

Oman ranked 67th in WEF tourism development index

Our Correspondent Muscat

In the 2024 edition of the Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI), a flagship index of the World Economic Forum, Oman has secured the 67th position among 119 countries.

The sultanate scored well in areas like tourism demand sustainability and safety and security, ranking 12th and 16th globally respectively.

Created in collaboration with the University of Surrey and with input from leading travel industry stakeholder organisations, the TTDI evaluates nations based on a set of factors and policies that enable the sustainable and resilient development of the Travel & Tourism (T&T) sector, which in turn contributes to the development of a country.

The sultanate also excelled in business environment, air transport infrastructure and ICT readiness, placing 36th, 45th and 49th respectively, highlighting its robust infrastructure that supports tourism growth.

Despite these strengths, Oman faces challenges in other key areas such as environmental sustainability and natural resources, where it ranks 114th and 83rd respectively. These dimensions suggest areas where continued focus and improvement



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism launched 'Experience Oman' tourism campaign in France on Wednesday

could yield significant benefits for the country.

In the GCC, the highest ranked country is the UAE at 18th place, followed by Saudi Arabia 41st, Qatar 53rd, Bahrain 58th and Kuwait 96th.

Globally, the USA has been ranked first, followed by Spain, Japan, France and Australia, making the top five.

The index report highlighted that the Middle East and North African countries have implemented policies and invested substantial resources into developing T&T, often as a way to diversify economies away from oil and gas production.

'In part, these efforts are reflected in broad increases in government T&T spending as a share of budgets, loosened visa requirements, improvements in the establishment and promotion of cultural resources and the highest regional average for T&T capital spending per employee in the index.'

The index recorded Oman tourism's stable contribution to its GDP (US\$2.23bn), maintaining a balance with its economic diversification efforts. International tourist arrivals in the country reached 464,000 in 2023, with inbound tourism receipts totalling US\$361.9mn, indicating a healthy interest in Oman's offerings.

Oman handles 5mn air passengers in first 4 months of '24

Our Correspondent Muscat

In the first four months of 2024, Oman's airports witnessed a substantial surge in both passenger traffic and flight numbers, underscoring significant growth in the country's air travel sector.

Data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) revealed that over 4.9mn passengers travelled through the sultanate's airports - encompassing arrivals, departures, and transits. This figure represents a 16.4% increase from the 4.2mn recorded during the same period in 2023.

The total number of flights also experienced a rise, reaching 36,000 - a 12.3% increase from the previous year's 32,000 flights. A closer look at specific airports illustrates distinct patterns of growth.

Muscat International Airport, serving as the primary hub, handled approximately 4.4mn pas-

sengers by the end of April 2024, marking a 16.8% rise from the 3.7mn passengers during the corresponding period last year. The airport also reported a 12.4% increase in flight operations, tallying 32,500 international and domestic flights.

Indian nationals led the international traffic at Muscat International Airport in April, with 89,200 arrivals and 83,800 departures. Pakistani nationals followed with 21,100 arrivals and 19,500 departures, and Bangladeshi nationals with 12,800 arrivals and 20,500 departures.

Salalah Airport also demonstrated growth, with passenger numbers reaching 429,181 - a 9.9% increase from the previous year. The number of flights mirrored this growth rate, escalating to 3,122. Sohar Airport showed the most dramatic rise, with passenger numbers increasing by 295% to 22,390, compared to the modest figure of 5,669 during the same period last year.



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Oman achieves 53% digital transformation milestone

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman has made substantial strides in the government's digital transformation initiative, achieving a 53% completion rate by the end of September 2023, according to a statement by H E Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Undersecretary for Communications and Information Technology in the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The announcement was made during the second edition of the Government Digital Transformation Forum, held alongside the COMEX Show on Wednesday.

The two-day forum was designed to highlight the achievements of various government institutions in adopting digital technologies. It provided a platform for discussing best practices, future trends and the integration of innovative technical solutions to enhance public services and foster skill development within the sultanate.

In his address, H E Shidhani detailed Oman's progress, noting the government's commitment to advancing digital transformation. He reported that in the first half of 2023 alone, the country



Oman's dedication to digital transformation is evident as it continues to leverage technology to enhance government efficiency and service delivery

DR ALI BIN AMER AL SHIDHANI

recorded over 30mn electronic transactions using e-authentication and nearly one million electronic signature transactions.

From January to October 2023, more than 41mn digital transactions were processed through the government portal, while over 3.3mn ID/residence card certificates were issued digitally. The national platform for electronic integration facilitated approximately 942mn data exchanges from January to October last year.

H E Shidhani also highlighted the simplification of 2,199 ser-

vices and the digitisation of 1,545 services from January 2021 to September 2023. These efforts mark a significant move towards achieving the goal of digitising all basic government services by 2025, with 61% of the target already met.

"Oman's dedication to digital transformation is evident as it continues to leverage technology to enhance government efficiency and service delivery, which is critical for socio-economic development and innovation across all sectors," he stated.

The forum has chosen two

main themes for discussions: 'Comprehensive Digital Transformation' with emphasis on the importance of an adaptive and innovative government sector; and 'Innovation and Digital Excellence' for adoption of global best practices and technologies to enhance government operations and services.

These discussions aim to foster a distinguished digital experience, improve communication strategies for digital transformation, and utilise smart technologies to develop Oman's digital infrastructure.

H M CONFERS ORDER ON FORMER IRANIAN ENVOY

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred Al Nu'man Order (first class) on Ali Najafi, former ambassador of Iran to Oman, in appreciation of his efforts and contributions in serving bilateral relations between the two countries. The Order was handed over to Najafi by Ibrahim Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of Oman to Iran, on Wednesday when he received him at the embassy in Tehran (ONA)



London business forum explores investment options in Oman

London, UK - A business delegation from Oman on Wednesday participated in a joint forum with the UK entrepreneurs in London to highlight the opportunities that the sultanate offers to foreign investors.

The Omani-UK Business Forum, which was held to expand the trade relations between the two countries, showcased a range of Omani products starting from incense and perfumes to dates and honey. It discussed the supportive measures provided by the sultanate to foreign investors as it seeks to enhance its investment opportunities.

The event, organised by the Embassy of Oman in the UK in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), dwelt on the progress of Omani small and medium enterprises (SMEs) transforming into globally competitive brands.

A promotional exhibition showcased a range of Omani products including handicrafts, incense, perfumes, fashion items, and various value-added prod-



ucts of dates and honey.

A significant theme at the forum was the empowerment of Omani women entrepreneurs, with initiatives designed to help them enter the British market by forming partnerships with their British counterparts.

Areej Mohsin Haider Darwish, a member of the Board of Directors of OCCI, spoke on the long-standing relationship between Oman and the UK. "This forum seeks to bolster cooperation and investment across various sectors," she said.

"Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, our strategic directives are set to enhance the business environment, support women entrepreneurs in the economic

sectors, and elevate their global market presence through experience exchange."

Karim Fatehi, CEO of the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, shared his enthusiasm about participating in a session titled 'The Impact of the Private Sector in Economic Development'. He highlighted the forum's role in fostering cooperation and opening avenues for both Omani and British chambers to explore potential opportunities.

