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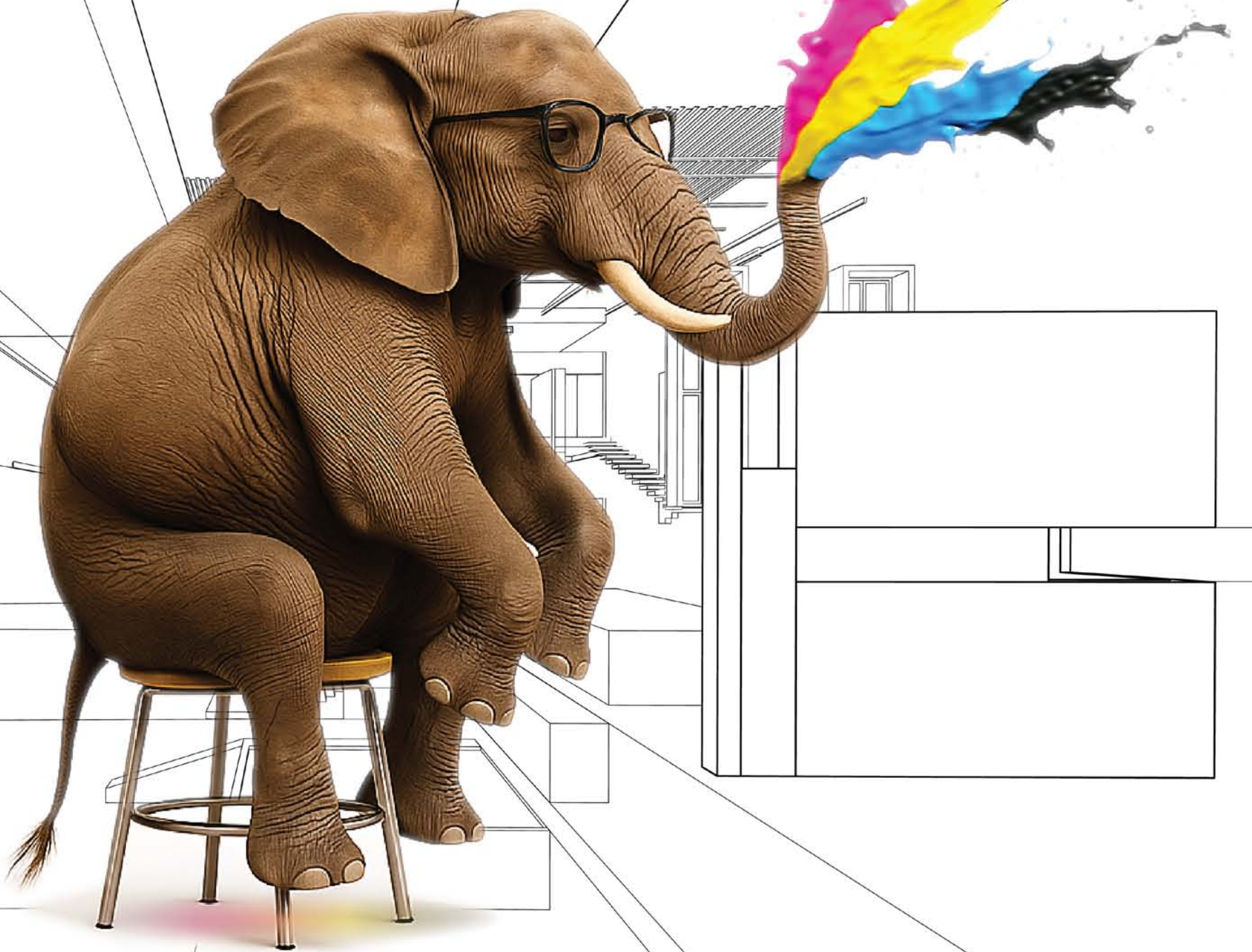
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UNESCO

Report on Oman’s readiness for artificial intelligence governance issued

PARIS: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has issued a report assessing the Sultanate of Oman’s readiness to expand the scope of a human rights-based ethical and comprehensive governance of artificial intelligence.

The report, based on “Readiness Assessment Methodology” (RAM), was prepared under the supervision of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The report constitutes a strategic step forward towards strengthening ethical and legislative governance and aligning national policies with the best global practices. It promotes the responsible use of modern technologies to serve humanity and society.

The report affirmed that the

Sultanate of Oman possesses strong foundations for the march forward in artificial intelligence. These foundations include a clear strategic framework that accords priority to digital economy and the launch of the “Public Policy for the Safe and Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence Systems” in 2025.

The report highlighted the “Personal Data Protection Law”, which was promulgated by Royal Decree 6/2022, and the statute’s importance in fostering digital trust. It valued the progress made in developing telecommunications infrastructure. It also noted the high rate of female graduates in the specialties of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

The report underscored two major national initiatives: The first was the development of a compre-



hensive Omani linguistic model codenamed “Mueen” (which aims to produce artificial intelligence solutions that observe cultural and

linguistic privacy) and the second was the launch of a “Green Artificial Intelligence Alliance” initiative to promote the sustainability

of digital technologies.

Key recommendations

The report made key recommen-

dations, including the adoption of mandatory ethical and social impact assessments of artificial intelligence systems, the development of a legal framework that defines liability for potential harms, the regulation of deepfake technologies and the consolidation of data governance.

The report concluded that the Sultanate of Oman boasts promising institutional and legislative grounds and that the realisation of Oman’s ambitions requires accelerating the pace of implementation, enhancing research funding and expanding the scope of community’s participation in a manner that ensures the use of artificial intelligence in serving sustainable development and fostering knowledge-based digital economy. — **ONA**

AL SUWAIQ INDUSTRIAL CITY



Contracts to localise three projects worth OMR1.6mn signed

Al Suwaiq: Al Suwaiq Industrial City, affiliated with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has signed three investment contracts to localise industrial projects in the sectors of Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) production from recycled plastics; industrial oil refining; polymer modification, and bitumen melting and storage.

The localised projects will be developed over a total area exceeding 11,000 sqm, with initial total investments touching OMR1.6 million. The signing ceremony was attended by Eng. Dawood Salim Al Hadabi, CEO of Madayn.

Located in North Al Batinah Governorate, Al Suwaiq Industrial City is the newest industrial city announced by Madayn under its phased development plan (2026–2030). Madayn is currently evaluating the bids submitted by participating companies for the tender of implementing the infrastructure and

utilities of Phase 1 of Al Suwaiq Industrial City. The project comprises the construction of internal road network, water, electricity and sewage networks, along with other essential facilities and services.

The tender also includes the establishment of several greenhouse units to implement modern agri-tech solutions, and hence contributing to food security and supporting agricultural investment and related industries. Implementation works are expected to commence during 2026.

Al Suwaiq Industrial City represents a qualitative addition to Madayn’s network of industrial cities through offering promising investment opportunities and competitive incentives that contribute to generating direct and indirect employment for the citizens, enabling entrepreneurs to launch innovative ventures, and supporting the growth of non-oil revenues. — **ONA**

The complex will cover an area of 165,000 square metres at a cost OMR230 million in Al Qurm of Muscat

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism signed an agreement yesterday with Sorouh Al Qurm Real Estate Company for the development of an integrated tourism complex in the Al Qurm area of the Wilayat of Bausher, Muscat Governorate.

The complex will cover an area of approximately 165,000 square metres and is estimated to cost around OMR230 million.

The agreement stipulates that the project will be implemented in phases over 15 years. It will include the construction of two four-star hotels with a capacity exceeding 400 hotel units, in addition to comprehensive recreational facilities.

These facilities will include an indoor arcade featuring laser tag, trampolines, rock climbing, and various sports fields, as well as retail outlets and freehold residen-



tal units.

The agreement was signed on behalf of the Ministry by Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said Al Busaidi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and on behalf of Sorouh Al Qurm Real Estate Company by Engineer Khalid Khudair Mishaan, Chair-

man of the Board of Directors of Al Argan International Real Estate Company and authorised signatory for Sorouh Al Qurm Real Estate Company.

He indicated that the project will focus on tourism, while also taking into account the reduction of carbon emissions and the creation of numerous green spaces.

Dr. Rashid bin Saleh Al Hinai, Director General of Planning at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, pointed out that this project is one of the projects that support investment in the tourism sector and adds value to the Muscat Governorate as an integrated tourism complex.

He noted that upon completion, the project will increase the number of hotel rooms in the Muscat Governorate and enhance job opportunities for Omanis.

Al Hinai added that the project allows freehold ownership for both Omanis and expats.

The signing of this agreement confirms the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism’s commitment to developing the infrastructure of the tourism sector, enhancing the attractiveness of tourist destinations, supporting local content, and creating sustainable job opportunities, thus contributing to achieving the objectives of the tourism sector and strengthening its contribution to the national economy.

— **ONA**

IN ECONOMIC AND FREE ZONES

Unified regulatory framework bolsters business environment

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (Opaz) clarified that the Authority’s system, promulgated by Royal Decree No. 39/2026, holds significant regulatory importance in achieving the objectives for which the Authority was established. It further enhances the business environment, contributes to attracting investment, and consolidates the governance of these zones.

Qais Mohammed Al Yousef, Chairman of Opaz, emphasised that the system grants broader powers that integrate with the Special Economic Zones and Free Zones Law and related legislation. He also affirmed the Authority’s commitment to fostering an investment environment characterized by ease, flexibility, and stability.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, he added that the existence of an independent system for the Opaz is vital for improving work procedures and systems within special economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities. This enables the Authority to fulfill its role in economic development, the development of industrial clusters, the attraction of investments, and the creation of a legislatively stable and highly competitive business environment. Such an environment is designed to support the government’s efforts in economic diversification and the achievement of local added value.

He noted that the system will en-



hance the Authority’s regulatory, supervisory, and monitoring roles over the zones under its jurisdiction by granting it broader powers. These powers ensure the integra-

tion of the legislative framework with the Special Economic Zones and Free Zones Law and other relevant legislation, achieving alignment between all existing

special economic, free, and industrial zones, as well as any zones that may be established in the future. Currently, work is underway to develop the Special Economic

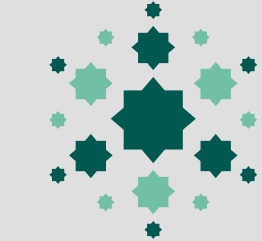
Zone in Al Dhahirah Governorate, the Special Economic Zone in Al Rawda, and the Muscat Airport Free Zone, in addition to four new industrial cities in the Wilayats of

Al Mudhaibi, Al Suwaiq, Thumrait, and Madha, with the aim of accommodating diverse industrial activities and strengthening the local manufacturing base.

Qais Mohammed Al Yousef confirmed that the powers granted by the system to the Authority will enable it to provide an integrated package of services through the “one-stop shop.” These services include project registration and the issuance of approvals, licenses, permits, and certificates necessary for conducting economic activities. They also include regulating the provision of municipal services within the zones, approving rules for issuing non-Omani labor licenses, and determining Omani- sation percentages in coordination with the Ministry of Labour. Furthermore, the Authority will regulate import and export procedures and establish the customs management system in coordination with the Royal Oman Police, contributing to the reduction of procedures, the elevation of performance efficiency, and the enhancement of the investor experience.

It is noteworthy that the Authority oversees 23 special economic zones, free zones, and industrial cities. New investments in these zones during the year 2025 exceeded approximately OMR1.4 billion, bringing the total volume of committed investment in the zones supervised by Opaz to OMR22.4 billion, representing a growth of 6.8% compared to 2024.

— **ONA**



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ANNOUNCEMENT

HM issues Royal Decree

< FROM Article (3) appoints Nasraa bint Salim bin Mohammed Al Hashmi, the Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to the Republic of Kenya as Oman's Non-Resident Ambas-

sador to the Republic of Rwanda, the Republic of Uganda and the Republic of Malawi. Article (4) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — **OMA**

CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY

Omani airspace not closed

< FROM The Sultanate of Oman is among the least affected countries in terms of flight cancellations in the GCC region. The Civil Aviation Authority has not closed Omani airspace, unlike several other major GCC countries. SalamAir said on Sunday that its overall flight operations have returned to normal, although services to and from several regional destinations remain temporarily suspended. In a travel advisory, the airline said it was “pleased to inform” customers that flight operations across its network had resumed as scheduled. However, SalamAir confirmed that flights to and from Iran, Iraq, Sharjah in the UAE, Doha in Qatar, Dammam in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait remain suspended

until further notice. Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways said regional airspace closures continue to impact its operations, and all flights to and from Abu Dhabi are suspended until 2pm UAE time on Tuesday, March 3. Dubai-based Emirates said it has temporarily suspended all flights to and from Dubai until 15:00 UAE time on Tuesday, March 3, due to multiple regional airspace closures. The airline said the situation is dynamic and continuously monitored, urging passengers to check its official website for updates. According to data shared by a global aviation analytics firm, more than 2,000 inbound flights were cancelled across Gulf and Middle East countries as of 2:30am on Tuesday.

More alternatives for passengers flying to India


Air India Express becomes the first Indian carrier to resume Gulf operations amid ongoing regional tensions



tor airlines and remain flexible with travel plans, as regional airspace closures may continue. Meanwhile Oman Air has announced the cancellation of several flights on Tuesday, 3 March 2026, due to ongoing regional airspace closures. The affected routes include all flights to and from Amman (AMM), Dubai (DXB), Bahrain (BAH), Doha (DOH), Dammam (DMM), Kuwait (KWI), Copenhagen (CPH), and Baghdad (BGW). The airline said that all other flights are operating as scheduled, although some delays may be expected.

line becomes the first Indian carrier to resume Gulf operations amid ongoing regional tensions. Passengers are advised to check the latest flight status on www.air-indiaexpress.com and update their contact information for real-time notifications. Meanwhile, flights to Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE remain suspended until 23:59 IST (18:29 UTC) on March 3. “We regret the inconvenience caused to our guests and appreciate their understanding,” said an Air India Express spokesperson. In response to the disruptions, EaseMyTrip is arranging charter

flights from Oman to India. Founder and Chairman Nishant Pitti urged travelers needing assistance to join their support channel and share the information widely. The resumption of flights comes amid escalating tensions involving the US, Israel, and Iran (Operation Epic Fury), which have led to widespread flight cancellations at major Middle Eastern hubs including Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Muscat. With UAE airspace tightly regulated, Oman has emerged as a critical transit point for Indians stranded across West Asia. Passengers are advised to moni-

In a statement, Oman Air emphasised that the safety and well-being of its guests and crew remain its highest priority. The airline added that it is closely monitoring the situation in coordination with the relevant authorities and will continue to provide updates through its official website and communication channels. Passengers are advised to manage their bookings via the airline's website or mobile application. Oman Air apologised for the inconvenience caused and thanked passengers for their understanding and cooperation during the disruption.

