax cuts



A reduction of some 50,000 IRS workers would result in \$2.4 trillion of forgone revenue over the next 10 years.

for the rich have no measurable impact on economic growth or unemployment, but do increase income inequality immediately and persistently. The proposed extension of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act — the biggest corporate tax cuts in US history — would add around \$37 trillion to the US national debt over the next 30 years, without delivering the promised economic boost.

Trump is worsening the trade deficit at the microeconomic level, too. The US has become a service economy. Among its largest exports are tourism, education, and health care. But Trump has systematically undermined each. What tourist, student, or patient would want to come to the US knowing that he could be arbitrarily detained and held for weeks? The undermining of America’s premier education institutions, the arbitrary cancellation of student visas, and the defunding of science research have cast a deep pall over these critical sectors. Trump’s strategically flawed approach is already backfiring. China is one of America’s biggest trading partners, and the US depends on it for critical imports. China has already retaliated. Fear of stagflation – higher inflation combined with stagnant growth – has hit the stock and bond markets. And this is just the beginning.



JOSEPH E STIGLITZ

The writer is a Nobel laureate in economics and University Professor at Columbia University, is a former chief economist of the World Bank and former chair of the US President’s Council of Economic Advisers

Thanks to Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency, tax revenues could plummet by over 10 per cent this year because of weaker enforcement and compliance. A reduction of some 50,000 IRS workers would result in \$2.4 trillion of forgone revenue over the next 10 years, compared to the projected \$637 billion increase under provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act that aimed to boost the IRS workforce. The agenda is clear: not just lower tax rates for the rich, but weaker enforcement.

In a world where capital and rich individuals can cross borders freely, international cooperation is the only way for governments to ensure that multinational corporations and the ultra-rich are fairly taxed. In this context, halting the enforcement of beneficial-ownership data collection, tolerating anonymity-enhancing crypto markets, and abandoning the process to conclude a new UN tax convention and a global minimum tax reveal a deliberate pattern: dismantling multilateral frameworks designed to combat tax avoidance and money laundering. The “pausing” of enforcement of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act indicates that the US no longer minds even bribery and graft. ©Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

FIRSTDIVISION



Seeb players celebrate after a point.

SEEB, AL SALAM POST FIRST-LEG WINS IN SEMIS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

Seeb Club claimed a deserved victory over **Al Bashayer** in straight sets (3-0) in the first leg of the First Division Volleyball League semifinals at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Monday.

The game began with a balanced rhythm as **Al Bashayer** opened the scoring through their professional player **Islam**. **Seeb** quickly responded via **Bogdan**, but **Islam** restored **Al Bashayer**'s lead. **Saud al Maamari** then levelled the score for **Seeb**. The teams continued exchanging points until **Bogdan** scored twice in a row, putting **Seeb** ahead 4-2. **Saud** added another point, but **Al Bashayer** managed to narrow the gap before Russian player **Artem** scored for **Seeb**.

A serving error by **Saud** allowed **Al Bashayer** to close in, and **Saman** equalised at 6-6. As the intensity built, **Ahmed al Toubi** and **Saud al Muqbali** added back-to-back points for **Seeb**. The teams remained neck and neck, reaching a 23-23 tie. **Bogdan** put **Seeb** ahead, **Saman** responded, and **Mazen** gave **Al Bashayer** a 26-25 lead. However, **Bogdan** equalised again, **Saud** gave **Seeb** the edge, and a serving error by **Islam** handed **Seeb** the set 28-26. In the second set, **Al Bashayer** started strong, but **Seeb** quickly bounced back with **Saud** scoring, followed by three consecutive points from **Bogdan** and **Saud**, making it 3-1. **Al Bashayer** tried to catch up through **Mazen**, but **Artem** responded with a powerful point. **Islam** scored for **Al Bashayer**, but **Seeb** maintained control, capitalising on repeated service errors from **Al Bashayer** and excelling in their blocking game.

Despite efforts by **Haitham al Shaqsi** to close the gap, service errors especially from **Islam** allowed **Seeb** to maintain a 16-14 lead. **Al Bashayer** fought back to level the set at 25-25. **Bogdan** then scored for **Seeb**, but a service error by **Artem** let **Al Bashayer** equalise. Still, **Saud** and **Artem** sealed the set 28-26 for **Seeb**.

Saud opened the third set with a point, answered by **Islam**. **Seeb**, however, quickly extended their lead to 3-1 through **Saud** and **Bogdan**. With organised play and **Al Bashayer** showing signs of decline, **Seeb** surged to a 15-9 advantage. **Saud** and **Artem** stretched the lead further, despite **Islam**'s attempts to bring **Al Bashayer** back. Ultimately, **Seeb** closed the set and match convincingly at 25-16.

AL SALAM EDGE MAJEES
Al Salam took a big step toward reaching the First Division Volleyball League final after a thrilling 3-2 victory over **Majees** in the first leg of the semifinals, held at Sohar Sports Complex.

Set scores were: 25-21, 18-25, 23-25, 27-25, 20-18.

The match was marked by high intensity and fierce competition. **Majees** started strong, taking the first set by four points. However, **Al Salam** responded impressively in the second and third sets, led by standout performances from **Mohammed Yaqoob** and their foreign professional, putting them ahead two sets to one.

In the fourth set, **Majees'** foreign duo from **Pakistan** and **Cameroon** stepped up, helping their team recover and win the set after a dramatic tie. Yet **Al Salam** managed to edge out the decisive fifth set with a narrow 20-18 win, bringing them closer to a spot in the championship final.

Sayyid Azzan elected as new chairman of OOC



The General Assembly elected HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said as the new chairman of Oman Olympic Committee for the term of 2024-2028 while Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi was elected as the vice-chairman of the OOC.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

THE GENERAL assembly members of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) elected HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said as the new Chairman of OOC for the upcoming term (2024-2028). Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education and Chairman of Oman School Sports Association (OSSA), was elected as Vice-Chairman.

The General Assembly regular meeting of OOC took place on Tuesday in presence of 17 representatives of sporting associations and committees and sports figures. The newly elected chairman of OOC replaced Shaikh Khalid al Zubair, who ended his journey after two terms. Taha Sulaiman al Kishry and Abdullah Mohammed Bamkhalaf were elected as members of OOC board members due to their international sporting positions.

Representative of OSSA, Yousef Awad Bait Saleem, was elected as board member in non-Olympic sports association seat while Khalifa bin Hamed al Jabri will represent athletes after being elected by the Oman Athletes Committee and Sayyidah Sana bint Hamed al Busaidiyah was selected as Chairperson of Oman Women's Sports and Gender Equality Committee. The General Assembly members elected the former chairman of Oman Volleyball Association Bader bin Ali al Rawas and Oman Club vice-chairman Jihad bin Abdullah al Shaikh to fill the two seats allocated to the category of sports personalities while Fahad al Raisi was not elected as he received less votes among the three candidates.

Six more board members were elected out of nine nominated members. Dr Marwan bin Juma al Jumaa, Chairman of Oman Hockey Association (15 votes), Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of Oman Basketball Association (13 votes), Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, Chairman of Oman Handball Association (13), Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, representative of Oman Aquatics Association (12 votes), Eng Ibrahim bin Abdullah al Maqbali, Chairman of Oman Volleyball Association (12 votes) and Said bin Mohammed al Hajri, Chairman of Oman Athletics Association (11 votes). The other three representatives including representative of Oman Football Association, Qutaiba bin al Ghilani, Faiz Mohammad Riaz, Vice-Chairman of Oman Golf Association and Saif al Rushedi, Chairman of Oman Cycling Association, were not elected due to their less votes.

The meeting's agenda featured accepting the minutes from the Extraordinary General Assembly which



The General Assembly took place on Tuesday in presence of 17 representatives of sporting associations, committees and sports figures.



Following the election, the board directors of OOC held their first meeting on Tuesday.



Six more board members were elected out of nine nominated members.

took place on February 16, 2025, besides reviewing the previous year's annual report and highlighting key administrative and technical achievements. Then, the members had an overview of the proposed activity plan for 2025 and there were discussions of the final accounts for the past year, the auditor's report, and the estimated budget for the current year.

COOPERATION AND SUPPORT
In his remarks after being elected as the OOC chairman, HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said said that it is a great honour to receive the esteemed trust to serve as chairman of OOC for the 2024-2028 term. "I would like to express my sincere gratitude and deep appreciation for

this confidence. I look forward to your cooperation and support in elevating the Committee's performance to meet your aspirations — and those of the athletes of our beloved homeland, the Sultanate of Oman," he said.

"What has been achieved over the past years in terms of organisational and technical progress, as well as the establishment of firm foundations, serves as an inspiration for us all to continue building and advancing the Committee's work towards greater integration and effectiveness — ultimately serving Omani sports and enhancing its presence regionally and internationally," he said.

"Names may change and faces may differ but the goal remains the same, and the destination unchanged. Our ambitions are renewed, carried by new energy, continuing the journey of those before us, holding the same torch and striving for greater horizons and deeper service to Omani sports," he added.

"I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair and the previous board members for their sincere efforts and the institutional, organisational, and technical legacy they have left behind — a legacy that will continue to motivate us to move forward on the same path and develop what they began with a spirit of appreciation and teamwork," he said.

"We will work in close coordination with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth under the leadership of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, guided by his ongoing support for this sector and his generous directives, which we consider a compass for our success. As we begin this new chapter together, we draw inspiration from the vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik — may Allah protect him — in making sports a cornerstone of Oman's renewed renaissance, and a fundamental pillar of empowerment, progress, and sustainable development," he concluded.

FIRST BOARD MEETING
Following the election, the board directors of OOC held their first meeting on Tuesday headed by HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said in presence of all members. During the meeting, Abdullah bin Mohammed Bamakhalef was appointed as Secretary-General of the Committee while Qais bin Saud al Zakwani was appointed as Treasurer.