Andrew Elia, Managing Director at Arishi Tech, discussed how the event offered insights into Oman's investment incentives and opportunities beneficial for British companies looking to expand in the Middle East.



Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

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Startups call for more tech shows

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Omani technology startups are calling for organisation of more technology shows and exhibitions to provide them a platform to reach wider audience and benefit from the knowledge exchange.

The 33rd edition of the COMEX Global Technology Show has become a beacon for Omani technology startups, offering them a prestigious platform to showcase their innovations.

Entrepreneurs - attending the four-day event coming to an end on Thursday - have expressed a unanimous desire for more such technology shows, which they believe are crucial for showcasing their products and expanding their reach.

Organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) and OITE Group, the event has drawn considerable praise from the local startup community for its role in enhanc-



ing visibility and fostering industry connections.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Mohammed al Zarei, founder and CEO of Shuarkom, emphasised the significance of the exhibition in providing exposure to Omani startups.

Zarei advocated for more frequent and longer events to capture a broader audience.

"Our platform is designed to bring together seasoned experts and dynamic new talents to tackle challenges in ICT and business sectors," he stated, un-

derscoring the initiative's goal to drive innovation.

Reem al Shamsi, representing Yesser company, highlighted how the exhibition serves as a vital link to major technology firms, allowing emerging companies to learn and grow from established expertise.

Yesser focuses on developing solutions for the food industry, specifically targeting administrative challenges in handling complaints.

Yasmine Abdel Mohsen, Project Manager at Rawaq al IBtikar,

pointed out the advantages of the show in promoting virtual and augmented reality technologies.

"The exhibition is an excellent opportunity for us to demonstrate our innovative approaches and seek investment and partnerships," she noted, expressing her company's aim to use virtual reality to promote Omani culture and heritage innovatively.

Hanaa al Harrasiya from Madad Financial Services discussed how their participation was for boosting awareness

about their financial solutions tailored for consumers and merchants.

Similarly, Abdullah al Maamari, a resident of Seeb and an event attendee, appreciated the exhibition for enabling direct interaction with consumers and facilitating knowledge exchange with tech experts worldwide.

An official from MTCIT announced that 133 emerging Omani technology companies participated in this year's event, selected based on their market readiness and potential through programmes like Jadara and Nomu.

The event not only aims to spotlight these companies but also strives to help them discover business opportunities, forge local and regional partnerships and promote locally developed tech products.

This strategic initiative by the ministry supports the broader goal of nurturing the tech ecosystem in Oman, aligning with national objectives to foster innovation and economic diversification.

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Foundation laid for camel milk cheese unit in Dhofar to support rural women

Our Correspondent
Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Water Resources (MAFWR), in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), celebrated the groundbreaking of a new camel milk cheese production unit in the Dhofar governorate on Tuesday.

The facility, funded by Al Jisr Foundation, is poised to enhance the economic prospects of rural communities by promoting cottage industries and supporting local camel milk producers.

Located in the Shahab Asayb area of Rakhyut, the 2,000sqm project is part of an initiative titled 'Strengthening the value chain of camel milk and its derivatives by empowering women producers in Rakhyut'.

This initiative aims to provide



significant economic opportunities for rural families and elevate the regional dairy industry.

Eng Rashid bin Saeed al Ghafri, Director General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar, stated, "The new unit will be fully equipped to produce cheese from camel milk, tapping into the local abundance of this resource."

He emphasised that the project would directly benefit 20 rural women in Rakhyut, aligning

with the ministry's objectives to foster rural development and women's empowerment.

The project leverages the nutritional benefits and growing market demand for camel milk and its products.

"With Dhofar governorate having the largest camel population in the sultanate - accounting for 60% or approximately 177,821 camels - there is a substantial scope for developing the camel milk industry here," Ghafri

added.

Thaer Yaseen, Regional Officer for Plant Protection and Production at FAO, highlighted the organisation's commitment to enhancing the camel milk value chain.

"This project not only aims to empower rural women by providing them with the skills needed to run a cheese production facility but also to integrate their products into global markets using international expertise," Yaseen explained.

In 2020, MAFWR and Al Jisr Foundation initiated this venture to engage local women in cheese production.

The initiative supports Omani camel breeders and shepherds, alongside women and jobseekers in Dhofar's rural communities, by developing a sustainable production unit for camel milk derivatives.



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BRIEFS

Amid fears of inflation, Israel keeps interest rate at 4.5%

Amid growing concerns in Israel about the war's impact on the economy, Israel announced keeping the interest rates at 4.5% amid the ongoing war uncertainty and fears of inflation.

The inflation in Israel currently stands at 2.8%, but it may increase in the upcoming months amid the continued war spending.

On Monday, the Bank of Israel, however, said the economic activity in the country continues to gradually recover.

It added that the continued state of geopolitical uncertainty reflects high economic risks.

While the Israeli economy registered a growth of 14.1% in the year's first quarter, it is still witnessing shrinking on an annual basis, with 1.4%.

MoCIIP, ITHCA Group sign deal to relocate and host Oman Business Platform



The agreement was signed by H E Dr Saleh Said Masan, Undersecretary of Commerce and Industry at MoCIIP, and Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari, CEO of ITHCA Group (ONA)

Our Correspondent
Muscat

On the sidelines of COMEX 2024, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) signed an agreement on Wednesday with ITHCA Group to relocate and host the Oman Business Platform (OBP) in the cloud service.

The move aims to establish a competitive business environment and provide integrated services to operate alongside the smart government scheme.

The agreement was signed by H E Dr Saleh Said Masan, Undersecretary of Commerce and In-

The services offered via Oman Business Platform cover the entire lifecycle of a company, from inception to the licensing of its activities

dustry at MoCIIP, and Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari, CEO of ITHCA Group.

The ministry also signed an agreement with ITHCA Group to conduct a consultative study on the business environment in Oman and outline a roadmap for digital transition at the Directorate General of Standards and Metrology.

The Oman Business Platform

represents an exemplary government model in utilising prominent international practices and standards to develop a digitally innovative business environment that motivates users through a set of electronic services.

The services offered via the Oman Business Platform cover the entire lifecycle of a company, from inception to the licensing of its activities.

Through the Oman Business Platform, MoCIIP seeks to direct investors to a single platform and provide self-service options for starting any business.

The ministry also announced a Certificate of Origin Service and a New License Request Service through the OBP application for smartphones. The app supports the 'Know Your Customer' feature and offers top-rated services such as starting a business, initiating a commercial register, searching for commercial registers, an investment guide, and options to follow up on the progress of applications.



IRES launches The Gate Duqm Project

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Integrated Real Estate Services (IRES), a leading company in Oman's real estate industry, announced the launch of its newest gem in the heart of Duqm, The Gate Duqm project, on Wednesday.

The Gate Duqm project features a versatile complex consisting of 14 retail shops and two floors with a total of 28 offices. Designed with flexibility in mind, these spaces can be adapted to accommodate a variety of activities, making it an ideal location for a mini shopping mall, business hub for companies, banks, schools, nurseries, and other similar ventures.

