

O M A N
عُمان
D A I L Y

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PAGES 20 BAISAS 200

SUNRISE 05:29 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:07 AM

DHUHR 12:08 PM

ASR 03:33 PM

MAGHRIB 06:43 PM

ISHA 08:00 PM

12

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INBRIEF

INDIA, PAKISTAN
RESTRAINT SOUGHT

The Sultanate of Oman is following up, with great concern, the current military escalation between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday, the Sultanate of Oman called on the two neighbouring countries to contain this serious escalation.

Oman stressed the need to give precedence to diplomatic efforts to reach an understanding between the two countries and prioritise political solutions in order to maintain security and stability and achieve peaceful coexistence and harmony. — ONA

OMAN, SAUDI FMS
DISCUSS RELATIONS

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a phone call from Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on Wednesday. They discussed regional developments and reviewed matters related to bilateral cooperation and joint action within the framework of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). — ONA

UN warns of ‘annihilation’ in Gaza

GAZA CITY: UN experts demanded action on Wednesday to avert the “annihilation” of Palestinians in Gaza, as rescuers said Israeli strikes across the territory killed dozens of people.

A planned expanded offensive revealed by the Israeli military has drawn international condemnation, after UN agencies previously warned of humanitarian catastrophe in the Palestinian territory already devastated by 19 months of war.

More than 20 independent United Nations experts said the world faced a “stark decision” to “remain passive and witness the slaughter of innocents or take part in crafting a just

resolution”.

The experts implored the international community to avert the “moral abyss we are descending into”.

Israel’s broader offensive, approved by the government amid a two-month aid blockade on Gaza, would include displacing “most” of its residents, the military has said.

France’s President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday called the situation in Gaza “the most critical we have ever seen”.

Spain’s Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said Madrid will present a draft resolution at the UN General Assembly aimed at “proposing urgent

measures to stop the killing of innocent civilians and ensure humanitarian aid” in Gaza.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told parliament the situation in Gaza and the occupied West Bank was “increasingly intolerable”.

Rescuers in the Palestinian territory said Israeli bombardment on Wednesday killed 42 people — 31 in Gaza City.

“At least 16 martyrs and dozens of wounded were transferred to Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City” after the Al Rimal neighbourhood was bombarded, spokesman Mahmud Bassal said. — AFP

Production of Al Khunaizi dates
at Royal Farms a success

MUSCAT: The Royal Gardens and Farms of the Royal Court Affairs have successfully conducted an experiment to advance the production of Al Khunaizi date variety for the 2025 season.

This achievement follows multiple trials and monitoring over consecutive seasons using natural methods without chemical intervention, after observing early pollination in certain palm varieties due to inherent genetic traits.

The experiment began by pollinating Al Khunaizi palms in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, selecting the optimal pollination timing and the most suitable pollen type to ensure quality results.

The clusters were carefully monitored and maintained, ensuring continuous fruit development, full growth and the appearance of ripening indicators — culminating in

The experiment began by pollinating Al Khunaizi palms in the Wilayat of Al Seeb.

the formation of Tabasheer (early-stage dates) by early April, approximately 3 to 4 months ahead of the usual harvest period.

These efforts resulted in a successful harvest, with multi-season monitoring confirming the feasibility of consistently obtaining early dates without any negative impact on the palm’s seasonal productivity.

MID-SEASON

The experiment aimed to transform Al Khunaizi variety from a mid-season to a premium early-season crop, producing exceptionally early Tabasheer — the first-of-its-kind in Oman and the Gulf region. This enhances future economic viability by marketing a premium variety at an ideal time while ensuring 100 per cent natural Tabasheer at all ripening stages. TURN TO P2

Journalists inspect a destroyed plane on the tarmac at the Sanaa International Airport. — AFP

regional security and stability.

He emphasised that the GCC states, through their wise and balanced policies, continue to work towards all measures that promote security and peace at both the regional and international levels.

The GCC secretary-general also reiterated the importance of de-escalation to safeguard regional security and stability, as well as to uphold the right of maritime navigation in accordance with international law and the provisions of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Meanwhile, political consultations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Yemen were held on Wednesday in Muscat.

The Omani side was headed by SShaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, while the Yemeni side was led by Dr Mansour Ali Bajash, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Political Affairs.

During the session, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and discussed means of enhancing cooperation in economic and trade exchange, as well as matters related to travel and communication between the two countries. — ONA



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OMAN

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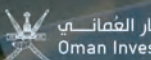


SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES JAPAN AMBASSADOR

HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received at his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Kiyoshi Serizawa, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and discussed topics of common concern.

GCC FINANCE OFFICIALS MEET IN KUWAIT

The Sultanate of Oman participated in the 73rd meeting of GCC Finance Under-Secretaries, held in Kuwait in preparation for the 123rd session of the Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee. The Omani delegation was headed by Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Finance. The meeting reviewed key agenda items including outcomes from the GCC Central Bank Governors Committee, Customs Union Authority, Heads of Tax Authorities Committee and the GCC Common Market Committee.





Launching the 3rd Cohort of 'Mu'tamad' Program for Omani Graduates in Finance, Accounting and Cybersecurity

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Meeting discusses healthcare in Muscat

SAYYID SAUD BIN HILAL AL BUSAIDY, Governor of Muscat, on Wednesday met Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmiah, Executive President for Oman Medical Specialty Board and Chairperson of the Healthcare Sector Employment Governance Committee, to discuss priority employment initiatives. These include programmes for hiring dentists, medical coders and pharmacists, as well as an initiative to retrain certain graduates of healthcare academic institutions. This involves upskilling them to meet labour market demands — such as retraining healthcare management graduates as medical coders. The meeting aimed to strengthen cooperation between Muscat Governorate and the Healthcare Sector Employment Governance Committee, supporting initiatives that expand job opportunities and

Omanisation in the governorate's healthcare sector, aligned with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. The session also introduced the committee's role in assessing the demand for medical and healthcare professionals, determining workforce requirements and developing initiatives to sustain employment rates and ensure sector stability. Discussions highlighted flexible initiatives to leverage national competencies, such as the freelancing programme, while emphasising the need for coordination between government healthcare entities and private sector institutions. This meeting reflects Muscat Governorate's commitment to fostering integration among government bodies and advancing national initiatives in partnership with relevant stakeholders. — ONA

250 TONNES OF WHEAT PRODUCTION IN AL BURAIMI

AL BURAIMI: The Directorate-General of Agriculture and Water Resources in Al Buraimi Governorate has begun harvesting wheat crop across the governorate's various wilayats since the beginning of April. Total production is expected to exceed 250 tonnes, thanks to a significant expansion in the cultivation of this vital crop, which is a cornerstone of food security.

Eng Nasser bin Ali al Marshoudi, Director-General of Agriculture and Water Resources, stated that over 200 acres of wheat have been planted across the governorate. More than 7,000 kilogrammes of high-quality seeds from high-yield varieties were distributed to farmers interested in cultivating the crop. He emphasised the directorate's ongoing efforts to support farmers by providing

all necessary resources to ensure a successful harvest season. "We are keen to expand wheat cultivation, as this crop is fundamental to the governorate's food security," he added. Al Marshoudi confirmed that the directorate plans to further expand wheat cultivation next season, leveraging the governorate's comparative advantage in wheat production. — ONA

Oman attends meeting of anti-corruption agency chiefs

MALE: Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI), met several heads of anti-corruption agencies from member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the sidelines of the Saudi-Maldives International Forum Integrity. The forum, held under the theme "Strengthening Integrity and Combating Corruption in the Tourism Sector," took place in the Maldives on May 6-7. The meetings included Adam Shamil, President of the Anti-Corruption Commission of the Maldives, as well as heads of delegations from counterpart institutions in Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco and Iraq. Shaikh Al Alawi also met Hissein Brahim Taha, Secretary-General of the OIC. Discussions emphasised the strong relations between Oman and OIC member states, while exploring avenues to enhance cooperation

in oversight, auditing and knowledge exchange to promote integrity and combat corruption. Shaikh Al Alawi reaffirmed Oman's commitment - through the State Audit Institution - in supporting international efforts to strengthen transparency and governance. This includes active participation in global professional events and building strategic partnerships with peer institutions. These meetings align with the objectives of the international forum, which serves as a platform for dialogue among experts and decision-makers on safeguarding vital sectors - particularly tourism - from practices that hinder sustainable development. — ONA

STATES SIGN ANTI-CORRUPTION CONVENTION

MALE: Member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) signed in the Republic of Maldives on Wednesday the Makkah Al Mukarramah Convention on Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Cooperation. The convention was initiated by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The Omani delegation at the signing ceremony was headed by Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI), as part of his participation in the Saudi-Maldives International Forum on Integrity. The forum, organised by Saudi Arabia and

the Maldives, was held in the Maldives on May 6-7. The Makkah Al Mukarramah Convention aims to enhance efficient and swift cooperation among law enforcement authorities regarding crimes covered by the convention. It seeks to facilitate the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of corruption offenses, as well as the tracing and recovery of illicit proceeds. Additionally, it promotes technical assistance, training and expertise exchange among member states to improve the effectiveness of combating such crimes and recovering criminal

proceeds. The convention's scope includes the exchange of information, intelligence and technical assistance among member states concerning the following corruption-related offenses: bribery of public officials and officials of public international organisations, embezzlement, abuse of functions, illicit enrichment, bribery in the private sector, money laundering, concealment and obstruction of justice. It is worth noting that Oman participated in the meetings discussing the draft convention and provided its observations on its provisions. — ONA

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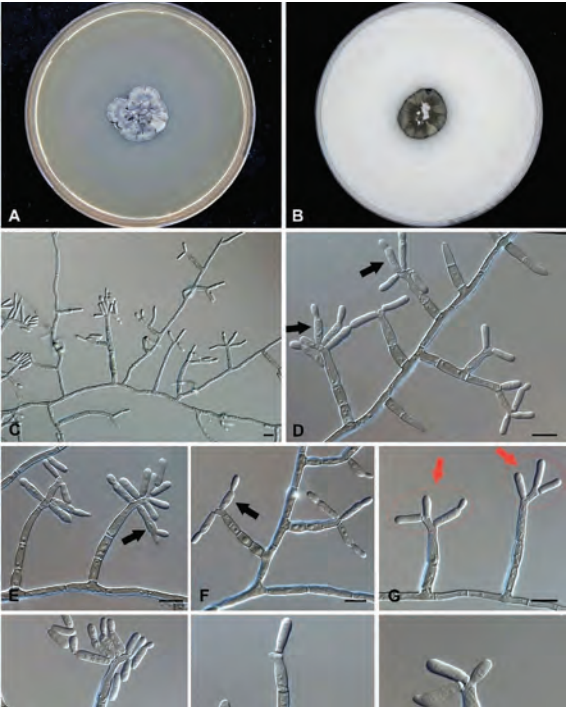
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SHORT TAKES



RESEARCH TEAM FINDS NEW FUNGAL FAMILY

NIZWA: A research team from the University of Nizwa took part in a unique scientific breakthrough that led to the discovery of a new fungal family comprising two genera and seven species. The fungal family is distinguished for its unique ability to coexist inside ant nests.

The findings were published in the international journal *Studies in Mycology*, one of Netherlands' most prominent publications specialised in mycology.

The achievement was made through international collaboration with researchers from Brazil, China, the Netherlands and Austria. The team was led by Dr Abdullah Mohammed al Hatmi, Assistant Professor at the University of Nizwa and Head of the Microbiology Laboratory at Nizwa University's Centre for Research on Natural Sciences and Medical Sciences.

Dr Al Hatmi said that the discovery constitutes a milestone in the field of fungal research, noting that the research highlights the complex symbiotic relationships between fungi and ants that date back millions of years.

Dr Al Hatmi added that identifying such a new fungal family opens up vistas for understanding ecological balance and the diversity of microorganisms. He expressed Nizwa University's pride about participating in this global research and its commitment to support quality research and consolidate international scholarly partnerships.

He pointed out that the discovery helps deepen our understanding of the ecological role of fungi and enhances the potential for future research into the interactions between microorganisms and insects within their natural environments.

PRODUCTION OF AL KHUNAIZI DATES AT ROYAL GARDENS



FROM P1

Eng Madlen al Mahrouqi, Director of Al Seeb Gardens Services Department, stated: "This experiment was based on prior knowledge of the genetic characteristics of certain palm varieties, which demonstrated a unique ability to produce pollen twice a year, suggesting possible genetic or environmental factors stimulating this phenomenon." She added that the best pollination timing was selected to ensure the experiment's success, along with high-quality pollen. — ONA

A model for building modern urban housing

THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING and Urban Planning continues to implement the Sorouh initiative, aimed at developing integrated residential neighbourhoods with comprehensive services.

Several projects under the initiative have already achieved high sales rates in their early phases, exceeding 80 per cent, reflecting strong public and investor confidence in this holistic housing model.

The Sorouh initiative includes 18 integrated residential projects across Oman's governorates, covering over 6 million square metres and comprising more than 9,950 housing units, with an estimated investment value exceeding RO 500 million.

The ministry highlighted that the initiative has engaged over 360 Omani employees in its execution while benefiting 145 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in construction works — reinforcing local economic empowerment. Additionally, integrated planning and service coordination have reduced infrastructure costs by more than 45 per cent.

Key ongoing projects include Al Naseem Neighbourhood (Barka, Al Batinah South) spanning 355,000 sqm, it offers 1,051 diverse housing units, with 60 per cent sales recorded and investments worth RO 80 million.

Al Laban Neighbourhood (Nakhal) features 1,442 units across 646,000 sqm, with RO 111 million investment and 26 per cent sales to date.

Hisn Al Zain (Bidbid, Al Dakhiliyah) a standout project with 75 per cent sales, comprising 639 units on 286,000 sqm and RO 30 million investment.

Majd Neighbourhood (Suhar) attracting significant interest, with 77 per cent of its 1,057 units sold across 370,000 sqm (RO 50 million investment).

Al Shurooq (Salalah, Dhofar) a modern model with 558 units on 324,000 sqm (RO 35 million investment) and a 79 per cent sales rate. The ministry highlighted that



The Sorouh initiative includes 18 integrated residential projects across Oman's governorates.

in Musandam Governorate, the Talal Al Nakheel (Palm Hills) project in Khasab stands out, comprising 650 residential units including detached and semi-detached villas, townhouses and apartments across a 635,000 square metre area, complete with public facilities and commercial zones.

MODERN SPECIFICATIONS

Meanwhile, in Muscat Governorate, Al Ahd Neighbourhood in Al Amerat features 965 residential units with modern architectural specifications and integrated amenities spanning 445,000 square metres.

The private sector plays a pivotal role, with several projects developed in collaboration with local firms, including Nusmat Zain (Sur) with 407 units on 268,000 sqm; Al Mazun (Samayil) with 194 units; Al Nama (Izki) with 182 units; and Al Salam (Al

Buraimi) with 521 units on 78,000 sqm.

In a strategic move, the ministry recently signed 24 agreements to expedite infrastructure development — including water, sewage, electricity and telecom networks — for eight Sorouh projects. These partnerships with Nama Water Services, Nama Electricity Distribution and Oman Broadband Company enhance the readiness of these communities for residents, ensuring carefully planned, service-integrated environments.

The Sorouh initiative embodies Oman's vision for modern urban communities that prioritise citizen well-being, stable living conditions and flexible planning models. By fostering public-private partnerships, it advances housing ownership opportunities, elevates quality of life and aligns with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

MTC to host series of conferences

MUSCAT: The Military Technological College (MTC) will be hosting a series of conferences as part of the International Conference on Engineering Advancements, Science and Technology (ICEAST) which aims to promote interdisciplinary collaboration among engineers, scientists, researchers and industry professionals in 2025, according to the management.

Expert papers have been called for from across the world to these conferences whose official opening will be followed by specialised speeches by keynote speakers. Side by side, there will be workshops and conferences by the respective engineering departments of the college, besides paper presentations, workshops, exhibitions, plenary sessions, poster sessions and technical sessions.

The ICEAST is aimed at providing a global platform for presenting cutting-edge research and technological innovations; and to encourage the exchange of ideas and solutions across diverse fields enabling the professionals as well



We are focusing on a wide range of topics to be covered under the International Conference on Engineering Advancements, Science and Technology which will cover a diverse range of areas including environment and sustainability.

DR JOHN PILLAI



as students who aim to make it big in their careers and to contribute to the society.

The ICEAST will feature five specialised conferences, each focusing on a distinct area of research and innovation.

Speaking to the Observer, Dr John Pillai, ICEAST Chair, said that these conferences would cover a wide array of topics, pertinent to a broader spectrum of key areas.

"We are focusing on a wide range of topics to be covered under the International Conference on Engineering Advancements, Science and Technology which will cover a diverse range of areas including environment and sustainability," he said.

According to him, these

conferences cover Sustainable Engineering and Green Technologies, Advanced Materials and Nanotechnology, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, Smart Cities and Infrastructure, Robotics and Automation, Biomedical Engineering and Biotechnology, Cybersecurity and Information Systems, Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering, Water Resources and Hydropower Engineering; and Advanced Computational Methods.