COMMENTARY

How one song by Udit Narayan changed my day



MOHAMMED ANWAR AL BALUHSI

It is never easy to compare one singer with another, just as it is difficult to compare one sunrise with the next. Every voice carries its own emotion, its own colour, and its own connection to the human heart. Music is not a competition — it is a journey of feelings. And for many of us who grew up listening to Indian songs, that journey often feels closely connected to nature, peace, and deep emotion. Whenever I listen to Indian music, I feel a strange calm, as if the wind slows down and the mind becomes lighter. Not every song creates this magic, but many do. There is something in the melodies, the words, and the voices that touches the soul gently — like rain falling on dry earth. Over the years, legends have shaped this beautiful musical world. It is impossible to rank or compare voices like Mohammed Rafi, Kishore Kumar, Manna Dey, Mukesh, Mohammed Aziz, Shabbir Kumar, Lata Mangeshkar, and Asha Bhosle. Each of them ruled an era and created memories that

Udit Narayan's singing flows gently, like a river through mountains

will live forever. Then came a voice that felt fresh, soft, emotional, and deeply natural — Udit Narayan. Udit Narayan's singing does not shout for attention. It flows gently, like a river through mountains. His voice carries innocence, romance, sadness, and hope — sometimes all in one song. That is why people often say his voice feels “pure.” It connects directly to the heart without effort. Born in Nepal and rising to fame in India, Udit Narayan struggled in his early life. He came from a humble background and worked hard to reach the top of the music industry. Before becoming a superstar playback singer, he sang on radio programs and small platforms. Slowly, his talent was noticed, and the 1990s became his golden era. From romantic melodies to emotional ballads, his voice became the heartbeat of Bollywood love stories. For many people, their favorite memories — first love, long drives, rainy evenings, heartbreaks — are connected to Udit Narayan's songs. Let me share a personal moment. One day, I was feeling mentally tired and confused. The kind of day when you don't know where to sit, what to think, or who to talk to. My mind was heavy. I randomly opened YouTube, not searching for anything special — just hoping for some distraction.

Suddenly, a song began to play in Udit Narayan's voice: “Priya Priya O Priya - Tu Chand Hai Poonam Ka.” I had heard Udit Narayan thousands of times since the early 1990s, but this song was new to me. Within minutes, something changed inside me. My breathing slowed. My thoughts became lighter. The confusion softened. That is the power of his voice. It wasn't loud music. It wasn't fast rhythm. It was simple melody, emotional singing, and natural flow. It felt like sitting under a tree on a quiet evening, listening to birds returning home. At that moment, I realized something important: Udit Narayan does not sing songs — he creates feelings. When I tried to compare his style with the legendary singers before him, I found him completely different. Where Mohammed Rafi had powerful classical control, Kishore Kumar had playful depth, and Mukesh had soulful sadness, Udit Narayan brought softness and romantic purity. His voice feels closer to nature — like breeze, rain, and morning sunlight. Perhaps that is why so many people across generations still love him. In a world full of noise, stress, and speed, voices like Udit Narayan's remind us to slow down. To feel. To breathe. To heal. Music is not just entertainment. It is therapy. And some singers are not just artists — they are emotional healers. For me, Udit Narayan will always remain the voice of nature — calm, pure, and timeless.

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Doctors in Oman advise light eating during Iftar



Doctors explained that the body undergoes sudden dietary and timing changes during Ramadan

MUSCAT: Doctors in Muscat have begun treating patients who over-indulged during Iftar and are urging residents not to gorge after long hours of fasting. While Ramadan often leads to increased food consumption, medical professionals warn that overeating — particularly heavy, oily foods — can result in serious health complications. Eating excessively at Iftar, es-

pecially rich and fatty meals, may cause gastrointestinal problems, abdominal pain, bloating, acidity and other digestive disorders. “In some places, Iftar becomes like a party, and people struggle to control their hunger,” said Dr Dilip Singhvi, Specialist in Internal Medicine and Diabetes at Burjeel Hospital in Oman, adding that he treated several patients during Ramadan due to overeating. Doctors explained that the body undergoes sudden dietary and timing changes during Ramadan, making it essential to eat moderately. “The human body needs time to adjust because meal timings change abruptly,” he said. Another physician echoed the advice, stressing that lighter meals are easier on the digestive system, which adapts to a new routine during the holy month. “When breaking the fast, start with two or three dates and a glass of water, along with soup. These are ideal foods,” he said. Doctors advised avoiding oily and fatty dishes such as samboosa,



DILIP SINGHVI, Specialist in Internal Medicine and Diabetes at Burjeel Hospital in Oman

biryani and large portions of meat at Iftar. They also recommended drinking plenty of water throughout the night, particularly during the summer months. For Suhoor, which is eaten 45 minutes to an hour before dawn, doctors recommend light meals including vegetables, chicken or

fish in small portions, along with adequate water intake. With temperatures in parts of Oman already crossing 30 to 35 degrees Celsius, doctors stressed the importance of hydration during the holy month. “When you sweat, the body loses sodium and chlorides. These must be replaced to prevent electrolyte imbalance, which can affect organ function,” one doctor said. “In children and adults, dehydration may lead to confusion and abnormal behaviour.” While some level of dehydration may be unavoidable during fasting, doctors warned against allowing it to become severe. “At night, nourish your body and prepare for the next day. Avoid beverages that increase urine output, such as coffee, tea and soft drinks. Eat fruits and vegetables with high water content, stay indoors when possible and avoid direct exposure to the sun,” he advised, urging parents to ensure children do not remain in the heat for extended periods.

IFTAR RECIPE BY ONEZA TABISH

Paya Soup

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Tbsp oil
- 8 pepper corns
- 3 cloves
- 2 cinnamon
- 2 medium sliced onion
- 1 tbsp ginger garlic paste
- 1 Tbsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 medium-size tomato, finely chopped
- 6 pieces goat trotters, thoroughly washed with hot water until absolutely clean
- Salt, to taste
- 6 cups water
- 1/2 cup fresh coriander leaves , finely chopped

PREPARATION

1. In a pressure cooker over medium-high heat, heat the vegetable oil.
2. Add the peppercorns, cloves, and cinnamon stick. Cook until the spices begin to crackle.
3. Add the onion and ginger garlic paste. Sauté for 2 minutes.
4. Add the coriander, turmeric, and cumin. Sauté for 1 minute more.
5. Add the tomato and trotters. Season to taste with salt and sauté until the spices have coated the trotters well.
6. Add the water and reduce the heat. Lock the lid in place and cook the soup in a pressure cooker for about 30 mins or 4 whistles .
7. Let the pressure release and remove the lid.
8. Mix well and garnish with fresh coriander .



CDAA handled 5,560 fire incidents and carried out 174 rescue operations



Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority continues to play a vital role in firefighting, ambulance, and rescue services



Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) handled 5,560 fire incidents and carried out 174 rescue operations at beaches and wadis in 2025, according to official statistics released on the occasion of World Civil Defence Day.

Oman, represented by the Authority, marked World Civil Defence Day, endorsed by the International Civil Defence Organization, observed annually on March 1. This year's theme, "Safe Environment for a Sustainable Future," highlights the importance of public safety and reflects ongoing development efforts that underpin the sustainability and stability of societies.

The Authority continues to play a vital role in firefighting, ambulance, and rescue services. Firefighting teams responded to incidents involving residential and commercial buildings, vehicles, farms, open spaces and flammable materials, following professional procedures to contain fires and minimise environmental impact.

Of the 5,560 fire calls received, teams successfully brought outbreaks under control in line with

the highest safety standards.

In the field of ambulance services, teams provided emergency medical care to serious health cases and injuries. During 2025, crews responded to 19,068 cases involving patients and injured persons, administering on-site medical assistance and transferring them to hospitals for further treatment.

Rescue teams also carried out multiple operations at sea, in wadis and dams, including flood response using fast boats and advanced diving equipment. A total of 174 rescue operations were conducted at beaches and wadis.

Additionally, teams responded to road traffic accidents, mountain fall incidents and 38 reports of missing persons during the year.

In dealing with hazardous materials, specialised teams responded to 83 related calls.

As part of efforts to monitor performance and development, the Chairman of the Authority chaired a meeting with officials and heads of Civil Defence and Ambulance units in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The meeting reviewed approved development plans and discussed key performance indicators, among other matters.



WAR ON IRAN

Path forward lies in constructive diplomacy

< FROM A1 They warned that pursuing military solutions would only deepen divisions, intensify suffering, and risk dragging the wider region - and the world - into a serious crisis.

The ministers collectively emphasised that the path forward lies in constructive diplomacy, calling for renewed talks and engagement to address the conflict's root causes. Their unified message underscores the urgent need for de-escalation and a return to peaceful resolution.

phased that the path forward lies in constructive diplomacy, calling for renewed talks and engagement to address the conflict's root causes. Their unified message underscores the urgent need for de-escalation and a return to peaceful resolution.

CONSUMER SAFETY

Oman enhances new gas appliance regulation

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), represented by the Directorate General for Standards and Metrology, has announced the mandatory implementation of Phase I of the technical requirements for gas appliances and related accessories,

effective Sunday, March 1, 2026.

The new regulation covers gas cylinders and rigid gas tanks, composite gas cylinders, and gas appliance accessories.

The move aims to enhance product safety, ensure compliance with approved technical standards, and strengthen consumer protection in the Sultanate.

Under the directive, all manufacturers, importers, and distributors

are required to obtain certificates of conformity through the Hazm platform by selecting an approved conformity assessment body. The ministry emphasised that compliance with the new requirements is essential for products to be placed on the local market.

Officials stated that the phased implementation reflects Oman's ongoing efforts to align with international standards, improve quality infrastructure, and reinforce safety measures in the handling and use of gas-related products.

The ministry called on stakeholders to adhere to the new procedures and expressed appreciation for their cooperation in supporting regulatory compliance and public safety.

ongoing efforts to align with international standards, improve quality infrastructure, and reinforce safety measures in the handling and use of gas-related products.

The ministry called on stakeholders to adhere to the new procedures and expressed appreciation for their cooperation in supporting regulatory compliance and public safety.

MARITIME SECURITY CENTRE

< FROM A1 Oil tanker attacked

Simultaneously, a vessel from the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) is monitoring the condition of the stricken tanker and issuing the necessary navigational warnings to vessels transiting the same maritime zone.

The Indian Embassy in Oman expressed its deepest condolences on the tragic demise of an Indian national on board MKD Vyom.

The Indian Embassy in Muscat said that it is coordinating with the local authorities in Oman to

facilitate the safe and early repatriation of our nationals on board the vessel. "We remain committed to extending all possible assistance in this matter," it said.





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TENDER NOTICE
Tender notice: tender ref: No: ISR-1/01/03/ 2025-26.

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- Tender documents shall be submitted in sealed envelope with clearly mentioned Tender Number/Name & Company Name.
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- For more details contact 00968-94868969

Indian School Rustaq reserves the rights to accept or reject any Tender.



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Interested parties shall remit a non refundable Tender fee of OMR 10/- each at School fee counter (Main Building) and can collect the Tender document between 9 am to 1 pm (Sunday to Thursday) from 04th March 2026 to 12th March 2026.

— Indian School Salalah reserves the right to accept or reject any Tender. —

Last Date for submission of Sealed Tender is 15-03-2026 on or before 1 PM

Many airlines suspend flights to Middle East

Airlines are offering passengers full flexibility with waivers and refunds



NEW DELHI: Major airlines including IndiGo, Akasa Air, Qatar Airways and Emirates, on Monday have suspended or extended suspension of flights to and from Middle Eastern destinations amid ongoing regional tensions, offering passengers full flexibility with waivers and refunds.

IndiGo announced on X on Monday that it has continued to meticulously evaluate the evolving regional developments and their potential impact on flight operations, and after reviewing the latest operational inputs, is taking the course that it believes is most responsible for its guests, given the priority of safety.

“As part of our continued precautionary approach, the temporary suspension of select international flights operating through parts of the Middle Eastern airspace has been extended. Additionally, certain other international services have been put on align operations

with evolving conditions. Please check your flight status for the latest updates,” IndiGo said in a travel advisory.

The airline added that it is extending full flexibility and waivers for travel to and from select cities, along with other impacted Air flights to international sectors, until March 7, 2026, for bookings made on or before February 28, 2026.

“Customers may reschedule at no additional cost or opt for a credit shell. If your booking is impacted, you will receive timely notifications on your registered contact number, and our teams are ready to provide assistance and guide you through the available options,” IndiGo stated.

Akasa Air announced suspension of all flights to and from Jordan, Doha, Kuwait and Riyadh for March 3, 2026.

“Due to the ongoing situation

in the Middle East, all Akasa Air flights to and from Jordan, Doha, Jeddah, Kuwait and Riyadh have also been suspended for March 03, 2026. We will continue updating our flight status for these destinations, based on the situation as it unfolds,” Akasa Air said in a travel update.

For all bookings made to or from these cities until March 7, 2026, passengers may opt for a full refund or reschedule their travel at no additional cost.

“Our teams will continue to closely monitor the safety and security environment and proactively adjust our operations as required. Passengers are requested to check their flight status before commencing travel to the airport. For any further assistance, please feel free to contact our 24x7 Akasa Care Centre,” the airline added.

Qatar Airways also announced that its flight operations remain

temporarily suspended due to the closure of Qatari airspace.

“Qatar Airways will resume operations once the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority announces the safe reopening of Qatari airspace. A further update will be provided on March 03 by 09:00 Doha time (06:00 UTC). Customers are advised to monitor the latest flight information on qatarairways.com or the Qatar Airways mobile app,” the airline stated.

Emirates announced the temporary suspension of all operations to and from Dubai up until 1500 hours UAE time on Tuesday, March 3, due to multiple regional airspace closures.

“The situation remains dynamic and is assessed continuously. We urge all customers to review the latest operational updates on <http://emirates.com> and check their email for any notifications about changes or cancellations to their flights before travelling to the airport,” Emirates stated.

For customers booked to travel before or on March 5, Emirates is offering two options: rebook on an alternate flight for travel on or before March 20, or request a full refund.

“Customers impacted by flight cancellations must contact their travel agency for rebooking. If booked directly with Emirates, please contact us. All city check-in points across Dubai are temporarily closed until further notice,” the airline said. -ANI



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ESCALATION OF CONFLICT

Kerala SSLC, Higher Secondary exams in Gulf postponed



POSTPONED: The SSLC exam scheduled for March 5 and the Higher Secondary exams on March 5, 6, and 7 in the Gulf centers have now been postponed. - ANI

WHITE HOUSE

Trump says objectives of war are to destroy Iran’s missile capabilities

WASHINGTON DC: US President Donald Trump has given his first live official address from the White House since the US and Israel launched a major military operation against Iran early Saturday.

Trump’s previous comments had been made on videos posted to social media or to US media outlets.

The event was intended to be a medal-awarding ceremony, but Trump also gave an update on the conflict.

He continued to claim the US and Israeli strikes last year had “obliterated” Iran’s nuclear program, but that Iran had restarted the programme despite being told not to.

Trump praised himself for withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal (also known as the JCPOA) during his first term, despite having been



unable to negotiate another deal.