"We are thrilled to introduce this new development to Duqm," said Ismail Kamel, CEO and Founder of IRES. "This project represents a significant step in the growth and diversification of Duqm's sub-economy, providing essential infrastructure for businesses and services that will benefit the entire community."

Fadi Nasser, Founding Partner of The Gate Duqm, said, "I am thrilled to announce the official launch of this landmark professional office and retail destination. The Gate Duqm represents a new era of commercial excellence in Duqm, offering unique architecture, signature office spaces, and premium retail opportunities."

With its strategic location at the entrance to Duqm city and mere minutes away from all the large industrial projects, The Gate Duqm is set to become the cornerstone of economic growth and innovation in the region.

"To ensure a quality experience for our clients, we are partnering with Integrated Real Estate Services, renowned for their expertise and commitment to quality, on launching this project. We are excited to welcome businesses and customers to experience the unparalleled environment that The Gate Duqm has to offer," Nasser added.



Saudi PIF crowned world's most valuable wealth fund brand

London, UK - BlackRock is crowned the world's most valuable asset management (AM) brand, with a brand value of just over \$7bn, and Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) is the most valuable sovereign wealth fund (SWF), according to new data from Brand Finance.

Robust revenue growth and innovation have fueled BlackRock's brand value, while PIF leads among SWFs driven by its investment strategy, trust in its name, brand awareness, and for being a catalyst for advancement.

BlackRock's high place in the rankings is underpinned by its forward-thinking approach in technology and sustainability, which attracts clients and drives market evolution. BlackRock's diverse product offerings have significantly contributed to its market position, securing its status as the leading AM globally.

PIF has the single most valuable brand name among the world's SWFs; valued at \$1.1bn and among all AM firms, ranked sixth in brand value to assets under management ratio.

JP Morgan Asset Management claims close second position in the overall ranking, which grades AMs and SWFs together, with a brand value just below \$7bn. Vanguard follows in third place, with a brand value of \$6bn.

JP Morgan also emerges as the world's strongest AM and SWF brand, boasting a brand strength index (BSI) score of 87.4 out of 100 and a corresponding AAA rating. JP Morgan noted exceptional scores across several brand strength metrics, including awareness, familiarity, and performance.

The only other brand featured in the rankings to achieve a AAA rating is BlackRock, which placed second in terms of brand strength globally.

PIF's value is largely driven by high scores for the brand's awareness, purpose and commitment to positive growth.

Among the other notable high-ranking SWFs, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority was recognised as the strongest SWF brand, scoring 63.9 out of 100 with an A+ rating. PIF's own BSI stands at 62.1 out of 100, and also scores A+.

FSA participates in IOSCO annual meeting

Muscat - Oman, represented by the Financial Services Authority (FSA), participated in the 49th Annual Meeting of the International Organization of Securities Commissions (IOSCO), hosted in Athens, Greece, with an official delegation chaired by Ahmed Ali al Maamari, Executive Vice President of the FSA.

The participation aimed to discuss key issues in the global and regional securities markets and the main challenges facing regulators and supervisors of these markets. The FSA also participated in meetings of the regional committees of IOSCO, such as the Africa and Middle East Regional Committee (AMERC) and the Growth and Emerging Markets Committee (GEMC).

The AMERC meeting discussed several issues related to developments in the securities markets, including financial sustainability in the region. It is important to discuss creating a sustainable investment environment.

The meeting also deliberated on virtual assets, their challenges, and the role of regulators in establishing regulatory frameworks to enhance investor protection and reduce potential risks to ensure financial markets are fair and efficient.

Additionally, the meeting discussed fintech and its role in facilitating access to financial markets.

The GEMC meeting addressed issues related to enhancing the capabilities of regulatory employees and investor protection. The conference accompanying the annual meeting highlighted the issue of climate change and its impact on national economies, the roles of regulators in promoting sustainability practices in line with transformation and financing plans in response to climate change, and its direct consequences on investments in financial markets.



The conference also reviewed international standards adopted by international organisations in this regard and proposed recommendations.

The FSA is keen to participate in such meetings to enhance the sultanate's presence in international organisations, which contribute to the exchange of expertise and information among members to develop markets, protect investors, and upgrade the level of regulations to the highest standards of integrity, fairness, and transparency. This participation also emphasises the efforts exerted by the FSA to enhance its role within IOSCO.

IOSCO was established in 1983 to set standards for securities commissions. It comprises several subcommittees for cooperation and implementation of international standards for regulation, supervision, and enforcement to protect investors and ensure fair, transparent, and efficient markets. It also addresses systemic risks and enhances investor protection by increasing confidence in the soundness and integrity of financial markets through the exchange of information and cooperation in enforcement against unsound practices to develop market infrastructure and implement laws and regulations.

Oil market braces for OPEC+ decisions on output

Tina Teng

Crude prices are experiencing upward pressure ahead of the upcoming OPEC+ policy meeting. However, the long-term outlook for oil markets remains uncertain due to the ongoing imbalance between demand and supply.

Oil prices have remained volatile this year due to geopolitical tensions and an uncertain outlook for global supply and demand. Brent and WTI futures prices peaked at \$90 per barrel and \$87 per barrel, respectively in early April before pulling back to around \$83 per barrel and \$78 per barrel currently.

In May, oil prices stabilised within a narrow range, with



Brent futures fluctuating between \$81 and \$84. Year-to-date, both Brent and WTI futures are up by approximately 5%, while the spot markets have shown greater strength, rising by about 10%.

Oil prices found some support in May ahead of the OPEC+ meeting in June. However, uncertainty surrounding the global economy, particularly in China, coupled with record high US production, continues to weigh on the market. Additionally, the ongoing energy

In May, oil prices stabilised within a narrow range, with Brent futures fluctuating between \$81 and \$84 per barrel

transition may exert downward pressure on fossil fuels in the long term.

The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies, including Russia, postponed the policy meeting by one day to June 2.

The meeting was shifted to a virtual format from an in-person gathering following the death of Iran's president.

The organisation, led by Saudi Arabia, provides 40% of the global oil supply and has voluntarily cut its output by approximately 2.2mn barrels per day (bpd), or around 2% of global oil consumption. OPEC is widely expected to maintain this level of output reduction until the end of the year.

The cartel began cutting outputs in November 2022 amid weakened demand due to China's economic slowdown. It deepened the output cut in July 2023, with Saudi Arabia reducing its production by 1mn bpd. (Source: Euronews.com)

MoE concludes School Creativity Award



The Ministry of Education (MoE), in cooperation with OMIFCO, celebrated the closing of the School Innovation Award and the honouring of the winning schools under the patronage of H E Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, and in the presence of H E Dr Madiha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniya, Minister of Education, and a number of ministers, advisors, directors-general, school principals, and members of the award's local committee at the JW Marriott Al Irfan Hotel on Tuesday.

Prof Abdullah bin Khamis Ambosaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, delivered the ministry's speech, saying, "In its first edition, the OMIFCO Award for School Creativity embraced all educational governorates of the Sultanate of Oman at various educational levels.