"Experts in the subjects and researchers can submit their papers which will undergo a review process by an expert panel. Participants to these conferences will engage in plenary sessions, technical presentations, workshops, poster sessions, exhibitions and panel discussions which will help them brainstorm and explore newer areas of professional excellence. Added to it, this dynamic platform is expected to provide ample opportunities for academia, students and professionals to network, collaborate and share groundbreaking ideas."

SPOTLIGHT



Children can be exposed to serious health risks such as heatstroke, dehydration and sunburn if schools do not take the necessary preventive measures

Some teachers and parents are also complaining about children suffering from nosebleeds due to high temperatures and dry air

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN is currently experiencing hot summer characterised by intense heat accompanied by dry and humid air, which can often reach record temperatures, especially in some areas far from the coast. This season brings with it harmful health problems known as summer ailments, which must be taken into account by students who are facing the brunt of the hot summer weather.

Protecting students from high temperatures and excessive sun exposure requires attention from families and schools. This is a key priority for ensuring their safety during the school hours, especially with high temperatures and high humidity. Children can be exposed to serious health risks such as heatstroke, dehydration and sunburn if schools do not take the necessary preventive measures.

Some teachers and parents are

also complaining about children suffering from nosebleeds due to high temperatures and dry air.

Specialists recommend adopting a healthy and proper approach in dealing with high temperatures; and avoiding summer ailments and nutritional and physical problems caused by extreme heat if guidelines are not followed. Researchers also note that when the body is exposed to heat stress, the brain becomes distracted by signals from the body. When you're in a hot or cold environment, maintaining internal balance becomes a priority for your mind and body.

Furthermore, exposure to moderate heat can affect a child's cognitive performance. Studies have shown that high temperatures can impair their attention, memory and overall cognitive function. This can have immediate effects on a child's ability to learn and perform in the school, as well as long-term effects on their development.

Heat stress also negatively impacts students' performance in

exams. Researchers have indicated in their studies that there is a strong relationship between high temperatures and poor student performance in schools and exams, with lower average performance and productivity, decreased comprehension and achievement; and difficulty in concentrating. Information absorption is slower in high temperatures and thoughts become confused and foggy.

To mitigate the above risks, it is essential to implement preventive measures. Parents and caregivers can take the following measures:

- Parents and teachers should encourage children to have regular water intake, especially during outdoor activities.
- Access to shaded areas and cool environments can help reduce the risk of heat exposure.
- Wearing lightweight, breathable clothing and applying sunscreen can protect children from the harmful effects of the sun.
- Schools should adjust schedules to avoid outdoor activities during

peak heat hours and ensure that classrooms are well-ventilated or air-conditioned.

- Educating children about the importance of drinking water and recognising the signs of heat-related illness can empower them to take proactive steps to protect their health.

Adequate drinking water should be provided and access to water should be facilitated by placing water coolers in easily accessible areas within the school, including near playgrounds and sports fields. Students should be encouraged and guided to drink water regularly throughout the day, especially before and after physical activities. Teachers can remind students to drink water to maintain hydration.

Students may not realise how dangerous it is to be exposed to sun and play in heat, especially with the rising temperatures during summer. Therefore, it is necessary to protect them from high temperatures and sunstroke while they are at school and teach them methods of prevention.

PROTECTING
STUDENTS
FROM
EXTREME
HEAT

SHORT TAKES



DISCUSSION ON
WAYS TO ENHANCE
VARSITY RANKING

A regional symposium on improving the ranking of Arab universities in international rankings kicked off on Wednesday in Muscat. The two-day event is organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. It is held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The symposium is organised in cooperation with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO) and Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science. It seeks to promote the academic reputation of Omani universities and consolidate their competitive status at regional and international levels. The symposium provides an opportunity to introduce strategies that align educational institutions’ practices with international standards and improve key areas of performance like the quality of academic output, the effectiveness of educational methodologies and the impact of scholarly research. Besides presenting insights into Arab and international ranking systems and accreditation frameworks, the symposium also provides universities with new measures necessary for enhancing their reputation and augmenting their rankings. — ONA

PAKISTANI
DELEGATION
VISITS MSC

A delegation from the National Defence University of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). Upon the delegation’s arrival at the centre, they were greeted by Commodore Adil bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Head of the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). During the visit, the guests were briefed about the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre in the safety of the Omani maritime environment. They also toured the centre’s facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties.

12 DAILY
FLIGHTS TO
SALALAH
DURING
KHAREEF

MUSCAT: Oman Air has announced an increase in its operational capacity during the khareef (monsoon) season in Dhofar, starting from July 1, with 12 daily flights between Muscat and Salalah as part of its commitment to boosting domestic tourism. The airline stated that an additional 70,000 seats were added to the Muscat-Salalah route till the end of the year — a 16 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2024 — to meet rising

seasonal demand. The company confirmed it will maintain its fixed national fares for all scheduled flights during this period, allowing Omanis to book round-trip tickets at a flat rate of RO 54 from July 1 to September 5. Oman Air also clarified that there is no cap on the number of tickets available at national fares for passengers booking from within the Sultanate of Oman by selecting the ‘Omani Citizen’ option on the airline’s website.



RO 24m water projects
opened in Al Wusta

A number of water projects were inaugurated in Al Wusta Governorate, on Wednesday. The most prominent among these projects is the RO 24-million Duqm-Haima Strategic Water Supply System Project, with a length of 211 kilometres. The project was inaugurated under the auspices of Shaikh Ahmed bin Musallam al Kathiri, Governor of Al Wusta. Executed by Nama Water Services, the project aims to achieve water security and sustainable water services in Al Wusta Governorate to meet population growth. The project involves construction of four stations: the Duqm station, which consists of a pumping station with full mechanical and electrical equipment; the Al Ajaz station, which consists of a pumping station with a 1,000 cubic metre ground reservoir; the Abu Madhabi station, which consists of a pumping station with a 1,000 cubic metre ground reservoir and a tanker filling station; and Haima station, which has a pumping station with a 5,000 cubic metre ground reservoir, a 600 cubic metre overhead reservoir and a tanker filling station. Among the projects is the Diaa 1 project in the Wilayat of Al Jazir.

The most prominent among these projects is the RO 24-million Duqm-Haima Strategic Water Supply System Project, with a length of 211 kilometres



A number of water projects were inaugurated in Al Wusta Governorate.

The project is a partnership with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO). It is a solar-powered project located in the Wadi Ghadan highlands and has a production capacity of up to 60 kilowatts. This is in addition to Wadi Rawnab tanker filling station which has a production capacity of up to 30 kilowatts, Al Khamkham water desalination plant project in the Wilayat of Haima with a production capacity of up to 42 kilowatts per hour, the Wadi Nafi desalination plant project in the Wilayat of Mahout with a production capacity of 400 cubic metres per day, Dhahr desalination plant project in Duqm

Governorate has a production capacity of 38 kilowatts per hour. The projects also include the Al Jazir desalination plant project with a production capacity of 240 cubic metres per day, the Al Najda desalination plant expansion project in the Wilayat of Mahout with a production capacity of 500 cubic metres per day as well as the rehabilitation of six tanker filling stations in the wilayats of Mahout and Al Duqm. Other projects include construction of a wastewater treatment plant in the Wilayat of Mahout and the construction of a wastewater treatment plant in the Wilayat of Al Jazir. — ONA



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
193/2025	Consulting services (design + supervision) for the construction of the evaluation and rehabilitation building at Al Khoudh	Companies specialized in consulting offices and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with an excellent or first degree.	Wednesday 28-05-2025 02:00 PM	Wednesday 18-06-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Thursday 08/05/2025.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

"The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

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INVESTMENTS IN
DHO FAR PHARMA
INDUSTRY AT
RO 90 MILLION

SALALAH: Dhofar Governorate boasts remarkable development in the field of localising pharmaceutical industries and medical supplies. The drive is aimed to secure the availability of medical drugs in the Sultanate of Oman and meet the needs of the local and regional markets. Investments to this effect stand at RO 90 million. Ibrahim Nasser al Rashdi, Director General of the Drug Safety Centre at the Ministry of Health, said that pharmaceutical industry in Dhofar Governorate is burgeoning through three major pharmaceutical factories that help contribute to the needs of the health sector and diminish dependence on imports. Al Rashdi said that Dhofar pharmaceutical industries unit in Raysut Industrial City, inaugurated in September 2024, was set up at a total cost of more than RO 15 million. The factory has an annual production volume of 15 million units of intravenous solution, along with 2.3 million units of kidney dialysis solutions, said Al Rashdi, noting that the factory meets the demand of the Omani health sector, thanks to its output estimated at 5 million units a year. Speaking about another unit, Oman Pharmaceutical Industries Company factory, Al Rashdi said that the company has been one of the most prominent pharmaceutical manufacturers in the Sultanate of Oman since its establishment in 2001. The factory has a cumulative investment volume of RO 35 million. Based in Raysut Industrial City in Salalah, the company aims to enhance the local pharmaceutical industry and provide high-quality pharmaceutical products to the Omani and global markets, Al Rashdi added.

— ONA



MUSCAT GOVERNORATE MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (12/2025)

Muscat Municipality invites Companies specialized in the field and registered with General Secretariat of **Tender Board**, to participate and obtain tender documents from the website via the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
(PRE-22-129)	Design & Construction of Channelization and Protection Works of Wadi Boshier (Re-Call 2)	12/05/2025	22/05/2025
(PRE-23-282)	Proposed Public Walkway in Bander Al Khairan (Re-Call)	26/05/2025	16/06/2025
(PRE-24-019)	Supply Electrical Material for Lighting Road (Re-Call)	12/05/2025	22/05/2025
(PRE-24-322)	Supply of Road Bollards for Muscat Municipality (Re-Call)	12/05/2025	22/05/2025
(PRE-25-040)	Providing Stray Dogs' Hunting Team (Re-Call)	12/05/2025	22/05/2025
(PRE-25-048)	Proposed Traffics Lights in Al Maalah Road at Qurriyat (Re-Call)	12/05/2025	22/05/2025
(PRE-25-060)	Providing Animal Caregivers at the (rafq) Service Headquarter (Re-call)	12/05/2025	22/05/2025
(PRE-25-072)	Landscaping Works at Al Khoudh	26/05/2025	16/06/2025
(PRE-25-073)	Maintenance of Fountains at Muscat Governorate	26/05/2025	16/06/2025

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



US Vice-President JD Vance speaks during a discussion at the Munich Leaders meeting in Washington. — AFP

US AND EUROPE ON ‘SAME TEAM’, SAYS JD VANCE

WASHINGTON: Striking a notably softer tone than his past remarks on Europe, US Vice-President JD Vance said on Wednesday that the United States and the continent are on the same side. “I do still very much think the US and Europe are on the same team,” Vance told the Munich Leaders Meeting in Washington. “I still think that this European alliance is very important, but I think that for it to be important and for us to be real friends with each other we’ve got to talk about the big questions,” he said. Vance shocked Europe when he used a February speech at a security forum in Munich to attack EU policies on immigration and free speech. On Wednesday, Vance spoke about ties that bring Europe and the United States together. “European civilisation and American civilisation, European culture and American culture, are very much linked, and they’re always going to be linked,” he said. “I think it’s completely ridiculous to think that you’re ever going to be able to drive a firm wedge between the United States and Europe.” — AFP

PUTIN AND MADURO SIGN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP DEALS



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro pose for a picture during a signing ceremony, in Moscow. — Reuters

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin and Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on Wednesday signed a strategic partnership agreement in a ceremony shown on state TV. The two leaders discussed energy and oil during their talks in Moscow on Wednesday, Russia’s Interfax news agency reported. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov had told reporters earlier on Wednesday that the strategic agreement would be a “weighty, substantial and very important framework document”, without providing details. Venezuela has a fraught recent history with the United States, marked by broken diplomatic relations, sanctions and accusations of criminal activity and coup-plotting. During his visit to Moscow, Maduro is also due to attend commemorative events around the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Soviet Union and its allies over Nazi Germany, including a military parade on Friday. Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that he welcomed the successful rescue of five Venezuelan opposition members holed up for political protect in the Argentine Embassy in Caracas. — Reuters

REHEARSAL GOES WRONG

Finnish fighter jet crashes in Arctic town



A Finnish F/A-18 Hornet fighter jet crashed near the Rovaniemi airport in Finland’s Arctic north, but the pilot was rescued after ejecting. The crash occurred “in the Rovaniemi airport area” around 11:00 am. “The aircraft crashed during a rehearsal for an airshow,” Timo Herranen, commander of the Finnish Air Force, said. Herranen said “the pilot luckily was able to eject from the aircraft” and had only sustained “mild injuries”. — AFP

DRONE STRIKE TARGETS PORT SUDAN NAVY BASE: ARMY SOURCES

PORT SUDAN: A drone strike targeted Sudan’s biggest naval base on Wednesday, an army source said, marking the fourth straight day the seat of the army-backed government has come under attack. “They (the drones) were met with anti-aircraft missiles,” the source said on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media. A correspondent reported a series of explosions and then a cloud of smoke coming from the direction of the Flamingo Base,

just north of the city. Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast had been a safe haven, hosting hundreds of thousands of displaced people and United Nations offices, until Sunday when drone strikes blamed on the RSF began. Drones struck across Port Sudan on Tuesday, hitting the main port, the city’s power station and the country’s last functioning international airport. Nearly 600 kilometres further south, “three drones attempted to

strike airport facilities” in the army-held eastern city of Kassala, near the border with Eritrea, a security source said. Witnesses said they heard explosions from anti-aircraft missiles west of the city, which has also come under repeated attack this week. Nationwide, the war has killed tens of thousands of people and uprooted 13 million. It has also effectively split Sudan in two, with the army controlling the centre, north and east while the RSF holds nearly all of Darfur. — AFP

India, Pakistan exchange fire as violence exceeds

INDIA and Pakistan exchanged heavy artillery fire along their contested frontier on Wednesday after New Delhi launched deadly missile strikes on its arch-rival, in the worst violence between the nuclear-armed neighbours in two decades. At least 38 deaths were reported, with Islamabad saying 26 civilians were killed by the Indian strikes and firing along the border, and New Delhi adding at least 12 dead from Pakistani shelling. The fighting came two weeks after New Delhi blamed Islamabad for backing an attack on the Indian-run side of disputed Kashmir. The South Asian neighbours have fought multiple wars over the divided territory since they were carved out of the sub-continent at the end of British rule in 1947. The latest violence exceeds India’s strikes in 2019, when New Delhi said it had hit “several militants” after a suicide bomber attacked an Indian security force convoy, killing 40. An Indian senior security source, who asked not to be named, said three of its fighter jets had crashed on home territory. Pakistan said a hydropower plant in Kashmir was also targeted by India, damaging a dam structure, after India threatened to stop the flow of water on its side of the border. Pakistan had earlier warned that tampering with the rivers that flow into its territory would be an “act of war”. World leaders have issued urgent calls for de-escalation, while Pakistan’s National Security



UN military observers arrive to inspect a site after Indian strikes in Muzaffarabad. — AFP

United Nations military observers arrived on Wednesday afternoon to inspect the site, which was blown out on one side. Residents had begun collecting damaged copies of the Quran among concrete, wood and iron debris scattered across the grounds

Committee, which convened an emergency meeting led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and attended by Chief of Army Staff Asim Munir, called on the international community to hold India “accountable”. In Muzaffarabad, the main city of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, troops cordoned off streets around a mosque Islamabad said was struck, with blast marks visible on the walls of several nearby homes. United Nations military observers arrived on Wednesday afternoon to inspect the site, which was blown out on one side. Pakistan said 21 civilians were killed in the strikes — including four children. India had been widely expected to respond militarily to the April 22 attack on tourists in Indian-administered Kashmir. “Escalation between India and Pakistan has already reached a

larger scale than during the last major crisis in 2019, with potentially dire consequences”, International Crisis Group analyst Praveen Donthi said. Diplomats have piled pressure on leaders to step back. “The world cannot afford a military confrontation between India and Pakistan,” the spokesman for UN chief Antonio Guterres, Stephane Dujarric, said. US President Donald Trump told reporters in Washington he hoped that the fighting “ends very quickly”. Concern poured in, including from China as well as from Britain, France and Russia, Germany and Türkiye, while airlines have cancelled, diverted or rerouted flights. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi is expected in New Delhi, two days after a visit to Islamabad, as Tehran seeks to mediate. — AFP

ISRAELI STRIKES HIT SCHOOL IN GAZA



GAZA: Israeli air strikes on a school housing conflict-displaced families and close to a crowded market and restaurant in Gaza City killed at least 38 people on Wednesday, local health authorities said. Medics said two strikes targeted the Karama School in Tuffah, a suburb of Gaza City, killing 15. An Israeli strike near a restaurant and market in the city killed at least 23 people. Footage of the scene near the market showed wounded men being rushed away on the back of pickups and carts. Two Israeli air strikes on another school, housing displaced people in Bureij camp in central Gaza, killed at least 33 people, including women and children. — Reuters

MAINTAINING RELATIONS

Al Sharaa meets Macron in first EU visit



Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa met French leader Emmanuel Macron on his first visit to Europe. By welcoming Sharaa, Macron hopes to help the authorities on the way to “a free, stable, sovereign Syria that respects all components of Syrian society,” a French presidential official, asking not to be named, said. France is eyeing an opportunity to increase its influence in the country, with French companies also seeking contracts. — AFP

PUBLIC ORDER

Mali junta suspends political activities



Mali’s junta on Wednesday suspended political parties’ activities “until further notice for reasons of public order”, as the opposition protests against the military government’s ramped-up crackdown on dissent. Read out on national television and radio, the decree comes ahead of a rally called for Friday by parties critical of the junta against their dissolution, as well as for a return to constitutional order in the insecurity-ridden Sahel nation. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



France’s President Emmanuel Macron (R) speaks with Germany’s Chancellor Friedrich Merz, in Paris. — AFP

FRANCE, GERMANY TO COOPERATE MORE CLOSELY ON DEFENCE

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron and Germany’s Chancellor Friedrich Merz vowed to ramp up security cooperation in the face of Russian threats, as the new German leader visited Paris on his first trip abroad. Europe is seeking to bolster its defences amid Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine and doubts over US security commitments to Europe under President Donald Trump, though Merz insisted that any peace deal in Ukraine required an American commitment.