The formation of the Executive committee of OOC was also approved and it is chaired by HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said, and accompanied by the following members: Abdullah bin Mohammed Bamakhalef, Qais bin Saud al Zakwani and Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma.

WEST ASIA QUALIFIERS



Oman are represented by Mundhir al Amri and Imad al Rahbi.

OMAN U12 TENNIS TEAM ATTENDS JORDAN TOURNEY

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

The Oman U12 national tennis team is participating in the West Asia U12 Championship qualifiers, hosted by Jordan from April 19 to 26. The Oman national team is represented by two players, aiming to earn ranking points and compete for top positions in the tournament. The delegation includes Faisal bin Ali al Balushi as head of the delegation, coach Mohammed bin Rashid al Falahi, assistant coach of the U12 team, and players Mundhir bin Kamil al Amri and Imad bin Ahmed al Rahbi. The team completed its preparation for the championship with intensive training sessions at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, where the coaching staff focused on optimally preparing the players to deliver strong performances during the competition. Coach Mohammed al Falahi stated that the team is ready to take on the tournament’s challenges. He emphasised the importance of such participation, especially for this age group, as it serves as a stepping stone to higher age categories. He added that the players had previously participated in the Oman Open Championship and other competitions organised by the federation, delivering commendable performances. The best talents from those events were selected to represent Oman in this championship. He expressed hope that the players would benefit from this experience and achieve the desired results.



Rashid al Balushi

RASHID NAMED FIA SAFETY OFFICIAL IN SAUDI RALLY

MUSCAT: The International Automobile Federation (FIA) has appointed Oman’s Rashid al Balushi as the FIA’s rally safety representative for the Saudi International Rally, the third round of the Middle East Rally Championship. This event is being held for the first time in Saudi Arabia as part of the Middle East Rally Championship calendar, where Saudi Arabia will join the 2025 World Rally Championship at the end of this year. Rashid al Balushi has extensive experience in the world of rallying, both as a driver in the Oman Rally Championship and as a safety supervisor in local rallies. He joined the FIA team in 2020 as a rally safety representative, overseeing the safety of competitors and spectators, as well as implementing FIA regulations to ensure everyone’s safety and the safe completion of the rally. Rashid al Balushi has previously participated as a rally safety representative in several regional rallies, including the Acropolis Rally in Greece, Middle East rallies under the supervision of the International Automobile Federation, and in Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon and Cyprus rallies, in addition to the Sultanate of Oman’s rallies, the last of which was this year in Suhar and in Qatar also. Al Balushi’s task will be to ensure that safety procedures are implemented in the Saudi Rally before the entering of rally cars to the rally stages.



Gujarat Titans’ Sai Sudharsan in action. — Reuters

Gill, Sudharsan knocks help Gujarat boss Kolkata

SHUBMAN GILL led from the front with his 55-ball 90 to help Gujarat Titans hammer holders Kolkata Knight Riders by 39 runs on Monday and consolidate their top spot in the IPL. Gujarat posted 198-3 after Sai Sudharsan, who hit 52, and Gill put on 114 runs for the first wicket to lay the foundations of the total at Kolkata’s Eden Gardens. The bowlers then combined to restrict Kolkata to 159-8 with skipper Ajinkya Rahane playing a lone hand with 50 to register Gujarat’s sixth win in eight matches. Kolkata, who won their third title of the popular T20 tournament last year, slipped to their fifth defeat in eight matches. The batters set up victory for Gujarat with England’s Jos Buttler hitting an unbeaten 41 off 23 balls as he steered the team after the opening stand between the Sudharsan and Gill. “We never talk about that one of us has to stay until the end,” player-of-the-match Gill said on being asked about one of their top three staying through to the end in most of the matches. “We just talk about how we can score runs

in these conditions and how to take the game deep.” Gill was watchful at the start but the left-handed Sudharsan hit a few boundaries to get Gujarat going after being invited to bat first. Gill took on Moeen Ali with a six and two fours in the second spell for the former England spinner and soon reached his third half-century of the season. The in-form Sudharsan raised his fifth 50-plus score in this edition as he went past 400 runs to nudge out Lucknow Super Giants batsman Nicholas Pooran (368) as the leading batsman. Buttler is third with 356 runs in his eight innings. KOLKATA’S BATTING STRUGGLES Andre Russell handed Kolkata its first breakthrough as the pace bowler dismissed Sudharsan after his 36-ball knock but he came under attack from Buttler who hit him for three successive boundaries. Buttler and Gill kept up the attack before fast bowler Vaibhav Arora denied the Gujarat captain his hundred. Buttler lost another partner in Rahul Tewatia but Gujarat finished with a flourish in a 18-run 20th over from Arora.

In reply, Kolkata lost Rahmanullah Gurbaz in the first over of the chase when Mohammed Siraj got the Afghanistan wicketkeeper-batsman trapped lbw for one. Sunil Narine, a left-hand opener, and Rahane hit back with regular boundaries in a brisk partnership of 41 until Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan broke the stand. Rashid had Narine caught out for 17 before Rahane and Venkatesh Iyer put on another stand to keep Kolkata in the hunt. Sai Kishore removed Iyer on 14 and fellow spinner Washington Sundar sent back Rahane stumped out after his fifty to derail the chase. “When you are chasing 199, you expect a good opening start with the batters, that’s where we are struggling throughout this tournament,” said Rahane. “I thought 199 chaseable on this wicket, we bowled really well, we faltered with our batting.” Russell added some spark with a 15-ball 21 as he hit three fours and one six but Rashid picked up his second wicket to remove him thanks to a Buttler stumping. Season’s leading bowler Prasidh Krishna then took two wickets in one over to take his count to 16. — AFP

Oman U16 set for ACC West Zone Cup in Qatar

MUSCAT: As the ACC Men’s U16 West Zone Cup 2025 kicks off on April 23 in Qatar, the Oman U16 cricket team arrived in Doha with quiet confidence, a well-balanced squad, and the ambition to make their mark on the regional stage. Led by skipper Aryan Joshi, who joins the team fresh from the ICC U19 CWCQ Asia in Nepal along with Kavish Shah and Vignesh Karthikeyan, the squad is a vibrant mix of talent and youthful promise. Under the guidance of head coach Parviz al Balushi, the team has been shaped through a comprehensive selection process and rigorous training schedule. “We had more than 60 picked players from different schools and clubs participating in Oman’s junior domestic league to conduct selections



from,” said Al Balushi. “We picked the best squad that would suit the conditions along with match our team combination for the way we want to play our cricket.” That combination, Parviz added, is built not just on talent, but on cohesion and tactical clarity. “The side has gelled well and the team combination looks settled. We have worked along the fitness of the players

initially, phasing into the skills with target-specific net sessions and a series of practice games to give our boys a solid preparation,” he said. Several members of the team also play in Oman’s senior domestic leagues, bringing with them a level of maturity that belies their age. From top-order resilience to bowling depth, Oman’s squad offers versatility across departments.

“This is a unique composition of experience and youth at this level,” Al Balushi said. “We are evenly stable with our batting and bowling unit, which allows us to be flexible with our plans.” Oman launch their campaign against Saudi Arabia on April 23 at 9:30 am. The tournament continues with matches against Bahrain (April 25), hosts Qatar (April 28), Kuwait (May 1), and UAE (May 3), followed by the final on May 5. SQUAD: Aryan Joshi (captain), Kavish Shah, Mohammad Aseel, Guransh Singh, Christo Tredoux, Vihaan Sanjay Chauhan, Mohammad Eisa, Arav Pillai, Mathew Samuel Kevin, Sethmina Devin, Shravan Sharat, Hafiz Mohamed, Vignesh Karthikeyan, Ayush Shetty. Coach: Parviz al Balushi, Assistant coach: Amir Ali, Manager: Sher Mohd al Balushi.

SPORTS

HIT FOR SIX



Burnley players celebrate after being promoted to the Premier League. — Reuters

LEEDS, BURNLEY PROMOTED TO PREMIER LEAGUE

LONDON: Leeds United and Burnley won promotion to the Premier League on Monday as faltering Sheffield United were forced to settle for a place in the Championship play-offs.

Leeds, who last played in the top division in the 2022/23 season, humbled Stoke 6-0 at Elland Road, with Joel Piroe scoring four goals.

Daniel Farke’s men knew that if Sheffield United failed to beat Burnley in the later kick-off, they would be back in the Premier League.

Captain Josh Brownhill scored twice for Scott Parker’s Burnley, who have made an immediate return to the top flight.

Leeds and Burnley both have 94 points and neither can now be caught by Chris Wilder’s Sheffield United (86), who have won just one of their past five games.

Leeds, who suffered the agony of defeat to Southampton in last season’s Championship play-off final at Wembley, made short work of Stoke.

Dutch forward Piroe, who had not scored since late February, returned to form with a vengeance, celebrating a hat-trick in the 20th minute.

Junior Firpo made it four and Piroe, the club’s leading scorer this season, netted his fourth goal shortly before half-time.

The game was already long over as a contest but Wilfried Gnonto nodded a sixth goal in the 59th minute.

Farke and his players celebrated in front of their passionate fans at the final whistle but the champagne is still on ice.

The German, who has previously managed in the Premier League with Norwich, praised the way his team had coped with the pressure.

“To deliver such an emphatic performance is really amazing and all the credit goes to the boys for the way they have handled the situation and the spirit they have shown in recent weeks,” he told the BBC.

“It’s the fate of a striker that sometimes you have a dry period or a dip in form. Joel had this but he has worked so hard and got himself out of it.

“In the last few weeks his performances were better but the ball didn’t want to go in the net. It’s a bit like shaking a bottle of ketchup — all of a sudden everything comes out and that was a bit the case today.” Leeds wobbled from the start of March, winning just one in six games, raising fears that they would again have to settle for a place in the play-offs.