He said the objectives of the war are to destroy Iran’s missile capabilities; to knock out its navy; to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon; and to stop Iran from arming and funding proxies throughout the region.

When he first announced the US-Israeli operation early on Saturday, Trump said one of the objectives was to remove the Islamic regime that has ruled Iran since the 1979 revolution.

The president also said the US could continue the war for weeks, rejecting claims he would get “bored” before the end.

Meanwhile Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of

Staff, said on Monday that the U.S. military was bolstering its forces in the Middle East, sending more troops and fighter jets to the region as America’s war in Iran expands.

“This work is just beginning and will continue,” General Caine said, adding that when additional fighter jets arrive in the coming days the United States will be “just about where we want to be in terms of total combat capacity and total combat power.” He declined to say exactly how big that overall force would be.

But even as General Caine’s words suggested an extended military campaign, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, standing beside him at a Pentagon news conference, insisted that this conflict would not spiral into one of the lengthy engagements that have characterized some of the United States’ past ventures in the region. - DW

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Kerala Education Minister V Sivankutty on Monday announced the postponement of the SSLC and Higher Secondary examinations in Gulf centres due to the intensifying conflict in the Middle East.

“With the conflict intensifying in the Middle East, conducting examinations in the Gulf region has become a major challenge. In this situation, the SSLC exam scheduled for March 5 and the Higher Secondary exams on March 5, 6, and 7 in the Gulf centres have now been postponed. The revised dates will be announced later,” Sivankutty said.

He added, “We understand that many students in both the Gulf and Kerala are anxious because they are unable to reach their exam centres. The Department of General Education stands firmly with these children.”

The Minister also urged affected students to take prompt action.

“Students who are unable to write the exams due to travel difficulties must submit an applica-

tion as early as possible through their class teachers or principals to the Director of General Education. The department will examine each request on merit and take decisions that favour the students’ best interests,” he said.

This comes amid heightened tensions after a joint missile strike titled Operation Roaring Lion/Operation Epic Fury by Israel and the United States on Iran on February 28.

US President Donald Trump and Iranian state media have confirmed that Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in the February 28 US-Israel strikes.

Iran has declared 40 days of public mourning following the death of their Supreme Leader.

Strikes by Iran have been reported in Dubai in the UAE, Qatar’s capital Doha, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Iran said it was targeting US bases in the region yesterday. An oil tanker was struck off the coast of Oman, and airlines cancelled and diverted flights in and around the West Asian region.

-ANI

MIDDLE EAST

Two Bangladeshis killed, 7 hurt in missile, drone strikes

DHAKA: Missile and drone attacks have killed two Bangladeshis and injured seven others, the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Monday, outlining the impact of the escalating violence across parts of the Middle East.

“The Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh is deeply saddened to inform that two Bangladeshi nationals have lost their lives and seven others have sustained injuries due to missile and drone attacks in different parts of the Middle East,” the statement said.

Detailing the incidents country by country, the ministry noted, “In the United Arab Emirates, Saleh Ahmed, a Bangladeshi national from Baralekha, Sylhet, tragically lost his life in Ajman after being struck by debris resulting from an aerial attack on a civilian installation. The Embassy of Bangladesh in the United Arab Emirates is in close contact with the local authorities regarding the matter and is extending necessary assistance to repatriate the mortal remains once commercial flights resume.”

The statement further said, “It has been reported that one Bangladeshi national has been killed and three more have been injured in Bahrain. The Bangladesh Mission in Manama is in touch with the local authorities regarding the incident.

“In the State of Kuwait, Aminul Islam from Nabinagar, Brahman-



baria; Rabiul Islam from Sathia, Pabna; Masudur Rahman from Begumganj, Noakhali; and Dulal Miah from Chandina, Cumilla, sustained injuries following a drone attack in the vicinity of the civilian airport. They have received necessary medical treatment and are currently reported to be in stable condition. The Embassy of Bangladesh in Kuwait remains in regular contact with them, and the Ambassador personally visited them at the hospital,” the statement said.

Apart from casualties, the ministry also addressed concerns regarding Bangladeshi assets in the region, stating, “Separately, the Bangladesh Shipping Corporation vessel Banglar Joyjatra is currently stranded at Jebel Ali Port in the United Arab Emir-

ates. The Embassy is maintaining close communication with the vessel’s captain. All crew members are reported to be safe,” the statement said.

Reiterating its broader position, the statement added, “The Government of Bangladesh reiterates its deep concern over the escalating situation in the Middle East and continues to monitor developments closely. The safety and security of more than six million Bangladeshis living in the Middle East are the top-most concern of the Government. Our Embassies in the concerned countries have been asked to issue appropriate advisories for our nationals to remain vigilant and strictly follow the guidance issued by the respective host governments.” -ANI



AL JAZEIRA SERVICES CO. SAOG

NOTICE AND INVITATION TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Al Jazeera Services Co. SAOG (“the Company”) has pleasure to invite the Shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Thursday at 05:00 PM on 26 March 2026 via the electronic platform which can be assessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om). If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting shall be held on Monday at 5:00 PM on 30 March 2026, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.om) to discuss the following agenda:

Annual General Meeting Agendas:

- 1) To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ report on activities of the company and its financial status for the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
- 2) To consider and approve the corporate governance report of the company for the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
- 3) To consider and approve the auditor’s report on the company’s audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
- 4) To consider and approve the proposed cash dividend to the shareholders, as on the date of the meeting, amounting to 20 baiza for each share from retained earnings of the company for the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
- 5) To approve the sitting fees of the Board and Committees meetings paid to the Board Members for the previous financial year and to determine the sitting fees for the upcoming financial year.
- 6) To consider and approve the proposal of distributing the total sum of **ﷵ** 15,600/- as remuneration to the Board of Directors of the company for the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
- 7) To consider the transactions entered into by the company with related parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2025.
- 8) To consider the amounts allocated and spent for the company’s social responsibilities for the year ended 31st December 2025.
- 9) To discuss and approve the proposed allocation of **ﷵ** 15,000/- to fulfill the company’s social responsibilities for the year ending on 31st December 2026.
- 10) To prove the criteria for measuring the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2026.
- 11) To appoint an independent entity to evaluate the performance of the Board of Directors for the financial year 2026 and fix their fee.
- 12) To appoint statutory auditors of the company for the financial year ending 31st December 2026 and to fix their fee.

According to the Company’s Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the Financial Services Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- A) A legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCD.
- B) Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder’s shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information, please contact Badriya Al Abri on telephone No. 24706499 or email: damacinv@omantel.net.om

Deputy Chairman

Legal Advisor

External Auditor

Afghan Taliban attacks met with Pakistani strikes on Kabul

Pakistan said it launched “strong and effective response” with explosions reported in Kabul

KABUL : Both Afghanistan and Pakistan acknowledged fighting in border areas on Thursday, albeit disagreeing markedly on exact developments on the ground and the extent of each other's losses and gains.

It's the latest escalation of violence between the uneasy neighbors in tensions that can ultimately be traced all the way back to the Taliban reclaiming control of Afghanistan in 2021, but which were most recently evident last Sunday with Pakistani airstrikes inside Afghanistan.

Both sides also reported cross-border fire on Tuesday, but without casualties.

What did Afghanistan say about the fighting?

The Taliban's government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid reported fighting in the border regions late on Thursday local time.

He portrayed it as a response to



Sunday's airstrikes that Afghanistan decried as an unauthorized incursion.

“In response to the repeated rebellions and insurrections of the Pakistani military, large-scale offensive operations were launched against Pakistani military bases and military installations along the Durand line,” Mujahid said in a post on X that began with what appeared to be a religious proverb.

The Durand line is the name for the two countries’ 2,611-kilometer (1,622-mile) border, which Afghanistan has not recognized.

Mujahid followed this up with frequent posts, some including an

image, but most simply text, claiming various military gains along the border. Most followed a consistent formula, announcing the capture of a military facility or post in a given district and concluding with a stock sentence saying: “A large number of the enemy's soldiers have been killed and wounded, and some have been captured alive.” Besides place names, and the occasional photo of what appeared to be casualties, very few precise details were offered.

Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said that operations were taking place in five provinces. The Taliban's deputy government spokes-

man, Hamdullah Fitrat, said in an English language post that “up to 55” Pakistani soldiers had been killed, with the remains of 23 of them brought back to Afghanistan, and that an undisclosed number had been captured.

Pakistan said it hit Kabul, Kandahar and rejects Taliban claims

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar disputed both the claims on casualties and captures and of territorial losses. Tarar said that two Pakistani soldiers had been killed and three wounded.

On X, he wrote that Pakistan was mounting a “strong and effective response” to what he called an unprovoked attack from Afghanistan, and said that Islamabad would continue to do so. Explosions were later reported in Kabul after the Pakistani statement.

Mosharraf Ali Zaidi, spokesman for Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, said “a total of 133 Afghan Taliban are confirmed killed, more than 200 wounded. Many more casualties estimated in strikes in Kabul, Paktia and Kandahar military targets.”

Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said Pakistan's “patience has reached its limit” and said there is now “open war” with the Afghan Taliban.

the cross-border attacks and resolve their differences through diplomatic means, the country's state-owned RIA news agency reported on Friday.

Simmering tensions for years, closer to the boil more recently

Long-testy relations between the neighbors deteriorated sharply in recent months, hitting a low point with the deadly fighting in October that killed more than 70 people on both sides.

Land border crossings have been largely shut since.

Several rounds of talks followed an initial ceasefire brokered by Qatar and Turkey, but no lasting agreement has materialized in the conflict.

Saudi Arabia this month managed to negotiate the release of three Pakistani soldiers captured in October.

Islamabad accuses Afghanistan of failing to act against militant groups that it says also act out of Afghanistan, which the Taliban deny. Chief among these is the TTP, often referred to as the Pakistani Taliban, but Pakistan would also point to Baloch separatist groups from the border areas.

Pakistan's airstrikes followed a series of deadly suicide blasts including an attack on a Shiite mosque in Islamabad claimed by the Islamic State-Khorasan regional chapter that's primarily active in eastern Afghanistan. **dw**

FRIENDLY FIRE INCIDENT

Kuwaiti air defence ‘mistakenly’ shoots down three US F-15Es

WASHINGTON, DC : United States Central Command (CENTCOM) has confirmed that three US F-15E Strike Eagles were “mistakenly shot down” by Kuwaiti air defence, highlighting a serious friendly fire incident amid ongoing regional hostilities.

The military command clarified in a statement published on X that the aircraft were engaged in error during active combat operations on Sunday.

Providing an update on the personnel involved, CENTCOM noted that “all six aircrew ejected safely, have been safely recovered, and are in stable condition. Kuwait has acknowledged this incident, and we are grateful for the efforts of the Kuwaiti defence forces and their support in this ongoing operation.”

The loss of the three fighter jets occurred amidst a high-alert environment in the Gulf, where coalition forces have been responding



to a series of regional threats.

This volatility has led to heightened scrutiny of coordination between allies, and regarding the official inquiry into the friendly fire event, the statement added, “The cause of the incident is under investigation. Additional information will be released as it becomes available.”

The broader security situation has also extended beyond military assets. Further illustrating the precarious regional climate,

Qatar's Defence Ministry has confirmed that two drones struck energy facilities in the industrial city of Ras Laffan, resulting in no reported casualties, according to Al Jazeera.

In an official statement detailing the incident, the ministry clarified the specific targets of the aerial attack, which appeared to aim at vital infrastructure.

“One drone targeted a water tank belonging to a power plant in Mesaieed, and the other targeted

an energy facility in Ras Laffan Industrial City, belonging to Qatar Energy,” it said.

As authorities assess the impact of these strikes on strategic energy installations, the ministry added, “All damages and losses resulting from the attack will be assessed by the relevant authorities, and an official statement will be issued later.”

The latest wave of strikes and Iranian counter-attacks follows a full-scale conflict that erupted in the Middle East involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, after a major “military offensive” launched on February 28.

In a coordinated operation known as Operation Epic Fury/ Roaring Lion, US and Israeli forces carried out large-scale air and missile strikes across Iran, targeting key military sites, nuclear-related infrastructure, missile batteries, and leadership compounds.

-ANI

DEEP CONCERN

China expresses concern over conflict spillover

BEIJING : As the conflict in Middle East intensified on Monday, China has voiced deep concern over the escalation, following military strikes by the United States and Israel against Iran. The Chinese Foreign Ministry highlighted the potential regional repercussions and emphasized the need to respect the sovereignty of all Gulf nations, reported China Daily.

Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning said, “China is deeply concerned about the spillover of the military strikes by the US and Israel against Iran, which has affected Iran's neighbouring countries. China believes that the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of Gulf countries should also be respected.”

The ongoing tensions in the region come amid rising hostility between Tehran and Washington, with Israel reportedly carrying out

strikes targeting Iran.

Addressing speculation about military cooperation with Iran, Ning dismissed reports that had suggested that Iran is close to reaching a procurement agreement with China for CM-302 supersonic anti-ship missiles as false information. “As a responsible major country, China consistently fulfills its international obligations, and opposes malicious speculation and hype linking unrelated issues,” she said.

China has also stepped up efforts to safeguard its citizens amid the conflict. “As of March 2, more than 3,000 Chinese nationals have been evacuated from Iran,” Ning stated. “Chinese embassies and consulates in countries neighbouring Iran have dispatched working groups to border ports to assist Chinese citizens leaving Iran,” she added. **-ANI**

BOLD VISION

PM Modi unveils \$50 billion trade target with Canada

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday outlined a bold vision for India-Canada relations, aiming to take bilateral trade to \$50 billion through the lens of a “light-year leap” and strategic synergy after the leadership change in Canada (with Mark Carney as PM), leading to a strategic “reset.”

Addressing the India-Canada CEO Forum, PM Modi highlighted that PM Carney has been in office for less than a year; however, established a “new chapter.”

“Friends, today we are going to write a new chapter in India-Canada relations,” he said. “Prime Minister Carney has not even completed one year in office, but our relations have taken a light-year leap. In the last few months, trust has grown, clarity has emerged, and a new momentum has been built.”

PM Modi declared that bilateral ties are entering a transformative phase and called on business leaders to power the next stage of growth along with emphasis on bilateral trade targets and finalisation of CEPA, noting that the renewed engagement comes amid global economic challenges.

“And this is happening at a time when the world is going through a period of economic uncertainty. The global economic order is under pressure. At such a time, the



deliberation of business leaders from India and Canada will prepare a new blueprint for our partnership,” said PM Modi.

Highlighting the shared foundations of the relationship, PM Modi said, “India and Canada are vibrant democracies, two major economies of the world, and societies based on shared values. Democracy, diversity, and development inspire us to move forward as natural partners.”

On trade and economic cooperation, the Prime Minister said, “Prime Minister Carney and I took some important decisions to advance our shared vision. We are continuously moving forward to take bilateral trade to the level of 50 billion dollars. We will finalise the Comprehensive Economic

Partnership Agreement as soon as possible.”