“We will set up a French-German defence and security council to meet regularly to bring operational responses to our common strategic challenges,” Macron said at their joint press conference. Merz is a committed European, transatlanticist and Ukraine supporter who has pledged to restore Germany’s role on the world stage after half a year of paralysis. “We will take joint measures to further enhance Europe’s security and defence capabilities,” Merz said, before heading to Poland later in the day. Macron said that strengthening “the European pillar of Nato” did not weaken the alliance. “It is perfectly natural that all issues should be discussed, including nuclear deterrence, given our history and our specific characteristics,” he said. — AFP

GREECE, EGYPT BOOST TIES



Egypt’s President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis sign cooperation agreements at the Maximos Mansion, in Athens, Greece. “Our relations are traditional and historical. We have the basis to enhance this relationship,” said Sisi during a televised meeting with Greek President Constantine Tassoulas in Athens. Greece and Egypt signed a “strategic partnership” agreement on Wednesday as the two countries seek to step up political coordination to help safeguard stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. — Reuters

EU TAKES HUNGARY TO TOP COURT IN MIGRANT SMUGGLER CASE

BRUSSELS: The European Commission on Wednesday said it will take Hungary to the EU’s top court for breaching rules on combatting people-trafficking, in the latest showdown between Brussels and the nationalist government in Budapest. Brussels launched legal action in 2023 after Budapest decided to release and expel several thousand jailed migrant traffickers on the grounds holding them in Hungarian prisons was a burden to the taxpayer.

An April 2023 decree by Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s government enabled the smugglers’ release — giving them three days to leave Hungary, theoretically with a view to serving out their sentences in their home country. But the EU charged that no system was put in place to ensure smugglers were taken back into custody once expelled, and decided to refer Hungary to the European Court of Justice after it failed to

address the concerns. More than 2,400 people-smugglers had been released under the measure as of January this year, according to Hungarian government figures. Brussels accuses Budapest of a failure to meet its obligations to “impose effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions” for migrant smuggling. Hungary’s government has retorted that human traffickers can only operate because of European laws encouraging migration. — AFP

Cardinals hold mass prior conclave to elect pope

CARDINALS from five continents held a final mass in St Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican on Wednesday before sealing themselves away to elect a new pope to lead the world’s 1.4 billion Catholics. A total of 133 cardinal electors are expected to take part in the conclave, the voting process to pick a successor to Pope Francis, who died last month after a 12-year papacy. No clear frontrunner has emerged from among the prelates — representing a range of progressive and conservative traditions within the Church — and the contest to lead the 2,000-year-old institution appears wide open. In a time of geopolitical uncertainty, the new pope faces diplomatic balancing acts, as well as Church infighting, the continued fall-out from scandals, and — in the West — increasingly empty pews.

The “Princes of the Church” began a pre-conclave mass in St Peter’s Basilica at 10:00 am, presided over by the dean of the College of Cardinals, Giovanni Battista Re. It was the last rite to be celebrated publicly before the Church’s 267th pope is presented to the world from a balcony of St Peter’s Basilica, likely several days later. Both Francis and his predecessor Benedict XVI were elected within two days, but the longest papal election in Church history lasted 1,006 days, from 1268 to 1271. With clerics from around 70 countries, this conclave is the largest ever, and the next pontiff will have to secure at least 89 votes — a two-thirds majority. The cardinals, who must be younger than 80 to take part, are staying at the Vatican’s Santa Marta guesthouse — where Francis used to live — and Santa Marta Vecchia, a building next door usually housing Vatican officials. They were to set off from Santa Marta to gather at the Pauline Chapel of the Apostolic Palace, where a prayer was held. They then proceed into the 15th-century Sistine Chapel for the conclave, which is “one of the most secret and mysterious events in the world”, the Vatican said on Tuesday. Under a ceiling of frescoes painted by Michelangelo, Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin — the senior elector — will call on God to give the cardinals “the spirit of intelligence, truth



Attendees wait for the start at the conclave, on St Peter’s Square, in front of St Peter’s Basilica, in The Vatican. — AFP

and peace” needed for their task. Parolin, a frontrunner who was Francis’s number two as secretary of state, will then lead the cardinals in chanting the Latin invocation of the Holy Spirit: “Veni, Creator Spiritus”. The cardinals have spent days discussing the most pressing challenges facing the Catholic Church and the character traits its new leader needs. Burning issues include falling priest numbers, the role of women, the Vatican’s troubled balance sheets and how to adapt the Church to the modern world. Some 80 per cent of the cardinals were appointed by Francis — an impulsive, charismatic champion of the downtrodden. But while interviews in the run-up suggested that some cardinals favour a leader able to protect and develop his legacy, others want a more conservative defender of doctrine. More than a dozen names are circulating, from Italian Pierbattista Pizzaballa to Hungary’s Peter Erdo and Sri Lanka’s

Malcolm Ranjith. We may never know how close a race it is. Having surrendered mobile phones, the red-robed cardinals will swear an oath to keep the conclave’s secrets. They also each pledge to “faithfully” serve as pope should they be chosen, before the master of liturgical ceremonies says “Extra omnes” (“Everyone out”). Once the doors close, the cardinals fill out ballots marked “Eligo in Summum Pontificem” (“I elect as Supreme Pontiff”). They then carry them, folded, and place them on a silver plate which is used to tip them into an urn, set on a table in front of Michelangelo’s Last Judgment. The cardinals traditionally cast just one ballot on the first evening, burning the votes along with a chemical that produces black smoke if there is no decision, white for a new pope. Outside, hundreds of the faithful have gathered on St Peter’s Square, all eyes trained on the Sistine Chapel chimney. — AFP

Ukraine, Russia trade attacks ahead of WWII victory parade

KYIVE: Russia and Ukraine traded a barrage of drone strikes overnight on Wednesday, in attacks that killed two in Kyiv and forced Moscow to shut major airports hours before a swathe of foreign leaders was to arrive. The Kremlin has announced a unilateral three-day truce to coincide with its grand May 9 military parade on Red Square, marking 80 years since the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II. Ukraine has dismissed Putin’s order to his troops to halt their attacks as a “manipulation” and “game” designed to protect his parade rather than a genuine peace measure. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is calling for an unconditional 30-day ceasefire — a proposal back by US President Donald Trump and previously rejected by Putin. Zelensky called for more pressure on Moscow to end its attack. “Only significantly intensified pressure

on Russia and stronger sanctions can pave the way to diplomacy. Any measures depriving the aggressor of resources to wage war must be implemented to bring lasting peace,” Zelensky said on social media. Hours before Putin’s order was set to come into effect, Russia unleashed a barrage of drone attacks across Ukraine. Zelensky said Russia fired 142 drones and four ballistic missiles. “Unfortunately, there are fatalities -- a woman and her son,” Zelensky said, referring to the Kyiv attack. The emergency services said falling debris from a drone attack on the central Shevchenkivsky district sparked a fire in an apartment block. Journalists in the capital heard loud explosions over the city at around 1:00 am. In the morning, a first-aid tent had been erected next to the charred facade of the building, blackened by the fire and with windows blown out



A Russian military vehicle moves along the Garden Ring road in front of a huge Z letter, in central Moscow. — AFP

on its top floors. Men in camouflage were inspecting debris from a fallen drone part. Attempted drone attacks by Ukraine across Russia triggered

hours of travel chaos, as airports across the western part of the country were repeatedly closed on Tuesday and the early hours of Wednesday. Arrivals and

departures from Moscow’s main Sheremetyevo international airport were suspended for hours overnight, aviation authorities said. “The restrictions were imposed to ensure the safety of civil aircraft flights,” Artyom Korenyako, press secretary for the Federal Aviation Transport Agency, wrote on Telegram. Moscow regularly halts air traffic in areas where its air defence systems are operating, but the scale of the forced closures has escalated significantly in the run-up to Friday’s parade. Russia’s defence ministry reported downing dozens of Ukrainian drones targeting the country, including Moscow, on Tuesday and Wednesday. Ukraine claimed it had hit a fibre-optic plant in Saransk, a central Russian city far from the borders, where the authorities announced a state of emergency, cancelling all lessons in schools, but without confirming damage to the plant. — AFP

OPINION

Khareef’s first drop and the price of paradise



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

WHEN Salalah’s first raindrop kisses the parched earth you can almost taste the sweet tang of wet frankincense on the breeze and hear the hush that falls just before the downpour. You might even catch the faint rumble of clouds on the horizon or the flutter of birds preparing for the storm. Children dart through newly carved wadis, their laughter echoing against slick stones. Behind that joy clings plastic the ghost of careless footsteps tangled in reeds and choking streams.

Every khareef more than 200,000 visitors, Omani families and guests alike, pour into Dhofar’s green valleys eager for cool air and cascading waterfalls. Oman Vision 2040 sets a national target of 11 million tourists by 2040 so our numbers will only grow. Yet each season Salalah’s beauty is tested by this surge. In Wadi Darbat litter collects along the trails prompting enhanced clean up plans before the season begins. Volunteers from the Green Dhofar campaign, including many university students, collected nearly nine tonnes of trash between October and December 2023. Our love for this land is clear; the question is whether we are doing enough to care for it.

Half a world away, Hawaii has answered a similar call. Beginning in 2026 visitors there will pay a small green fee of 0.75 cents added at checkout to hotel and cruise bills, with every dollar directed towards climate action and environmental conservation. An expected \$100 million each year will restore eroded beaches, reduce wildfire risk and protect coral reefs. It is the first statewide tourism tax in the United States devoted entirely to conserving natural heritage and it carries a simple message: those who enjoy a place’s beauty share responsibility for its upkeep.

What if Oman made a similar pledge in Dhofar? A modest khareef contribution folded into every hotel bill or visa payment could help cover the cost of conserving its natural beauty. Local hoteliers and guides I’ve spoken with say they would welcome a small charge, if it kept sites clean and preserved our waters. True hospitality goes beyond open doors; it is the promise that what we welcome today will still inspire generations to come.

Destinations around the world are learning that tourism and local recreation must help pay their way. Palau asks each visitor for a contribution to marine protection of \$100.

Oman Vision 2040 sets a national target of 11 million tourists by 2040 so our numbers will only grow. Yet each season Salalah’s beauty is tested by this surge

Bhutan includes a sustainable tourism fee in its daily packages. New Zealand is expanding its conservation levy. None of these measures drove travellers away. They drew in conscientious explorers who see a fee not as a toll but as a token of respect.

For Oman the smallest gesture can carry the greatest meaning. Imagine a handful of baisas folded into your room rate, barely more than the price of a cup of Karak, collected as easily as a booking confirmation. In return, you see frankincense-shaped bins dotting the wadis, local artists painting simple signs urging us all to tread lightly and a roadside board tracking how many kilos of waste have been reclaimed. We do not need marble halls or sprawling endowments. We need the quiet pulse of a community taking care of its own: families, guides and shopkeepers each doing their part in real time.

In that quiet space after the rain, when droplets rest on leaves and the air feels born anew, we remember that caring for paradise is an act both simple and profound. I sincerely hope that every grateful footstep here becomes a promise to protect this land we call home.

HILARIUS OR SIMPLICIUS, PAPAL NAME DILEMMA

ELLA IDE

From Pius to Clement, Hilarius to Simplicius, papal names through the centuries are inextricably linked to the brilliant or wretched legacies of the men who have ruled the Vatican.

The cardinal elected to succeed Pope Francis following the conclave, which began on Wednesday, will be announced to the world with his papal name in Latin.

With so much weight placed on the significance of the papal moniker, the cardinals must choose wisely. The tradition of choosing a new name dates back to the sixth century, when an ordinary priest — Mercurius — was elected but felt he could not keep his pagan name. He swapped it for John, arguing that if Christ had renamed Simon, the first pope, as Peter, other popes could do the same.

Since then only one, Adrian VI in the 16th century, has kept his baptism name.

In 2013, Argentine Jorge Bergoglio became the first pope to take the name Francis after Saint Francis of Assisi, a 13th-century mystic who renounced his wealth and devoted his life to the poor. Bookmakers had been betting he would call himself Leo — which means lion.

While some names are associated with peace or theological brilliance, others have more controversial connotations.

There has not been a pope called Celestine since the name was taken in 1294 by a hermit, who was elected against his wishes and resigned from the post after five months.

Francis’s predecessor Benedict XVI also stepped down, so plumping for Benedict XVII or Celestine VI might spark speculation about an eventual resignation. While popes in the first few centuries were called anything from Zachary to Adeodatus or Victor, from the 16th century onwards the same names have been circulating — Clement, Gregory, Pius, Paul, Benedict — and it is likely to be one of those, or a composite name.

John Paul I was the first in 1978 to bring two papal names together, to honour those who led the Roman Catholic Church during the Second Vatican Council and John Paul II upheld the tribute when his predecessor died after just 33 days as pope. Those aspiring to emulate Francis’s charismatic leadership might call themselves John Paul III — or even just John, after “Good Pope John” XXIII, who called the Second Vatican Council and declared it his mission to open up the Church to the world.

The name is considered off limits out of respect for the Church’s first pope and, according to a prophecy attributed to a 12th-century saint, the next Peter’s pontificate will bring the destruction of Rome and kick off the Apocalypse. — AFP

Towards building a third generation of culture

KHAMIS AL ADAWI

IBN Khaldun theorised that a state rarely endures beyond four generations, each spanning around 30 years. I have previously shown how this theory applies to Oman’s history twice: during the first centralised state under the Yahmad dynasty (177–272 AH) and again under the Al Ya’aruba dynasty (1034–1131 AH). This article approaches cultural discourse as a component of modern state-building, drawing from Khaldun’s generational model.

In a 2024 article titled “Sultan Qaboos bin Said... and a New Oman,” I argued that the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos recognised the implications of Ibn Khaldun’s view and worked to overcome them through the establishment of institutions and rule of law. I have taught the phases of Omani cultural development in university lectures and here I frame culture as a strategic force for the future — essential to sustaining the state and avoiding the so-called “Khaldunian trap.”

Oman’s modern cultural evolution can be grouped into two generations. The first focused on unifying the national cultural vision during the 1970s Renaissance, with the founding of the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture in 1979 reflecting the state’s orientation towards Islamic heritage and Arab identity. The second generation marked a shift towards cultural pluralism, beginning with the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos’s key address in May 2000, affirming freedom of thought and expression. This phase empowered civil society and later moved towards governance, aligning with Oman Vision 2040. By 2030, this phase should give way to a third generation of cultural development.

This third generation should centre on intellectual and cultural discourse — not merely content



Oman’s first cultural generation secured unity and national cohesion.

production, but the conscious shaping of thought, identity and social values. I discussed this in a paper on hate speech at the University of Oxford in 2019, stressing that discourse is not just language, but a full ecosystem: speaker, audience, context, medium and intent.

Oman’s first cultural generation secured unity and national cohesion. The second welcomed diversity, adapting to global trends and integrating different cultures, especially after the 1990s. Through ministries, libraries, clubs and civil associations, the state promoted cultural awareness. What Oman now needs is to articulate its cultural discourse through thinkers and communicators who reflect its heritage and aspirations.

This third generation is crucial. Global shifts — especially digital and AI developments — demand cultural models suited to a rapidly evolving world. Oman must be prepared not only to preserve its heritage but to project it internationally. Under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan

Haitham bin Tarik, the path ahead is challenging but promising.

To do so, I propose five priorities: research into Omani intellectual history and disciplines such as literature, jurisprudence and folklore; refining the 2021 national cultural strategy under Oman Vision 2040; producing cultural specialists and ambassadors; establishing research centres and creative workshops; and finally, asserting Omani cultural leadership globally — particularly in the age of artificial intelligence, not just through technology, but through the values and philosophies it reflects.