But the league’s top-scorers, with 89 goals, have now won their past four league games.

Burnley are nowhere near as prolific as their closest rivals, whom they will battle for the Championship title, but their superpower is their defence — they have conceded just 15 goals all season. — AFP



Sohar players celebrate after their win against Seeb.

Sohar shock OL leaders Seeb, Al Shabab thrash Ibri

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

SOHAR PULLED OFF a major upset by defeating league leaders Seeb 3-2 in a thrilling match held on Monday at the Sohar Sports Complex as part of Matchday 19 of the Omantel League.

Sohar opened the scoring in the 18th minute through Saud al Maqbali, followed by a second goal in the 37th minute from Mohsen Johar, who capitalised on a costly error by Seeb’s goalkeeper. Seeb responded in the 44th minute with a goal from Zaher al Aghbari, who netted a rebound off the crossbar.

Just two minutes into the second half, Abdullah al Balushi made it 3-1 for Sohar. Al Aghbari struck again in the 55th minute to bring Seeb closer, but despite several chances including shots by Jameel al Yahmadi and Aboukamara Seeb couldn’t find the equaliser. Sohar held on to secure the win.

With this victory, Sohar climbed to 21 points and temporarily escape the relegation zone, while Seeb remain on top with 47 points but suffer only their second defeat of the season.

SUR HOLD AL NASR
The match between Al Nasr and Sur ended in a goalless draw at the Al Saada Sports Complex.

The game began with moderate attacking intent from both sides. Al Nassr had the first



Al Shabab player celebrates a goal against Ibri.

notable chance through a shot by Abdul Fadel Saonina that went just wide, while Sur responded with a dangerous attempt from Mohammed al Najashi, brilliantly saved by goalkeeper Ibrahim al Rajhi. As the match progressed, the play was largely confined to the midfield with few clear chances.

In the second half, Al Nasr ramped up their attack after the introduction of substitute Osama Majdi. He nearly broke the deadlock in the 55th minute with a shot that struck the crossbar, followed by a header that was

stopped by Sur’s keeper. Sur, in turn, relied on counterattacks, with Badr al Farsi coming close from a free kick.

In the final minute, Sur’s Manea al Mukhaini was sent off for fouling Osama Majdi. However, Nassib al Ghilani failed to capitalise on the resulting free kick, and the match concluded in a 0-0 draw.

The result takes Al Nasr to 24 points in fifth place, while Sur remain bottom of the table with 14 points, deepening their relegation troubles.

AL SHABAB DOMINATE
Al Shabab secured a commanding 4-0 victory over hosts Ibri at the Ibri Sports Complex.

Shabab started aggressively and missed an early chance through Emerson in the 5th minute. Their pressure paid off in the 37th minute when Johnson Lima Do headed in a precise cross from Hatem al Roshdi to make it 1-0. Ibri came close to equalising before half-time, but Abdulaziz al Mandhari’s shot lacked danger. The second half saw continued dominance from Shabab, with Ahed al Hudhaifi doubling the lead in the 54th minute with a brilliant strike. He followed up with another well-executed goal in the 61st minute after dribbling past the defence. Despite timid attempts by Ibri to reduce the deficit, Mohammed al Ghafri sealed the win with a fourth goal in the 71st minute, finishing from inside the box.

The victory lifts Al Shabab to 26 points, solidifying their fourth-place position, while Ibri remain ninth with 20 points.

Pistons snap NBA playoff skid, Clippers beat Nuggets

LOS ANGELES: The Detroit Pistons snapped their record 15-game NBA playoff losing streak with a 100-94 victory over the New York Knicks on Monday to level their Eastern Conference first-round series at one game apiece.

Cade Cunningham scored 33 points with 12 rebounds and Dennis Schroder added 20 points off the bench — including a go-ahead three-pointer with 55.7 seconds left — as the Pistons thwarted another Knicks’ rally bid. The Los Angeles Clippers also bounced back from a game-one defeat, beating the Nuggets 105-102 in Denver behind a brilliant 39-point performance from Kawhi Leonard.

Leonard made 15 of his 19 shot attempts and the Clippers withstood NBA Most Valuable Player Nikola

Jokic’s triple-double of 26 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists to level their Western Conference series at 1-1.

The Pistons, in the playoffs for the first time since 2019, notched their first playoff victory since game four of the 2008 Eastern Conference finals against the Boston Celtics.

Two days after the Knicks authored a 21-0 scoring run to rally in game one, the Pistons were pushed to the finish in a fast-paced, physical encounter at Madison Square Garden.

They led by as many as 15 in the third quarter, but the Knicks had cut the deficit to eight going into the final period.

New York star Jalen Brunson scored 14 of his 37 points in the fourth and fed Josh Hart for a dunk that tied it at 94-94 with 1:15 to play.



Detroit Pistons’ Cade Cunningham (2) takes a shot against New York Knicks’ OG Anunoby (8) and Miles McBride (2) during the third quarter of game two of the first round of the 2024 NBA Playoffs at Madison Square Garden. — Reuters

But Schroder answered immediately, drilling a three-pointer that put the Pistons ahead for good.

The Knicks came up empty on three straight possessions while Schroder and Jalen Duren connected at the free-throw line to seal Detroit’s win. Tobias Harris scored 15 points and pulled down 13 rebounds and Duren had 12 points and 13 boards for the Pistons, who host game three on Thursday. “Feels good to represent the city like we did tonight,” Cunningham said. “It’s something that the city’s been waiting on a long time, so we feel good about it and we’re ready to get back to the crib and perform in front of them.”

Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau was irked at what he considered inconsistent officiating, noting that

the Pistons went to the free-throw line 34 times to the Knicks’ 19.

“If Cunningham’s driving and there’s marginal contact and he’s getting to the line, then Jalen (Brunson) deserves to be getting to the line,” Thibodeau said.

VINTAGE LEONARD
It was another pulsating contest in Denver, where the Clippers bounced back from a narrow game-one overtime defeat thanks to a vintage performance from Leonard — an NBA champion in 2014 and 2019 who has been hindered by injury in recent seasons. Leonard set the tone early, making nine of his 10 shots in the first half and sending the Clippers into halftime up 55-52 with a buzzer-beating three-pointer. — AFP



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15,000 tpa of aluminium recycled as Oman advances in circular economy

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

THE second edition of the Aluminium Recycling Forum, hosted by Sohar Aluminium in collaboration with the Environment Authority, convened senior policymakers, industrial leaders and sustainability experts in Muscat to chart the future of aluminium recycling in the Sultanate of Oman.

Held under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, the forum sought to strengthen national efforts towards circular economy



Featuring a robust line-up of national and international experts, the forum tackled key themes including scrap collection challenges, regulatory frameworks and innovations in recycling technology.

adoption, enhance domestic recycling capacity and unlock new investment opportunities across Oman's growing aluminium sector.

Featuring a robust line-up of national and international experts, the forum tackled key themes including scrap collection challenges, regulatory frameworks and innovations in recycling

technology.

Discussions also addressed how Oman's industrial strategies align with global sustainability frameworks, particularly in the context of climate goals and green industrial transformation.

Speaking at the opening session, Eng Said al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium, emphasised the strategic opportunity Oman holds in becoming a regional leader in aluminium recycling.

"We firmly believe that Oman has the potential to become a major aluminium recycling hub servicing the entire GCC," said Al Masoudi.

"At Sohar Aluminium, we recycled 3,500 tonnes of aluminium scrap in 2024, and we

are committed to exceeding that in 2025.

"With the Environment Authority's March 2025 decision to suspend export permits for non-hazardous waste — including aluminium and copper scrap — we now have a unique opportunity to scale up local recycling, reduce reliance on imports and create jobs."

He noted that aluminium is an inherently circular material, requiring 95 per cent less energy to recycle than primary production, which in turn reduces greenhouse gas emissions by up to 97 per cent.

"This is not just an environmental obligation — it's a national economic opportunity."

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بنك الإسكان العُماني
OMAN HOUSING BANK

Bank Board of Directors' Report for 2024

Dear Shareholders,

I would like to begin by extending my deepest appreciation for your unwavering support of Oman Housing Bank. On behalf of the Board of Directors and myself, I am privileged to present the Board's annual report, detailing the Bank's operational performance, key achievements, and financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2024.

Economic Outlook

The Sultanate of Oman has been able to effectively address the challenges posed by the global economic environment, achieving a financial surplus despite the decline in oil prices. This performance reflects the success of the Sultanate's economic diversification strategy, which is based on sustainable investments in priority sectors, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. Prudent fiscal policies have contributed to reducing the public debt-to-GDP ratio to 34%, along with a 5.3% decrease in total public debt. These achievements have been recognized by international credit rating agencies. S&P upgraded the Sultanate's rating to BBB - (investment grade), while Fitch and Moody's improved their outlook for the Sultanate's economy, reflecting growing confidence in the strength of the country's public finances. The successful initial public offerings of OQEP and OQBI also confirmed the government's strategic approach to asset management and strengthening financial markets.

The 2025 State Budget builds on these solid foundations, continuing to implement fiscal discipline with a focus on stimulating economic growth through targeted investments in education, health, and infrastructure, along with strengthening social safety nets. The budget estimates a financial deficit of OMR 620 million, reflecting the government's commitment to balanced financial planning. OMR 900 million has also been allocated to development projects and programs within the budgets of civil ministries and government units, including OMR 44 million to support governorate development programs and OMR 50 million to finance initiatives aimed at enhancing employment opportunities in the private sector. Furthermore, the increased focus on public-private partnership programs in the education, health, communications, and information technology sectors reflects a strategic approach to promoting sustainable growth, increasing the efficiency of public spending, and empowering the national workforce. The government has also paid great attention to the housing and urban planning sector by completing the first phase of Sultan Haitham City, granting housing assistance to (1,200) eligible cases, and allocating an amount of OMR 73 million to support the interest on development and housing loans within the approved budget for 2025.