The award was evaluated at several levels, starting with the local level, which produced three schools in the first places from each governorate, and nominating one school to compete for one of the award's shields, which are (strategic planning, administrative organisation, quality of school performance, and community partnership). This was followed by evaluation at the central level, which produced six schools in the first places at the ministry level, and four other schools winning the shields of the award."

Ambosaidi also stressed the importance of the existing partnership between the Ministry of Education and the community, saying, "This award showed us a lot of energies, ideas, and initiatives, which we could not have discovered without such high-end community partnerships with various public and private sectors. What we have achieved today would not have been possible without the efforts of our supporters, especially the supporters here, OMIFCO, and the generous support the company provided to express a sense of social responsibility.

Bank Muscat wins 'Best Places to Work' award

In recognition of its pioneering role in the field of developing human resources and cultivating an ideal work environment, Bank Muscat was honoured with the global prestigious award 'Best Places to Work for 2024' presented from 'Best Places to Work, a prestigious global institution in the United Kingdom.

This distinguished award was given to the bank based on the results of an evaluation assessing work culture and employee satisfaction, as well as a thorough review of HR policy and processes. The bank scored highly on the majority of the award parameters, qualifying for this award, which recognises international organisations that play an important role in areas that encompass continuous work environment development, enhancing employee experience, employee engagement, and workplace culture.

On this occasion, Sheikha Yousuf al Farsi, COO, Bank Muscat, said, "We are proud of this recognition, as it reflects the tremendous effort dedicated to developing human resources and establishing an inclusive and collaborative working environment in which the bank's employees are empowered and supported. The bank is developing specialised plans for employment and training processes in order to stay up with current and future changes while also improving the institutional culture in the bank's several connected business areas. Employees at Bank Mus-



cat form a basic core that contributes significantly to the bank's continuing growth and development. To preserve this development, we are keen to improve transparency and governance while working with a clear vision and values."

Sheikha al Farsi said, "I would like to take this opportunity to thank the bank's employees whose dedication and passion enabled this recognition. To achieve our common goal, we always work together to maintain an innovative working atmosphere in which every employee feels respected and empowered to succeed."

Said Salim al Aufer, general manager - Human Resources and Administration, Bank Muscat, said, "We are honoured to be named the Best Place to Work, which demonstrates our dedication to strengthening the Bank's

leading position by attracting talent and cultivating an outstanding work environment that provides the resources needed to assist individuals and support their career growth. The bank's work approach is underpinned by a set of principles that enhances its vision "To Serve You Better, Everyday," which is expressed equally for customers as well as employees.

"We are proud of the contribution played by Omani human resources, who demonstrated their capacity to take on responsibility and strengthen the Bank's pioneering position in the country. This achievement reflects the efforts of all of our employees; their cooperation and dedication to translating the Bank's vision and values are significant factors for establishing a healthy work environment."

UTAS team prepares for Asian Championship

The University of Technology and Applied Sciences team conducted its preparatory training within the team's internal camp in preparation for participation in the Asian Universities Football Championship, which is being organised by Malaysia next week with the participation of the elite university teams in the continent of Asia.

The capital, Kuala Lumpur, will host the matches of the university team in the tournament, which will be drawn on June 1, in the presence of the participating teams, a press release said.

Muhammad al Mayahi said, "We faced several challenges in establishing an intensive training camp due to the fact that the players of the university team study in several distant branches, which affected the homogeneity of the group, but this will be contained in this training camp be-



fore the mission travels, and we are also betting on the distinguished composition of the team."

The university team is made up of a group of talented players from the university's branches in the governorates, which has

achieved an ideal selection of players and they hope to achieve a continental achievement for the university and the country.

This participation of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences team comes within the university's keenness

to pay attention to student skills as an essential part of the university educational process, as well as supporting and strengthening the university students and developing their abilities by interacting with their counterparts.

MoH launches e-sick leave service at COMEX

Within its participation at the 33rd edition of COMEX Global Technology Show 2024, the Ministry of Health launched on Wednesday an e-service for sick leaves approval through the health portal.

The launch was held under the patronage of H E Dr Fatima Mohammed al Ajmi, executive president of Oman Medical Specialty Board, in the presence of Dr Muhanna al Maslahi, MOH's director general of Private Health Establishments, and a number of officials from the ministry, a press release said.

Regarding the process, Dr



Maslahi said that the issuance of sick leave starts first through the system by the healthcare provider at the private health institution. He emphasised that

sick leave issued by the system is considered valid, and the beneficiary can present it to various authorities within and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Maslahi added that the targeted beneficiaries of the service are patients, whether citizens or residents, who have received treatment at one of the private health institutions in the country. He explained that there are certain conditions that must be met, including that the treating physician and the private health institution must have valid licenses. Additionally, the patient must provide a personal ID card to get the sick leave issued.

Physicians will be able to issue sick leave and send it to the patient via text message or print it from the health institution.

Ministry of Education felicitates students with diploma certificates

The Ministry of Education celebrated the distribution of diploma certificates in the French language (DELF) and the German language (FIT IN DEUTSCH) to students enrolled in the two programmes - 163 students in 9 schools across the sultanate.

The ceremony was held at the theatre of the Directorate-General of Education in Muscat Governorate under the patronage of H E Majid bin Said al Bahri, Undersecretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs, in the presence of the French ambassador and the German ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, Dr Yahya al Harithi, Director-General of

the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development, and a number of educational officials.

Dr Sana al Sinani, assistant director-general of the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development, said, "The honouring ceremony comes on the basis of the wise vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to advance the education sector in the Sultanate of Oman with its various types, stages and outcomes and work to ensure its quality.

The development of education requires developing the skills of national competencies to enable them to deal with the givens of times and adapt to changes.



Continuous planning for education works to create the appropriate conditions for cognitive, economic, and social development and provide increasing opportunities to hone national talents and capabilities."

H E Veronique Aulignon, Ambassador of France to the sultanate and H E Dirk Luelke, Ambassador of Germany to the sultanate, also delivered a speech, during which they touched on the importance of learning languages to keep pace with global developments, especially in the field of technology. They congratulated students on passing the diploma programme, which lasted for two years.

The ambassadors also thanked the Ministry of Education for its constant cooperation and organising such programmes that develop students' talents in acquiring different languages. They also encouraged students to continue to pay attention to the language skills they have learned that enable them to overcome the challenges of their university studies.

The ceremony included a number of segments, where the students of the French programme presented a play in French on tourism in France. The students of the German programme also presented a German song about students.

Voting commences in South Africa’s crucial general elections

Johannesburg, SA - South Africans on Wednesday began voting to elect national and provincial lawmakers in a contest believed to be the tightest since the first post-apartheid democratic elections of 1994.

Polling stations opened at 7am local time (0600GMT) and will close at 9pm. There are over 27mn registered voters in the country of some 62mn people.

Crowds of people waiting to cast their votes could be seen in parts of Johannesburg as early as 6.30am, despite the cold weather. South Africans are vot-

ing for lawmakers of provincial legislatures and 400 members of parliament, known as the National Assembly. Voting is on a party basis and the parties get seats in the parliament.