These proposals are submitted to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth as a contribution to building Oman’s third cultural generation — one that embraces the future without losing sight of its past, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. (Translated by Badr al Dhafari and the original version of this article was published in Arabic in the print edition of Oman newspaper on May 6)

Expertise on social media and the loss of knowledge



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

A current trend in thought and action praises self-reference - or, should I say, self-learning entitlement. Achology, the new unconventional educational approach, is a practice that departs from traditional methods and seems to involve adapting and adopting learning processes. While knowledge is an intellectual development based on the appreciation of wisdom, achology – a new word and concept - refers to self-learning and practice via social media applications. The trend is for someone to be an expert in posting and to give opinions on topics about which they know little or nothing: the specialist on Instagram, Facebook and other social platforms. There are fundamental differences between knowledge and technique. Knowledge does not imply training or expertise in the dissemination of information. These opposites reflect on media practice, including the selection of editors. However, when intellect and technique are aligned, they result in higher levels of quality and creativity. Using a critical approach, I look into mass media and culture, such as radio, cinema, television and social platforms. For decades, they have been playing an alienating role in contemporary society. According to German philosopher Theodor Adorno, alienation causes cultural homogenisation to meet media’s business market and capitalist purposes. In this context, we can observe the

use of the media to justify genocide, conflicts, the dislocation of entire communities, the manipulation of election results, etc. I wonder whether one of our greatest social communication contributions is based on agenda-setting, sugar-coating issues, and using carefully crafted images and scenarios to build narratives. Some people are masters in populism, while others are artfully skilled in disguising issues. Given the current state of global politics, economy and military activities, anything is possible. History repeats itself. Misinformation, lies, disinformation and propaganda are not new phenomena, but they have become more common over the last decade. Thus, there is a need for philosophical and historical approaches to perspective formation and opinion expression. It is important to look into the world of politics, delve into critical thoughts and develop media and journalism practice with a pinch of understanding. Every civilisation needs a mechanism for storing and transmitting knowledge. A glance back into thousands of years: Julius Caesar, the legendary Roman Emperor, was a skilled marketing professional to publicise his military achievements and inform the people of the expansion of the Empire through the first newspaper known in the world, the Acta Diurna, which was created in 59 BC. That is when the first professional journalists, known as Imperial Correspondents,

Misinformation, lies, disinformation and propaganda are not new phenomena, but they have become more common over the last decade. Thus, there is a need for philosophical and historical approaches to perspective formation and opinion expression

appeared. We can highlight the Code of Hammurabi, which was written in 1750 BC and contains many principles and self-promotion skills that are still relevant today. Thanks to the Greeks and Romans, journalism has been associated with historiography and millennial literature. In modern civilisation, where we are now since the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century, individuals are empowered through education and technology. However, many people have access to technology yet lack access to education. Our civilisation is marked by advancements in technology, science, industry and societal structures. Still, it is also defined by appalling events, such as the Holodomor, the famine that struck Ukraine from 1929 to 1933, which was a genocide perpetrated by the Soviet Union; the First World War; the Khmer Rouge regime that led to the deaths of approximately 2.5 million people due to starvation, forced labour and execution; and the Three Years Chinese Famine. Past events provide references to current affairs. In the actual media practice, there is a clear disregard for tackling ‘sensitive’ issues and a deliberate lack of historical memory. There is an obvious endorsement of an intellectual vacuum, which is exacerbated by the triviality of social media and, now, achology, a learning process based on social platforms.

MERZ ELECTION SIGNALS END OF GERMANY’S STABLE POLITICS!

PIERRICK YVON

Germany was long a beacon of stability in Europe, its politics often reassuringly boring. The high drama of Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s election left little doubt that those days are over. As former fringe parties such as the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) have surged, the two traditional big-tent parties of the post-war era are increasingly volatile nature of politics in the EU’s biggest economy. Merz’s swearing in on Tuesday came after a roller-coaster ride of events that threw into focus the increasingly volatile nature of politics in the EU’s biggest economy. After his CDU/CSU bloc won February elections, with the AfD in second place, Merz was forced to build a coalition with the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) of then chancellor Olaf Scholz. But, in a surprise upset that rattled Berlin and marred the launch of his “grand coalition”, Merz was defeated in the first round of voting on Tuesday, only to scrape by the second time around. A visibly relieved Merz was then appointed chancellor by President Frank Walter Steinmeier, who drily made light of what he called a “minor delay”. But the early scrape — celebrated by a jubilant AfD — left a bitter taste on day one of the Merz era, highlighting the fragility of his coalition. “Germany and Europe need a strong leader in the German chancellor’s office,” said economist Holger Schmieding of Berenberg Bank. “Merz now looks weaker than expected.” Germany, long a model of consensus-based liberal democracy, has had just 10 heads of government in the past 76 years. By comparison, 31 people have served as Italian prime minister since 1949, some of them more than once. But, like elsewhere across Europe, Germany’s big “people’s parties” have been bleeding support. Germany’s traditional workers party the Social Democrats (SPD) scored their worst ever result, of just 16 per cent, in the election. The conservative Christian Democrats (CDU) and their Bavarian allies the CSU won 28 per cent, while the liberal Free Democrats (FDP) vanished from the scene. Germany’s opposition is now made up of the AfD, which scored a record 20 per cent, as well as the Greens and the far-left Die Linke. A more hostile political tone in parliament is a far cry from the staid years under CDU chancellor Angela Merkel, who watched Tuesday’s parliamentary turmoil as a guest. Critics charge that many of her policies planted the seeds of today’s discord – from neglecting key economic reforms and infrastructure to her open-door policy to migrants. The AfD, founded during her rule, has railed against immigration and a political establishment it labels the “cartel parties”. — AFP

When AI dominates, do minds fade?

DURING my second reading of the influential book Super-intelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies, which explores the accelerating rise of artificial intelligence and the alarming possibilities of achieving superior synthetic cognition, I found myself reflecting on a more profound concern: the not the ascent of machines, but the potential decline of human intelligence itself. As algorithms increasingly integrate into every dimension of life - including, soon, our biological systems - the question of the future of human cognition becomes not only philosophical but existential. While technological advancement is often praised for enhancing productivity and improving quality of life, there is growing unease that excessive reliance on AI systems may lead to a gradual deterioration in human intellectual capacity. This is not merely about the erosion of practical skills, but about the very architecture of intelligence itself. A 2023 report by the World Economic Forum projected that AI will directly impact around 83 million jobs by 2025, with algorithms replacing many roles once carried out by humans. Though this shift is often justified by gains in efficiency and reductions in error, a pressing question emerges: will this transformation result in the atrophy of human intellect due to increasing reliance on digital systems? To address this question objectively, we turn to a 2025 study published in “Societies”, which found that prolonged use of AI tools - particularly generative AI models that now rival traditional search engines - correlates with a measurable decline in memory and critical thinking skills. Those who regularly rely on digital tools for quick problem-solving, the study noted, tend to demonstrate diminished creativity and struggle with complex decision-making. This cognitive decline appears most pronounced in educational contexts. While AI-powered



There is growing unease that excessive reliance on AI may lead to deterioration in human intellectual capacity.



DR MUAMAR AL TOBI

The writer is an academic and a researcher

personalised learning platforms have been lauded for tailoring education to individual needs - something I’ve previously affirmed in academic articles - there’s a darker undercurrent. Over time, this ease of access and consumption may produce addiction-like effects that dull the brain’s analytical and reflective capabilities. Learning without effort, the study suggests, undermines the very mental muscles needed for critical and independent thinking. A 2024 report from the UK Parliament reinforces this concern. It found that students who depend heavily on AI tools for research and writing assignments exhibit lower levels of logical reasoning and idea generation compared to peers who employ traditional study methods. The researchers recommend striking a balance between leveraging advanced technologies and cultivating independent cognitive skills. The issue is not confined to educational outcomes; deeper consequences loom on the horizon. A 2023 study in “Frontiers” warns that excessive dependence on AI may cause long-term changes in brain structure, particularly in areas responsible for memory and spatial reasoning. Reduced cognitive engagement can also

impair the development of neural networks critical for innovation and analytical thought. From a genetic perspective, emerging hypotheses - though not yet definitive - suggest that prolonged mental inactivity could influence gene expression in neurons, ultimately impairing adaptability and mental growth across generations. These concerns are not alarmist exaggerations but existential challenges that demand urgent reassessment of our relationship with technology. To protect the integrity of human cognition, we must redesign our educational systems and daily habits in ways that uphold mental resilience. Among the actionable steps is a shift towards interactive and creative education models, those that stimulate critical thinking, encourage debate and maintain space for organic human engagement. Moderate, intentional use of AI must be emphasised, with conscious limits on digital immersion and reinforcement of non-digital experiences. I have personally experimented with hybrid teaching methods in university settings - integrating technology while preserving active discussion and inquiry - and witnessed clear improvements in student creativity and engagement. As I also discussed in my book Thus We Evolve - Arabic version, the development of a human being is rooted not only in cognition but in moral, linguistic and logical dimensions. Humanity is inherently ethical, rational and expressive, but these innate faculties require nurturing. Overuse of AI, if unchecked, risks stunting the emergence of these traits over time. Therefore, we must invest in revitalising moral education - especially in the face of globalised digital values - while strengthening language, communication and logical reasoning in an age increasingly shaped by the cold rationality of algorithms. To conclude, the challenge we face is not merely technological, but civilisational.

SPORTS

OMANTEL LEAGUE



League champions Seeb will host Al Nasr on home ground to cap off their brilliant run.

SOHAR, IBRI FACE RELEGATION BATTLE IN LAST ROUND

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

The curtain falls on the 2024-25 Oman Professional League (Omantel League) on Thursday evening with a dramatic final round that promises excitement and tension especially at the bottom of the table, where the fierce fight for survival continues between Sohar and Ibri, after Sur were officially relegated earlier.

All six matches will kick off simultaneously at 7:15 pm to ensure fairness and equal opportunity for all teams. The games will be held across six different stadiums and will not only decide the fate of the relegation battle but also feature the championship celebration in Seeb, along with teams seeking to improve their standings before the end of a long season.

League champions Seeb will host Al Nasr on home ground in a festive atmosphere as they celebrate their fourth league title. "The Emperors" aim to cap off the season with a morale-boosting 17th win, having secured the title in the previous round with a 1-0 victory over Al Rustaq.

Al Nasr, meanwhile, will be looking to bounce back from a 2-1 loss to Al Khabourah and reach 30 points, potentially climbing to fourth place.

DO-OR-DIE CLASH IN SOHAR

Sohar host Oman Club in a must-win match at the Sohar Sports Complex. With just 21 points one above the relegation zone, Sohar need victory to survive. Oman Club, on the other hand, sit comfortably in third with 42 points and aim to end the season on a high.

Ibri will cling to survival hopes as they visit Al Khabourah at the Rustaq Sports Complex. Sitting second-to-last with 20 points, Ibri need a win and must hope for a slip-up from Sohar or Al Rustaq to avoid relegation. Al Khabourah (28 points) target a potential fourth-place finish with a strong result.

AL NAHDA CLING TO SECOND SPOT

Al Nahda face Al Rustaq at the Al Buraimi Sports Complex, aiming to secure second place with a 47-point finish, after their title hopes were dashed by Seeb's last win. Al Rustaq, having already confirmed their place in the league next season, is seeking a seventh win that could lift them from ninth place (currently at 23 points).

Already relegated Sur will host Saham in a match of formality. Sur look to end their season with pride, while Saham (26 points) eye a fourth-place finish dependent on other results involving Al Shabab, Al Khabourah and Al Nasr.

At the Nizwa Sports Complex, Bahla will face Al Shabab in a match focused on improving standings. Al Shabab currently hold fourth place with 28 points and aim for a ninth win to stay ahead of their rivals. Bahla (25 points) have secured safety and will seek a strong finish.

The Oman Football Association previously announced an increase in the league's cash prizes this season to RO 130,000, distributed among first through sixth-place finishers. The champions will receive RO 50,000, runners-up RO 30,000, third place RO 20,000, fourth place RO 15,000, fifth place RO 10,000 and sixth place RO 5,000.

Oman eye second straight win against Hong Kong

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

OMAN NATIONAL BEACH HANDBALL TEAM will eye a second straight win as they will take on Hong Kong on Thursday in their second match in Group A for the underway 10th AHF Men's and Women's Asian Beach Handball Championship. The match will kick off at 8 pm at the sands court in Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

In the other matches, Philippines will play against India while Pakistan will take on Jordan.

Oman began their campaign with a decisive 2-0 win over the Maldives in the opener on Tuesday.

Oman's Asaad al Hasani and his teammates demonstrated their dominance with set scores of 22-8 and 22-6 to clinch an essential win.

The team will target for another triumph which will secure their place at the top of the group standings and move further in the knockout stage.

Oman's goalie Hudaifa al Siyabi was named as the man of the match following his outstanding show during the game.

In an early match, Pakistan snatched a crucial 2-1 victory over Philippines on Tuesday.

The first set ended for Philippines by 19-18 before Pakistan equalised in the following half by 18-10.

In the penalty shoot-out, Pakistan won the match by 7-6.

Speaking ahead of the match, Oman head coach Hamood al Hasani said: "We have clear goals in this tournament. The first target is to secure an early qualification for the semifinals."

"We will have a tough match against Hong Kong as they are ranked as a fast, young team with good skills but we have played with them before and now the team are much prepared are ready for the fixture. I can say that each match in the group stage is like a final and there are no room for mistakes."

The coaching staff attended Hong Kong match against Saudi Arabia on Wednesday to note down all the technical points.

It is expected they will select and implement the right technical strategy in Thursday's match.



Oman's player in action against Maldives during the 10th AHF Men's and Women's Asian Beach Handball Championship in Muscat on Tuesday.



Oman's goalkeeper Hudaifa al Siyabi was named as the man of the match.

WOMEN'S ACTION FROM TODAY
The action of 10th AHF Women Asian Beach Handball Championship will commence on Thursday with two matches taking place at the sand courts at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. In the

first match, India will take on Vietnam and the match will kick off at 6 pm. In the following match, Hong Kong will face Philippines and the game will begin at 7 pm. The technical meeting for the women's teams was held on Wednesday and during the meeting all the player lists, kit colours and rule updates were confirmed.

Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, Chairman of Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), praised Oman's opening performance against Maldives and reiterated his hopes that the team will continue to challenge for the championship title and qualify for the World Championships. "These events bring major organisational and tourism benefits to the Sultanate of Oman. They also provide valuable experience to our national sports personnel and promote Oman as a destination for major global and sporting events," Al Zubair said.

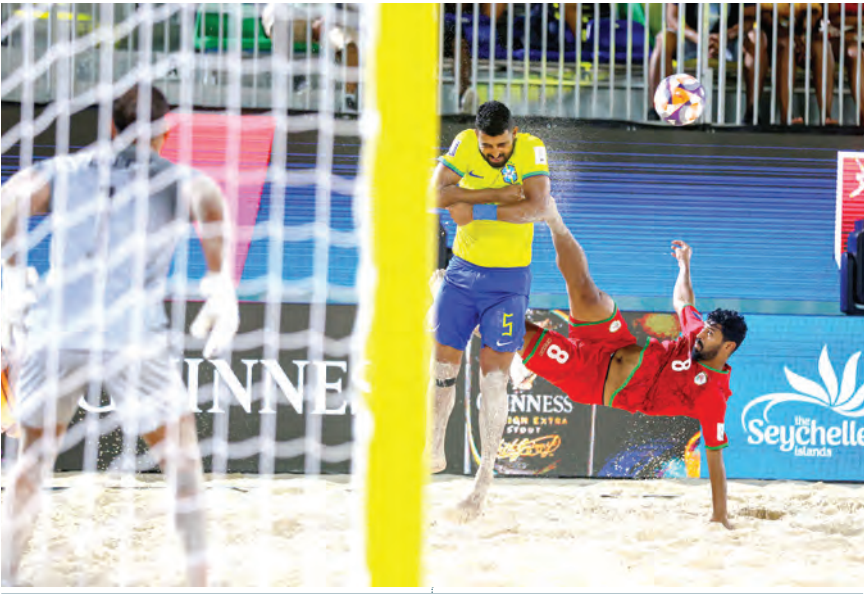
Oman out of beach soccer WC with Brazil defeat

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

Oman beach soccer team ended its journey at 2025 Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in Seychelles from an early stage as they suffered a 11-1 loss against world champions Brazil in the concluding Group D match on Tuesday night.

The national team could not manage to move into the knockout stage for the first time in history in their sixth participation at the beach soccer world championships.

Oman began their campaign in the tournament with a difficult 7-4 loss against Italy, runners up of the last edition. Then, the team managed to earn a victory against El Salvador through penalty shoot-out as the match ended at 4-4 draw. The only victory was not enough for the team to move into the next round as Italy joined Brazil to the following phase of the championship after they



Oman player makes an acrobatic effort against Brazil.

blanked El Salvador by 5-0.