Lending Activity

During the year, thanks to the continued government support, the bank was able to continue providing subsidized loans to citizens, as follows: The number of approved loans reached (3,250) loans, with a value of OMR 145.10 million by the end of 2024. The bank also sought to extend its services to various governorates of the Sultanate, especially areas outside Muscat Governorate. The number of loans granted to citizens in governorates outside Muscat Governorate reached (2,413) loans, with a total value of OMR 107 million, representing (74%) of the total lending activity.

The total number of subsidized loans provided by the bank to citizens since its establishment in 1977 until the end of 2024 across the bank's branches spread across the Sultanate's various governorates and states amounted to 69,028 loans, with a total value exceeding OMR 1.8 billion. These loans included 28,088 loans to Muscat Governorate, with a total value of OMR 614.8 billion, representing 41% of the total number of loans granted. The number of subsidized loans granted to citizens in areas outside Muscat Governorate amounted to 40,940 loans, with a total value of OMR 1.2 billion, representing 59% of the total number of loans granted and 66% of their value.

Iskan Program

Since the launch of the Iskan Program in January 2024, with the aim of tackling the challenges of waiting lists, the program has achieved tangible success by providing a digital experience for customers to process their applications through participating banks. The total value of loans approved by December 31, 2024, amounted to OMR 50.5 million, enabling 1,130 Omani families to obtain suitable housing.

The digital experience offered by the bank through the "Iskan Platform" is witnessing positive customer response. Registration on the platform has reached 48% of the total waiting lists referred to the program, with a significant increase of 44% by the third quarter of 2024. The bank is continuously developing this platform to improve and expand the services provided to its valued customers.

The success of this program in its first year would not have been possible without the support of the esteemed Ministry of Finance and the concerted and collaborative efforts between the bank and the participating banks. The number of participating banks by the end of 2024 reached 6 conventional and Islamic banks (National Bank of Oman - Muzn Islamic Window - Alizz Islamic Bank - Bank Nizwa - Ahli Bank - Ahli Islamic Bank). In addition, at the beginning of 2025, a contract was signed with Bank Sohar International to join the program.

Financial Results

With regard to financial results, and by reviewing the balance sheet figures for the fiscal year ending 12/31/2024, it is clear that the bank has achieved positive results, recording good growth rates in most financial indicators. The bank's total assets increased at the end of 2024 to reach OMR 896.8 million, compared to OMR 791.6 million at the end of 2023, i.e. an increase of 13%. The growth in assets was mainly based on the increase in the housing loan portfolio, as the total loan portfolio increased on December 31, 2024 to reach OMR 858.5 million compared to OMR 772.7 million at the end of 2023, i.e. a growth rate of 11%. Total shareholders' equity also increased to reach OMR 349.7 million compared to OMR 336.5 million at the end of the previous year, an increase rate of 4%. The bank achieved net profits amounting to OMR 21.9 million, which increased by (1%) over the profits of 2023, which amounted to OMR 21.7 million.

The bank is focused on growing its assets while maintaining their quality and durability, strengthening the bank's financial position and enabling it to achieve its objectives with the required effectiveness.

Human Capital

Based on the bank's vision to empower its employees, 88 training programs were implemented for employees, contributing to the development of their professional skills and enhancing their capabilities in various disciplines. The bank also supported 45 employees in obtaining nine accredited professional certificates, contributing to raising the level of professional qualifications of human resources and enhancing their competitiveness in the banking sector.

As part of promoting a culture of continuous learning and developing human capital, Oman Housing Bank launched the LinkedIn Learning platform, which provides employees with access to more than 23,000 online training courses. This initiative aims to enable employees to self-learn according to their professional needs, contributing to raising performance and enhancing institutional efficiency. Oman Housing Bank is the first bank in the Sultanate of Oman to provide the LinkedIn Learning platform to all its employees, reflecting its commitment to implementing the latest innovative educational solutions and investing in human capital.

Finally, the bank's Board of Directors extends its sincere thanks and gratitude to the wise government for its continued support to the bank, enabling it to continue providing its services to citizens and achieving the goals and objectives for which it was established.

The Board also extends its sincere thanks to the esteemed shareholders, the Oman Investment Authority, the Central Bank of Oman, and all ministries and government institutions for their fruitful cooperation with the Bank in fulfilling its duties and mission. We also extend our thanks to the Bank's employees for their dedication, loyalty, and efforts to serve and advance this institution.

May God grant all of us continued success in serving our beloved Oman under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said (may God protect and preserve him). We pray to God Almighty to grant His Majesty good health, well-being, and a long life, and to bless the Omani people with goodness and prosperity.

Salaam Said Salim Al Shaqsi
Chairman

Assets and Liabilities as of 31 December 2024

RO, 000's

Assets	Current Year 2024	Previous Year 2023	Liabilities	Current Year 2024	Previous Year 2023
1. Cash	195	220	1. Deposits (incl. Govt.)	-	-
2. Balances with CBO	14,535	14,862	a. Demand	-	-
3. Capital Deposit with CBO	-	-	b. Savings and call	61,714	25,928
4. Government & other Securities	-	-	c. Term deposit	163,423	99,007
5. Treasury Bills & Other Bills	-	-	2. Certificate of Deposits	-	-
6. Due from H.O., branches, principal shareholders & affiliates abroad	-	-	3. Due to H.O., branches, principal shareholders & affiliates abroad	-	-
7. Due from banks:			4. Due to Banks:		
i. Placements	19,084	156	i. Placements	31,092	35,098
ii. Loans & Advances	-	-	ii. Borrowings	274,072	280,367
8. Other Money Market Placements	-	-	5. Other Money Market Deposits	-	-
9. Investments	-	-	6. Borrowings from CBO	-	-
10. Loans and advances	858,503	772,704	7. Capital	100,000	100,000
11. Property, equipment and software	4,357	3,476	8. Reserves	127,923	122,311
12. Losses carried forward	-	-	9. Retained Earnings	121,763	114,147
			10. Capital Bonds	-	-
13. Other Assets	180	211	11. Other Liabilities	16,867	14,771
Total Assets	896,854	791,629	Total Liabilities	896,854	791,629
ECL provision & Reserved Banking and Administrative	9,191	8,040			

Profit and Loss Account for the year ended 31 December 2024

RO, 000's

Details	Current Year 2024	Previous Year 2023
Gross Interest Income	49,413	45,030
Interest Expense	(17,567)	(14,225)
Net Interest Income	31,846	30,805
Other Operating Income	-	-
1. Dividend Income	-	-
2. Net Fee & Commission Income	1,144	1,158
3. Net Foreign Exchange Income/(Loss)	299	(665)
4. Net Income from dealing in securities	-	-
5. Net Income from Investment Securities	-	-
Other Income	-	-
Gross Income	33,289	31,298
General Administrative Expenses	(10,005)	(7,762)
Depreciation	(202)	(488)
Total Operating Costs	(10,207)	(8,250)
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Loans & Advances	(1,174)	(1,367)
ECL Allowance charged (net) for Others	2	25
Profit for the year after loan loss provisions	21,910	21,706
Any other comprehensive income for the year	-	-
Total Comprehensive Income for the year	21,910	21,706

ADVERTORIALS

ONEROOF



The purpose-designed hub offers SMEs and corporates access to tailored telecom solutions and value-added services, all under one roof.

VODAFONE OMAN OPENS FIRST-EVER BUSINESS HUB

MUSCAT: Marking a new chapter in its journey to reshape business connectivity, Vodafone Oman opened its first-ever Business Hub in the Sultanate of Oman at Active Oman.

Building on the momentum of its successful entry into the enterprise segment in 2024, the purpose-designed Hub offers SMEs and corporates access to tailored telecom solutions and value-added services, all under one roof.

The new space represents a physical extension of Vodafone Oman's connected tech-telco ecosystem, created to simplify how businesses interact with their telecom partner.

From onboarding and consultations to services and support, the Hub brings together digital convenience and in-person expertise, enabling businesses to navigate their growth journeys with greater clarity, speed and confidence.

Eng Mohammed al Alawi, Head of Enterprise at Vodafone Oman, said: "As Oman's business landscape evolves, so do the expectations of its enterprises.

"Today's companies, especially SMEs, are looking for more than just connectivity; they want simplicity, speed and partners who understand their needs.

"The Business Hub is one way in which we are ensuring that we continue to be part of our customers' growth every step of the way."

The new Hub brings together Vodafone's full portfolio of enterprise services from advanced connectivity and mobility to cybersecurity and IoT.

Business customers can explore BLACK for Business postpaid plans, Makani Internet, MaxImpact Messaging for bulk campaigns, Mobile Private Network (MPN), as well as tailored ERP and IoT solutions, all designed to scale with evolving business needs.

More than just a customer touchpoint, it is the first-of-its-kind to integrate government-related services for business customers, including SANAD service counters, making it easier for customers to complete key administrative processes in one place.

Vodafone has also joined hands with partners like Oman Automobile Association, Action Point and Strike Padel to deliver exclusive experiences, positioning the Hub as a space that supports operational needs while fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation.

As part of this collaboration, business customers will benefit from a range of limited-time offers and curated activations, adding tangible value to their experience from day one.

‘SMART CITIES TALKS’ INITIATIVE RAISES AWARENESS ON CITIES OF THE FUTURE

MUSCAT: Communities Connect Cities (C3), in collaboration with the Oman IT Society, launches the first event of the Smart Cities Talks initiative — a knowledge-based platform designed to simplify the concepts of smart cities and the future of urban living.

The initiative provides interactive discussions and workshops that explore the latest digital transformations shaping our world.