He underlined the role of industry in realising the vision. “Governments can create frameworks and provide policy direction. However, the power to turn that vision into reality lies with all of you, my fellow business leaders.”

Calling India one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, PM Modi said, “India is among the world's fastest-growing major economies. Behind this transformation are strong domestic demand, a young population, large-scale investment, and the power of digital technology. This is the result of our continuously running Reform Express. From policy simplification to Production Linked Incentives (PLI), and

from logistics modernisation to tax and bankruptcy reforms, we are strengthening the ease of doing business in every sector.”

PM Modi framed the relationship not through the lens of past grievances, but through a \$6 trillion economic force to be throttled forward.

He added, “When India and Canada stand together, we don't just connect two economies. We create an economic force of capital and capability. Our combined GDP is more than 6 trillion dollars. But our real strength lies in our ambitions forward, I will make some suggestions to you.”

PM Modi highlighted opportunities for collaboration in clean energy, infrastructure, AI, manufacturing, and food processing.

Outlining five priority areas, PM Modi said, “First, Clean Energy: This is a priority for both countries. Today, we have increased cooperation in the field of nuclear energy and contracted for a long-term supply of uranium. A while ago, we had the opportunity to hear positive thoughts from the CEO of Cameco. We should move forward together in the fields of small modular reactors, advanced reactors, and the nuclear value chain,” he called for joint progress in small modular reactors and the nuclear

value chain.

On critical minerals, he said, “We have also taken steps to create resilient supply chains for critical minerals. We can move forward by combining Canada's innovation with India's scaling capability in batteries and energy storage.”

On infrastructure, he said, “The second area is Infrastructure and Capital Partnership: In this year's budget, we have made a record allocation of 130 billion dollars for infrastructure. Under the National Infrastructure Pipeline, an investment of 1.3 trillion dollars is being made. Canada's pension funds have invested 100 billion dollars in India. This shows deep trust. I invite you to become a part of India's infrastructure growth story.”

Turning to technology, PM Modi proposed, “Third, AI: We can work together to create joint AI compute corridors and AI innovation sandboxes for startups.” He also emphasised collaboration in electronics, aerospace, and engineering and highlighted food processing as another strong avenue for cooperation.

He said, “Fourth, Manufacturing and Technology: In electronics, aerospace, and engineering, we can strengthen global value chains by combining Canada's technology and India's scale.”

He added, “The fifth area is

Food Processing: Today, mega food parks, cold chains, and food testing labs are being built rapidly in India. This could be another strong example of our win-win cooperation.”

Stressing the importance of substantial partnerships, he said, “Our partnership should not be limited only to national capitals. We must take it to the states and provinces. We must link Alberta's natural resources with the renewable ambitions of Gujarat and Rajasthan. We must combine Ontario's manufacturing strength with the industrial clusters of Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. We must integrate Montreal's tech ecosystem with the innovation hubs of Bengaluru and Hyderabad. Only then can we turn this partnership from policy to prosperity.”

In a lighter moment, PM Modi referenced cricket diplomacy. He said, “Some of you must be watching cricket. We were all happy to see Canada play in the T20 Cricket World Cup going on in India. Just like in T20 cricket, with fast decisions, fearless strokes, and match-winning partnerships, India and Canada will shape the future together.”

“With this resolve, I invite all of you to join India's development journey,” the Prime Minister concluded. **-ANI**

Men's Asian Games Hockey Qualifier 2026 in Muscat

Nine Asian nations
to battle for six
qualification spots at
Hockey Oman Arena
in Al Amerat from
March 28

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman's rising stature on the international hockey stage received another major boost as Hockey Oman officially confirmed on Monday that it will host the Men's Asian Games Hockey Qualifier Oman 2026 in Muscat from March 28 to April 5, 2026.

The high-stakes tournament will feature nine national teams competing for coveted spots at the upcoming Asian Games, promising a week of intense, high-performance hockey at the Hockey Oman Arena in Al Amerat.

The participating nations - Oman, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong China, Thailand, Chinese Taipei, Uzbekistan, Ka-

zakhstan and Indonesia - will battle it out in what is expected to be a fiercely contested qualifying campaign.

nesia while Pool B will include Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Chinese Taipei and Uzbekistan.

The top six teams will qualify for the 2026 Asian Games, which will be held in Japan from September 18-October 3. A total of 12 teams feature at the Asian Games with the six top-ranked nations from the 2022 Asian Games di-

rectly qualifying for this edition. The qualified teams are China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan and South Korea.

With qualification to the Asian Games on the line, the tournament is set to showcase tactical intensity, and emerging Asian talent eager to make a continental breakthrough.

The 2026 qualifier adds to Oman's growing portfolio of major hockey events. Muscat hosted the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup in 2024, a landmark global tournament that drew international acclaim for its organisation and atmosphere.

Oman have also staged key Asian-level competitions in recent years, reinforcing confidence in their logistical strength, facilities and operational expertise.

Hockey Oman confirmed that comprehensive preparations are already in motion to ensure world-class competition standards.

From venue readiness to technical operations and spectator engagement, organisers have pledged a memorable experience for teams, officials and fans alike.

Beyond competition, the tournament is expected to strengthen sporting ties across Asia, promote hockey development in emerging nations, and elevate Oman's influence within the continental hockey community.

Pakistan players fined following World Cup exit

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) fined all Pakistan squad members from the T20 World Cup PKR 5 million (US\$ 18,000 approx.) each following their underwhelming campaign.

Pakistan were eliminated after the Super Eight stage, missing the semi-finals of an ICC men's event for the fourth successive time - the first such instance in Pakistan's history. The fines are not for disciplinary reasons, but specifically for what the board deems poor performance at the event, according to an *ESPNcricinfo* report on Monday. The fines were imposed immediately following Pakistan's match against India in the group stages, where a meek showing resulted in a 61-run defeat. They were further told the fines might be waived if Pakistan reached the tournament semi-finals.

Pakistan reached the second round, avoiding a third straight first-round exit, but ran into trouble in the Super Eight group after a washout against New Zealand was followed by defeat to England. New Zealand's crushing win over Sri Lanka left Pakistan relying on other results and a huge victory over Sri Lanka to sneak into the last four. However, their win against Sri Lanka was much too narrow to prevent an early exit.

The PCB has disciplined players harshly in the past, though sanctions have generally been framed as disciplinary. - **Agencies**

Samson delivered 'when the team needed him the most': Gambhir

KOLKATA: After Sanju Samson's unbeaten 97 secured India's qualification into the semi-final of the T20 World Cup on Sunday, India head coach Gautam Gambhir said he always knew the wicketkeeper-batter would come good at the right time.

"He's a world class player, we all know how good a player Sanju is," Gambhir told reporters after the game. "It was all about backing him. When the team needed him the most - obviously today was the day - he showed his full potential."

What stood out for Gambhir was the control in Samson's innings. He said the signs had been there in training, even if Samson didn't



post big scores in the lead up to the World Cup.

"I actually felt that he never accelerated the innings," Gambhir said. "It was just very normal cricketing shots and I never saw him muscling the ball as well. That is the kind of talent he has."

"Obviously he had a tough series against New Zealand, so sometimes it's important to give him a break as well, because you want to get the guy off that pressure situation as well. And we always knew that whenever we needed him in the World Cup game, he'll come and deliver it for us."

While Samson stayed right till the end in the chase of 196, Gamb-

hir also pointed to the bowling powerplay as a key phase. India conceded only 45 even if they didn't strike in the first six overs.

"I thought we started off really well, especially when you play this kind of a game of this magnitude," Gambhir said. "You've got to start off really well with the new ball, which Arshdeep and Hardik did."

"I think the way they started off in the first three overs was really good and then Axar bowled two overs in the powerplay, which was again a great job done by him. It's never easy on this wicket on their ground to bowl two overs in a powerplay, but Axar did that really well."

"The powerplay didn't go away

from us, which was very important because once the powerplay goes away from you, it's very difficult to control."

When asked if India are peaking at the right time, bouncing back with two strong wins after the loss to South Africa, Gambhir said he did not believe in that concept. He also said he asks his players to back their instinct over data.

"I don't believe in data, honestly. I've never seen the data. I don't even know what data is all about. I absolutely do not believe it. Because I feel it's more about instinct. I think T20 cricket is about instinct and backing your instinct as well."

He made a similar point about batting roles, referencing Tilak Varma, who made a 15-ball 27 from No. 5 to keep India's required run-rate in check. "He's batted out of his position," Gambhir said. "He batted at No. 3 initially. But now when we've pushed him to five or six and see how he's batted. So you've got that talent. You need to have that talent where you can bat out of positions." - **Agencies**



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OMAN CRUDE PRICE RISES
The official price of Oman crude for May delivery (2026) settled at \$80.40 per barrel yesterday. This represents a substantial increase of \$9.69 for Oman crude in yesterday's trading session. -**ONA**

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER
The Muscat Stock Exchange 30 index concluded yesterday's trading session at 7,369.34 points, gaining 80.8 points, which constitutes a rise by 1.11 percent from the previous close of 7,288.56 points.

MSX lists Oman Gateway Fund as first listed-open ended fund

The Oman Gateway Fund operates as a regulated mutual fund and is simultaneously listed and traded on the MSX

MUSCAT: Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) listed the Oman Gateway Fund. This fund stands as the Sultanate of Oman's first mutual fund to innovatively combine the characteristics of an open-ended fund with the flexibility of real-time trading.

United Securities LLC, the owner and manager of the fund, announced the successful conclusion of the Initial Public Offering (IPO) phase, which attracted record-breaking investments exceeding OMR26.5 million.

This achievement establishes the offering as the largest public subscription for a mutual fund in terms of capital in the history of the Sultanate of Oman.

The Oman Gateway Fund operates as a regulated mutual fund and is simultaneously listed and traded on the MSX. Investors can buy and sell units during regular trading hours in the same manner as any listed equity, while benefiting from professional portfolio management, regulated governance, and net asset value-based pricing. No



fund in Oman has been structured this way before.

United Securities brings to this fund its strong track record in managing Omani Discretionary Portfolio

Management (DPMS) mandates and will be applying the same disciplined and research-driven investment process that has consistently delivered results for DPMS clients

directly into the management of the Oman Gateway Fund.

Over the past year, the MSX has seen a sharp and sustained rise in trading turnover and daily vol-

umes, driven by Oman Vision 2040 reforms, fiscal consolidation, and increased market-making activity. Oman's improving market governance and liquidity profile strengthen its case for inclusion in the FTSE and MSCI emerging market indices, a development that would attract significant passive and active capital inflows.

The Oman Gateway Fund provides investors with a professionally managed diversified vehicle for local and foreigners investors to capture this opportunity at a pivotal moment in Oman's capital market development.

Haitham Al Salmi, Chief Executive Officer, Muscat Stock Exchange, stated: "The listing of Oman Gateway Fund represents a significant milestone in deepening the Omani capital market and diversifying the investment in-

struments available to investors. The inclusion of this type of traded fund enhances liquidity levels, improves pricing efficiency, and expands the investor base. This further solidifies the Muscat Stock Exchange's position as a regulated and transparent market that supports efficient capital allocation. It also keeps pace with the continuous development of the market infrastructure, in line with our efforts to enhance the exchange's attractiveness and reinforce its role as a fundamental pillar of the national financial ecosystem."

Mustafa Ahmed Salman, Chief Executive Officer, United Securities LLC stated: "Exceeding RO 26.5 million from institutional and public investors in a single public offering reflects genuine confidence in Oman's capital markets and in United Securities. Our established track record in managing Omani DPMS mandates has given us deep and tested knowledge of this market, and we bring that expertise directly into the management of the Oman Gateway Fund. Combining the discipline of a mutual fund with the accessibility of an MSX-listed security is a first for Oman. We are proud to deliver this innovation and remain fully committed to bringing institutional grade investment products to Omani investors." The listing of the Oman Gateway Fund marks a strategic milestone in enhancing the liquidity and dynamism of the Muscat Stock Exchange. By offering innovative investment vehicles, the fund aligns with the Sultanate of Oman's strategic roadmap for financial sector development, further solidifying Oman's position as a premier destination for regional and international capital. -**ONA**

REPORT



Amid West Asia tensions, gold may hit \$6,000/ounce

NEW DELHI: Gold prices could surge to USD 6,000 per ounce, and Rupee may weaken to 92-92.5 against USD if West Asian conflict escalates further, according to a report by Elara Capital.

The report said gold stands to benefit significantly from rising geopolitical tensions. Apart from continued central bank and ETF-related buying, gold is likely to receive an additional boost from geopolitical risk premium.

In commodity markets on Monday morning, gold prices surged 3 per cent to Rs 1,67,329 per 10 gm for 24 karat, while silver prices rose 3.89 per cent to Rs 2,85,700 per kg.

The Elara Capital report stated, "We remain positive on gold as central bank, ETF-related buying now is likely to be complemented by geopolitical risk premium."

The report noted that if oil prices sustain at USD 90 per barrel or higher in the coming months, it would add around 0.3-0.4 per cent to its baseline current account deficit (CAD) estimate of 0.9 per cent of GDP for FY27E. In such a scenario, the USD-INR is expected to weaken to 92-92.5.

It also highlighted that if the conflict escalates and lasts longer than last year's "12 Day War" against Israel, oil flows from the Strait of Hormuz could be restricted, triggering a spike in global supply chain risks. More

than 80 per cent of crude transiting through the Strait of Hormuz is destined for Asia, which could result in heightened stress for Asian markets.

While recent media reports suggest that US President Donald Trump has agreed to talk with the new regime of Iran, a move seen as a step towards de-escalation, the brokerage cautioned that how fruitful these talks would be remains highly uncertain.

On the equity front, Elara Capital said historical trends over the past twenty-five years of Middle East crises show that median Nifty returns have been flat at one week and one month, and around +17 per cent at one year."

However, the sell-off tends to be sharper when geopolitical tensions evolve into a sustained energy shock.

It added "History of last twenty-five years of Middle East crisis, shows median Nifty returns are flat at one week and one month, and +17 per cent at one year."

During the 2011 Arab Spring phase, Brent crude rose 20-25 per cent in the first month and equity drawdowns widened.

So, the report suggested that while gold may rally sharply amid escalating tensions, Nifty returns could remain flat in the near term, with the trajectory depending on whether the situation turns into a prolonged energy shock. -**ANI**

HIGHLY SECURED FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

Oman's central bank issues treasury bills worth OMR10.45 million



MUSCAT: Oman's central bank raised OMR10.45 million by way of allotting treasury bills on Monday.

The value of the allotted treasury bills include OMR5 million, for a maturity period of 28 days. The average accepted price reached OMR99.720 for every OMR100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at OMR99.720 per OMR100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 3.65000%

and 3.66025%, respectively.

Additionally, treasury bills worth OMR5.45 million for a maturity period of 91 days was also issued. The average accepted price reached OMR99.041 for every OMR100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at OMR99.040 per OMR100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 3.84724% and 3.88450%, respectively.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

It may be noted that the interest

rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 4.25% while the discount rate on the treasury bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 4.75%.