It was a one-sided match against Brazil as their players delivered a dominant performance. Edson Hulk opened the scoring early in the first period while Rodrigo added a spectacular acrobatic finish to double the lead for

his team. Two more goals were scored in the opening period as Thanger's powerful left-footed strike made it 3-0, while Brendo raised the scoring gap to a 4-0 lead before the period end by two minutes.

In the following period, Oman players pressed hard to

find a goal but the defending area of the opponents blocked all chances as there were no goals in this period from both sides.

In the final set, the world champions raised their attacking focus as they managed to have a goal-scoring spree. Benjinha's penalty strike bounced past the Omani goalkeeper, followed quickly by a sublime goal from Catarino and another goal from Brendo to make it 7-0. Oman's Sami al Balushi scored the only goal for Oman team but the response was so quick from Brazil side as Catarino completed his hat-trick, and goals from Mauricinho and Benjinha sealed an overwhelming 11-1 victory over Oman.

Italy snatched showed a solid performance to defeat El Salvador 5-0 in their final group stage clash to join Brazil in the quarterfinals which will begin on Thursday.

CONTINUEODIS



Mumbai Indians' Rohit Sharma warms up before an IPL match. — Reuters

ROHIT ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT FROM TEST CRICKET

NEW DELHI: India captain Rohit Sharma on Wednesday announced his retirement from Test cricket ahead of the team's tour of England starting next month, but will continue to play the shorter 50-over format.

In 67 Tests, Rohit scored 4,301 runs including 12 centuries with a best of 212 against South Africa in 2019 and an average of over 40. He captained India in 24 Tests with 12 wins, nine defeats and three draws. "Hello everyone I would just like to share that I am retiring from Test cricket," the 38-year-old Rohit wrote on Instagram.

"It's been an absolute honour to represent my country in whites. Thank you for all the love and support over the years. I will continue to represent India in the ODI format."

Rohit, who quit T20 internationals alongwith Virat Kohli after India's World Cup triumph in Barbados last year, recently led the team to an ODI Champions Trophy title in Dubai. India will begin a five-Test series in England in June-July and the team now needs a new Test skipper.

India's cricket board said, "Rohit Sharma has informed us of his decision to retire from Test cricket. A legend of the red-ball game."

"We will soon announce a new Test captain — it's time for the next generation to rise."

Rohit's last Test was in Melbourne last year when India lost to Australia by 184 runs.

He stood down as captain in the fifth Test in Sydney due to poor batting form but India went on to lose the match and the five-match series 2-1.

'PRICELESS'

Rohit managed just 31 runs in five innings of his three outings Down Under and the Indian media speculated that he could retire from Test cricket after the series.

The captain, nicknamed 'Hitman' for getting to big scores quickly — especially in white-ball, also had a poor home series against Bangladesh and New Zealand late last year. Rohit's India won both the Tests against Bangladesh, but New Zealand handed a rare 3-0 whitewash to the hosts.

Rohit began his Test career in 2013, but it was five years later that he came into his own in the five-day format as a swashbuckling opener and later took over as captain from Kohli.

"As player and as captain, you were a joy and India will say a big thank you to you," veteran commentator Harsha Bhogle posted on social media.

"That century in Chennai, that one at the Oval, both priceless. You walked out against South Africa to open as if you had done it all your life. Will look forward to watching and, hopefully calling, some more great moments in your ODI career," Bhogle added. — AFP



Gujarat Titans' Prasidh Krishna celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Mumbai Indians' Naman Dhir, caught out by Shubman Gill. — Reuters

Gujarat edge Mumbai in last-ball thriller to top IPL

HARDIK

PANDYA missed a shy at the stumps to force a Super Over as Gujarat Titans edged out Mumbai Indians by three wickets from the final ball in a rain-hit IPL clash on Tuesday to top the table.

Gujarat started strongly in their initial chase of 156 with a second-wicket stand of 72 between skipper Shubman Gill, who fell to an inspired Jasprit Bumrah after a rain break, and Jos Buttler at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium.

Bad weather interrupted play twice and after the second delay the victory target was revised to 147 from 19 overs, leaving Gujarat needing 15 from the final six balls.

Rahul Tewatia began with a four off Deepak Chahar and Gerald Coetzee smashed a six on the third ball before holing out on the fifth with only one run required to win.

But number nine Arshad Khan stole a single off the final ball after hitting it to Pandya at mid-off, as the former Gujarat skipper, now Mumbai captain, missed the wicket with his throw from close range.

Gujarat jumped to the top of the 10-team table and pushed Mumbai, whose winning streak of six matches came to an end, to fourth.

The top four teams after the league phase will make the playoffs, with the final on May 25 in Kolkata.

Gujarat were cruising at 113-2 after the



Gujarat Titans' Shubman Gill in action against Mumbai Indians at the Wankhede Stadium, Mumbai. — Reuters

first rain break when Bumrah, who returned figures of 2-19, bowled Gill for a 46-ball 43 and fellow quick Trent Boult trapped impact substitute Sherfane Rutherford lbw for 28.

Bumrah rattled the stumps of the big-

hitting Shahrulkh Khan and Gujarat slipped to 126-6 when Rashid Khan was out for two.

Tewatia and Coetzee were batting when rain stopped play for the second time with Gujarat behind the DLS par score at 132-6, but after a long wait achieved a nail-biting victory.

Mumbai were restricted to 155-8 despite Will Jacks' 53 and a late cameo of 27 by Corbin Bosch.

Pace spearhead Mohammed Siraj claimed a wicket from just the second ball when he got Mumbai's South African opener Ryan Rickelton caught out for two.

Gujarat's fielders then dropped three catches, including two reprieves to Jacks who counter-attacked after the fall of Rohit Sharma, for seven.

England batter Jacks, along with Suryakumar Yadav, who made 35, put on 71 runs for the third wicket.

Sai Kishore broke the stand with his left-arm spin to cut short Suryakumar's 24-ball knock and trigger a collapse.

Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid sent back Jacks after the batsman's first half-century for Mumbai.

Pandya, Tilak Varma and Naman Dhir were dismissed in quick succession as Mumbai slipped to 123-7 in 16.2 overs.

South Africa's Bosch, who got out in the final over and was later replaced by a concussion substitute having been hit on the helmet, put together 27 for the eighth wicket with Chahar. — AFP

40 trainees attend international volleyball coaching course

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

The Oman Volleyball Association inaugurated the Level 1 International Volleyball Coaching Course on Sunday morning at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The course will continue until May 8 and features the participation of 40 male and female trainees from inside and outside the Sultanate, under the supervision of international instructor Dr Hamoud al Harthy.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Ali al Maawali, Director of Sports Facilities in Muscat Governorate. This course is accredited by the International Volleyball Federation

(FIVB) and aims to qualify coaches by equipping them with the essential skills and knowledge required to train beginners and youth at schools, clubs, and youth development centers.

Participants in the course come from various countries, including the UAE, Kuwait, Egypt, India, the Philippines, Poland and Bulgaria, reflecting the regional and global scope of the event and affirming Oman's status as a recognised training hub in the sports sector.

Dr Hamoud al Harthy, an FIVB-certified instructor, explained that the Level 1 course focuses on training coaches to work with beginners whether in schools, clubs, or youth development centres. He emphasised that this



The course is under the supervision of international instructor Dr Hamoud al Harthy.

course is the first step in a series of internationally accredited coaching levels and carries the title 'How Do I Play?', which encapsulates the central theme of the programme.

Al Harthy added, "Through this course, we aim to provide coaches

with fundamental information on teaching volleyball's basic skills and effective methods to deliver these to beginners, especially emphasising positive engagement with younger age groups."

He expressed his happiness

that Oman is hosting the course, noting that this reflects the FIVB's confidence in the Omani federation's capability to organise accredited training programmes. He said, "I am honoured that this is the first course I am teaching under the umbrella of the International Federation, and even more so that it is being held in Oman, with strong participation from 40 trainees highlighting the course's international dimension."

Ali al Maawali expressed his happiness at the launch of the Level 1 coaching course and warmly welcomed all international participants, stating that "Oman is their second home."

He also thanked the OVA for organising such a high-quality course.

Frattesi’s extra-time winner sends Inter into CL final

INTER MILAN substitute Davide Frattesi struck an extra-time winner to send his side into the Champions League final following a sensational 4-3 victory over Barcelona on Tuesday after Francesco Acerbi had rescued them from the brink of elimination with a stunning equaliser deep in added time. Frattesi’s goal and a string of superb saves by goalkeeper Yann Sommer secured Inter a rip-roaring 7-6 aggregate victory in a semifinal for the ages.

The Italian side will face either Paris St Germain or Arsenal in the Munich final later this month, with the French team taking a 1-0 lead into Wednesday’s semifinal second leg.

Following a breathtaking first leg in Barcelona that had everything from early drama, late chaos, and dazzling moments from 17-year-old Lamine Yamal, the return encounter in Milan was even more dramatic, a rollercoaster ride that will live long in the memory.

It was a tale of two halves as Inter dominated the first 45 minutes and opened a two-goal lead thanks to a Lautaro Martinez goal on the counter in the 21st minute before Hakan Calhanoglu extended their advantage with a penalty right before the break.

The penalty was awarded after the VAR spotted a foul by Pau Cubarsi on Martinez in the box that had looked like a well-timed challenge on first viewing.

However, Barca woke up in the second half with Eric Garcia and Dani Olmo netting within six minutes to level the scoring and, even though Sommer worked his magic to help keep the hosts alive, the Catalans thought they had scored the winner through Raphinha, who struck from close range in the 87th minute. But as Inter made a desperate run for an equaliser, Denzel Dumfries found 37-year-old Acerbi inside the box and he fired a first-time effort into the net to score his first European goal in his 20th season and take the game to extra time.

In the 99th minute, Marcus Thuram made a brilliant run from the right and played the ball into the area for Frattesi, who set himself before neatly guiding a curling shot into the bottom corner to send the delighted home fans into raptures.



Inter Milan’s Swiss goalkeeper #01 Yann Sommer makes a save after a shot by Barcelona’s Spanish forward #19 Lamine Yamal during the Uefa Champions League semifinal second leg match between Inter Milan and FC Barcelona at the San Siro stadium in Milan. — AFP

‘THE INCREDIBLE HAPPENED’
Sommer made two world-class saves from Yamal, who also hit the post with another stunning strike deep in added time, as Inter moved a step closer to their fourth Champions League title and their first in 15 years after losing to Manchester City in the final two years ago. “I’m lucky to have finished the game, I screamed so much that I saw everything black,” Frattesi, who also came off the bench to score the winner in the first leg of their quarterfinal at Bayern Munich, told Sky Sport.

“I have to thank the physiotherapists because in recent days I was not well, I dedicate the victory to them. It’s incredible, I don’t know what to say. Tonight the incredible happened.”
Barca were chasing a treble after winning the Copa del Rey, but will now turn their focus to LaLiga, where they top the table and on Sunday host rivals Real Madrid, who trail them by four points with four games to go.
The five-time winners were hoping to reach their first Champions League final in a decade,

but were left licking their wounds ahead of Sunday’s clash.
Unbeaten domestically since late December, Barcelona will try to grab a fourth consecutive victory over Real this season.
“Football has been very cruel to us,” Barca defender Eric Garcia told Movistar Plus. “We were down 2-0 again and the character this team showed was remarkable.
“We are a team full of young players and this has been a great year. We still have the (Spanish) league to play for.” — Reuters

Weekend

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Al Mudhish Whole Wheat Flour 5kg

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SAVE

1.400

1.100

OMR

بوتونودي عصيدي بكاري ٢x١ كجم

Ajmi Steam Puttupodi 2x1kg

28.382%
SAVE

26.390

18.900

OMR

ارز لسمين طويل خ

الموزة الموزة ٣٥

Basmati Rice 35Kg

28.869%
SAVE

3.360

2.390

OMR

كريم اوبي لبنة والتين ٥

كريم + غسول الوجه

Olay Day+Night Cream 50Gm+Face Wash

41.593%
SAVE

1.695

0.990

OMR

مسحوق غسيل بكار ٥٠٠ كجم

Bahar Washing Powder 2.05Kg

40.667%
SAVE

1.500

0.890

OMR

صابون ياردلي ٣x١00Gm

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Haliburton stunner sinks Cavaliers, Warriors down Wolves in playoffs

LOS ANGELES: The Indiana Pacers defeated the top-seeded Cleveland Cavaliers 120-119 as the Golden State Warriors shrugged off a Stephen Curry injury to claim victory against the Minnesota Timberwolves in the NBA playoffs on Tuesday.

Tyrese Haliburton’s 24-foot three-pointer with just 1.1 seconds remaining sealed a remarkable comeback from fourth seeds Indiana as they took a commanding 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference semifinal series.

Donovan Mitchell had almost single-handedly dragged an injury-depleted Cleveland to victory with a masterful performance, scoring 48 points in a game the Cavs led by 20 midway through the third quarter.

But Cleveland, missing injured starters Darius Garland, Evan Mobley, and De’Andre Hunter, wilted visibly down the stretch as a dogged Pacers line-up refused to roll over and steadily chipped away at the Cavaliers’ lead.

Cleveland forward Max Strus looked to have put the Cavs on course for victory after draining his fifth three-pointer of the night to put the home side 117-110 up with just over a minute remaining.

Indiana, though, closed with a 10-2 run, culminating with Haliburton’s winning three to set the seal on a sensational fightback.

“Cleveland hit us with a hellacious punch early in the game and it was difficult to get the ball over half court, let alone score,” Indiana coach

Indiana Pacers’ Tyrese Haliburton (0) drives to the basket between Cleveland Cavaliers Max Strus (1) and Jarrett Allen (31) during game two of the second round of the NBA Playoffs. — Imagn Images

Rick Carlisle said afterwards.
“We played from behind the whole game. But in the fourth quarter we just hung in there...our group has a belief in one another and we just keep executing and keep playing.”
Pacers point guard Haliburton finished with 19 points while Aaron Nesmith and Myles Turner scored 23 points apiece. Six Indiana players finished in double figures.
Mitchell’s 48-point performance was backed by Strus with 23 points while Jarrett Allen added 22.
Cleveland coach Kenny Atkinson said his team had faded in the critical fourth quarter.
“We outplayed them for most of the game,” Atkinson said. “We couldn’t really separate ourselves. Every possession, they just upped their physicality. We ran out of gas.”

Game three is in Indianapolis on Friday.

CURRY WORRY FOR WARRIORS
In Minneapolis, the Golden State Warriors were forced to dig deep before battling to a 99-88 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves in their Western Conference semi-final series opener.

The Timberwolves had dismantled the third-seeded Los Angeles Lakers in the previous round, but struggled to get to grips with a steely Golden State defense in a low-scoring contest at the Target Center.

Timberwolves star Anthony Edwards had a rare off-night, sinking just one three-pointer in his 23-point total. The Wolves’ wayward long-range shooting proved the difference, with the team making just five of 29 from beyond the arc.

The Warriors by contrast made 18-of-42 from three-point range with Buddy Hield draining five threes to lead the Golden State scoring with 24 points. Jimmy Butler added 20 points while defensive linchpin Draymond Green also chipped in with an important 18-point haul.

But the victory was clouded by a worrying injury to superstar Curry, who left the game in the second quarter clutching his left hamstring.

The 11-time All-Star headed to the locker room for treatment and did not return, almost certainly ruling him out of Thursday’s game two and putting a question mark over his fitness for the rest of the series. — AFP



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BUSINESS

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be'ah is laying the groundwork for a circular economy model to handle the first wave of renewable energy waste, expected between 2040 and 2045.

BE'AH PLANS CIRCULAR ECONOMY FOR RENEWABLE INFRASTRUCTURE WASTE

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 7

AS OMAN gears up for the arrival of vast quantities of equipment — chiefly solar PV modules, wind blades, towers and turbines — needed to realise its ambitious renewable energy and green hydrogen goals, be'ah, the country's solid waste management entity, is already planning for the future when this infrastructure reaches the end of its operational life and must be sustainably managed.

Aware of the significant challenges posed by end-of-life renewables in early adopter countries, be'ah is laying the groundwork for a circular economy model to handle the first wave of renewable energy waste, expected between 2040 and 2045. To prepare for this phase, be'ah partnered with Nafas International, an Oman-based consultancy specialising in project management and sustainability, to conduct a study addressing renewable energy waste, including from solar PV systems and wind turbines.

"The study identified waste streams, proposed circular solutions and recommended strategies for integrating renewable energy waste management into be'ah's operations," the utility said. "Findings — highlighting material lifecycles with a focus on recycling and sustainable disposal — were shared at a workshop and the Energy Majlis hosted by the Netherlands Embassy in 2024," it added in its newly published 2024 Sustainability Report.

To meet its strategic green hydrogen target of around 8 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) by 2050, Oman expects to deploy approximately 300 million solar PV panels, over 10,000 wind turbines, and around 5,200 electrolyzers, in addition to a wide range of supporting infrastructure.