The inaugural event took place on Monday, April 15, 2025, with a workshop titled: "The AI



Revolution: From Text Generation to Studio Ghibli", held at the Youth Centre – Future Hall.

This workshop spotlights the creative applications of generative AI, especially in the fields of text,

image and video generation. It included real-world demonstrations and engaging activities that showcase how these technologies are shaping daily life and the design of future cities.

The initiative aimed to build an open platform for dialogue, bringing together experts, creators and tech enthusiasts to raise public awareness about the importance of digital transformation and the development of smart, sustainable cities — aligning with Oman Vision 2040.

MG Motor recognised for innovation and excellence

MG Motor Oman, a division of MHD ACERE, proudly announces its dual victory at the prestigious MG Distributor Conference held in Dubai on April 15, 2025. The brand was honoured with awards for Best Corporate Marketing and Best Customer Experience, solidifying its position as a regional leader in innovation, customer engagement and brand strategy.

The Best Corporate Marketing award recognised MG Motor Oman's holistic and strategically integrated approach to corporate outreach. The Corporate Programme, a first-of-its-kind, brought the MG brand experience directly into the workplaces of Oman's top companies. MG Motor Oman built a 360° Corporate Marketing Ecosystem, combining on-ground activations with targeted digital engagement, employee-exclusive benefits



The accolades reflect MG Motor Oman's commitment to driving growth through meaningful engagement and world-class service.

and long-term partnership strategies. By collaborating with large organisations across banking, telecom, oil and gas, and government sectors, MG was able to embed itself within the daily lives of high-potential working professionals.

This multi-pronged strategy not only delivered high-quality leads and boosted test drive volumes, but also established

MG as a trusted mobility partner for Oman's workforce, reinforcing the brand's positioning beyond showrooms.

In parallel, the Best Customer Experience award celebrated MG Oman's consistent focus on personalised service, seamless after-sales support and customer-centric innovation. From digital service tracking tools to VIP

test drive experiences and rapid response service teams, MG has transformed every touchpoint of the customer journey.

Commenting on this achievement, Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, said: "These awards are a testament to the power of innovation, agility and listening to the voice of the customer. At MG Motor Oman, we believe that marketing is not just about visibility — it's about value, connection and creating experiences that resonate.

"I'm incredibly proud of our team for bringing bold ideas to life and for consistently delivering a customer experience that sets us apart in the region."

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

ROLLS-ROYCE MOTOR CARS MUSCAT LAUNCHES BLACK BADGE SPECTRE

MUSCAT: A new era of defiant luxury has arrived in Oman. Rolls-Royce Motor Cars Muscat revealed Black Badge Spectre — the marque's alter ego, amplified. This momentous debut signified the arrival of a new force in ultra-luxury motoring — one that redefines power, presence and prestige.

With an unprecedented 1075 Nm torque and 485 kW (659 hp) power output, Black Badge Spectre stands as the most powerful Rolls-Royce ever.

Created for bold individuals who redefine luxury, Black Badge Spectre delivers effortless intensity, precision and immediacy. Engineered to meet the extraordinary expectations of Black Badge clients, it reflects their demand for unparalleled craftsmanship and dynamic edge.

By analysing anonymised driving data across vast distances, Rolls-Royce identified a



Black Badge Spectre stands as the most powerful Rolls-Royce ever.

preference for short bursts of power over sustained acceleration - insight that shaped Spectre's dramatic and intense performance.

This validation underscores Black Badge Spectre's role as the definitive expression of power,

precision and daring character.

HARNESSING FORMIDABLE POWER

Black Badge Spectre takes power to the extreme with two advanced powertrain innovations. Inspired by Rolls-Royce's aviation legacy, these functions mirror the burst-power capabilities of the legendary Merlin engine.

Infinity Mode, activated via the ∞ button, unlocks the full 485 kW (659 hp) output for an immediate, heightened throttle response, with the dials intensifying to match the car's dynamic shift.

Spirited Mode delivers an instant acceleration surge. Engaged while stationary, the driver fully depresses the brake and throttle, waits for a haptic and visual signal, then releases the brake to unleash 1075 Nm of torque — propelling the car from 0-60 mph in just 4.1 seconds.

BYD Seal: An all-electric ocean-inspired sedan

MUSCAT: Dive into futuristic experiences and embrace the shift to all-electric vehicles with BYD. Begin your electrifying journey with the BYD Seal, a dynamic all-electric sedan. Experience the thrill of high performance and cutting-edge technology, perfectly blended with BYD's advanced innovations.

Designed to meet the growing demand for premium electric vehicles, the BYD Seal represents a significant leap forward in the future of mobility.

The BYD Seal is an all-wheel drive electric five-seater that embraces BYD's Super DM (Dual Mode) Technology. This C-segment family sedan is designed to be spacious, practical, safe and comfortable, all while featuring BYD's intelligent technology. It is a pure-electric car that harnesses the power of electric,



It is a pure-electric car that harnesses the power of electric, and delivers enhanced driving performance for all.

and delivers enhanced driving performance for all. Powered by BYD's revolutionary Blade Battery technology, the SEAL offers an

impressive range of 570 km on a full charge, making every journey truly remarkable. Its dual-motor all-wheel-drive system delivers

exhilarating acceleration, achieving 0-100 km/h in just 3.8 seconds.

Inspired by nature and the ocean, the BYD Seal's aerodynamic design enhances both energy efficiency and the driving experience while exuding elegance. Its sleek silhouette, bold front grille, and LED lighting details make it appealing from every angle.

Feel empowered and take control of your ride with the sporty, premium leather interiors, augmented by BYD's revolutionary 15.6-inch rotatable multimedia touchscreen, a 10.25-inch multi-information display, HIFI Dynaudio Premium Sound with 12 state-of-the-art speakers, a panoramic sunroof, wireless charger for smartphones and practical storage up to 400L in the rear and additional 53L storage in the front, among other

exciting features. Prioritising safety and convenience, the Seal is equipped with a wide range of safety features, including lane-keeping assist, adaptive cruise control and automatic emergency braking, anti-lock braking system, Forward Crossing Traffic Alert, Front Rain-Sensing Wiper, Intelligent Speed Limit Control, Predictive Collision Warning (PCW) and front and rear parking sensors to deliver peace of mind.

Customers are invited to experience the electrifying performance and innovative features of the Seal at BYD showrooms in Al Wattayah, Al Mouj and Mall of Oman. Visit the showrooms to witness BYD's transformative technologies and gain a deeper understanding of how BYD can change your life.

BUSINESS

BANKINGCONFERENCE

CBFS CONFERENCE
EXPLORES AI’S ROLE
IN BANKING AND
FINANCE



CBFS hosts international conference exploring AI’s transformative role in banking and finance.

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

The College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) is hosting the third International Conference on Banking, Finance and Business (ICBFB 2025) from April 22–24 under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Held in strategic partnership with the Central Bank of Oman, Financial Services Authority, and Oman Banks Association, the conference also enjoyed academic collaboration with renowned institutions like the University of Portsmouth (UK) and ISACA Muscat Chapter.

Themed “Applications of Artificial Intelligence in Banking and Finance: Opportunities and Challenges”, ICBFB 2025 brings together academic researchers, industry practitioners, and technology innovators to talk about the future of AI in financial services. Topics range from evolving business models and AI-powered innovation to data-driven research and real-world implementation.

In opening remarks, Dr Zahran al Salti, Dean, College of Banking and Financial Studies, stated “The third edition of the conference will be devoted to applications of artificial intelligence in banking and finance, and both opportunities and challenges will be addressed.”

Dr Al Salti added: “This event is part of the broader initiative of the university to foster scientific research and knowledge transfer. It is designed to provide a forum for the exploration of key issues in AI, finance, and banking. The conference is expected to develop a deep understanding of the challenges as well as opportunities in these fields, offering innovative solutions and best practices based on expert counsel.”

“There will be a range of scientific papers and discussion sessions providing great insights. The conference is being staged as Oman remains on its digital transformation in accordance with the Oman Vision 2040, which exploits developments in information and communication technology,” he stated.

A key highlight of the event was the CBFS AI Expo, inaugurated by Ahmed al Musallami, Governor of the Central Bank of Oman. The expo featured over 14 AI companies with next-generation business intelligence and financial technology solutions, and it attracted strong interest from the corporate and entrepreneurial communities.

Dr Ali al Shidhani, Under-Secretary of Communication and Information Technology at the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Information Technology, remarked on the matter, “I believe AI can solve a host of pressing challenges facing the banking and finance sector. From fraud detection and credit scoring to algorithmic trading and personalised financial services, AI is already proving transformative.”

Regulation key to protect recycling sector in Oman

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 22

AMID growing concerns over resource constraints and market distortions in Oman’s aluminium recycling sector, Mohammad Azam, CEO of Silver Star Copper & Aluminum Smelting LLC, has called for urgent regulatory reforms to safeguard the future of the industry and encourage long-term investment.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Aluminium Recycling Forum, Azam highlighted the strategic importance of feedstock security and a fair competitive environment, warning that unregulated market activity could jeopardize the viability of serious industrial players.

“We currently operate one of the most advanced facilities in the sector, but we are facing a serious material shortage,” Azam said.

“This isn’t just a logistical issue—it’s a strategic threat. Without access to raw materials, we cannot fully utilize our production capacity or justify further investment, even though we are ready and committed.”

Silver Star, one of Oman’s leading recyclers, has invested heavily in advanced technology and skilled labor to deliver high-value aluminium products.



‘Without access to raw materials, we cannot fully utilise our production capacity or justify further investment,’ Mohammad Azam, CEO of Silver Star Copper & Aluminum Smelting. Picture for illustration only.

However, inconsistent access to recyclable material remains a key obstacle.

Azam also expressed concern over the rise of small-scale operators entering the market without proper licensing or regulatory oversight.