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the Government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. -**ONA**

STRENGTHENS TECHNOLOGICAL SELF-RELIANCE

China issues guidelines to boost high-quality development of sci-tech insurance

BEIJING: China on Monday made public new guidelines to accelerate the high-quality development of sci-tech insurance, among broader efforts to strengthen technological self-reliance.

The document, which was issued by the Ministry of Science and Technology, the National Financial Regulatory Administra-

tion, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, and the China National Intellectual Property Administration, sets out 20 measures across six areas, aiming to build a sci-tech insurance system that is better aligned with technological innovation.

The country's sci-tech insurance has played a stabilizing role

in offsetting the high costs, long development cycles and elevated risks associated with technological innovation. In 2025, it provided about 8 trillion yuan (about 1.16 trillion U.S. dollars) in risk coverage, with premiums rising 44 per cent year on year.

The new guidelines call for improved risk-sharing mechanisms

for major technological breakthroughs, as well as strengthened insurance support for national strategic technological forces.

For tech-focused small and medium-sized enterprises, insurers are encouraged to offer simpler, more affordable products with greater ease of access and convenient claims processes. -**Xinhua**

MARKET

MSX index ends higher

Trading value soared to OMR62,351,409, marking a 38.1 percent increase compared to the prior session's OMR45,140,153



MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange 30 index concluded yesterday's trading session at 7,369.34 points, gaining 80.8 points, which constitutes a rise by 1.11 percent from the previous close of 7,288.56 points.

Trading value soared to OMR62,351,409, marking a 38.1 percent increase compared to the prior session's OMR45,140,153. Market capitalisation rose by 0.602 percent relative to the last

trading day, reaching OMR 36.30 billion, according to the official report issued by the MSX. Non-Omani investors recorded purchases totalling OMR6,429,000, constituting 10.31 percent of overall trading activity, while sales by non-Omani investors amounted to OMR7,392,000, representing 11.86 percent. Net non-Omani investment registered a fall of OMR963,000, or 1.54 percent. — **OMA**

OMAN STOCKS

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

INDICES

Index	High	Low	Value	Prev. Value	Diff.	Diff%
MSX 30 INDEX	7,377.65	7,290.19	7,369.34	7,288.56	80.78	1.11
FINANCIAL INDEX	12,325.09	12,095.67	12,320.94	12,092.94	228.01	1.89
Industry Index	9,555.10	9,446.73	9,552.40	9,469.21	83.19	0.88
Services Index	2,876.15	2,821.85	2,867.31	2,821.18	46.13	1.64
MSX Shariah Index	640.48	630.80	638.77	630.38	8.39	1.33
MSX TR INDEX	11,089.01	10,957.56	11,076.52	10,955.11	121.41	1.11
FINANCIAL TR IDX	14,642.64	14,370.08	14,637.71	14,366.83	270.88	1.89
INDUSTRIAL TR IDX	11,780.61	11,647.00	11,777.29	11,674.72	102.57	0.88
SERVICES TR IDX	3,750.71	3,679.90	3,739.18	3,679.03	60.16	1.64
FIXED INCOME INDEX	1,209.68	1,209.68	1,209.68	1,209.68	0.00	0.00

Trading Summary

Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap.	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
194,412,718	62,351,409	5,558	36,300,729,195	46	8	18	72

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR MONDAY, MARCH 2

SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RD)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST RD	LAST OFFER	P/B VALUE	MARKET CAP
REGULAR MARKET															
OM0000004933	AL SUWADI POWER	174,192	27,955	46	0.159	0.164	0.157	0.162	0.151	0.011	7.285	0.162	0.161	0.162	0.100 ... 115,733,827
OM0000004925	AL RATTINAH POWER	42,745	6,794	11	0.157	0.165	0.157	0.163	0.153	0.010	6.536	0.163	0.162	0.163	0.100 ... 110,008,651
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	4,811,020	734,284	172	0.148	0.154	0.148	0.153	0.146	0.007	4.795	0.152	0.152	0.152	0.100 ... 342,253,814
OM0000002274	UNITED FINANCE	405,100	34,981	12	0.086	0.087	0.086	0.087	0.084	0.003	3.571	0.087	0.086	0.087	0.100 ... 30,983,075
OM0000003125	GLOBAL FINANCIAL INVESTMENT HO	1,148,293	332,091	77	0.273	0.300	0.272	0.289	0.289	0.010	3.460	0.299	0.292	0.299	0.100 ... 59,800,000
OM0000004768	MADINA TAKAFUL	704,221	91,427	51	0.127	0.131	0.127	0.130	0.126	0.004	3.175	0.130	0.130	0.131	0.100 ... 22,750,000
OM0000001707	OMAN CABLES INDUSTRY	1,305	3,628	3	2.750	2.785	2.750	2.785	2.700	0.085	3.148	2.785	2.760	2.960	0.100 ... 249,814,500
OM0000001333	OMINVEST	322,438	125,895	39	0.390	0.400	0.389	0.399	0.387	0.012	3.101	0.399	0.397	0.425	0.100 ... 373,348,927
OM0000002440	AL SHARQIA INVESTMENT HO	84,250	10,014	5	0.118	0.121	0.118	0.121	0.118	0.003	2.542	0.121	0.119	0.122	0.100 ... 10,890,000
OM0000002226	ALJAZEERA SERVICES	118,585	29,505	25	0.245	0.250	0.245	0.250	0.245	0.005	2.041	0.250	0.248	0.250	0.100 ... 10,710,748
OM0000003224	RENAISSANCE SERVICES	486,870	185,129	64	0.376	0.383	0.376	0.382	0.375	0.007	1.867	0.382	0.382	0.386	0.100 ... 90,308,620
OM0000001087	OMAN UNITED INSURANCE	260,054	100,663	12	0.385	0.390	0.385	0.390	0.385	0.005	1.299	0.390	0.384	0.390	0.100 ... 39,000,000
OM0000003961	VOLTAMP ENERGY	64,958	121,465	44	1.850	1.870	1.850	1.870	1.850	0.020	1.081	1.870	1.870	1.870	0.100 ... 175,056,613
OM0000002188	AL ANWAR CERAMIC	6,815,713	1,320,584	127	0.195	0.205	0.190	0.201	0.199	0.002	1.005	0.201	0.201	0.201	0.100 ... 44,220,000
OM0000003289	SOHAR INTERNATIONAL BANK	51,665,270	11,382,009	919	0.217	0.221	0.216	0.218	0.216	0.002	0.928	0.218	0.218	0.220	0.100 ... 142,559,867
OM0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	34,773,382	14,781,777	658	0.426	0.428	0.423	0.427	0.425	0.002	0.471	0.427	0.428	0.427	0.100 ... 303,205,231,545
OM0000003026	OMAN TELECOM	6,596,596	8,496,614	180	1.287	1.290	1.278	1.290	1.286	0.004	0.311	1.290	1.290	1.290	0.100 ... 967,500,000
OM0000003968	OOREDOO	70,900	25,053	13	0.350	0.354	0.349	0.354	0.353	0.001	0.283	0.354	0.346	0.355	0.100 ... 230,434,257
OM0000001483	NATIONAL BANK OMAN	2,100	624	3	0.392	0.393	0.392	0.393	0.393	0.000	0.000	0.393	0.392	0.394	0.100 ... 638,996,918
OM0000008072	QIGAS NETWORKS	267,987,827	6,304,334	846	0.297	0.298	0.293	0.295	0.296	-0.001	-0.424	0.295	0.295	0.295	0.100 ... 101,697,661
OM0000008634	ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES	4,125,579	1,858,358	202	0.450	0.453	0.448	0.448	0.451	-0.003	-0.665	0.448	0.448	0.447	0.100 ... 345,049,600
Total	21	139,465,398	45,854,186	3,509											
Parallel Market															
OM0000004776	TAKAFUL OMAN	123,194	9,242	20	0.073	0.076	0.073	0.076	0.070	0.006	8.571	0.076	0.073	0.076	0.100 ... 19,000,000
OM0000003000	AI MAHA PETROLEUM PRODS MRKTNG	202	242	1	1.200	1.200	1.200	1.200	1.114	0.086	7.720	1.200	1.135	1.200	0.100 ... 82,800,000
OM0000005963	PHOENIX POWER	448,459	69,276	88	0.153	0.156	0.149	0.156	0.146	0.010	6.849	0.156	0.156	0.156	0.100 ... 228,165,828
OM0000002077	AL OMANIYA FINANCIAL SERVICES	10,000	1,850	2	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.185	0.175	0.010	5.714	0.185	0.170	0.185	0.100 ... 58,332,146
OM0000001823	OMAN GATEWAY FUND	17,900	17,100	5	1.000	1.050	1.000	1.050	1.000	0.050	5.000	1.050	0.900	1.050	0.000 ... 28,182,525
OM0000001178	MUSCAT GASES	100	13	1	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.121	0.006	4.959	0.127	0.122	0.127	0.100 ... 3,810,000
OM0000001160	NATIONAL GAS	245,262	22,865	36	0.085	0.096	0.082	0.094	0.090	0.004	4.444	0.094	0.092	0.094	0.100 ... 7,990,000
OM0000001681	OMAN EMIRATES HO	431,500	45,031	39	0.102	0.107	0.102	0.106	0.102	0.004	3.922	0.106	0.106	0.111	0.100 ... 12,918,750
OM0000004735	SEMOBOP SALALAH	84,240	18,465	19	0.217	0.220	0.217	0.218	0.210	0.008	3.810	0.218	0.218	0.218	0.100 ... 208,095,685
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	81,966	11,004	11	0.135	0.136	0.132	0.136	0.132	0.004	3.030	0.136	0.134	0.139	0.100 ... 40,603,199
OM0000008447	OMAN RET FUND	39,896	4,038	12	0.100	0.102	0.100	0.102	0.099	0.003	3.030	0.102	0.102	0.102	0.100 ... 66,538,912
OM0000001590	MUSCAT FINANCE	38,385	3,074	10	0.076	0.080	0.076	0.078	0.076	0.002	2.632	0.078	0.074	0.079	0.100 ... 23,957,413
OM0000002028	GULF INTERNATIONAL CHEMICALS	330,500	28,101	39	0.085	0.086	0.083	0.084	0.082	0.002	2.439	0.085	0.084	0.085	0.100 ... 1,764,000
OM0000003281	TAGEER FINANCE	21,500	2,716	6	0.126	0.127	0.126	0.127	0.124	0.003	2.419	0.127	0.127	0.127	0.100 ... 35,461,348
OM0000002287	GULF MUSHROOM PRODUCTS	8,790	3,729	8	0.421	0.430	0.421	0.430	0.421	0.009	2.138	0.430	0.428	0.430	0.100 ... 19,679,293
OM0000004248	SMN POWER HOLDING	535,898	130,408	37	0.243	0.245	0.243	0.244	0.239	0.005	2.092	0.244	0.240	0.255	0.100 ... 48,711,086
OM0000002549	BANK DHOFAR	485,500	98,759	252	0.201	0.204	0.200	0.203	0.199	0.004	2.010	0.203	0.201	0.203	0.100 ... 61,079,102
OM0000001152	OMAN NATL ENGG & INVESTMENT	38,090	6,056	8	0.158	0.160	0.158	0.159	0.156	0.003	1.923	0.159	0.159	0.171	0.100 ... 23,850,000
OM0000008908	QJBASE INDUSTRIES (SFZ)	28,155,050	6,421,621	522	0.226	0.230	0.225	0.229	0.225	0.004	1.778	0.229	0.229	0.229	0.100 ... 792,223,405
OM0000007407	DHOFAH GENERATING	31,000	2,666	4	0.086	0.086	0.086	0.086	0.085	0.001	1.176	0.086	0.081	0.086	0.100 ... 19,112,640
OM0000009759	QJ EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION	14,211,038	6,887,370	322	0.480	0.486	0.480	0.484	0.479	0.005	1.044	0.484	0.484	0.485	0.100 ... 101,032,000,000
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	919,250	505,443	20	0.547	0.549	0.531	0.540	0.535	0.005	0.935	0.540	0.530	0.540	0.100 ... 178,671,263
OM0000008710	BARKA DESALINATION	30,000	4,928	4	0.163	0.165	0.163	0.164	0.163	0.001	0.613	0.164	0.160	0.163	0.100 ... 12,855,608
OM0000008868	THE PEARL REIF	103,000	19,077	20	0.189	0.189	0.185	0.185	0.184	0.001	0.543	0.187	0.184	0.187	0.100 ... 109,415,823
OM0000001400	OMAN FLOUR MILLS	50,000	25,212	12	0.510	0.510	0.502	0.510	0.510	0.000	0.000	0.510	0.504	0.510	0.100 ... 84,341,250
OM0000001897	MAJAN COLLEGE	1,790	267	1	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.000	0.000	0.127	0.119	0.127	0.100 ... 12,873,000
OM0000001962	AL MADINA INVESTMENT HOLDING	17,507	700	2	0.040	0.040	0.040	0.040	0.040	0.000	0.000	0.040	0.038	0.040	0.100 ... 3,400,000
OM0000002036	MUSCAT THREAD MILLS	5,000	1,075	1	0.215	0.215	0.215	0.215	0.215	0.000	0.000	0.215	0.213	0.220	0.100 ... 3,789,088
OM0000002275	SHIELL OMAN MARKETING	125	125	1	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.000	0.000	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.100 ... 74,150,000
OM0000002333	SALALAH PORT SERVICES	21,357	8,436	3	0.395	0.395	0.395	0.395	0.395	0.000	0.000	0.395	0.395	0.434	0.100 ... 710,353,773
OM0000002648	NATIONAL FINANCE	472	109	1	0.230	0.230	0.230	0.230	0.230	0.000	0.000	0.230	0.218	0.235	0.100 ... 138,969,104
OM0000002811	FINANCIAL CORPORATION	500	500	1	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.047	0.000	0.000	0.047	0.043	0.048	0.100 ... 291,408
OM0000003017	BARKA WATER AND POWER	10,027	16,210	14	0.157	0.157	0.157	0.158	0.158	0.000	0.000	0.158	0.159	0.159	0.100 ... 25,380,017
OM0000005005	ALMAHA CERAMICS	5,000	455	3	0.280	0.280	0.280	0.285	0.285	0.000	0.000	0.280	0.256	0.280	0.100 ... 14,025,000
OM0000005260	OMAN ARAB BANK	34,721	6,899	5	0.199	0.199	0.198	0.199	0.199	0.000	0.000	0.198	0.181	0.198	0.100 ... 398,545,923
OM0000007084	MUSCAT CITY DESALINATION	6,842	6,842	1	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.000	0.000	0.090	0.090	0.090	0.100 ... 999,539
OM0000007010	AMAR REAL ESTATE	3,044	235	4	0.078	0.078	0.077	0.078	0.078	0.000	0.000	0.078	0.076	0.085	0.100 ... 156,000
OM0000005929	DHOFAH INTL DEVPNT & INVESTMENT	497,256	152,449	68	0.300	0.312	0.298	0.298	0.299	-0.001	-0.324	0.298	0.300	0.302	0.100 ... 147,824,700
OM0000007327	QJ BASE SHIPPING	6,834	1,654,221	32	0.247	0.247	0.238	0.247	0.238	0.009	0.009	0.247	0.238	0.247	0.100 ... 1,000,000,000
OM0000001889	SALALAH MILLS	1,421	661	3	0.465	0.465	0.465	0.465	0.469	-0.004	-0.853				


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RS\$6.0 BILLION

Pakistan’s fruit exports revenue rises in last decade

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan’s fruit export earnings have nearly doubled over the past decade, rising from Rs44.6 billion in 2015-16 to Rs86.0 billion in 2024-25.