These national lawmakers will then elect the president, which means that the party which wins the election gets ultimate power in the country.

There are a record 70 registered political parties contesting in these elections, but all eyes are on the ruling African National Congress party (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA), the



There are over 27mn registered voters in the country of some 62mn people

largest opposition force in parliament, and the Economic Freedom Fighters party (EFF) which is the third largest.

The ANC which has governed South Africa for three decades, faces its toughest elections with experts and opinion polls suggesting it might not get the required 51 per cent vote

“I want to see change in my country. There is high unemploy-

ment, crime and corruption. I hope my vote will bring change,” Soweto resident Nkosi Maluleke told Anadolu after casting his vote. Another voter who did not give her name told Anadolu she cast her ballot because it is her democratic right. “During apartheid we never had the opportunity to vote, now we do and our vote counts,” she said.

The ANC once led by the late global icon Nelson Mandela, which has governed South Africa for three decades, faces its toughest elections with experts and opinion polls suggesting it

might not get the required 51 per cent to govern without forming a coalition.

It is also the first time in the country’s history that the former president of the ANC which has ruled South Africa since attaining democracy in 1994 is leading an opposition party to challenge his former group.

Jacob Zuma, 82, a former ANC leader who served for two terms, is backing the Umkonto We sizwe political (MK) party which is seen as a threat to Mandela’s movement.

Anadolu Agency

Garry Conille named as Haiti’s new PM

Bogota, Colombia - Garry Conille was named Haiti’s new prime minister by the Transitional Presidential Council, its president Edgard Leblanc Fils said on Tuesday.

Conille, who was appointed by six out of seven members with voting power on the nine-member council, served as prime minister from October 2011 to May 2012 during the presidency of Michel Martelly and is currently the UNICEF regional director for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Only a month ago, Michel Patrick Boisvert had been named interim prime minister after Ariel Henry resigned in April due to the escalation of violence in the country. Since February 29, gangs have captured airports, police stations, government ministries, prisons and other government facilities. Criminal gangs control most of the country’s capital, Port-au-Prince, and are responsible for widespread abuses including sexual violence, murder, kidnapping and torture.

The hostilities began during the absence of Prime Minister Henry, who was visiting Kenya to finalise details for the deployment of 1,000 police offi-

cers to retake control of the Caribbean nation. He was unable to return to the country due to the attacks, and the airport in the capital was closed for almost three months.

The Kenyan-led mission, which was authorised by the United Nations Security Council in October 2023, is expected to be deployed soon. Kenyan President William

Conille studied medicine and public health and worked with impoverished communities

Ruto recently met with US President Joe Biden in Washington, who pledged to support the mission.

Conille studied medicine and public health and worked with impoverished communities in Haiti, where he helped coordinate reconstruction efforts after the devastating 2010 earthquake. He worked for several years at the United Nations.

Anadolu Agency

North Korea airdrops ‘trash’ into South: Seoul’s military

Seoul, South Korea - In a new move to grapple with its neighbour, North Korea has come up with an idea of using enormous balloons to transport floating sacks of trash containing ‘filth’ across the border.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) of South Korea stated that as of Wednesday morning, the military had detected some 260 balloons sent from the North since Tuesday night, which fell in various locations across the country, including border areas, Seoul and even the southeastern province of South Gyeongsang, Yonhap News Agency reported.

Images made public by the JCS show two enormous balloons carrying plastic bags, and some damaged items scattering sheets of paper, plastic bits and what looks to be ‘dirt’ onto pavements and roads.

No damage has been detected as of yet, but according to a JCS officer, the fell balloons appeared to have carried a variety of garbage, including plastic bottles, batteries, shoe parts, and even manure, as per Yonhap.

According to the JCS, government agencies are currently analysing the balloons that so far



No damage has been detected as of yet, but the fell balloons appeared to have carried a variety of garbage, including plastic bottles, batteries, shoe parts, and even manure

include ‘filth and garbage’, and the military is collaborating with the United Nations Command.

“North Korea’s actions clearly violate international law and seriously threaten the safety of our

citizens,” the JCS said, adding ‘all responsibility arising from the North Korean balloons lies entirely with North Korea, and we sternly warn North Korea to immediately stop its inhumane and low-level actions’, according to CNN.

In addition, people in the northern provinces of Gyeonggi and Gangwon received warnings

from their local governments cautioning them about ‘unidentified objects’ and advising them not to go outside. The JCS stated that there is a chance that the packages will harm houses, airports, and roadways.

Retaliation against South Korean activists who frequently send goods to the North - propaganda leaflets, food, medicine, radios, and USB sticks with South Korean news and television dramas, which are forbidden in the isolated totalitarian regime - was seen as the possible reason behind the action, CNN reported citing North Korean state media KCNA.

Campaigners in the South, including defectors from North Korea, have long transmitted these documents by balloons, drones, and bottles floating down the cross-border river - even after South Korea’s government banned such operations in 2020.

“Scattering leaflets by use of balloons is a dangerous provocation that can be utilised for a specific military purpose,” said Kim Kang Il, North Korea’s Vice Minister of National Defence, CNN reported citing KCNA recently.

ANI

Colombia’s congress passes bill banning bullfighting

Bogota, Colombia - Colombia’s congress passed a bill on Tuesday banning bullfighting in the country following heated debates.

“We did it. Today, after more than seven years of fighting to ban bullfighting, we can announce to the thousands of citizens who love life that Colombia is getting rid of this animal torture disguised as culture,” said Juan Carlos Losada, a lawmaker who supported the bill.

The lower house approved the bill with a 93-2 vote. The regulation contemplates the possibility of adopting the bulls and that bull-rings become centres of recreation, sports and culture. Opponents have questioned where the money will come from to make these changes in all the cities of the country.

The bill’s procedure in Congress was long and disputed, as there are tens of thousands of people in the country that make a living from these shows. The government would be required to help find employment options for the people estimated to depend directly or indirectly on bullfighting for their income. Ending bull-fights also means ending a deeply rooted custom in several regions of the country where celebrations revolve around this show.

President Gustavo Petro cele-



After President Gustavo Petro approves the bill, the ban will come into effect in 2027

Colombia is one of only eight countries in the world where bullfights are still held, including Ecuador, France, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Spain and Venezuela

brated the news.

“Congratulations to those who finally managed to make death not a spectacle. Those who have fun with the death of animals will

proves the bill, the ban will come into effect in 2027.

Colombia is one of only eight countries in the world where bull-fights are still held, including Ecuador, France, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Spain and Venezuela. Other countries in the region like Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Guatemala have banned the practice.