Investments in innovation to spur low-carbon future

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

OMAN IS ADVANCING a climate-resilient investment model by integrating environmental goals with strategic economic growth. Two standout initiatives backed by the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) signal this shift: a large-scale lemon tree plantation for carbon sequestration and the localisation of cutting-edge water treatment technologies through the US-based firm Gradiant.

In Dhofar's Rahab Farm, Nakheel Oman Development, under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and funding from Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), has planted 30,000 Omani lemon trees.

This landmark project is one of the first nature-based carbon sequestration investments in Oman and is expected to play a dual role — capturing atmospheric carbon while enhancing national food security.

The lemon trees are projected to increase Omani lemon production by 38 per cent, reaching approximately 11,000 tonnes annually.

Beyond output, the project strengthens Oman's alignment with its net-zero emissions target by 2050. Using groundwater and smart irrigation systems that respond to soil moisture, the initiative maximises resource efficiency — offering a scalable model for sustainable agriculture in arid environments.

"This is more than a farm — it's a carbon sink with economic yield," a senior OIA official noted. "It shows how local ecosystems can be turned into assets within the global carbon market, while directly supporting food production and rural employment."

Equally transformative is OIA's investment in Gradiant, a global leader in water and wastewater treatment.

Through the full acquisition of Muscat Projects and Engineering Services (MPES), Gradiant has established a strong operating base in Oman, providing engineering and



OIA has invested in Gradiant, a leading provider of advanced solutions for water and wastewater treatment.

Net-Zero:
30,000 lemon trees and AI-driven water solutions mark climate-smart shift in OIA's portfolio.

procurement services to key clients including Nama Water Services, the Ministry of Defence and PDO. The move brings advanced technologies into Oman's utilities sector, especially as climate pressure mounts on water infrastructure. In August 2023, Gradiant launched "Turing," an AI-powered digital platform that enhances desalination performance, predicts network leaks and enables real-time water quality monitoring. These technologies are now being deployed in collaboration with Nama to modernise wastewater treatment systems across the country.

In November 2024, OIA supported the launch of the Oman Innovation Labs Centre, a research and development facility operated jointly by Gradiant and Nama.

The centre is equipped with engineering workshops, electromechanical testing units and laboratories, designed to accelerate the adoption of smart water technologies tailored for Oman's climate and infrastructure conditions.

The localisation of these solutions reflects OIA's broader investment philosophy — prioritising long-term national value, sustainability and knowledge transfer.

"We are not just investing in foreign companies," an OIA executive explained. "We are bringing the most advanced global solutions into Oman and anchoring them locally to build capability and resilience."

Together, these initiatives exemplify the new face of Oman's sovereign investment: rooted in Vision 2040, climate-aligned, innovation-led, and grounded in real economic and environmental returns. From carbon farming to AI-enhanced utilities, Oman is shaping a green economic model that speaks not just to financial growth, but to national transformation.

Oman fast-tracks Artificial Intelligence for economic transformation

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is intensifying efforts to integrate artificial intelligence (AI) across various economic sectors as part of its broader digital economy strategy. Central to this initiative is the National Programme for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Digital Technologies, which promotes AI adoption in economic and development sectors, localises AI technologies and ensures responsible governance with a human-centred approach.

Oman's focus on AI is yielding results. In 2024, the country climbed five spots to rank 45th globally out of 193 countries on the Government AI Readiness Index.

The national AI programme has led to several milestones, including the "Engineer It with AI" competition, which generated eight qualified generative AI

applications now available on digital platforms.

To foster innovation and reduce implementation risks, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has piloted a range of AI-powered experiments in controlled settings.

These include facial recognition systems, air quality monitoring, AI-driven agricultural census, smart urban planning, drone-based surveying and intelligent systems for fish farming and construction.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation is backing academic research aligned with national AI priorities.

A standout project from the National University of Science and Technology — focused on maximising benefits and minimising risks of generative



In 2024, the country climbed five spots to rank 45th globally out of 193 countries on the Government AI Readiness Index.

AI in education — has made notable progress. The research involves building smart models and analysing educational data to create a national framework for AI's impact in the sector.

Oman is implementing the "Artificial Intelligence Economics" initiative, which supports government innovation and AI-based solutions across sectors.

Among the approved projects are the National Centre for Virtual Health, Geological Data Analysis, Environmental Information Bank, Ain Media Platform, Investment Dashboard, smart governance portals, and a support programme for Omani start-ups.

Dr Salem bin Humaid al Shuaili, Director of AI and Advanced Technologies Projects at MoTCIT, revealed that Oman allocated RO 10 million in 2023 and RO 15 million in 2024 for

AI projects. Between 2021 and 2024, total investment in the AI sector reached RO 60 million. Dr Al Shuaili also highlighted the ongoing development of "Oman GPT", a national language model to improve public sector efficiency using generative AI.

Additionally, the upcoming "Studio Oman" AI Centre will serve as a platform to bridge innovators with market needs, boost GDP contributions from AI and localise key digital technologies.

Oman is also setting up a Fourth Industrial Revolution Centre — the sixth in the Middle East and 22nd globally — to drive AI localisation and benefit from international expertise. The move underscores Oman's ambition to become a leading nation in AI readiness, attract more start-ups and increase annual AI investment by 20%. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS



Mohamed Sleiman, Chief Executive Officer of Alfardan Properties and Alfardan Hospitality.

ALFARDAN PROPERTIES LAUNCHES PRIVILEGE PROGRAMMES IN OMAN

MUSCAT: Alfardan Properties has officially launched “Alfardan Living Privilege Programme” and “Alfardan Oyster Privilege Club” which was attended by Alfardan Properties’ distinguished tenants and members of Oman’s press at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort.

Having been successfully launched previously in Qatar, these programmes have now been introduced to enhance the lifestyle of distinguished residential and commercial tenants based in premier mixed-use developments in Oman: Alfardan Heights and Finaa Alfardan.

“Alfardan Living Privilege Programme” is designed exclusively for elite residential tenants at Alfardan Properties while “Alfardan Oyster Privilege Club” is a programme tailored to their commercial tenants and their employees, both offering access to a world of carefully curated benefits and unparalleled experiences.

In Oman, Alfardan Properties’ tenants will enjoy bespoke preferential rates at The St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, including preferred rates across hotel rooms, award-winning Guerlain Spa and renowned dining outlets such as Em Sherif, Coya, Novikov Café, Roberto’s, Hakkasan, and Zorba, among others.

International privileges extend across Qatar and Türkiye, offering preferential rates at 5-star hotels, over 50 award-winning dining outlets, and exclusive spas at premier destinations such as The St Regis Doha, The St Regis Marsa Arabia Island, Marsa Malaz Kempinski in Qatar, and Six Senses Kocataş Mansions in Istanbul. Additionally, members enjoy preferred rates across Alfardan Jewellery brands.

The remarkable success of the “Alfardan Living Privilege Programme” and the “Alfardan Oyster Privilege Club” in Qatar has played a pivotal role in driving their expansion to Oman. These initiatives have become cornerstones of Alfardan Properties’ commitment to distinctive living, elevating residential and corporate experiences through exclusive access to a curated suite of premium lifestyle benefits.

Their success and strong impact on tenant satisfaction have underscored the programmes’ ability to create meaningful connections and deliver exceptional value — making their introduction to the Omani market a strategic next step.

Mohamed Sleiman, Chief Executive Officer of Alfardan Properties and Alfardan Hospitality, states: “Introducing these two programmes in Oman marks a key milestone for us. By extending tailored privileges across three countries, we are enhancing the living and business experiences of our partners and residents, while setting a new industry benchmark.

More than just benefits, these programmes build a connected community defined by luxury, service and the distinctive living Alfardan Properties offers.”

NBO, OMAN OIL LAUNCH CASHBACK REWARD CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced a limited-time cashback campaign in collaboration with Oman Oil, offering 20 per cent cashback in the form of reward points on purchases made with NBO Retail VISA Credit Cards.

The offer is valid from May 1-31, 2025 across Oman Oil fuel stations nationwide. Available to the first 3,000 customers, the cashback will apply to their first transaction during the campaign period on Oman Oil with a maximum reward of RO 3 per



customer.

During the campaign period, Oman Oil will reward 10 NBO Debit Card holders with Basma

fuel card, pre-loaded with RO 50. These cards will be issued to 10 top spender NBO Debit Card holders at Oman Oil.

The next 20 highest Debit Card spenders on Oman Oil will receive Basma fuel card, pre-loaded with RO 25 each. Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager and Head of Retail Products at NBO said, “At National Bank of Oman, we are always looking for ways to provide added value and rewards to our customers. We are delighted to partner with Oman Oil for this exclusive campaign.”

Abraj, Sonatrach solidify strategic partnership

ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES, Oman’s leading oil and gas services provider marked a significant presence during the historic state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria. The visit witnessed the strengthening of bilateral economic ties and the opening of new horizons for strategic partnership and investment between the Sultanate of Oman and Algeria.



This strategic initiative is expected to establish a joint energy entity that strengthens bilateral cooperation in the energy services sector.

Under the gracious auspices of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and His Excellency President Abdelmadjid Tebboune of Algeria, a Term Sheet agreement was signed between Abraj Energy Services and Sonatrach to establish a joint venture specialising in drilling and well services as well as integrated project management.

The signing ceremony took place at the Presidential Palace in Algiers and was attended by Eng Saif bin Said al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services

and Rachid Hachichi, Chairman and CEO of Sonatrach.

The agreement is the result of extensive efforts that followed the signing of an MoU between the two parties in April 2024 and months of collaboration between their joint working teams.

Commenting on the occasion, Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services, said: “We are deeply honoured and proud of this moment, representing a national and strategic milestone for Abraj Energy Services and the

Sultanate of Oman. Being part of His Majesty’s official delegation to Algeria reflects the trust and vital role Abraj plays locally and regionally.

This visit has significantly deepened our cooperation with Sonatrach and marks a true starting point for a sustainable and impactful partnership.”

The signed key terms agreement aims to lay the legal, technical and commercial foundations for assessing the feasibility of launching a joint

venture company focused on delivering drilling and well services, along with integrated project management. The initial focus will be on the Algerian market, with plans to expand regionally and internationally in the future.

This strategic initiative is expected to establish a joint energy entity that strengthens bilateral cooperation in the energy services sector.

It also supports knowledge transfer and operational expertise sharing, aligning with the growing demand for integrated and sustainable energy solutions.

The announcement follows an exceptional year for Abraj Energy Services in 2024. The company recorded revenues exceeding RO 152.6 million, an EBITDA margin of 32 per cent and completed three consecutive years with zero Lost Time Incidents (LTI).

It also spent over RO 193 million locally and supported over 150 small and medium enterprises (SMEs), solidifying its position as a leading regional energy services provider.

Dhofar Islamic launches salary transfer campaign

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic Banking Window of Bank Dhofar,” launched the “Salary Transfer” campaign, offering customers a comprehensive package of exclusive benefits designed to enhance their banking experience. The four-month campaign will offer a range of exclusive benefits and privileges for individuals who open new salary accounts or transfer their existing salaries to Dhofar Islamic.

Customers with a minimum salary credit of RO 700 will enjoy first-year annual fee waiver on credit cards, as well as benefit from competitive financing rates, faster processing times



The four-month campaign will offer a range of exclusive benefits and privileges.

and flexible terms.

In addition, the campaign features special debit and credit card offers; free debit card

issuance for accounts opened through Dhofar Islamic mobile banking; and access to standby cash credit facilities via Dhofar Islamic credit card cash advance facility at competitive pricing.

Commenting on the launch, Amor al Amri, GM & Chief Dhofar Islamic Banking Officer, stated, “This campaign reflects our commitment to delivering meaningful value to our customers while supporting our growth trajectory.

By offering tailored benefits and enhanced digital access, we aim to strengthen our relationship with customers and make Dhofar Islamic their preferred banking partner.”

The Salary Campaign aligns

with Dhofar Islamic’s long-term strategy to expand its customer base, improve market share and enhance brand visibility across the Sultanate of Oman. It underscores the bank’s commitment to providing innovative and customer-centric financial solutions while contributing to the economic growth of the Sultanate of Oman.

The bank has made significant strides in expanding its offerings, launching innovative products like the Savings Plan and MasterCard World Credit Card; and supporting the financing of major projects across sectors such as energy, real estate and infrastructure.

Sohar International sponsors free-diving champion Omar al Ghailani

MUSCAT: As a progressive and purpose-driven institution dedicated to cultivating homegrown talent, Sohar International — serving as the Gold Sponsor — has recently formalised its sponsorship of Omar al Ghailani, a globally acclaimed Omani free-diving champion.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was officially signed by the bank’s Chief Executive Officer, Abdulwahid Mohamed al Murshidi. This strategic partnership not only reflects the bank’s steadfast

commitment to empowering Omani youth but also, through Omar’s ongoing community engagement.

Abdulwahid Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, said, “Freediving is a discipline that demands exceptional mental fortitude, physical control and a deep harmony with nature — qualities that set it apart from conventional sports.

At Sohar International, we take pride in supporting a broad



This strategic partnership not only reflects the bank’s steadfast commitment to empowering Omani youth but also, through Omar’s ongoing community engagement.

spectrum of athletic pursuits that resonate with our national identity and future aspirations. By standing behind Omar’s remarkable journey, we celebrate not only personal excellence but also the enduring spirit of perseverance deeply rooted in Oman’s maritime legacy.

Through this partnership, we aim to inspire a new generation of Omanis to dream boldly and pursue their goals with purpose.”

Expressing his gratitude to Sohar International for their support,

Omar al Ghailani stated, “I am honoured to collaborate with Sohar International — a partner whose values closely align with my own. Having the backing of an institution that champions commitment, discipline and national pride is both empowering and affirming.

This support not only strengthens my journey as an athlete but also reinforces the importance of fostering meaningful partnerships that elevate individual potential and national representation.”

BUSINESS

CONCRETE SOLUTIONS



Deliberations sought to tackle trade barriers, streamline Gulf business integration, and empower the private sector for stronger regional economic growth.

WORKSHOP ADDRESSES PRIVATE SECTOR CHALLENGES IN GCC COMMON MARKET

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MAY 7

THE OMAN Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), in collaboration with the Federation of GCC Chambers, held a workshop on May 7, 2025, to address the issues facing the Gulf private sector in the GCC Common Market context.

Held at the Chamber’s headquarters in Muscat, the forum brought together policymakers and business leaders to discuss key issues hindering intra-GCC trade, including cumbersome laws, customs procedures, logistics challenges, and poor access to funding for cross-border investment.

Participants debated concrete measures to increase regional trade and make Gulf enterprises more competitive.

The workshop also reviewed current incentives and introduced requirements needed to spur private sector development and integration.

Zakaria bin Abdullah al Saadi, CEO of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, emphasised the importance of strengthening Gulf private sector cooperation in his opening remarks at a recent workshop.

He emphasised the need to overcome underlying issues in trade law, financing, and investment and push for more intense economic integration within GCC nations.

Al Saadi noted the Gulf Common Market is a keystone achievement and called for concrete solutions to boost its efficiency and shape regional trade goals.

GCC expert Sulaiman al Balushi described the workshop as being a vital arena for GCC businessmen to air issues and provide down-to-earth suggestions. He further stated that actual discussion with policymakers is needed in order to establish real change and strengthen the area’s private sector.

Entrepreneur Muntaha Majid said, “Such workshops allow businesspeople to raise awareness about intra-GCC trade issues.

More importantly, she added, they offer a chance to meet decision-makers and exchange views on establishing the Gulf Common Market for the benefit of the private sector and enhancing regional economic integration.”

Noura al Salem, Federation of GCC Chambers Senior Director of Corporate Relations and Communications, introduced the Federation’s role in empowering the private sector. She stated its work in GCC initiatives, including cooperation with the GCC Secretariat, the Gulf Common Market, the Customs Union, and collaborative policy-making activities.

Al Salem also instituted the Tawasul programme — a platform focused on consolidating direct dialogue among the private and public sectors within the Gulf region.

The initiative is intended to highlight opportunities in investment, consolidate economic integration, as well as resolve trade and investment challenges.

ASYAD UNVEILS SOHAR MAX WIND-POWERED CARGO VESSEL

MUSCAT: Asyad Group has introduced the Sohar Max, a pioneering cargo ship that harnesses wind power to enhance environmental performance in maritime transport.

This 400,000-tonne vessel is equipped with five massive rotor sails, each standing 35 metres tall and five metres wide, developed in collaboration with Vale and Anemoi Marine Technologies.

The innovative sails utilise the Magnus effect — a physics principle that leverages rotating cylinders to generate lift from wind — to reduce fuel consumption by 6% and cut carbon emissions by up to 3,000 tonnes annually per vessel.

Anemoi’s advanced folding system allows the sails to retract



This 400,000-tonne vessel is equipped with five massive rotor sails.

horizontally, enabling smoother navigation during port operations and under low-clearance structures, without compromising cargo handling or vessel performance.

Dr Ibrahim bin Bakhit al Nadhairi, CEO of Asyad Shipping, said Sohar Max represents a transformative step toward net-

zero emissions by 2050.