“Some are setting up unregulated furnaces, and if this continues unchecked, it will be difficult for serious players like us to survive, let alone scale,” he warned. “We are not against competition—on the contrary, we welcome it. But it must be under clear and fair regulatory frameworks.”

He emphasized that informal operators often fail to create jobs or contribute meaningfully to the national economy, while potentially undermining pricing structures and operational standards in the market.

“Large industrial recyclers like us are creating real value, driving innovation, and contributing to Oman’s economy,” Azam noted.

“We cannot allow the aluminium sector to go the same way as the global steel industry, where unregulated recyclers have distorted the market with little accountability.”

In addition to material shortages, Silver Star is also contending with volatile scrap pricing—exacerbated by under-declared exports and inconsistent enforcement of customs regulations.

“We’re not just collecting

15,000 tpa of aluminium recycled as Oman advances circular economy

FROM PAGE 13

Delivering a keynote address, Mahmood Dailami, Secretary-General of the Gulf Aluminium Council, placed Oman’s efforts in a broader regional context.

“The aluminium industry accounts for nearly 2 per cent of global industrial CO₂ emissions — largely driven by energy-intensive processes.

“In the Gulf, we have a unique opportunity to change that through recycling,” said Dailami. He stressed that while renewable energy and next-generation smelting offer promise, recycling remains the most immediate and realistic path to reduce the industry’s carbon footprint.

“Despite producing nearly half a million tonnes of recyclable aluminium annually, the region recycles less than 30 per cent. To unlock this untapped value, we must address regulatory gaps, expand remelting infrastructure and build a transparent, well-regulated secondary market.

Forums like this are not merely local events — they are global imperatives to build a circular, low-carbon future.”

Dr Mohammed al Kalbani, Director-General of Environmental Affairs at the Environment Authority, echoed these sentiments, citing Oman’s rapid progress: “Oman is charting a bold path towards a circular economy, with over 83 recycling facilities now operational and national recycling rates rising from 25 per cent in 2022 to more than 40 per cent in 2024.

“Our aluminium scrap recycling sector alone now processes over 15,000 tonnes annually, positioning the Sultanate of Oman as a future leader in sustainable metals recovery across the GCC.”

Eng Abdullah al Rawahi, Head of the Industrial Strategy Implementation Section at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, outlined key policy measures currently being developed to

support and regulate Oman’s recycling sector.

“We’ve already begun implementing several policies aimed at controlling the export of key recyclable materials such as aluminium, iron, used tyres, and other industrial waste.

“One of the recent decisions specifically focuses on restricting the export of these materials to prioritise domestic processing,” he said. Al Rawahi also referenced the launch of a new digital transformation platform, developed in collaboration with be’ah and the Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, as a key step towards improving efficiency and oversight across the recycling value chain.

“We’ve worked closely with be’ah to develop a digital platform that will enhance traceability and transparency across the recycling process.

“This platform is designed to ensure material availability for local recycling plants and to offer deeper insights for both

investors and regulators.”

He further highlighted the importance of improving access to financing, a persistent challenge facing recycling centres in Oman. “We recognise that funding remains a key challenge for recycling centres.

“We are currently exploring innovative solutions, including the development of alternative fuel products from waste materials. These policy tools are still under development, but we welcome suggestions and amendments from industry stakeholders.”

The forum featured two focused panel discussions.

The first examined the technical and regulatory barriers hindering scrap collection and recycling operations. Experts explored how smarter logistics, improved enforcement, and clearer policy guidelines could enhance sector efficiency.

The second panel addressed the investment potential of the aluminium recycling industry.

SAFE HAVEN

Gold price hits record high above \$3,500



Gold reached \$3,500 an ounce for the first time on Tuesday, as US President Donald Trump’s tariffs and verbal attack against the Federal Reserve sent investors snapping up the safe haven asset. The precious metal reached an all-time high \$3,500.10 an ounce before pulling back to \$3,467.87.

Gold has hit a series of record highs in recent weeks as investors seek refuge amid a weakening dollar and following sharp losses across stock markets. — AFP

KEY MATERIALS

Korea asked not to export rare earth items



Beijing recently asked South Korean companies not to export products containing China’s rare earth minerals to US defence firms, the Korea Economic Daily reported on Tuesday.

The report said China’s commerce ministry delivered the message in letters to Korean companies which make power transformers, batteries, displays, electric vehicles, aerospace and medical equipment, all of which use the key materials. — Reuters

ROLL-OUT PLAN

Investors await details on affordable EVs



Tesla investors are anxious to know if plans to roll out a cheaper car and a robotaxi service this year are on track, and whether CEO Elon Musk is ready to ditch his role in the Trump administration soon and get back to managing the company more closely.

The EV maker is scheduled after market close on Tuesday to provide what is likely to be its most important update on operations since the launch of its Model 3 vehicle in 2017. — Reuters

OPINION

Trump tariffs torch chances of meeting with China’s Xi



MATTHEW WALSH

The writer is China & Mongolia correspondent at AFP

WITH his storm of tariffs on Chinese goods, US President Donald Trump has torched ties with Beijing and likely wrecked any hope of meeting his counterpart Xi Jinping in the near term, analysts say.

Since taking office in January, Trump’s maelstrom of import duties against friend and foe alike has rattled diplomats and pushed global markets to the brink of financial meltdown.

A screeching halt on further levies for most countries has calmed nerves — for now at least — but there has been no reprieve for China, accused by the US leader of trying to “screw” Washington. Adding to the tensions, talks between the two superpowers on international issues like climate change and opioid addiction seem to have stalled.

“Under Trump, China-US ties have sunk to the worst state of affairs short of a fairly large armed conflict,” Shi Yin hong, director of the Center for American Studies at Beijing’s Renmin University of China, said.

“Trump has unsheathed his dagger against China at a speed that exceeded many people’s imaginations,” he said.

After a flurry of tit-for-tat hikes, the United States now charges tariffs of 145 per cent on

many products imported from China, with cumulative duties on some goods reaching a staggering 245 per cent.

A furious Beijing has set a retaliatory toll of 125 per cent on goods entering from the United States, and dismissed further rises as pointless.

US-China relations are in “effectively a state of economic war”, Susan Thornton, who served as acting top US diplomat for East Asia during Trump’s first administration, said.

“China views Trump’s stated intent to... erect a ‘tariff wall against China’ as illegal and an existential threat,” Thornton, now a senior fellow at Yale’s Paul Tsai China Center, said.

NOB BACKING DOWN

Just a few weeks ago, multiple reports suggested Beijing and Washington were mulling a face-to-face meeting to coincide with the two leaders’ birthdays in June.

But recent events have effectively left those plans dead in the water.

Trump’s “rude and unreasonable” behaviour has made any talks in the first half of the year “very unlikely”, according to Wu Xinbo, director of the Centre for American Studies at Shanghai’s Fudan University.

Rosemary Foot, a professor and senior research fellow at Oxford University’s politics

Since taking office in January, Trump’s maelstrom of import duties against friend and foe alike has rattled diplomats and pushed global markets to the brink of financial meltdown. A screeching halt on further levies for most countries has calmed nerves — for now at least — but there has been no reprieve for China, accused by the US leader of trying to “screw” Washington.

and international relations department, said Beijing “would want to ensure that there would be some policy deliverables and Xi would be treated with respect”.

Trump has approached the trade conflict with a typical mixture of flattery, denigration and bombast — slamming China’s “lack of respect” while hailing Xi as a “smart guy” and talking up a prospective trade deal.

Ali Wyne, a senior research and advocacy adviser focusing on US-China ties at the International Crisis Group think tank, said neither Trump nor Xi “will want to convey that he has yielded to the other”.

The “likeliest impetus” for talks, he said, would be a scenario where both could claim victory — Trump by his willingness to keep ratcheting up economic pressure, and Xi by showing China’s resilience.

Rana Mitter, a professor of US-Asia relations at the Harvard Kennedy School, said a Trump-Xi summit was “still quite possible”, citing the mercurial US leader’s dizzying pivot from threatening war against North Korea in 2017 to meeting Kim Jong Un the following year.

“Beijing will not agree to meet if it looks as if they are conceding to the US, so behind-the-scenes diplomacy will likely be necessary,” Mitter said. — AFP

US MARKETS’ CRISIS POINT HINGES ON A TRIPLE THREAT

GABRIEL RUBIN

A selloff in US stocks, long-term government bonds and the dollar clearly traces back to policy choices by President Donald Trump’s administration.

Recent moves spawn a trio of worries: first, that a trade war will hit business and destabilize the United States’ role in the world; second, that a \$4.5 trillion tax cut plan could explode an already-historic fiscal deficit; and, finally, that pressure on Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell could warp monetary policy. Trump has not yet forced an irrevocable break, but cracks are spreading at an alarming pace.

Investors are piling into short-term US debt even as longer-term Treasuries sell off, a potential sign of hesitancy to bear the risk of erratic policy shifts. Yields on 20-year bonds topped 4.9% on Monday. Similarly, cash is moving into non-US assets as the dollar tumbles.

It makes some sense: Trump has imposed, then partially lifted, tariffs of a magnitude not seen in over a century, sparking worries of a break with the global community.

The consequences are slow to filter through into economic data, but early signs are arising. South Korean exports to the US tumbled 14% in April’s first 20 days from the year before, particularly hitting cars and parts.

The President places the onus on Powell, dubbing him “Mr. Too Late” for not lowering interest rates and warning that an economic slowdown could result.

The Fed chair is clear that he prioritizes keeping price pressures anchored — making any move unlikely as the public’s inflation expectations shift well above the Fed’s target.

Trump has pondered firing Powell in a legally uncertain maneuver that would threaten the independence safeguarding the central bank’s credibility, though advisers including Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent have pushed back, the Wall Street Journal reported.