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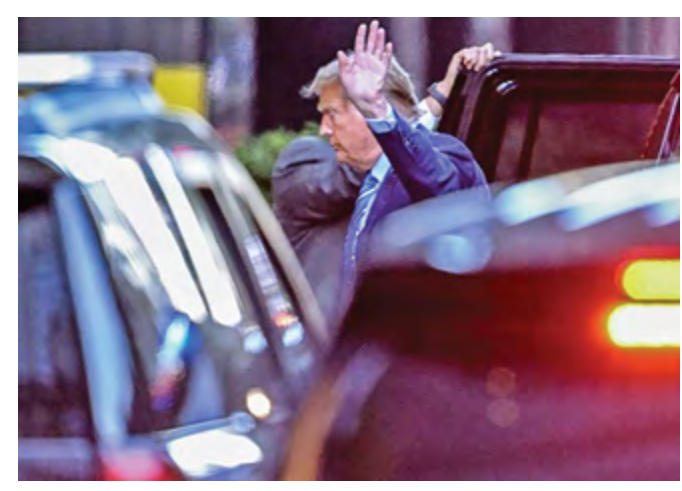
Closing arguments wrap up in Trump hush money case

Houston, US - Closing arguments in the hush money case against former US President Donald Trump wrapped up on Tuesday in New York City, where the jury must now decide whether he is guilty on 34 criminal counts regarding falsifying business records to cover up a six-figure hush money payment to an adult film star.

Defence attorney Todd Blanche claimed that prosecutors had not presented a ‘shred of evidence’ showing that Trump falsified business records when he reimbursed his former personal attorney and fixer Michael Cohen US\$130,000 for a payment to adult film star Stormy Daniels to conceal her alleged extramarital affair with the former president so the story would not go public during the 2016 presidential election, according to media outlets.

“You cannot convict President Trump on any crime beyond a reasonable doubt on the words of Michael Cohen,” said Blanche in his closing statement. “He’s the human embodiment of reasonable doubt,” he added, noting that Cohen admitted to stealing US\$60,000 from the Trump Organization.

Prosecutors countered that argument, stating that the case was indeed about ‘a conspiracy



and a cover-up’ to keep voters from learning about the alleged sexual relationship between Trump and Daniels.

“In this case, there’s literally a mountain of evidence of corroborating testimony that tends to connect the defendant to this crime, from Pecker to Hicks to the defendant’s own employees,” said senior trial counsel Joshua Steinglass, referencing former National Enquirer publisher David Pecker and former Trump aide Hope Hicks.

The prosecution laid out the plot, which included what is known as a ‘catch and kill’ arrangement with the National Enquirer to keep negative stories about Trump from being published.

“It’s difficult to conceive of a

case with more corroboration than this one,” Steinglass continued, according to CNN. “This scheme, cooked up by these men, at this time, could very well be what got President Trump elected.”

Regarding Cohen’s testimony against his former boss, prosecutors conceded that he had ethical flaws but noted that Cohen laid out exactly what had been done to keep Trump’s secrets hidden from the public.

“We didn’t choose Michael Cohen to be our witness. We didn’t pick him up at the witness store,” said Steinglass. “The defendant chose Michael Cohen as his fixer because he was willing to lie and cheat on his behalf.”

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'War on Gaza not to end this year'

Israel PM Netanyahu's national security adviser Tzachi Hanegbi said it will continue until early 2025

Jerusalem - The Gaza war will not end this year and will continue until early 2025, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's national security adviser said on Wednesday.

Tzachi Hanegbi told the Israeli public broadcaster KAN that the war is expected to continue for another seven months.

The Israeli army 'is now in control of 75 per cent of the Philadelphi Route', Hanegbi claimed. "I believe we will be in control of it all with time."

"Together with the Egyptians, we must ensure weapon smuggling is prevented from Egypt into Gaza," Hanegbi said.

Israel expanded its ground offensive in Rafah on Tuesday, with its tanks reaching the centre of the city. Israel's current expansion of its incursion into the city makes the Israeli army close to fully control the border area between Gaza and Egypt, known as the Philadelphi Corridor, a demilitarised buffer zone running along the Gaza-Egypt border.

Before the launch of the Israeli military operation against Rafah on May 6, the city was home to over 1.5mn displaced Palestinians who fled their areas across the Gaza Strip due to the Israeli onslaught that started on October 7, 2023, following a Hamas attack.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian death toll from Israel's military offensive on the Gaza Strip has surged to 36,171 since last October, the Health Ministry in the besieged enclave said on



Israeli forces continued to bombard different parts of the besieged enclave on the 236th day of the conflict on Wednesday

The Palestinian death toll from Israel's military offensive on the Gaza Strip has surged to 36,171 since last October, the Health Ministry in the enclave said

Wednesday. At least 81,420 people have also been injured in the assault, the ministry added in

a statement.

"Israeli attacks killed 75 people and injured 384 others in the

last 24 hours," the ministry said.

"Many people are still trapped under rubble and on the roads as rescuers are unable to reach them," it added.

Despite international condemnation urging Tel Aviv to cease the ongoing assault on the Gaza Strip, Israeli forces continued to bombard different parts of the besieged enclave on the

236th day of the conflict on Wednesday, with the latest attack killing at least three more Palestinians, including two children, and injuring dozens.

Three Palestinians, including two children, were killed in an Israeli airstrike on the Abu Jazar family's home in eastern Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip, according to witnesses.

Another attack on a home in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood of northern Gaza City has resulted in several casualties, medical sources told Anadolu, adding that the bodies and injured have been transferred to the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital.

In Rafah, once again Israeli artillery and quadcopters opened fire on Palestinians gathered near

humanitarian aid stores, injuring at least 20 people, eyewitnesses told Anadolu. The injured were transferred to the Gaza European Hospital in Khan Younis, as almost all hospitals in Rafah are currently closed due to the Israeli incursion, they said.

Earlier on Tuesday, Gaza's government media office said Israeli forces killed at least 72 displaced Palestinians in attacks on refugee tents in Rafah over the last 48 hours.

More detained in West Bank

The Israeli army on Wednesday detained 25 more Palestinians in military raids across the occupied West Bank, according to the prisoners' affairs groups.

The arrests took place in the cities of Hebron, Jenin, Tulkarem, Qalqilya and East Jerusalem, the Commission of Detainees' Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoner Society said in a joint statement.

Those arrested included a journalist and two women, the statement added.

The new arrests brought to 8,935 Palestinians detained by the Israeli army in the West Bank since last October, according to Palestinian figures. The Israeli forces assaulted and abused the Palestinians and damaged their homes, the statement said.

At least 519 Palestinians have been killed since last October and nearly 5,000 others injured by Israeli army fire in the occupied territory.

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Sweden pledges \$1.3bn military aid package to Ukraine

London, UK - Sweden will supply Ukraine with its 16th military aid package worth US\$1.3bn which is the Nordic country's biggest package so far, the Defence Ministry said on Wednesday.

The package aims to help strengthen the Ukrainian air defence and includes Saab's Airborne Surveillance and Control (ASC) 890 aircraft.

The aircraft will be used in coordination with Kyiv's implementation of US F-16 fighters that will be supplied by other European countries, including Denmark, Belgium, and the Netherlands. "We have held intensive discussions with countries in the fighter jet coalition and the assessment is that a donation of the ASC 890 airborne surveillance and control aircraft would have the largest impact on Ukrainian air defence," Defence Minister Paal Jonson told a press conference in Stockholm.

"It will be an important contribution by adding capabilities that Ukraine doesn't have currently," he added.