“Air propulsion technology opens new horizons for sustainable shipping, balancing economic growth with environmental responsibility,” he stated.

Nasser bin Sulaiman al Azri, Vale Oman CEO, described the initiative as a milestone in the partnership with Asyad. “This achievement reflects our shared commitment to building greener logistics solutions and reducing the environmental footprint of the global supply chain,” he said.

The launch reinforces Asyad Group’s ambition to lead the maritime industry’s shift toward cleaner, more efficient propulsion systems and sustainability-driven operations. — ONA

Oman sees strong gains in digital services

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN has recorded significant progress in the 2024 Government Electronic and Mobile Services Maturity Index (GEMSMI), advancing by six percentage points to reach a 72% score, up from 66% in 2023.

The index, issued by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), assesses the maturity of digital government services delivered via electronic portals and mobile applications across Arab countries.

The evaluation covered 27 government institutions in Oman and reviewed a total of 94 services across diverse sectors, including health, education, transportation, police, finance, justice, municipal and social affairs, trade and industry, labour and tourism.

The 2024 results highlight notable improvements across all key performance pillars of the index.



The evaluation covered 27 government institutions in Oman and reviewed a total of 94 services across diverse sectors.

In the pillar of Service Availability and Development, Oman achieved an 80% score, up from 76.64% last year.

Service Usage and User Satisfaction also saw a marked improvement, reaching 63%, compared to 51.95% in 2023.

Public Access rose to 78%, up from 73.78% the previous year,

reflecting expanded outreach and digital inclusiveness.

Moreover, Oman recorded a 94% performance level in service development on electronic portals, a notable rise from 84.45%.

User satisfaction with the electronic portals climbed to 89%, compared to 76.44%

in 2023. On the mobile side, application availability improved to 60%, from 49.97%, while mobile user satisfaction grew to 62%, up from 47.76%.

The GEMSMI report underlines Oman’s steady advancement in e-government transformation, positioning it among the leading countries in the Arab region in terms of digital maturity.

ESCWA developed the index as a benchmarking tool to track and encourage the development of digital government services and to guide policymaking and strategic planning in support of national digital transformation programmes. A total of 17 countries took part in this year’s index evaluation.

The 2024 edition also saw an expansion in the number of government services assessed and the inclusion of new performance indicators to better reflect the evolving landscape of digital public services in the Arab world. — ONA

OMAN RECEIVES LARGEST-EVER SHIPMENT OF AUSTRALIAN WHEAT

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 7

The Sultanate of Oman received its largest shipment of Australian wheat, marking a milestone in its agricultural trade and food security efforts. The vessel MV Vela Star arrived at Salalah Port this week, carrying 72,815 metric tonnes of premium Australian wheat — Oman’s largest single wheat consignment to date.

Shipped from Port Kembla, New South Wales, the wheat is consigned to Salalah Mills Co SAOG and Oman Flour Mills Co SAOG — two of the country’s leading publicly listed flour producers.

The vessel was chartered by Salalah Grains International DMCC, a subsidiary of Salalah Mills registered in Dubai Multi Commodities Center. The unloading will take place at Salalah Port and Sultan Qaboos Port in Muscat.

Unlike previous shipments which often included mixed grains shared across regional



The MV Vela Star was chartered by Salalah Grains International DMCC, a subsidiary of Salalah Mills.

markets, this exclusive, wheat-only delivery reflects a strategic shift in procurement and reinforces Oman’s growing demand for high-quality wheat sourced directly from origin.

The successful coordination across global shipping, procurement, and port logistics demonstrates the maturity of Oman’s food supply chain capabilities. Oman imports around 400,000 metric tonnes of Australian

wheat annually, primarily Australian Premium White, Prime Hard and Soft White grades.

Ahmed bin Alawi bin Abdullah al Dhahab, CEO of Salalah Mills, praised the coordination behind this achievement and acknowledged the support of Haitham al Fannah, CEO of Oman Flour Mills Co.

Al Fannah noted the significance of the collaboration in securing high-quality wheat for the nation.

This shipment aligns with Salalah Mills’ long-term strategy to secure high-quality raw materials and optimise sourcing efficiency for its growing downstream operations.

This landmark shipment not only strengthens Oman-Australia trade ties but also secures a reliable wheat supply for Oman’s milling industry, supporting food security and economic resilience.

Further such strategic bulk shipments are planned to strengthen Oman’s grain reserves and stabilise input costs in a dynamic global market.

MARGIN GAP

Low-cost carriers hit by US travel slump



A slump in travel demand due to President Donald Trump’s trade war has left all US airlines reeling, but the pain is most acute at budget carriers.

Southwest, Frontier and JetBlue all saw sharp declines in their margins in Q1. Margins at Delta and United Airlines held up, despite faltering consumer demand. The margin gap between budget and full-service airlines is expected to widen further. — Reuters

LOWER OUTPUT

Oil rises as market eyes US-China talks



Oil prices pared gains on Wednesday but rose for a second session, finding support from positive investor sentiment over US-China trade talks to be held this weekend and signs of lower US shale output.

Brent crude futures climbed 34 cents a barrel, or around 0.6%, to \$62.46 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude was up 44 cents, or 0.7%, at \$59.51 a barrel. — Reuters

TRADE RETALIATION

EU considers tariffs on Boeing jets



The European Union intends to propose tariffs on Boeing jets, as it prepares to retaliate further if trade talks with Washington fail, the Financial Times reported on Wednesday.

The European Commission, which oversees European Union trade policy, plans to include civilian aircraft on a list of roughly \$100 billion in annual United States imports to be targeted, the report added. — Reuters

OPINION

Implications of money laundering for GCC economies



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

In recent years, courts across the Gulf have issued several convictions against individuals involved in money laundering, in cases that violate commercial and investment laws and regulations.

One of the most high-profile cases involved the Fourth Criminal Court in Dubai, which recently convicted a prominent Indian businessman known as “B.S.S.” or “Abu Sabah.” He was sentenced to five years in prison for laundering money through a criminal gang.

In addition to a fine of AED 500,000, the court ordered the confiscation of AED 150 million and ruled that he be deported after serving his sentence. Several others, including his son and 32 co-defendants, were also convicted.

The case was referred to the Public Prosecution on December 18, 2024, and the first court session was held on January 9, 2025. The verdict was delivered in under six months. The court also seized electronic devices and documents for further investigation, highlighting how the Gulf region has become increasingly vulnerable to money launderers who manipulate local economies.

Money laundering poses a serious

challenge for any country, and in the Gulf, it raises concerns that some commercial activities are exploiting regulatory loopholes to conduct illicit operations.

GCC countries have strong banking systems, large financial flows, and substantial remittances—especially from expatriate workers—some of whom are unwittingly used in money laundering schemes.

Nonetheless, anti-money laundering efforts in the region continue to identify and prosecute perpetrators.

According to both international and local reports, a wide range of crimes are associated with money laundering in the GCC. These include predicate offences that generate illicit funds, which are then laundered.

Examples include financial and economic crimes, banking fraud (such as stock manipulation and loan fraud), corruption, and bribery.

These developments have intensified the need for regulatory authorities to enhance oversight and enforce international disclosure agreements.

The region also faces cases of embezzlement of both public and private funds, as well as cross-border crimes such as human trafficking, illegal labour practices, smuggling of prohibited goods (including

weapons and contraband), cybercrime, online fraud, bank data theft, and terrorist financing—the most dangerous form of money laundering.

GCC countries are placing increasing emphasis on monitoring and controlling these issues, particularly in response to international expectations and Financial Action Task Force (FATF) requirements.

Shell companies and luxury real estate investments are frequently used as fronts for laundering illicit funds.

Exchange houses and money transfer companies are also common conduits, with multiple bank accounts often employed to fragment transactions and avoid detection. In many cases, accounts are opened in the names of expatriates or shell entities to obscure the origins and destinations of funds.

This raises a final, critical question: how many expatriate traders and investors, operating in sectors such as food, retail, and services, are also running money transfer companies? Some exploit low-wage expatriate labour while channeling funds through both legitimate and illegitimate means.

Shouldn’t the financial records of such operators be audited to determine the annual volume of remittances—and to identify any links to money laundering?

Money laundering poses a serious challenge for any country, and in the Gulf, it raises concerns that some commercial activities are exploiting regulatory loopholes to conduct illicit operations.

CHINA’S WAIT-AND-SEE APPROACH EXPOSES POLICY LIMIT

KA SING CHAN

China is biding its time ahead of planned trade talks with the United States. On Wednesday, the country’s top three regulators announced a raft of new measures but held off on major spending.

The reluctance partly stems from the government’s limited room to expand its fiscal deficit too quickly. In a rare joint meeting, the heads of the People’s Bank of China, the China Securities Regulatory Commission and the National Financial Regulatory Administration detailed steps to prop up the tariff-hit economy. Those included lowering bank reserve requirements to inject 1 trillion yuan (\$138 billion) into the system, rate cuts and other monetary easing, as well as stock market support tools and other moves.

The gathering is reminiscent of the last time the trio convened in September when they surprised markets with sweeping rate cuts and followed up with a 2 trillion yuan spending package. Based on that playbook, the Ministry of Finance may soon follow suit with fiscal stimulus.

Yet it’s becoming clear that Beijing is more reluctant to quickly open up its fiscal taps this time around. For one, officials are still assessing the economic damage of Washington’s 145% tariffs on Chinese goods. It’s also unclear how the trade war may pan out.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and chief trade negotiator Jamieson Greer will meet China’s economic tsar He Lifeng in Switzerland this weekend; the two sides are expected to discuss reductions to the broader tariffs and eliminating duties on specific products.

Moreover, economic planners will probably stick to their budget deficit target of 4% of GDP this year – the highest on record – given the central government’s weakening fiscal position. In the first quarter, tax revenue fell 3.5% year-on-year, partly due to tax breaks handed out to boost growth.

And even if the country hits its “around 5%” economic growth target in 2025, aggregate fiscal revenues are still likely to decline, reckons research outfit Rhodium Group. Notably, global ratings agency Fitch downgraded China’s sovereign credit rating last month, citing rapidly rising government debt and risks to public finances.

Against this backdrop, it looks prudent for Beijing to pace itself. — Reuters

Those included lowering bank reserve requirements to inject 1 trillion yuan (\$138 billion) into the system, rate cuts and other monetary easing, as well as stock market support tools and other moves.

UK, India sign landmark billion-pound trade deal

BILLIONS of pounds in extra trade could soon be exchanged between India and the UK after the two nations signed a landmark free trade agreement, ending years of protracted negotiations.

The deal, which the UK government said was the most “economically significant” free trade agreement signed since Brexit and the “best deal India has ever agreed”, is projected to be worth as much as £25.5 bn in bilateral trade, adding £4.8 bn to the UK economy.

The deal will see a significant lowering of tariffs imposed by India on the UK, which the government said would “lock in” in reductions on 90 per cent of tariff lines, of which as much as 85 per cent become fully tariff-free within ten years.

That would amount to India cutting tariffs worth £400m per year once the deal becomes law, and as much as £900m within a decade.

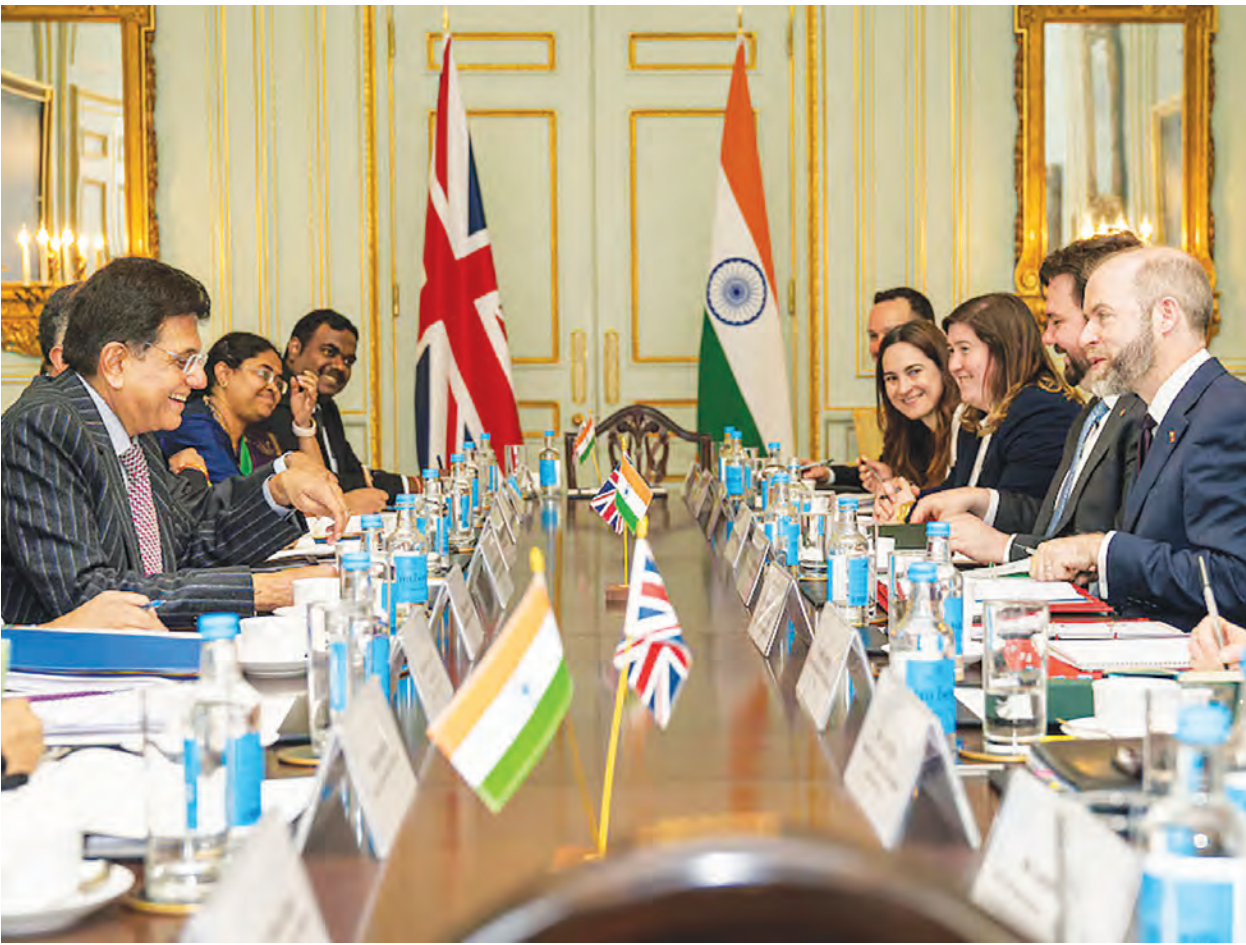
Tariffs on certain alcoholic beverages will be halved from 150 per cent to 75 per cent before reducing to 40 per cent by year ten of the deal. Automotive tariffs will be slashed from over 100 per cent to 10 per cent but will remain subject to a quota.

The UK would also lower the small number of tariffs it imposes on India. India had sought lower UK tariffs on textiles, as well as better terms to facilitate visas for high-skilled jobs in the tech sector.

The deal was understood to have stalled over differences on visa rules, though a breakthrough was reached after Trump’s erratic tariff regime sent shockwaves through global trade. The UK also hopes the deal could speed up trade talks on an agreement with the US.

The government said British shoppers could see cheaper prices and more choices on products including clothes, footwear, and food products – though the deal did not include certain types of food, such as dairy products and rice.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: “In a historic milestone, India and the UK have successfully concluded an ambitious and mutually beneficial Free Trade Agreement.” Modi added that



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



ANDY JALIL

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

the deal would “catalyse trade, investment, growth, job creation and innovation in both our economies.”

Prime Minister Keir Starmer said: “We are now in a new era for trade and the economy. That means going further and faster to strengthen the UK’s economy, putting more money in working people’s pockets.”

The UK is already a major trading partner with India, with as much as £7 bn in British exports to the country in 2024, though that remains lower than India’s £10 bn exports to the UK. Ben Ramanauskas, senior research fellow in economics at Policy Exchange and a former government trade adviser, said the deal “has the potential to be very significant economically due to India’s high tariffs.”

“The Government should be commended on their efforts to finally get the deal over the line. It shows that countries still recognise the benefits of free trade and so the government should continue

to negotiate deals with as many countries as possible.” Stock Exchange. The UK and India’s financial sectors are also looking to boost investment by allowing companies to list shares on both the London Stock Exchange and India’s National Stock Exchange or Bombay Stock Exchange.

The proposal set out by the India-UK Financial Partnership (IUKFP), a group of investors and policymakers from both countries, would require Indian regulators to amend existing rules. The group also called for both governments to find an agreement that would allow investors to avoid double taxation.

Standard Chartered chief executive Bill Winters, who is also the UK chair of the IUKFP, said the recommendations set out would boost investment and foster the Chancellor’s growth plans. The London Stock Exchange currently has a similar arrangement in place with the New York Stock Exchange that allows cross-listing.