According to official trade data for the last 10 fiscal years from the Ministry of Finance available with Wealth Pakistan, fruit export volumes stood at 677,000 tonnes in 2015-16, generating Rs44.6 billion in export receipts.

In 2016-17, volumes declined to 646,000 tonnes, a drop of around 4.6%, while export earnings fell to Rs39.9 billion, reflecting both lower shipments and reduced export value. Pakistan recorded above-average rainfall from March to September 2016, triggering flash floods in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab that damaged orchards, standing crops, and rural infrastructure, affecting output during the period.

Exports recovered in 2017-18, rising to 697,000 tonnes, while earnings improved to Rs43.8 billion.

The upward momentum continued in 2018-19, when volumes increased to 756,000 tonnes and export value climbed to Rs56.3 billion, representing a year-on-year growth of nearly 28% in earnings.

In 2019-20, fruit export volumes reached 798,000 tonnes, with export receipts increasing further to Rs67.8 billion. This marked a two-year expansion phase in both quantity and value.

A major surge occurred in 2020-21, when shipments

jumped to 975,000 tonnes — the highest level recorded in the decade — lifting export value to Rs76.8 billion. Compared to 2015-16, volumes during this peak year were higher by nearly 44%.

However, 2021-22 witnessed a sharp reversal in shipment volumes. Exports fell to 622,000 tonnes, a decline of more than 36% compared to the previous year. Despite the contraction in quantity, export earnings rose to Rs84.4 billion, indicating a substantial increase in export value per tonne.

In 2022-23, volumes remained relatively subdued at 629,000 tonnes, while export value declined to Rs68.8 billion.

In 2022, the worst floods in decades swept across the country, inundating vast stretches of farmland and affecting millions of acres of crops.

Exports rebounded strongly in 2023-24. Shipment volumes rose to 928,000 tonnes, while export earnings surged to a record Rs97.1 billion — the highest export value recorded during the 10-year period under review.

Compared to 2015-16, export earnings in 2023-24 more than doubled.

In the latest fiscal year, 2024-25, volumes again declined sharply to 579,000 tonnes — the lowest level recorded in the decade.

Despite the 37% drop in volume compared to the previous year, export receipts remained robust at Rs86.0 billion. -APP

Nepal interim PM calls voters to take part in polls

Addressing the nation, Karki said Nepal stood at a “historic and important juncture” and appealed to citizens to cast their ballots

KATHMANDU: Nepal’s interim Prime Minister Sushila Karki on Monday called on voters to participate in the March 5 poll for the Nepal House of Representatives.

Addressing the nation, Karki said Nepal stood at a “historic and important juncture” and appealed to citizens to cast their ballots.

“You all remember the time when I took on this responsibility. The situation after the Gen-Z movement was complex, sensitive and challenging. There was anger among the youth on the streets, fear in everyone’s mind, and the future of the country was uncertain. Our first duty was to manage that difficult transition, guide the country away from a violent turn toward a peaceful path, and return it to the constitutional framework. Today, I am satisfied that we have overcome that difficult transition and have come this far. We have succeeded in establishing the rule of law and moving forward with stability on the constitutional path. This achievement is the result of the restraint and co-operation of all of you, the Nepali people,” Karki said in a televised address.



Karki urged voters to exercise their franchise, emphasising that every vote would bring change.

“To move the country forward on the path of political stability and prosperity, all voters should participate in the upcoming elections. Voting is not just about stamping an election symbol and sending someone to victory. It is a decision you make about how you will shape your future and that of your children. Therefore, I sincerely appeal to you to go to your polling station on Thursday, March 5, even if it means leaving other work behind, and cast your vote,” Karki added.

Karki urged political parties and candidates to maintain discipline, especially during the silence period, and thanked the Election Commission, security agencies and civil servants for their preparations to ensure free and fair polls.

She said the government was committed to conducting the election in a free, fair and fear-free manner.

“At this juncture, with the election at the doorstep, I request everyone to maintain peace and harmony. Peace is the true identity of Nepal. There is healthy competition in elections, there are different opinions, but there should be no misunderstandings or animosity among us. I thank all political parties and independent candidates in the electoral fray. Our democracy will survive only with your active participation. I also urge all political parties, candidates and supporters to observe complete discipline during the silence period and to conduct campaigning in a restrained and respectful manner in the remaining

time before it begins,” the Interim Prime Minister said.

The Prime Minister also warned against misinformation on social and mainstream media, saying authorities were tracking and taking action against those spreading fabricated content and misleading claims.

Extending greetings on Holi ahead of the vote, she said the festival symbolises unity and goodwill and urged people to celebrate responsibly without applying colours against anyone’s will.

On foreign affairs, Karki expressed concern over rising tensions in West Asia. She said the government was closely monitoring developments and prioritising the safety of Nepalis in the region.

“We have received encouraging support and feedback from friendly countries and international organisations for Nepal’s ability to manage the elections within a short time. I would like to thank the friendly countries that provided in-kind, cash and technical assistance for election management. We are also grateful for the support received from United Nations agencies,” Karki said.

“Today, in another corner of the world, the war crisis in the Middle East has deepened. The tension in and around Iran has worried us. The Government of Nepal is closely monitoring the developments. The safety of our brothers, sisters and youth living there is a matter of great concern to us. All Nepali missions in the region have been activated to ensure that there is no lapse in security facilitation, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is closely monitoring the situation,” Karki said. -ANI

DIVERTED A VESSEL

Belgium seizes Russian shadow fleet tanker

BRUSSELS: Belgian Defence Minister Theo Francken announced that his country’s navy boarded and diverted a vessel believed to be part of Russia’s illicit shadow fleet of oil tankers on Sunday.

Francken said the ship was being taken to the Belgian port of Zeebrugge, where it would be seized by Belgian authorities.

Francken said the tanker Ethern, captured Sunday by Belgian and French forces, was suspected of sailing under “false flag and false documents.”

“Over the past few hours, our armed forces, with the support of the French Defense, have boarded an oil tanker belonging to the Russian shadow fleet,” Francken wrote in an early morning post on X.

“The vessel is currently being escorted to the port of Zeebrugge, where it will be seized.” French President Emmanuel Macron also posted a video of naval forces commandeering the Ethern in the North Sea, calling the successful operation a “major blow” to Russia’s shadow fleet.

Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed the seizure.

“We welcome this strong action against Moscow’s floating purse and thank France for supporting the operation,” he wrote on X.

Russia has systematically operated a clandestine network of usually rickety older tankers with no clear documentation of ownership to evade international sanctions and export crude oil to nations willing to buy its discounted contraband, propping up its Ukraine invasion as its economy melts.

“Without his shadow fleet Putin can’t wage war against innocent Ukrainians. So we take these vessels out. One by one. Until his war of aggression stops,” Francken wrote, adding that Belgium takes its responsibilities to this end.

Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever also took to X to congratulate the armed forces for “the successful operation last night.” He thanked France in the post, adding that Belgium would, “uphold international maritime law and the security of its territorial waters.”

Belgium recently faced criticism from EU partners after it opposed the seizure of Russian assets held frozen in Europe to finance loans to Ukraine. -DW

SMEARING COLOURS

Foreign tourists bask in Holi celebration in Kathmandu

KATHMANDU: Hundreds of foreign tourists on visit to Nepal drenched themselves in colours along with the revellers celebrating Holi, the festival of colours in Kathmandu Durbar Square.

Foreigners joined the celebration in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, smearing colours on each other’s faces with the greeting of “Happy Holi” in the premises of the ancient palace.

The Kathmandu or Basantapur Durbar Square a common place for Kathmanduites to gather and celebrate the festival of colours. The UNESCO World Heritage Site, previously the royal palace, has witnessed major turmoil and changes in Nepal is also referred as the “Holi Junction of Kathmandu”. Every year, people observing the festival of colours usually visit the historical courtyard for recreation.

“It is amazing. Just arrived yesterday, and the first impression of Nepal is great, it’s awesome,” Alexander, a German tourist smeared in colors told ANI.

The festival, also called the Spring festival, marks the arrival



of spring and the harvest season. The first day of the festival is called Chhoti Holi or Holika Dahan, and the second-day Dhuleti or Holi. Holika Dahan, the death of Holika, the symbol of the triumph of good over evil, is marked by lighting a bonfire and performing a special Puja to burn evil spirits. The next day, people enjoy smearing one another with different colors including Abir or red vermilion powder.

Among various cultural festivals celebrated in Nepal, the Fagu Poornima carries its own special-

ty and significance. People from old to young age enjoy the festival with enthusiasm. One of the widely observed festivals of the country, the festival begins on the eighth day of the new moon and ends with the burning of the ‘Chir’, which was installed earlier, on the full moon day later today.

“I came here around one hour before, but it was not that busy, not much energy, but in the last hour so many people came, so much energy and action, you can feel the happiness; everybody just happy and celebrating. Happy

Holi,” David, another tourist from the Czech Republic told ANI.

The formal start of Holi in Nepal starts with the erection of the “Chir” in the premises of the Basantapur Durbar Area, the old residence of Nepali rulers over time. The pole or the sacred “Chir” tied with multicoloured pieces of clothes gives the go-ahead signal for the people of Nepal to make preparations for the holi signalling it is arriving on their doorsteps.

The death of Holika

In order to mark the death of Holika, who had the boon to remain unaffected in fire gets burned down. In order to mark the victory of godliness over the devil forces, holi is believed to have started, and the burning of Chir is based on it.

This traditional culture of playing Holi is marked on two separate days in Nepal. The Hilly and Himalayan districts of Nepal mark the day of holi on Thursday (this year), whereas the Terai districts will be celebrating Holi on Friday, this year. -ANI

OLDEST HINDU FESTIVAL

In India, Holi welcomes spring with a mélange of colours

NEW DELHI: During the Holi festival, Indians welcome spring with a riot of colour. Faces and clothes are transformed into colorful works of art. For a moment, traditional social hierarchies seem to disappear.

What looks like a wild rave party has roots that go back thousands of years: Holi is traditionally celebrated in the northern regions of India to mark the end of winter. This is also the case in the state of Uttar Pradesh, on the border with Nepal, where the spring festival is celebrated. It is one of the oldest Hindu festivals and is now popular throughout the subcontinent.

The festival begins on the last full moon day of the Indian month of Phalgun, which corresponds to February or March in the Gregorian calendar. Holi lasts at least two days and up to ten days in some areas. In 2026, the main day, which is a national holiday, falls on March 4. It is a day off work, and schools and most shops are closed.

Preparations begin weeks before the festivities. These men, for

example, are making colored powder. The colors, like the festival itself, have a long tradition. Originally, they were made from natural materials, but today they are often synthetic. Participants regularly report skin and eye irritation, but that hardly stops anyone from celebrating.

During the colour battle, social barriers are broken down. Caste, gender and age cease to matter: everyone celebrates together. Music, including both folk songs and Bollywood songs, plays an important role in the Holi festival. Loudspeakers are set up in many public places so that people can celebrate and dance in the streets.

The renewal of life

Like most Indian festivals, Holi has a multifaceted meaning: its religious origin is the rescue of the god-devoted Prahlad by the god Vishnu from the demoness Holika. The festival thus represents the victory of good over evil and the renewal of life. For many devout Hindus, Holi is one of the

most important religious festivals of the year.

A special variation of the festival called Lathmaar Holi is celebrated in the towns of Barsana and Nandgaon. During the festivities, the women take charge and symbolically beat the men with bamboo sticks. This tradition dates back to a Hindu legend in which the god Krishna was chased away by his beloved with sticks.

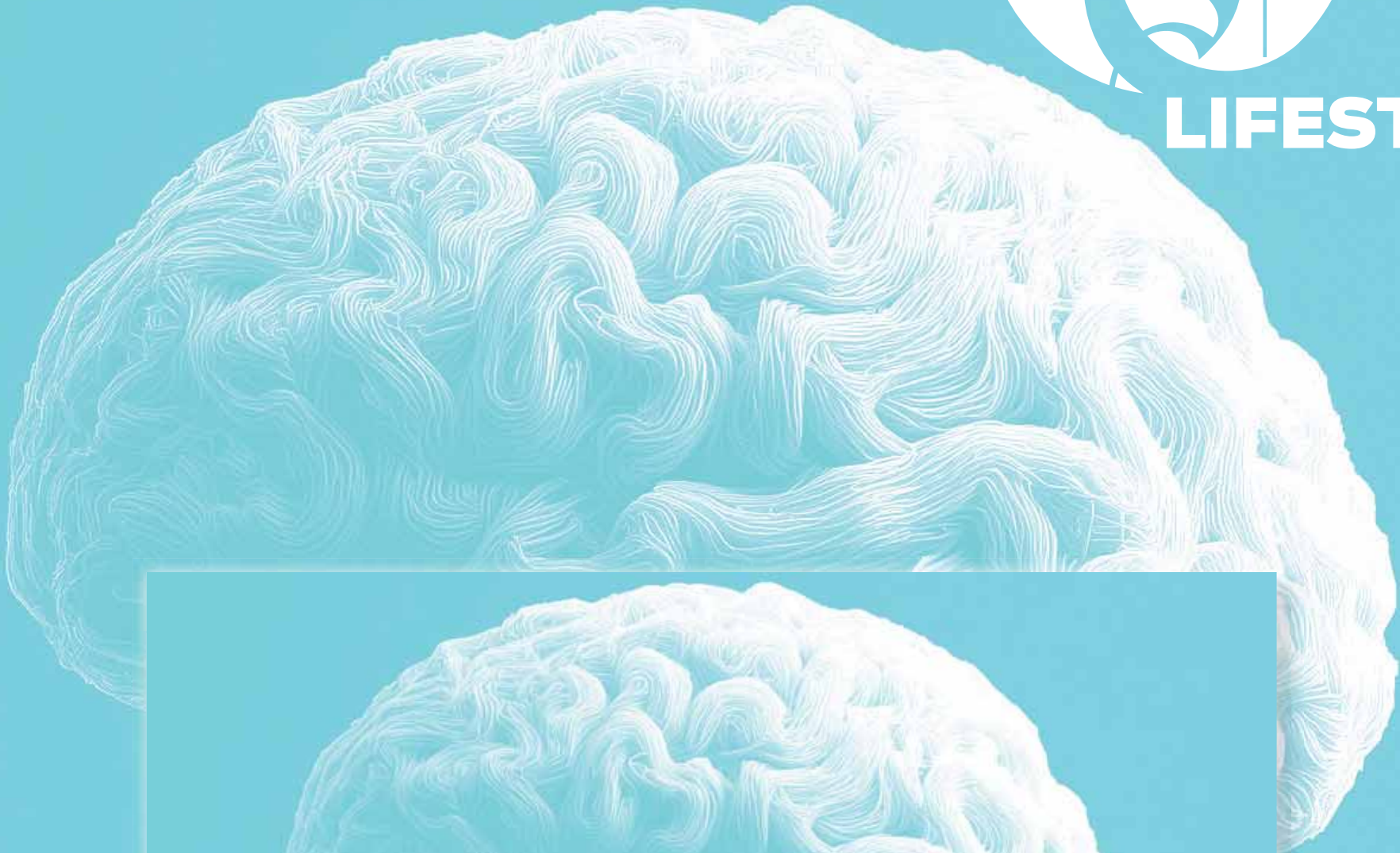
Perhaps the battle with the women during Lathmar Holi has worn these men out: these two men are exhausted by the celebrations and are sleeping it off outside a temple in Nandgaon. The region in northern India is considered the home of the Hindu deities Krishna and Radha and is the spiritual center of this festival.