Even if that one pillar of economic management remains intact, though, Republicans’ push for gigantic tax cuts is continuing, just as the US budget deficit has widened to a near-record \$1.3 trillion in the six months since October.

Negotiations are underway to stanch the red ink with spending cuts or revenue.

But the US sustains its fiscal profligacy thanks to international investors who treat Treasuries as the world’s risk-free asset.

If they demand a meaningful risk premium, financing \$36.6 trillion in national debt may become very expensive. With Trump pushing to bend monetary policy and the budget deficit potentially moving in the wrong direction, uncertainty is only rising.

Despite the gloom, US capital markets still have no clear substitute. An orderly transition when Powell’s term ends in 2026 could smooth institutional frictions. And tariff-reducing trade deals could ameliorate the worst of the economic damage. — Reuters

Oman-Russia relations on the rise: Trade to tourism

OMAN is home to a growing Russian-speaking community estimated at 2,000-3,000 people, including over 1,000 Russian nationals. According to Dr Igor Egorov, a businessman and long-time Gulf resident who leads the ten-member Board of Russian Compatriots in Oman, the community is increasingly vibrant and diverse. Many Russians have lived in Oman for more than 15 years, drawn by its warm climate, safety and renowned hospitality.

Professionals from Russia are active in sectors such as oil and gas, logistics, real estate and private investment, with many relocating to attractive freehold areas like Al Mouj and Muscat Bay. The influx is partly driven by economic reforms initiated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, which have eased the process of setting up businesses and opened doors to foreign investors.

Cultural and historical ties between the two nations run deep. One of the most respected biographies of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, Reformer on the Throne, was written by Russian author and historian Sergey Plekhanov, who lived and passed away in Salalah.

A significant number of Omanis have studied in Russian universities, and many continue to speak the language fluently. Interest in learning Russian and studying in Russia is steadily growing, with more young Omanis inquiring about academic opportunities.

Supporting this demand is Russian House Oman, an independent organisation based in Muscat that connects the two countries through three key areas: culture and tourism, education and business — particularly trade missions.

Led by Anna Popova, Russian House Oman regularly organises initiatives that foster cultural exchange and bilateral cooperation. One of the most remarkable events to date was the Spring Festival Maslenitsa 2025, held at Al Mouj Muscat’s Marsa Plaza. The festival, organised in collaboration with the



NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The writer is a Media and Communication Master’s graduate skilled in diverse writing formats, specialising in storytelling, branding, and in-depth journalism

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Russian Ministry of Culture, the Government of St. Petersburg, and the Russian Embassy, attracted over 20,000 visitors. Nearly 100 Russian artists participated, including the St. Petersburg Song and Dance Theatre “Moroshka” and the State Academic Honored Dance Ensemble of Dagestan “Lezginka.”

The event featured traditional music, dance, puppet theatre, matryoshka painting and interactive crafts. Beloved characters from the Soyuzmultfilm studio brought nostalgic joy to families, while Omani SMEs were given a platform to showcase local products.

“We are excited to make Maslenitsa an annual tradition and to bring more events and initiatives to Oman, and expanding them beyond Muscat,” Anna Popova said.

Russian businesses are increasingly looking towards Oman, particularly since the Sultanate of Oman’s recent push to diversify its economy. The nation’s neutrality, geographic position and strong infrastructure make it an appealing gateway to regional markets. Tech companies with Russian roots, such as Yango, are exploring opportunities to expand their services in Oman.

Current Russian-Omani business cooperation includes oil and gas technologies, IT, trade and agricultural commodities. Emerging sectors of interest include real estate development,

logistics and smart infrastructure.

These economic ties were further underscored during the current state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Moscow, at the invitation of President Vladimir Putin. The visit has focused on enhancing strategic cooperation, with both nations expressing strong interest in expanding partnerships in trade, logistics, energy, infrastructure and tourism.

The anticipated signing of a visa waiver agreement is expected to further facilitate business mobility and tourism between the two countries.

Beyond business, collaboration in education and scientific research is also gaining momentum. Several Russian universities are in discussions with Omani institutions to establish joint study programmes, research initiatives and student exchanges.

Over 50 young Russian Arabists are currently based in Muscat and Suhar, enhancing their Arabic language skills and contributing to academic exchange.

Oman is gaining popularity as a winter destination among Russian travellers, who are traditionally drawn to places like Egypt, Türkiye and the UAE. While Oman currently welcomes around 50,000 Russian visitors annually, this number is expected to grow with the planned introduction of direct flights and visa-free travel agreements between the two countries.

Visitors from Russia are consistently impressed by Oman’s diverse landscapes, traditional architecture, and unique blend of ocean and mountain environments.

The shared cultural values — such as respect for heritage, family and education — further deepen mutual appreciation.

Moreover, Russia’s large Muslim population, including Islamic centres in regions like Tatarstan and Chechnya, finds spiritual and cultural resonance in Oman’s inclusive environment. Efforts to expand direct flight routes — particularly between Salalah and Russian cities like St. Petersburg — could also promote off-the-beaten-path travel and encourage cultural exploration beyond the capitals.

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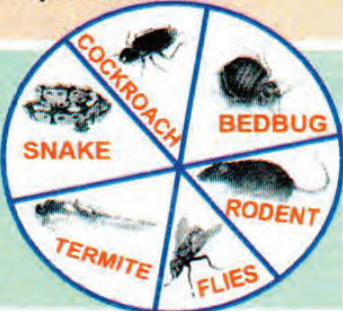
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L I F E S T Y L E

REAL ESTATE CHALLENGES IN OMAN AND THE RISE OF TECH-DRIVEN SOLUTIONS₂₀

ENTERTAINMENT

Pianist to perform London musical marathon



CLASSICAL Russian-German pianist Igor Levit takes to a London stage this week for an epic musical endurance test directed by the world-famous Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic.

Levit is aiming to be the first person to solo play “Vexations”, a single sheet of music repeated 840 times, in a public performance expected to last at least 16 hours.

The audience at central London’s Queen Elizabeth Hall will witness “silence, endurance, immobility and contemplation, where time ceases to exist”, according to Abramovic on the venue’s website.

Written by Erik Satie in 1893, “Vexations” is described as “one of classical music’s most simple, yet arduous and demanding works”.

Satie’s manuscript included a composer’s note instructing that it should be repeated 840 times, a feat which generally takes between 16-20 hours of continuous playing.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Levit livestreamed a “Vexations” performance from a Berlin studio. He also streamed dozens of “concerts” from his flat in the German city to highlight the challenges faced by artists during lockdown.

Although numerous pianists playing in succession have succeeded in performing “Vexations” over the years, it has rarely been completed in its entirety by a single musician. Tickets have been priced from £32 for a one hour slot with others available for the full-length performance.

Levit, who is a professor at Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media, has released a dozen albums of classical works including Beethoven’s complete piano sonatas and concertos by Brahms.

Levit told The Guardian daily he’d “never tell an audience” what they should hope to experience.

“But I would encourage people to just literally let it go. There is no agenda in this piece. There is no meaning to it,” he said.

“It’s just empty space, so just dive into that and let go. That would be the dream,” he added. Abramovic, 78, an art world icon, has earned worldwide acclaim for her work that has frequently tested her own physical and mental endurance.

In one of her best known early works Rhythm O, Abramovic invited audiences to interact with her in any way they chose which resulted in a loaded gun being held to her head. The “Vexations” performance will begin at 10:00 am (0900 GMT) on Thursday.

— AFP

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



LIFESTYLE

Visitors in costume from Canada pose while attending “Star Wars Celebration Japan 2025” at the Makuhari Messe convention centre in Chiba City, Chiba prefecture in suburban Tokyo. — AFP



FILM

Bollywood actor Varun Dhawan cuts a cake during his 38th pre-birthday celebrations in Mumbai. — AFP



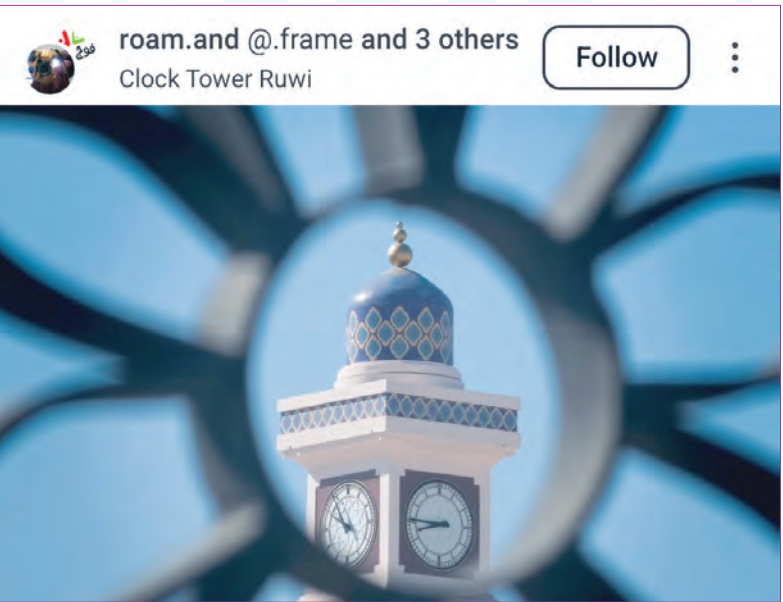
MUSIC

Spanish musician Enrique Bunbury gestures during press conference about his new tour called “Huracan Ambulante Tour 2025” in Mexico City. — AFP

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N America moviegoers embrace ‘Sinners’ on Easter weekend



NORTH AMERICAN moviegoers feasted on Warner Bros.’ vampire thriller “Sinners” as it debuted to an estimated \$45.6 million over the Easter holiday weekend, analysts said on Sunday.