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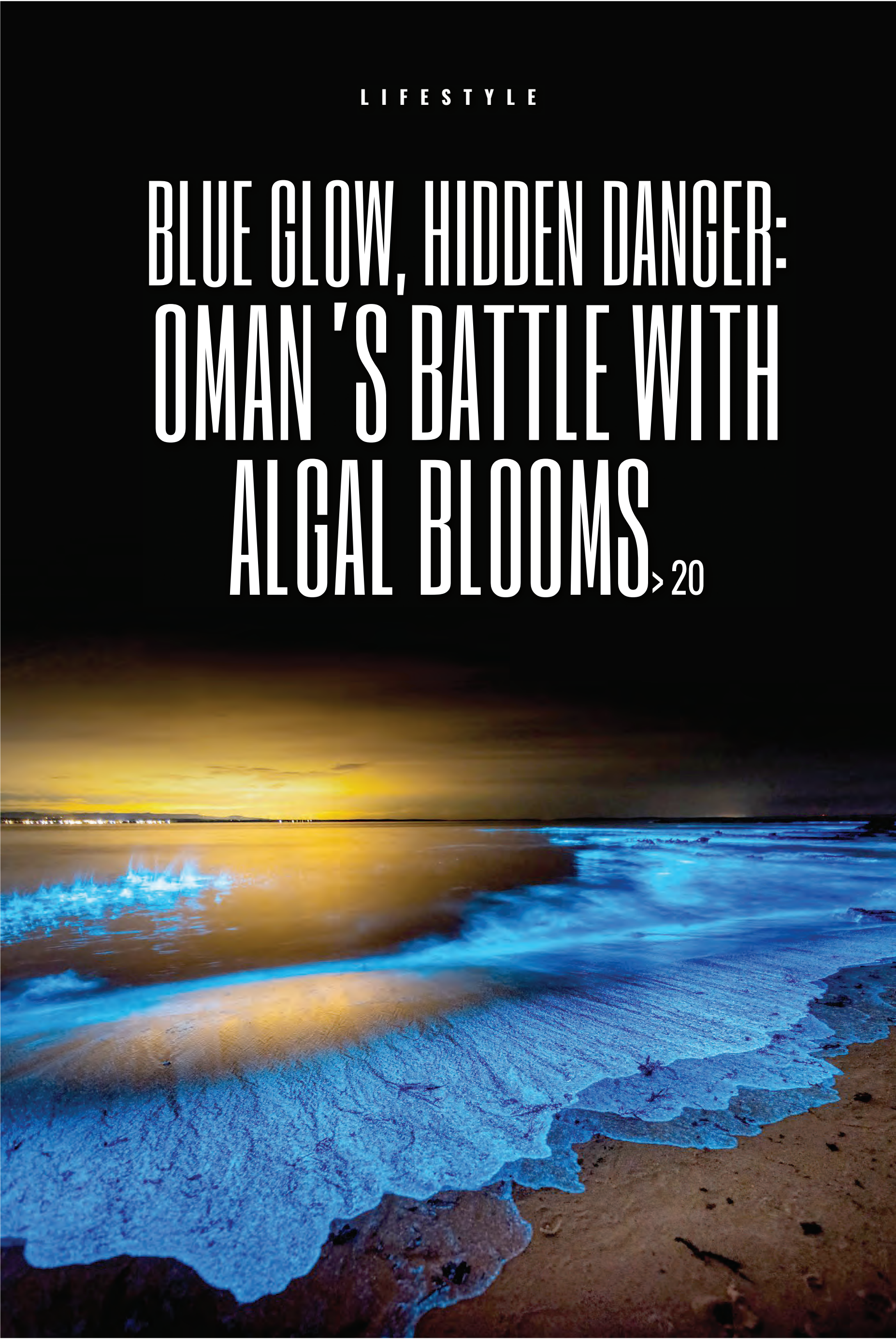
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ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

BLUE GLOW, HIDDEN DANGER: OMAN'S BATTLE WITH ALGAL BLOOMS_{> 20}

TRAVEL TALES

Traditional culture, fancy dress meet at Hong Kong's raucous bun festival



KIDS DRESSED as real and fantasy heroes, drummers pounding a beat and sweet treats -- thousands of visitors poured onto a small island in Hong Kong for its annual Bun Festival on Monday.

Held on the Chinese city's outlying Cheung Chau, the raucous five-day festival transforms the usually quiet fishing community into an explosion of colour and noise that blends Cantonese traditions with modern culture and draws locals and tourists alike.

Monday's three-hour parade -- known as "Piu Sik", meaning floating colours -- traditionally saw locals march through town with statues.

These days, local children dress up as both real and imaginary figures, including Olympic fencing champion Cheung Ka Long, Ne Zha from a recent Chinese blockbuster animation, and the legendary Monkey King, Sun Wukong.

The five-day Bun Festival is said to date back to the 1800s when fisherfolk drove away pirates and the plague by parading a statue of Taoist sea deity Pak Tai.

"It's my first time to visit the island and this showed me a new Hong Kong, completely different from downtown," Cedric Linet, a 49-year-old French banker, said.

The buns represent good fortune, holding sweet bean paste in a crumbly pastry marked with Chinese characters for "peace" and "safety".

Crowds queued all day to get hold of the buns, used to make offerings to traditional deities and sacrifices to the souls of the dead.

The climax of the festival comes at midnight when contestants climb a 14-metre high tower covered in buns -- hoping to be crowned "King of Kings" or "Queen of Queens".

Among those gathered were tourists from Communist Party-ruled mainland China, keen to get a glimpse of traditional Chinese culture not often seen back home.

Chinese students studying in Hong Kong, Gao Yidan and Cheng Qi, said they learnt about the festival on Xiaohongshu, an app similar to Instagram.

"The atmosphere of traditional culture is very strong here," Gao said.

Another visitor from China's southwestern Sichuan province said she appreciated Hong Kong's celebrations of Buddha's birthday, which fell on Monday.

"We love the crowded atmosphere here, even though today's very hot," Huang Dan, a 42-year-old housewife, said. — AFP

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



ART

René Magritte's "La Traversée difficile" was on display during the press preview on May 2, 2025 at Sotheby's New York for their Contemporary Art Evening and Live Auction in New York City. —AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

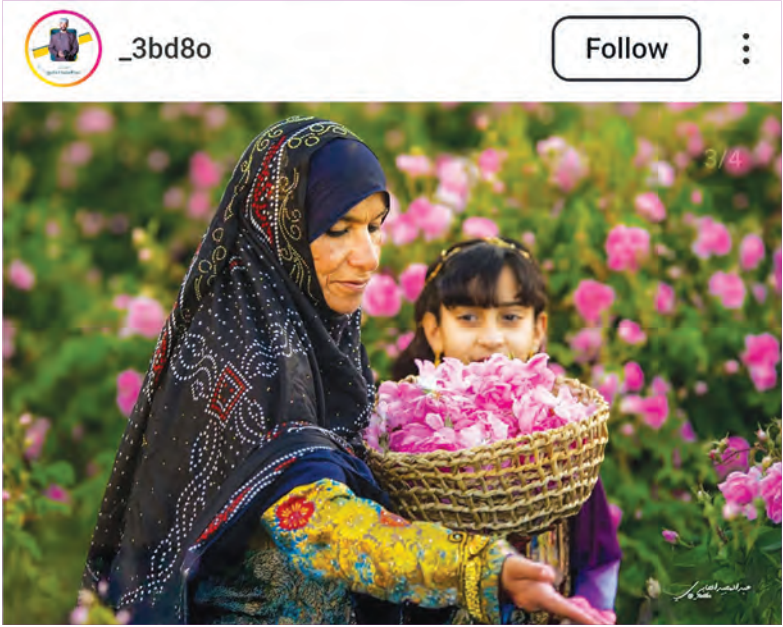
Chinese-US actress Lisa Lu (L) and President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Janet Yang attend the ceremony honouring Lu with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Hollywood, California. —AFP



LIFESTYLE

Slovenian actor Marinka Stern performs during a dressed rehearsal of "Noordung 1995-2005-2045" theatre play set in the Center of Space Technologies Herman Potocnik Noordung in Vitanje. —AFP

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Ancient Cuban flatbread makes comeback as economic crisis bites



A BUSTLING restaurant in old Havana offers diners a blast from the distant past - small circular flatbreads made from ground yucca served alone or topped with any combination of onion, tomato and garlic. The dish, known locally as casabe, has been around for over a thousand years, historians said. More recently, it has mostly been relegated to field hands and Cuban country outposts. Now it may be making a comeback. Cuba's dire economic crisis has vastly reduced the import and production of such basics as wheat flour, sugar and salt. This has prompted some to give the simple flatbread another look. Its only ingredient is locally grown yucca root, also known as cassava. "In a time of food crisis like the one we're currently experiencing, we believe cassava bread can help," said Yudisley Cruz, co-founder of Yucasabi, a small business and restaurant that promotes yucca-based products. Her small restaurant in

touristy old Havana sells a single casabe for 15 pesos (4 cents), making it nutritious, delicious and affordable for both tourists and locals alike, she said. Cruz's restaurant - the only one in Cuba dedicated exclusively to yucca - is trying to popularise the flatbread in urban areas. But in the countryside, peddlers on foot, bike and moto-taxi sell casabe at even lower prices, a rare foodstuff nearly everyone can afford. Its near universal appeal, simplicity and cultural roots - it was first cooked on hot rocks by the indigenous Taino people in Cuba and elsewhere in the Caribbean - prompted the United Nations last year to add the food to its intangible cultural heritage of humanity list. Yucasabi, which features paintings of Tainos in Cuba's lush countryside on its walls, has given the ancient bread a modern spin, in hopes of attracting a new and larger clientele. — Reuters



Qataris hooked on traditional fishing competition

ON THE DOHA seashore, rows of wooden dhow boats line a pier, with scores of fish on display — part of a festival seeking to revive the country's long seafaring tradition. Aboard the boats, men in customary sea gear — a white t-shirt and towel — pay tribute to the age-old tradition of line-fishing in the energy-rich Gulf emirate for the 11th edition of the Senyar festival. "The feeling was amazing," competitor Mohammed al Hail said as he returned from four days out at sea to waiting friends and family at the close of the festival in Katara Cultural Village, a hub for arts and heritage preservation in Doha. "As soon as we finished... here and there we saw our friends," said Hail, a naval officer. Nearby, children dressed in traditional white thobes tried to measure themselves against three hefty fish, their scales glossy in the afternoon sun, strung up for crowds of onlookers. The specimens — each roughly 10 kilogrammes (22 pounds) — were the largest caught during the week-long competition. This year, 54 teams gathered to catch fish using simple handheld fishing lines, living for days at a time aboard dhows, the wooden boats that criss-crossed the Gulf waters around Qatar for centuries. Competitors are rewarded for the biggest fish, but the most sought-after prize is presented for the number, quality and variety of fish caught using a points-based system that values hamour and kingfish over other local types. PRESERVING HERITAGE Prior to the advent of the oil and gas industries, Qatar's economy, like many Gulf countries, was dominated by pearl-diving — until artificial pearls began flooding the market in the 1920s — as well as fishing. But while reliance on these practices is a thing of the past, Qataris like Hail and his teammate Mohammed al Mohannadi are eager to preserve the heritage. "I feel good but I am not very happy about my result because I



hoped to take first," Al Mohannadi said. "But God willing next competition... we'll have a good result," he added. Four days earlier, dozens of boats were scattered across the azure Gulf waters, roughly five kilometres (three miles) off the desert sands south of the Qatari capital. Onboard the "Lusail" boat, Yousuf al Mutawa explained that his team was setting fishing lines to take advantage of a mid-morning lull in the winds. "When the wind comes down, the big fish come up," said Al Mutawa, whose 12-strong team was participating in the competition for the second year in a row. The 55-year-old director of operations for Qatar's Lusail city explained that his father had been a trader on a small wooden dhow until the 1940s. 100 YEARS BACK Al Mutawa said his father used to work on a ship between Qatar and Kuwait, "taking some food from there and bringing it here". Eventually, though, the boat was wrecked in high winds and his

father took a job in Qatar's nascent oil industry, he explained. If you saw "100 years back how they were eating... it was difficult for them", Al Mutawa said. He added that his own sons had competed in previous years and he hoped they would again. Ali Almulla, a Dubai real estate manager, said he had travelled from the United Arab Emirates to join the "Lusail" team for the second year. "I came here to participate in the local traditional fishing. I'd say that's fun for us. It's nice to be with friends. It's a good company," the 35-year-old said. "It's good to have the younger generations... aware of what our grandfathers did back then," he added. Almulla said his family also had deep roots in seafaring. "We got that from our father, and my grandfather and so on. My grandfather actually used to dive for pearls," he said. The competitor said he took part in sports fishing competitions around the Gulf, some using modern techniques and others, like the Senyar festival, more traditional. "Winning is nice, but we are here to enjoy," he added. —AFP

FEATURES



BLUE GLOW,
HIDDEN
DANGER:
OMAN'S
BATTLE WITH
ALGAL BLOOMS

BY JOMAR MENDOZA

ON CALM winter and spring nights along the coast of Oman, residents and visitors alike are often captivated by a surreal sight — gentle blue waves shimmering with an ethereal glow. This dazzling marine light show, known as bioluminescence, is caused by microscopic organisms called Noctiluca scintillans. But while these glowing creatures enchant the eye, they also harbour a less visible, far more troubling story.

Noctiluca scintillans, a species of dinoflagellate, has become one of the most dominant forms of microalgae in the Sea of Oman. These tiny organisms are technically animal-like, but they form a unique partnership with photosynthetic green algae, enabling them to harness energy from the sun. Their blooms are linked to seasonal monsoons: the chilly Northeast Monsoon and the nutrient-rich upwellings brought by the Southwest Monsoon. Both events trigger conditions ripe for Noctiluca's explosive growth.

And therein lies the problem.

When these blooms reach massive densities — a phenomenon known as a harmful algal bloom (HAB) — they pose serious ecological and economic risks. “Noctiluca blooms deplete oxygen in the water, creating hypoxic conditions that suffocate marine life,” explains Dr Khalid al Hashmi, a marine scientist at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). “They also release ammonia, which is toxic to fish and other organisms.”

The consequences ripple beyond marine ecosystems. For Oman's vital fisheries and aquaculture sectors, Noctiluca blooms can mean fish kills and ruined harvests. Coastal desalination plants — essential for producing drinking water — also suffer. The microalgae clog the reverse osmosis membranes, reducing efficiency and increasing operational costs.

To tackle the growing threat, a team of scientists from SQU, led by Professor Sergey Dobretsov, Unesco Chair in Marine Biotechnology, has launched a major research initiative called FORCA-HAB. Funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the project aims to understand the origins, movement and impact of Noctiluca blooms along northern Oman's coast.

One area of focus is the connection between bloom density and the phenomenon of bioluminescence. Hajir al Lawati, a researcher with SQU's Department of Marine Science and Fisheries, is studying how Noctiluca cells emit light when disturbed by waves or water movement. “The brighter the glow, the denser the bloom,” she notes, emphasising that this natural wonder also serves as a warning signal.

To detect and monitor these blooms beneath the surface — where they often escape satellites and

aerial drones — Dr Gerd Bruss deploys sea gliders, unmanned underwater vehicles capable of diving up to 1,000 metres. Equipped with high-tech sensors measuring temperature, salinity, oxygen and chlorophyll, these gliders help researchers locate blooms as deep as 20–30 metres.

Meanwhile, the microbiological side of the puzzle is being tackled by MSc student Buthaina al Khaziri. Under Professor Dobretsov's supervision, she has isolated 82 species of bacteria from seawater collected during blooms. Advanced DNA sequencing revealed that certain bacteria actually boost the growth of Noctiluca, while others — including potentially pathogenic species — may contribute to fish mortality.

“This kind of detailed genetic insight gives us a fuller picture of what's really happening during a bloom,” says Al Khaziri. “It's not just the algae — it's an entire ecosystem of interactions, some of which are still poorly understood.”

Ultimately, the scientists hope their work will pave the way for predicting and mitigating future harmful algal blooms in Oman. As climate change and coastal development continue to alter marine environments, understanding and managing these complex phenomena has never been more urgent.

The shimmering waters of the Sea of Oman may still dazzle tourists, but behind the beauty lies a powerful reminder: nature's most mesmerising spectacles can also be its most dangerous warnings.

QUICK FACTS:

- Noctiluca Blooms in Oman
What is Noctiluca scintillans?
A species of bioluminescent dinoflagellate — a microscopic marine organism that glows when disturbed by water movement.
- Why does it bloom in Oman?
Seasonal monsoons enrich coastal waters with nutrients, triggering large-scale growth of Noctiluca.
- What's the risk?
Hypoxia: Dense blooms deplete oxygen in the water, threatening marine life.
Toxicity: They release ammonia, which can cause fish kills.
- Industry impact: Desalination plants suffer from clogged membranes; fisheries face stock losses.
- Where are blooms found?
Surface and subsurface waters — often 20–30 metres deep — especially along northern Omani coasts.

Note: Images are for illustration only.