Holi parties are becoming increasingly popular abroad including in Germany. The cultural adaptations no longer have any religious significance: these festivals, which usually take place in the summer months, are purely about having fun. -DW

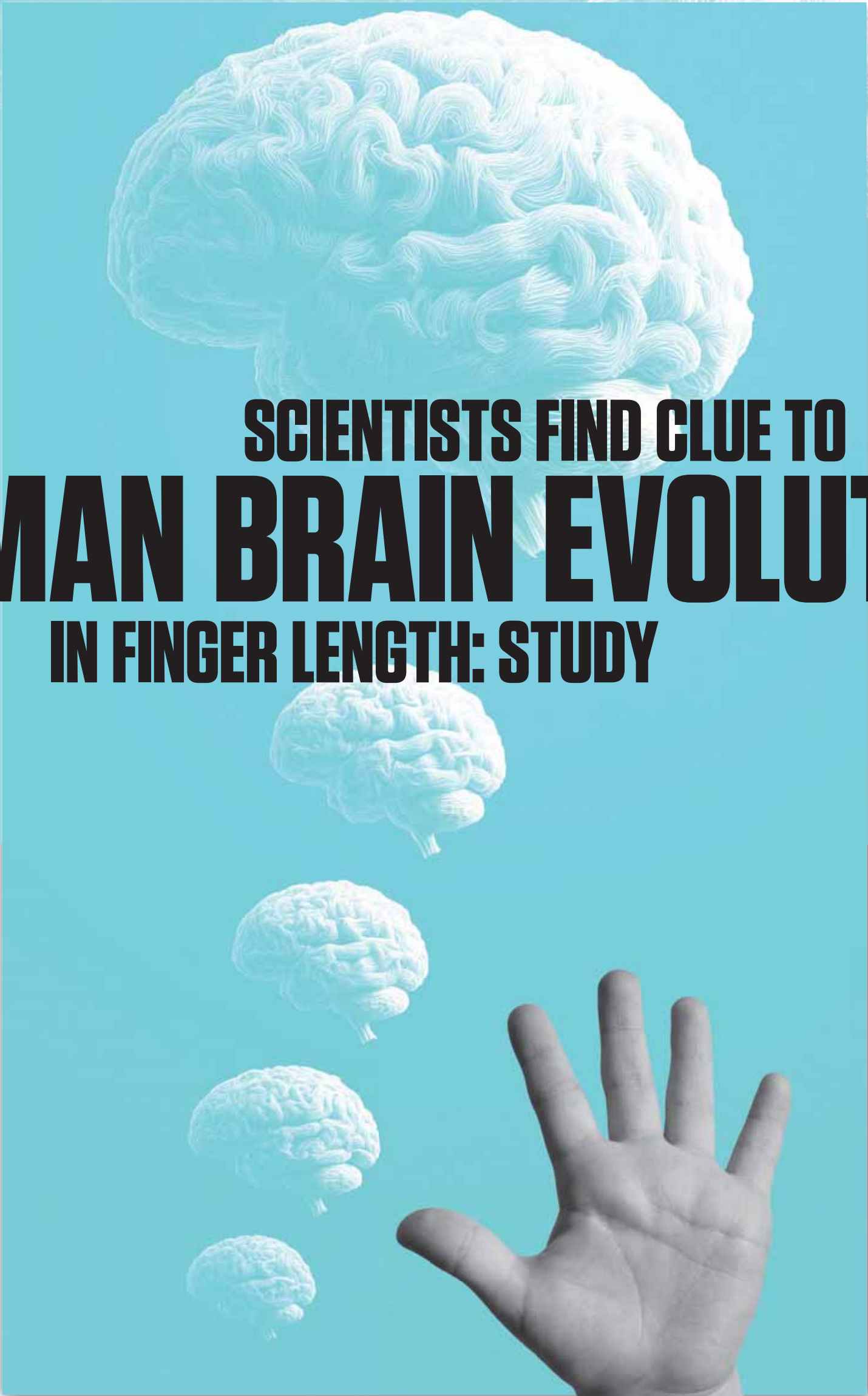




LIFESTYLE



SCIENTISTS FIND CLUE TO HUMAN BRAIN EVOLUTION IN FINGER LENGTH: STUDY



Human evolution has long been tied to growing brain size, and new research suggests prenatal hormones may have played a surprising role. By studying the relative lengths of the index and ring fingers, a marker of prenatal exposure to oestrogen and testosterone, researchers found that higher prenatal oestrogen exposure was associated with larger head size in newborn boys.

Human evolution is closely tied to a steady increase in brain size. New research suggests that this expansion may be partly influenced by pre-birth oestrogen levels, with an unexpected indicator in the length of our fingers.

Professor John Manning, part of Swansea's Applied Sports, Technology, Exercise and Medicine (A-STEM) research team, has spent years studying what is known as digit ratio.

This measure compares the length of the index finger to the ring finger, a relationship called the 2D:4D ratio. Scientists have shown that this ratio reflects the balance of estrogen

and testosterone a fetus is exposed to during the first trimester of pregnancy.

When prenatal oestrogen levels are higher relative to testosterone, the index finger tends to be longer than the ring finger. In these cases, the 2D:4D value is considered high.

In his latest study, Professor Manning worked with researchers from Istanbul University's Department of Anthropology. Their findings were recently published in the journal Early Human Development.

Because head circumference in newborns is strongly linked to brain size and later measures of

The results showed a clear pattern in boys. Higher 2D:4D ratios, which point to greater prenatal estrogen exposure, were associated with larger head circumference. This relationship did not appear in girls

intelligence, the research team examined both finger ratios and head size in a group of 225 newborns. The group included 100 boys and 125 girls.

The results showed a clear pattern in boys. Higher 2D:4D ratios, which point to greater prenatal estrogen exposure, were associated with larger head circumference. This relationship did not appear in girls.

Professor Manning explained the broader significance of the findings. "This finding is relevant to human evolution because increases in brain size are found alongside feminisation of the skeleton, what is known as the estrogenized ape hypothesis."

High values of 2D:4D in males have been found to be related to elevated rates of heart problems, poor sperm counts and predisposition to schizophrenia.

"However, increases in brain size may offset these problems. Thus, the evolutionary drive for larger brains in humans may inevitably be linked to reductions in male viability including cardiovascular problems, infertility and rates of schizophrenia," added Manning.

The researchers say the study adds to growing evidence that prenatal estrogen has played a positive role in shaping the evolution of the human brain, even if it came with biological costs.

Professor Manning's earlier work has also linked digit ratio to a wide range of outcomes. Past studies have explored connections between finger length and alcohol consumption, recovery after Covid-19 infection, and oxygen use in football players. Together, this research highlights how a simple anatomical trait may reflect powerful influences during early human development. - ANI

SPORTS

Timber header earns Arsenal crucial victory over Chelsea



League leader Arsenal moved to 64 points from 29 games with sole chaser Manchester City, who have played a game fewer, on 59

LONDON: Arsenal maintained control of the Premier League 2025-26 title race as they chiselled out a nervy 2-1 win over London rival Chelsea to open up a five-point lead at the top of the table on Sunday. Jurrien Timber's 66th-minute header from a Declan Rice corner ensured Arsenal took three

precious points, but it was an afternoon of nerves in north London. It was far from pretty, but Mikel Arteta's side, and the fans who squirmed through the closing minutes, will not care about that as a first title since 2004 edged a little closer. Arsenal moved to 64 points from

29 games with sole chaser Manchester City, who have played a game fewer, on 59. Defender William Saliba had given Arsenal the lead in the 21st minute from a trademark corner routine. But it had looked as though an own goal by Piero Hincapie just before halftime would prove costly for the host until Timber came to their rescue. Chelsea, whose six-match unbeaten league sequence under new manager Liam Rosenior was halted, ended the match with 10 men after Pedro Neto was sent off for a second yellow card. Arsenal fans will hope that the remaining nine games of the Premier League run-in are less fraught

than this one. It was not a fluent showing as Arsenal extended their unbeaten league run against Chelsea to nine games, and they had to resort to the tactic that has served it so well this season. With both their goals coming from corners, Arsenal have now scored 16 times from that route this season in the Premier League, the joint-most by any side in a single campaign. They were given a taste of its own medicine though with Hincapie's own goal also coming from a corner. There were puffed cheeks aplenty, too, as the referee blew the final whistle after a period of stoppage time that Arsenal spent hanging on against Chelsea's 10 men.

Arsenal got ahead when captain Bukayo Saka's deep corner was headed back across goal by Gabriel, and fellow defender Saliba nodded goalwards with the ball going in off Chelsea's Mamadou Sarr, although Saliba was credited with the goal. They looked in control for much of the first half but wobbled before halftime as they fell foul of Chelsea's own set-piece acumen. Arsenal keeper David Raya had just made a reflex save to keep out a header by Jorrel Hato, but from an almost identical corner swung in by Reece James, he was helpless as the ball skimmed off the head of Hincapie and into the net. The nerves really began to fray in the second half as Chelsea

looked the more threatening side with Enzo Fernandez forcing Raya to turn his low shot around the post and then Joao Pedro heading the resulting corner straight at him. When Rice's corner left Chelsea keeper Robert Sanchez floundering, Timber was there to restore Arsenal's lead. Neto was booked for dissent in the aftermath and three minutes later got himself sent off for a foul on Gabriel Martinelli. Yet Chelsea ended strongly, and substitute Alejandro Garnacho almost snatched a point with his cross being clawed out by Raya before Liam Delap poked in from close range, but Arsenal were saved by an offside flag. - Agencies

‘Finalissima’ in Qatar at risk amid attacks

DOHA: The “Finalissima” match between Spain and Argentina in Doha is in doubt after the Qatar Football Association suspended football tournaments indefinitely following US and Israeli attacks on Iran and retaliatory missiles fired at the Arabian Peninsula. The contest between European Championship winner Spain and Copa America champion Argentina was scheduled for March 27 at Doha's Lusail Stadium, with potential big-name draws including Lamine Yamal and Lionel Messi. “Qatar Football Association announces the postponement of all tournaments, competitions and matches, effective



from today and until further notice,” the association said in a statement on Sunday. “The new dates for the resumption of competitions will be announced in due course through the Association's official channels,” it added. The final call on whether to postpone the game rests with event organisers UEFA and CONMEBOL. The Bahrain Football Associ-

ation postponed all its matches until further notice, while the Asian Football Confederation on Sunday announced it was delaying Champions League Elite fixtures in the region. The Asian Champions League Two, currently at the quarterfinal stage, has also been impacted, along with games in the Challenge League. Countries across the Middle East have been on high alert since Saturday, when the US and Israel launched air strikes against Iran. Iran retaliated by attacking US targets around the region, including in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar. - Agencies

ITALIAN SERIE A

Juve play out draw against Roma

TURIN: Substitute Federico Gatti equalised in stoppage time, and Juventus came back from two goals down to earn a 3-3 draw at Roma in Serie A 2025-26 on Sunday. Gatti, who had come on in the 88th minute, scored from close range following a free kick. The result kept Juventus within four points of fourth-place Roma and the final Champions League spot. Wesley put Roma ahead with a long curler late in the first half, and then Evan Ndicka and Donyell Malen added second-half scores for the Giallorossi after Francisco Conceicao had equalised for Juventus. Jeremie Boga scored for Juventus in the 78th minute to create a



tense finish at the Stadio Olimpico, with former Roma coach Luciano Spalletti loudly urging his squad on for the equaliser. AC Milan needed two late goals to secure a 2-0 win at Cremonese and bounce back from their

second loss of the season. Also, Sassuolo beat Atalanta 2-1 with Armand Laurienté setting up both goals for the hosts; and Torino beat Lazio 2-0 with goals from Giovanni Simeone and Duvan Zapata. - Agencies

IRAN-ISRAEL-US AIR STRIKES

National team doubtful of participating in World Cup 2026: Iranian FA chief

TEHRAN: The president of Iran's football federation said on Monday that he does not know if the national team can play World Cup matches in the United States of America following the US and Israeli bombardment of his country. “What is certain is that after this attack, we cannot be expected to look forward to the World Cup with hope,” Mehdi Taj told sports portal Varzesh3 as Iran traded strikes with Israel as part of a widening war prompted by the bombardment. The US-Israeli strikes on Iran continued for a third day on Monday after the killing of Iranian Su-

preme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei threw the future of the nation into uncertainty and raised the risk of regional instability. Iran have been drawn in Group G at the World Cup and are scheduled to play in Inglewood, California, against New Zealand on June 15 and Belgium on June 21 before finishing the first round against Egypt in Seattle on June 26. The US are hosting the tournament with Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19. Fans from Iran were already banned from entering the US in the first iteration of the travel ban announced by the Trump administration.



Asian Cup 2027 Riyadh's King Fahd Sport City Stadium will host the opening and closing matches of next year's Asian Cup, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) officials announced on Monday. The Asian Cup, scheduled between January 7 and February 5, 2027, will be a dress rehearsal for Saudi Arabia, which will host the FIFA World Cup in 2034. “The King Fahd Sports City Stadium... will provide the backdrop for both the eagerly anticipated Final as well as the opening match, featuring hosts and three-time Asian champions Saudi Arabia,”

the AFC said in a statement in Kuala Lumpur. The 70,000-plus venue in Riyadh will also host four group stage battles, a round of 16 tie and a quarterfinal match before the final in early February, the AFC added. Popularly known as “The Tent” because of its roof, inspired by a traditional Bedouin dwelling, the stadium is the largest of the eight venues hosting the continental tournament. Asian Cup matches will also be played in Jeddah and Al Khobar. The match pairings and kick-off times will be confirmed at the AFC's final draw on April 11 in Riyadh, the AFC said. - Agencies

South Africa coach Conrad embraces ‘favourites’ tag

Often called “chokers” for failing in the knockouts of top global competitions, the Proteas have played commanding cricket in the ongoing ICC Men’s T20 World Cup edition

KOLKATA: South Africa coach Shukri Conrad said on Sunday that the team has embraced its favourite tag in the ICC Men’s T20 World Cup as they remain unbeaten heading into their semifinal against New Zealand on Wednesday.