The 'entire Swedish stock' of 302 infantry fighting vehicles, artillery shells, anti-air missiles, and materials to help

maintain and replenish previously donated military equipment will also be included, said Jonson. In addition, the military aid will enable financial assistance, satellite communication resources, and a mandate by Sweden's Total Defence Research Institute to help Ukraine develop its own research capabilities.

The announcement came a day after Sweden announced it was providing Kyiv with a new energy aid package worth US\$58.2mn to 'strengthen Ukraine's resilience'.

The Nordic country said on Tuesday it was suspending plans to send Gripen jets to Ukraine after other countries decided to prioritise the delivery of F16s fighter jets to the war-torn country, Jonson then told the TT news agency.

Earlier this month, Stockholm announced plans to provide Ukraine with military support totalling US\$7bn over a three-year period.

So far, Stockholm has supplied Ukraine with a variety of advanced military equipment, including the Archer self-propelled howitzer and CV90 infantry fighting vehicle.

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Hundreds protest in front of White House

Washington, D.C., US - Hundreds of protesters gathered in front of the White House in the US capital on Tuesday to protest Israel's attack over the weekend on a tent camp in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, calling on the US government to end funding of Israel's war on the Gaza Strip.

The protest was supported by several pro-Palestine groups including the Palestinian Youth Movement, the Party for Socialism and Liberation and Maryland for Palestine.

The protesters carried banners saying 'Free Palestine', 'End All US Funding of Israeli Apartheid', 'All Eyes on Rafah' and 'Stop This Slaughter'.

The protesters chanted 'Stop bombing Rafah now' and 'End the occupation now'.

Meanwhile, China, on Wednesday, repeated its call to Israel, urging Tel Aviv to cease its attacks on the Rafah city in the Palestinian besieged enclave of Gaza, state media reported.

Beijing 'expresses serious concern over Israel's military actions targeting Rafah', said Mao Ning, the spokeswoman of the Foreign



The protest was supported by several pro-Palestine groups

Ministry.

Israel should 'listen to the overwhelming calls of the international community to cease its attacks', Mao said.

"The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is extremely dire and we call on all parties to immediately cease fire and to spare no effort to prevent further casualties among innocent civilians and to prevent the Gaza Strip from experiencing a more serious humanitarian disaster," Mao added.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is extremely dire and we call on all parties to immediately cease fire... prevent further casualties

MAO NING

'No country safe unless Israel abides by international law'

Istanbul, Turkey - The Turkish president on Wednesday said no country is safe unless Israel abides by international law, referring to its actions in the Gaza Strip which have continued for more than seven months despite rulings and resolutions against it.

"No state is safe unless Israel accepts international law and considers itself to be bound by it," Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a speech at the Turkish parliament.

"A bare-knuckled Israel is a threat not only to Palestine or Gaza but also to global peace and humanity as a whole," he said, blasting Israel's Sunday at-

tack on a refugee camp in Rafah, southern Gaza, which killed at least 45 people and ignited fires that spread quickly through tents and makeshift accommodation.

Erdogan criticised the inability of the international system, including bodies such as the UN to stop the ongoing atrocities in Gaza, where more than 36,000 Palestinians have been killed and has led to widespread destruction, displacement, and conditions of famine.

"What are you good for, the UN, if you cannot stop a genocide broadcast live in the 21st century," he asked.

"The United Nations was un-



Recep Tayyip Erdogan

able to protect even its own personnel or aid workers, let alone stop the genocide. Not only did humanity perish in Gaza, but so did the UN with its spirit," Erdogan said.

gan said.

Censuring the West for its alleged complicity in the Israeli war on Gaza, the Turkish leader said: "No belief considers it legitimate to burn innocent civilians to death in their tents. The world is watching the barbarism of the vampire known as Netanyahu on a live broadcast.

"The American state, your hands are also stained with blood; European heads of state and government, you have become complicit in Israel's barbarism as you have remained silent," he said.

Erdogan said values such as 'democracy, human rights, free-

dom of speech and press, women's and children's rights' have perished due to the 'death of humanity' in Gaza.

The president said Israel's 'genocide, atrocity and barbarism' must be stopped by a 'united alliance of humanity before Netanyahu and his murderer network spiral out of control'.

"Zionism is being unmasked all over the world," he said. "Young people are beginning to see how Zionism is an unlawful perversion, and I hope this revolution will free the world from Zionist perversion."

Algeria's resolution Besides, Algeria is circulating a draft UN Security Council resolution to 'stop the killing' in Rafah as Israel intensified its attacks in the densely populated area.

"Algeria will circulate this afternoon a draft resolution on Rafah. It will be a short text, a decisive text, to stop the killing in Rafah," Algeria's Ambassador to the UN, Amar Bendjama, told reporters after a Security Council meeting.

It was not immediately clear when the voting on the draft resolution will take place.

The draft resolution seen by Anadolu calls on Israel to 'immediately halt its military offensive and any other action in Rafah'.

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Bangladesh MP murder case: Flesh samples to be sent for forensic tests

Flesh was found in the septic tank of the Kolkata housing complex where he was killed

Kolkata, India - Flesh found in the septic tank of the Kolkata housing complex where Bangladeshi MP Anwarul Azim Anwar was allegedly killed earlier this month will be sent for forensic tests, the neighbouring country's police detective department chief said.

The Bangladesh Detective Department chief Harun-or-Rashid, who arrived in India on Sunday said that any development in the case could only be confirmed once results on the flesh samples are received. "We have opened the sewage line and septic tank of that duplex flat (murder site) with the help of West Bengal CID and found flesh there," Harun-or-Rashid told media persons.

"It will be sent for forensic and DNA tests, and only after that, something can be said...Only after forensic and DNA tests can we tell whose flesh it is," he said.

The chief of the Bangladesh Detective Department is currently in India to investigate the murder case of Bangladesh MP Anwar. "We also got many digital evidences and we will also record the statement of the accused butcher. After interrogation, we matched the statement with our accused in Bangladesh. We also got circumstantial evidence and we are matching it," he had said earlier.

Harun-or-Rashid arrived with



Police searching for the body parts of Anwarul Azim Anwar who was brutally murdered in Kolkata, at Bhangar area canal in South 24 Parganas on May 24 (ANI)

a police team in Kolkata on Sunday afternoon and described the killing of Anwar as 'cold-blooded, barbaric murder'. He had stated that he had never seen such a

heinous planned murder.

He said that he is in India, to collaborate with Interpol and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to intensify efforts to

apprehend the prime suspect behind the Bangladesh MP's murder. He said that the prime suspect in the murder case was identified as Akhtaruzzaman and

they suspect he could have probably escaped to the United States via Dubai from Kathmandu.

Bone-chilling details surrounding the murder of the member of

parliament from Bangladesh, who had been missing since May 13 just a day after his arrival in Kolkata had come to the fore.

ANI

DR Congo announces new govt

Kinshasa, DRC - The Democratic Republic of Congo announced a new government on Wednesday, ending more than five months of political uncertainty since the reelection of President Felix Tshisekedi.