The first original film from Ryan Coogler — director of Oscar-nominated “Black Panther” — has Michael B. Jordan playing twins who encounter a sinister force as they return home to Jim Crow-era Mississippi. Hailee Steinfeld and Delroy Lindo also star in the music-driven thriller.

Riding on “near-perfect reviews,” according to the Hollywood Reporter, “Sinners” outperformed another Warner Bros. blockbuster, “A Minecraft Movie,” which kept up its solid run with \$41.3 million, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations reported.

“Minecraft,” co-produced by Legendary Pictures, has recorded \$344.6 million in domestic ticket sales and \$376.2 million internationally for a total haul of \$720.8 million in just three weeks out. Analysts say it could be

the year’s first billion-dollar blockbuster.

Starring Jack Black and Jason Momoa, “Minecraft” already ranks as the all-time most successful film adaptation from a video game.

“The King of Kings,” an animated telling of Jesus’s life from indie media company Angel Studios, did well over Easter weekend, scoring an estimated \$17.3 million in ticket sales.

Oscar Isaac, as Jesus, leads the voice cast, along with Kenneth Branagh, Pierce Brosnan, Uma Thurman and Mark Hamill.

20th Century thriller “The Amateur” slipped one spot to fourth place, taking in \$7.2 million. Rami Malek plays a nerdy CIA analyst who turns vicious as he tracks down his wife’s killers. Rachel Brosnahan, Laurence Fishburne and Jon Bernthal also star.

And in fifth place, also down one spot from last weekend, was A24’s “Warfare,” at \$4.9 million.

— AFP



Morocco volunteers on Sahara clean-up mission

IT MAY BE THE gateway to the vast Sahara desert, but that doesn’t mean it’s free of that modern scourge of the environment — the rubbish humanity discards.

In southern Morocco, volunteers are hunting for waste embedded in the sand, and they don’t have to look far.

Bottles, plastic bags — “there are all kinds”, noted one helper who has come forward to join the initiative cleaning up the edge of a village bordering the Sahara.

The initiative marks the 20th International Nomads Festival, which is held in mid-April every year in M’Hamid El Ghizlane in Zagora province in southeast Morocco.

Some 50 people, gloved and equipped with rubbish bags, toiled away for five hours — and collected between 400 and 600 kilos of waste, the organisers estimated.

“Clean-up initiatives usually focus on beaches and forests,” festival founder Nouredine Bougrab, who lives in the village of some 6,600 people, said.

“But the desert also suffers from pollution.”

The campaign brings together artists, activists and foreign tourists, and is a call for the “world’s deserts to be protected”, said the 46-year-old.

Bougrab said the clean-up began at the northern entrance of the village “which was badly affected by pollution” and extended through to the other end of town and the beginning of the “Great Desert”.

The rubbish is “mainly linked to the massive production of plastic products, low recycling rates and atmospheric pollutants carried by the wind”, said anthropologist Mustapha Naimi.

Morocco has a population of almost 37 million and they generate about 8.2 million tonnes of household waste each year, according to the Ministry of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development.

“This is equivalent to 811 times the weight of the Eiffel Tower — enough to fill 2,780 Olympic swimming pools with compacted waste,” said Hassan Chouaouta, an international expert in sustainable strategic development.



Of this amount, “between six and seven per cent” is recycled, he said.

ANCIENT WAY OF LIFE

Their morning alarm went off “early”, according to one volunteer, New York-based French photographer Ronald Le Floch who said the initiative’s aim was “to show that it’s important to take care of this type of environment”.

Another helper was Ousmane Ag Oumar, a 35-year-old Malian member of Imarhan Timbuktu, a Tuareg blues group.

He called the waste a direct danger to livestock, which are essential to the subsistence of nomadic communities.

Anthropologist Naimi agreed: “Plastic waste harms the Saharan environment as it contaminates the land, pasture, rivers and nomadic areas,” he said.

Pastoral nomadism is a millennia-old way of life based on seasonal mobility and available pasture for livestock.

But it is on the wane in Morocco,

weakened by climate change and with nomadic communities now tending to stay in one place.

The most recent official census of nomads in Morocco dates to 2014, and returned a nomadic population of 25,274 — 63 per cent lower than a decade earlier in 2004.

Mohammed Mahdi, a professor of rural sociology, said the country’s nomads have “not benefited from much state support, compared to subsidies granted to agriculture, especially for products intended for export”.

“We give very little to nomadic herders, and a good number have gone bankrupt and given up,” he said.

Mohamed Oujaa, 50, is leader of The Sand Pigeons group who specialise in the “gnawa” music practised in the Maghreb by the descendants of black slaves.

For him, a clean environment is vital for future generations, and he hopes the initiative will be “just the first in a series of campaigns to clean up the desert”. —AFP

FEATURES

BY ARWA AL HASHIMI

FINDING a home in Muscat has turned into a real challenge for many people, as shown by the experience of Mohammed al Riyami.

Mohammed, an Omani citizen, began his search for a new home expecting it to be straightforward. He browsed listings on social media and various property apps, but quickly became frustrated. “I sent clear details about what I wanted,” he said. “But many brokers didn’t respond, and the ones who did offered properties that were too expensive or in areas I didn’t want.”

After weeks of searching without success, Mohammed realised he had to change what he was looking for. “I had to give up on some things I really wanted, which felt disappointing. It shouldn’t be this hard to find a home.”

This struggle highlights a worrying trend in Oman’s real estate market, which has become increasingly complicated. What was once a straightforward process involving a few local brokers has morphed into a challenging maze. The increase in listings on social media and non-specialised platforms, alongside rising property prices in popular areas, has left many potential buyers feeling lost.

Recent statistics indicate that the real estate market in Oman is indeed growing, albeit complexities exist. According to preliminary data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the value of real estate transactions in Oman saw a significant rise of 29.6% in 2024, reaching RO 3.38 billion compared to RO 2.61 billion in 2023. This growth reflects a broader trend seen in many countries worldwide, where property prices have surged due to a mixture of demand and low inventory.

Badr bin Salim al Rahbi recognised these challenges and saw a pressing need for improvement. After spending five years in real estate, he decided to create Doorly, a digital platform designed to streamline the home search process. “With Doorly, we aim to make the real estate process better for clients and brokers,” he explains. “We’re not competing with brokers; we work with them to build trust and help people find homes.”

A SHIFT IN GLOBAL REAL ESTATE PRACTICES

The ongoing challenges Mohammed faces reflect a global trend in real estate. In many countries, traditional buying and selling methods are increasingly giving way to technology-driven solutions. According to the National Association of Realtors, nearly 97% of homebuyers now start their property search online. The rise of digital platforms has created a more informed consumer base, but it has also led to greater expectations for convenience and transparency in the buying process.

In markets like the United States, the boom of property technology (proptech) firms exemplifies this shift. Companies like Zillow, Redfin and Opendoor have revolutionised how people buy and sell homes, offering innovative tools that make it easier for buyers to find properties quickly. These platforms allow users to filter search criteria, view detailed property information, and even conduct virtual tours from the comfort of their own homes.

Similarly, in the UK, platforms like Rightmove and Zoopla have become household names, simplifying the house-hunting process with user-friendly interfaces and extensive listings. This technological evolution not only streamlines the search, but enhances overall customer satisfaction — a factor that is becoming essential in competitive markets.

OMAN’S GROWING REAL ESTATE SCENE

In Oman, as the property market grows, the need for modern solutions becomes increasingly evident. The government has launched several initiatives aimed at boosting the real estate sector, including efforts to encourage foreign investment. The Oman Investment Authority has actively promoted partnerships between local and international developers to spur growth, which has helped attract more substantial projects and boost the overall market.

As potential buyers like Mohammed navigate a rapidly changing landscape, platforms like Doorly are stepping up to fill the gaps. The platform provides solutions



for both buying and renting properties. With an enhanced commitment to customer satisfaction, Doorly follows up with clients if there aren’t any suitable options available and even offers a money-back guarantee for consultation services if clients are unhappy with the results.

Currently, Doorly operates primarily in Muscat and Barka, aiming to simplify the home search process for residential properties. Clients can submit their requests through the mobile app, website, or even via WhatsApp. The system promises to protect client privacy while efficiently forwarding requests to brokers who can provide tailored offers.



Badr Salim al Rahbi
CEO, Doorly

THE ROAD AHEAD

As Doorly develops its business model, it positions itself as a significant player in both local and regional real estate markets. The platform has already garnered recognition, being named one of Oman’s top five emerging start-ups, celebrating its innovative approach to real estate challenges.

The lesson from Mohammed’s journey is clear: while the path to homeownership can be fraught with obstacles, the digital solutions emerging in Oman and around the world offer hope. With technology paving the way for a more streamlined and user-friendly process, individuals navigating the complex real estate terrain in Muscat may soon find that their search for a home is no longer the daunting challenge it once was.

The evolution of the real estate landscape in Oman mirrors trends seen across the globe, revealing the increasing interplay between traditional practices and innovative technology. As individuals like Mohammed al Riyami confront hurdles in their home searches, they can find solace in the fact that advancements in technology are reshaping what is possible in real estate.

Experts believe that as Oman’s economy diversifies and attracts more investment, the real estate sector will likely continue to grow. The introduction of smart technologies and AI-driven solutions like Doorly represents a shift towards a more efficient, customer-centric approach to property transactions. These advancements align with global real estate practices, which emphasise accessibility, transparency and user experience.

Furthermore, as many countries have embraced the digital revolution within the industry, Oman stands at a crucial juncture. By aligning itself with these global trends, Oman can create a real estate environment that not only meets the needs of its citizens, but also attracts international buyers looking to invest in emerging markets.

Looking ahead, it is crucial for the Omani government and private sector stakeholders to collaborate in promoting innovations such as digital platforms. As real estate markets become more competitive, building a robust support system that incorporates technology can help foster trust and reliability among clients and brokers alike.