Runner-up in the 2024 edition, South Africa defeated Zimbabwe by five wickets in its last Super Eights match in New Delhi to be the only unbeaten team in the tournament.

Often called “chokers” for failing in the knockouts of top global competitions, South Africa have played commanding cricket in this edition, save one close match against Afghanistan.

Their opponent, New Zealand, sneaked into the semifinal with a better net run rate than Pakistan and are the underdog in the first



semifinal in Kolkata on Wednesday.

“There’s always pressure, and it’s really about embracing that pressure,” Conrad told reporters.

“And we don’t do things any differently, we’re gonna prepare exactly the same way for New Zealand whether we start as favourites probably because we’re the only unbeaten side in the competition.”

He added, “I always felt that as a South African team you want to be able to play as a favourite and because it’s easy being an underdog you know the expectation isn’t great.”

“If we can continue doing what we’re doing, and [we] need a little bit of luck along the way as well, hopefully that will give us the result on Wednesday. And then, on

to our home ground in Ahmedabad for the final.”

Aiden Markram’s South Africa registered two statement wins over defending champions India and the West Indies in its first two Super Eights matches.

South Africa lost the T20 World Cup final to India in Barbados two years ago, but Conrad said the ex-



perience was invaluable.

“I think our experience in the last T20 World Cup will stand us in good stead,” said Conrad. “And I’ve said this many a time previously, if you continue to make semifinals and finals eventually you’re going to win one. But if you don’t make it, you can’t win anything.”

Conrad is a realist, who said that being South African forces him to see the world a certain way, because “in our country, the minority are walking for pleasure but the majority are still walking to get to work”. So, sport is what it should be: joyous first, a job later.

South Africa beat Australia in the World Test Championship final in June 2025 to win their first major International Cricket Council (ICC) trophy, but they are still hunting for a first World Cup title in the white-ball format.

Markram has led the team from the front with his 268 runs, including three half-centuries, at a punishing strike rate of 175.16.

Conrad praised Markram’s lead-

ership of a well-oiled unit.

“Aiden has been fantastic both with bat in hand as well as a captain,” he said.

“But he is only as good as his troops, and he’d be the first one to admit that. So, it’s easy to captain a bowling unit that’s on top of their game and batters that are firing, but Aiden’s been at the forefront of everything that we do.”

As for the advantage of playing five out of their seven games in Ahmedabad, South Africa will tell you that they didn’t design the schedule. Now, they are on their way to Kolkata to play New Zealand. Eden Gardens was the first venue Conrad coached South Africa at last November, where they won their first Test in the country for 15 years.

“We’re looking forward to getting to Kolkata, where our tour a couple of months ago started really well for us,” he said, looking back and ahead at the same time. “We’re hoping to get some good memories there again.” - Agencies

ATHLETICS



Anthony wins US 60m indoor title ahead of Bromell, Lyles

NEW YORK: Rising sprint talent Jordan Anthony pulled off a 60m upset at the US Indoor Championships on Sunday, clocking 6.45sec to win ahead of Trayvon Bromell and Noah Lyles.

The 21-year-old Anthony, who was last year’s NCAA collegiate champion, didn’t match his season-leading time of 6.43, but he got the best of 2016 60m indoor world champion Bromell, who was second in 6.45, and Olympic 100m gold medallist Lyles, who was third in 6.51.

Lyles, who earned 60m silver at

the 2024 Indoor World Championships, is unlikely to be selected for the Indoor Worlds in Torun, Poland, from March 20-22.

Jacius Sears won the women’s 60m in 7.04.

Seventeen-year-old sensation Cooper Lutkenhaus won the men’s 800m in 1:46.68. Newly minted world record holder Khaleb McRae won the 400m in 45.01. Nathan Green sprung a surprise in the 1,500m, winning in 3:37.65, as Olympic champion Cole Hocker settled for fifth a day after winning the 3,000m. - Agencies

TENNIS

Stearns claims second WTA title

LOS ANGELES: Hometown favourite Peyton Stearns battled past Taylor Townsend 7-6 (10/8), 7-5 on Sunday to capture her second WTA title in the Austin Open in Austin, Texas.

Fourth-seeded Stearns, who played two years of collegiate tennis for the University of Texas at Austin, needed two hours and 22 minutes to get past Townsend, a former doubles world No.1 who was playing in her first WTA singles final.

Townsend broke Stearns to open the match, but she was unable to convert a pair of set points in the ninth game and was broken in the 10th as they went to the tie-breaker.

Townsend fended off four set points and had one more of her own before Stearns pocketed the first set.

They were all square at 4-4 in the second after an exchange of four breaks, but Stearns gained a decisive break for a 6-5 lead and calmly served it out.

The American, ranked 62nd in the world, added the hardcourt Austin title to the claycourt trophy she lifted in Rabat in 2024.

Elsewhere, Spain’s Cristina Bucsa captured her first WTA title on Sunday, beating Poland’s Magdalena Frech 6-1, 4-6, 6-4 in the final of the hardcourt tournament in Merida, Mexico.

The 63rd-ranked Bucsa was coming off her first career win over a top-10 player with her semifinal triumph over seventh-ranked Jasmine Paolini. She had reached the second final of her career without dropping a set.

She was on fire to start, winning



the first three games and bouncing back from a break in the fourth game to win the next three as Frech struggled for consistency.

As Frech stepped things up in the second set, Bucsa’s errors multiplied, and she quickly found herself down two breaks at 0-3 to the 57th-ranked Pole, who levelled

the match with authority but was broken in the fourth game of the third.

Bucsa was broken as she served for the match in the ninth game, but she put it away in the next with the aid of two gutsy volley winners and two double faults from Frech. - Agencies

AGAINST ESPANYOL

Elche forward Rafa Mir accused of racism in La Liga match

MADRID: Espanyol defender Omar El Hilali accused Elche forward Rafa Mir of a racist insult during their teams’ La Liga clash on Sunday, according to the referee’s report.

Referee Iosu Galech Apezteguia briefly paused the match under the anti-racism protocol in the 80th minute after speaking to Morocco international El Hilali.

“El Hilali informed me that (Mir) addressed him in the following terms: ‘You came here on a dinghy,’ which could not be heard by any member of the refereeing team,” wrote the referee in his report.

“Consequently, I proceeded to activate the anti-racism protocol, for which reason the match was stopped for three minutes.”

El Hilali, born in Spain, seemed visibly upset after the incident.

Mir scored a penalty in the 90th

minute to secure the host a 2-2 draw against Espanyol.

In October 2025, the Spanish striker, on loan at Elche from Sevilla, was indicted on sexual assault allegations.

Spanish football has struggled to deal with racism in the stands in recent years, with Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior regularly targeted.

In February, Vinicius accused Benfica midfielder Gianluca Prestianni of racially abusing him in a Champions League game.

In May 2025, five Valladolid supporters were jailed for a year for racist insults aimed at Vinicius in 2022.

Four members of an Atletico Madrid ultra group received prison sentences for displaying an effigy of Vinicius in January 2023, though the punishment was later changed to fines. - Agencies



ROUND-UP

All-new Electric Mustang Mach-E GT test drives open in Oman

This celebratory season also introduces exclusive Ramadan offers, adding incredible value to the ownership experience of this groundbreaking vehicle

MUSCAT: The all-new electric Mustang Mach-E GT is now available for exclusive test drives at Ford Wattayah showroom, inviting drivers to experience the next chapter of the legendary Mustang legacy. Arabian Car Marketing Company, the official distributor of Ford vehicles in Oman, is offering the public a first-hand look at how this all-electric SUV combines iconic muscle car performance with the latest in sustainable technology.

This celebratory season also introduces exclusive Ramadan offers, adding incredible value to the ownership experience of this groundbreaking vehicle. Following its high-profile debut in Muscat, the vehicle is ready to demonstrate its capabilities on the road, allowing potential owners to feel the instant response and refined handling that define Ford's new era of electrification.

Under the hood of this performance SUV is a powertrain capable of delivering 487 horsepower and 950 Nm of torque, enabling a rapid 0 to 100 km/h sprint in only 3.3 seconds. This speed is supported by a lithium-ion battery placed



strategically between the axles to create a low center of gravity, ensuring the Mach-E GT remains stable and agile through every turn. With an estimated range of up to 419 km and the ability to charge from 10% to 80% in under 37 minutes using a DC fast charger, the vehicle is designed to balance high-intensity driving with the practical demands of daily life in Oman.

The test drive experience highlights the vehicle's versatile

nature through four selectable drive modes—Whisper, Engage, Untame, and the GT-exclusive Untame Plus—which tailor the steering and throttle response to the driver's environment. Drivers can also test the One-Pedal Drive system, which utilizes regenerative braking to slow the vehicle to a complete stop when easing off the accelerator. The interior remains focused on the user, featuring a 15.5-inch vertical touchscreen with SYNC 4A technology, wire-

less charging and standard smartphone integration to keep every journey connected and intuitive.

Practicality remains a core feature of the Mustang Mach-E GT, offering ample storage space that traditional sports cars cannot match. The vehicle includes a 402 L rear cargo area that expands significantly to 1,420 L with the seats folded, along with a signature 81 L front trunk for additional gear.

Safety and convenience are further enhanced by a suite of driver-

assist technologies, including Intelligent Adaptive Cruise Control and Lane Centering. Those interested in feeling the power and innovation of the Mustang Mach-E GT can now schedule their session at the Ford showroom to see how this SUV fits their lifestyle. The special Ramadan benefits include a 5-year or 100,000 km service plan covering five services at 20,000 km intervals, complimentary one-year registration, and complimentary comprehensive one-year insur-

ance for Oman (Terms & Conditions Apply). Customers will also receive a complimentary charging unit and an 8-year or 160,000 km battery warranty. Furthermore, those who test drive the vehicle get a chance to win an iPhone 17 and enter a grand raffle to win a Ford Territory Ambiente.

Mustang Mach-E GT is now available at the Ford showroom in Oman. In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co.

HOLY MONTH

Meethaq Islamic launches exclusive Ramadan offer on auto and travel financing

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic banking from Bank Muscat has introduced exclusive offers to commemorate the holy month of Ramadan. Customers benefit from competitive profit rates on Auto Finance and Travel Finance until 31 May.

Both new and existing customers can apply for the products and enjoy swift processing with minimal documentation requirements. Eligible applicants can receive up to 80 percent financing for Auto Finance, with attractive rates on new and used cars (excluding Takaful).

Customers travelling for Umrah and opting for Meethaq Travel Finance can access 100 percent financing through an easy installment plan structure and competitive pricing. In addition, customers planning their Umrah journey will benefit from reduced rate and waiver on processing fees.

On the occasion, Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager – Meethaq Personal Banking, said: "As we welcome the Holy month of Ramadan, we are pleased to continue supporting our valued customers through tailored services and convenient financing solutions designed around their needs. To celebrate this special time, we are introducing exclusive and competitive rates on Auto and Travel Finance, with a special emphasis on customers planning to go for Umrah. At Meethaq, we take pride in being a leading provider of Islamic banking and remain dedicated to continually strengthening our offerings in response to the evolving needs of our customers and the wider sector."

Reflecting its leading role in promoting Islamic financial awareness and reinforcing the values of social solidarity, Meethaq continues its strategic partnership with the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MoERA) to support the national Zakat campaign. Through this collaboration, Meethaq enables the collection



of Zakat contributions by offering innovative and secure digital payment solutions that allow individuals to fulfil their religious obligations with ease and confidence. Customers can pay Zakat directly through the mobile banking application and Internet Banking, with funds transferred seamlessly to the Ministry's designated Zakat account.

As part of its commitment to delivering a world-class Islamic banking experience across Oman, Meethaq has established the larg-

est Islamic network in the Sultanate consisting of 32 branches across all regions. Meethaq also has a dedicated ATMs and CDMs network, and provides free access to more than 900 ATMs and CDMs of Bank Muscat across the country for customers to conduct their banking transactions with ease. Every Meethaq product goes through the process of Shari'a compliance certification by the Shari'a Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.

PROMOTION



Sohar International and Sohar Islamic unveil 'Swipe & Win' campaign offering FIFA World Cup 2026 travel packages

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to delivering differentiated value and globally relevant experiences, Sohar International, together with its Islamic banking window, Sohar Islamic, has launched the "Swipe & Win" campaign.

The initiative provides both existing and new credit cardholders with the opportunity to attend the FIFA World Cup 2026 through exclusive, fully curated travel packages. Running until 15 April 2026, the campaign links eligible credit card spending to raffle draw entries, whereby each approved transaction of OMR 50 or above automatically qualifies as an entry. This structured rewards framework enables cardholders to accumulate multiple chances to win, effectively transforming routine transactions into access to one of the world's most prestigious sporting events.

Commenting on the initiative, Abdul Qadir Al Sumali, Chief Retail & Premier Banking Officer, at Sohar International stated, "Global platforms such as the FIFA World Cup transcend sport; they represent moments of in-

ternational convergence, shared aspiration, and collective engagement. Our decision to align this campaign with an event of such global stature reflects a deliberate strategic direction – positioning our credit card portfolio not merely as a transactional instrument, but as an enabler of access, experience, and elevated lifestyle relevance.

"Through initiatives such as 'Swipe & Win', we continue to evolve our retail proposition by integrating experiential value into everyday banking. This approach strengthens customer engagement, enhances product differentiation, and reinforces long-term relationship depth – ensuring that our offerings remain competitive, aspirational, and globally connected."

Under the campaign framework, Sohar International and Sohar Islamic Credit card holders will have the opportunity to win one of six FIFA World Cup 2026 travel packages, comprising one Semi-Final package, two Round of 32 packages, and three Group Stage packages.

In parallel, Sohar Islamic cus-

tomers will be eligible to win two Group Stage packages, ensuring balanced representation across both conventional and Islamic banking segments.

Each package has been structured as a comprehensive, end-to-end experience. Winners will receive match tickets, return flights from Oman to the hosting countries, and accommodation in four-star hotels. The offering also includes coordinated ground transfers, curated gifts, and a dedicated cultural experience within the host city. On-ground Visa hospitality services and a Visa prepaid product are incorporated to ensure a seamless and well-managed travel journey.

As customer expectations continue to evolve toward experience-led value, the bank remains focused on strengthening its product ecosystem making it more relevant and engaging. Through carefully structured initiatives that connect customers to globally significant moments, the Bank continues to reinforce its strategic positioning while building long-term portfolio depth in a dynamic financial landscape.

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