The new Cabinet is composed of 54 ministers versus 57 in the last government, including Prime Minister Judith Sumonwa Tuluka, Congo's first female prime minister who was appointed in early April. At the Interior Ministry, the president appointed Jacquemain Shabani, his strongman former electoral campaign director who was already his main adviser.

Constant Mutamba, leader of the Congo Dynamic Progressive Revolutionary Opposition platform, was appointed justice minister, while Jean-Pierre Bemba was replaced at the Defence Ministry by Guy Kabombo. At the Foreign Ministry, Tshisekedi appointed a woman, Therese Kayiwamba, who replaced Christophe Lutundula.

Kizito Kapinga was appointed to the Mines Ministry, in charge of the country's reserves of coltan, copper, and other minerals.

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Pakistan: Nawaz Sharif elected as PML-N president

Islamabad, Pakistan - Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has been elected unopposed as the President of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), as reported by ARY News.

Sharif, who previously lost the presidency of PML-N due to a Supreme Court ruling in the Panama Papers case six years ago, has now reclaimed the position unopposed.

The party's five-member election commission, chaired by Rana Sanaullah and including Iqbal Jhagra, Ishrat Ashraf, Jamal Shah Kakar, and Khealdas Kohistani, oversaw the election process.

Notably, no candidate submitted nomination papers against Nawaz Sharif, paving the way for his uncontested election, according to ARY News. During the session, the general council will also address resolutions concerning Kashmir, Palestine, and other pertinent matters.



Nawaz Shaif

No candidate submitted nomination papers against Sharif, paving the way for his uncontested election

Initially scheduled for May 11, the party's general council meeting for the presidential election

was later rescheduled to coincide with Youm-e-Takbeer on May 28. This date marks 26 years since Pakistan's historic nuclear tests on May 28th, 1998. It's worth mentioning that Nawaz Sharif was previously disqualified from holding any public position following his conviction in 2018.

Sharif faced convictions in both the Avenfield and Al-Azizia references by the Accountability Court, resulting in a 10-year jail term and an eight-million-pound fine in the Avenfield case, and a seven-year sentence in the Al-Azizia reference, accompanied by a fine of Rs1.5bn and US\$25mn. Additionally, he was disqualified from holding public office for 10 years. However, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) acquitted him in both the Avenfield and Al-Azizia references on November 29 and December 12 of the previous year, respectively.

ANI

Military fighter jet crashes in New Mexico

Washington, D.C., US - Emergency teams rushed to the site of a military fighter jet crash near the airfield at the Albuquerque International Sunport, the main international airport in New Mexico, officials said on Wednesday.

The accident left the pilot seriously injured, who was located and transported while the fire was extinguished, Albuquerque Fire Rescue (AFR) said on X.

Local media outlet KOB4 said the pilot - who ejected before impact - is recovering at the UNM Hospital.

The fighter jet crashed and burst into flames just before 2pm on Tuesday. Albuquerque Fire Rescue and Bernalillo County firefighters battled the fire, but they needed help from Kirtland Air Force Base.

"We carry 500 gallons of water on our apparatus and small foam tanks, but it's no match for a jet fuel fire of that scope," said Lt. Jason Fejer with AFR.



The accident left the pilot seriously injured, who was located and transported while the fire was extinguished

Investigation is under way to identify the reason of the incident, the fire service said.

Footage captured at the crash site seemed to depict a military fighter aircraft, although the spe-

cific model of the plane has not been officially confirmed.

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HAPLESS VICTIMS OF NATURE'S FURY



Villagers stand on a road damaged by flood-water due to heavy rainfall triggered by Cyclone Remal at Singi Mari village near Kampur, in Nagaon, Assam in India on Wednesday (ANI)

Relations with Arab nations foster peaceful development, says China

Beijing, China - China on Wednesday said Beijing's relations with Arab nations have fostered 'peaceful development', state media reported.

"Pragmatic cooperation between China and Arab countries continues to deepen," said Mao Ning, spokeswoman for China's Foreign Ministry.

Mao said Beijing has signed cooperation agreements with all 22 Arab countries and the Arab League to 'collaboratively advance' China's Belt and Road Initiative. Beijing's statement comes on the eve of the 10th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum which is slated for Thursday.

Beijing and the Arab states are marking the 20th anniversary of



the forum, which was founded in 2004.

"The strengthening of China-Arab relations not only benefits the people on both sides but also fosters peaceful development in the Middle East," said Mao.

Four Arab leaders will attend the forum in Beijing, alongside

Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, Tunisian President Kais Saied, and United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan are expected to reach Beijing on Wednesday.

Anadolu Agency



Josh Hazlewood

Hazlewood, Warner shine as Australia crush Namibia in World Cup warm-up match

Trinidad, West Indies - Josh Hazlewood returned from a three-month break to take two for five and David Warner hit a half century as Australia thrashed Namibia by seven wickets in a Twenty20 World Cup warm-up in Trinidad.

Paceman Hazlewood said it had been more than seven years since he had last enjoyed such a lengthy break but he looked in good touch with three maidens from his four overs.

"We didn't have a full quota of players but the guys who played, probably a few of us needed to, coming off a big layoff," he said after the match on Tuesday.

"I know a number of the bowlers were coming off a long break which is pretty unusual in our system, but it's good to get out there, obviously playing is always different to training."

With some of the players who took part in the Indian Premier League (IPL) not in camp yet, Australia fielded only nine of their squad with head selector George Bailey among the staff who played roles as replacement fielders.

Warner, who will retire from all international cricket after the World Cup, rebounded from an IPL campaign blighted by a hand injury with a quickfire 54 not out as Australia chased down Namibia's 119-9.

"He always stands up when it comes to these tournaments, as we know," Hazlewood added. "We expect nothing but big things again from the Bull, he looked good on what looked like a tough wicket."

THE QUEST BEGINS

Djokovic beats Herbert to start bid for 25th Grand Slam title

Paris, France - Defending champion Novak Djokovic shrugged off doubts about the state of his game with a confident 6-4, 7-6(3), 6-4 defeat of Pierre-Hugues Herbert in the French Open first round on Tuesday.

The top seed had to wait until the night match on the third day of the tournament to begin his quest for an Open era record-extending 25th Grand Slam title but quickly hit his stride to dispatch French wildcard Herbert on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Djokovic, 37, has not reached a final this year and his world number one ranking is under threat from Jannik Sinner. But everything looked in fine working order against Herbert who put up solid resistance but never looked likely to unduly concern the Serbian who has now won 72 of his 74 first-round matches in Grand Slam tournaments.

The only blip came in the second set when Djokovic broke serve early but then dropped his own and was dragged into a tiebreak before finding an extra gear to move towards victory.

"He gave me a lot of trouble on his serve, serve and volleying, but from my side I'm pleased with the performance," Djokovic told Eurosport. "At this age I see every match as a golden opportunity as you don't know how long you have at this level."

Defeats in Rome and Geneva to Alejandro Tabilo and Tomas

Machac respectively led Djokovic to say he had high hopes but low expectations for the French Open.

But while he may have played down his chances, Grand Slam tournaments are a different proposition.

"It's something that I have been saying from the beginning of the year, that Grand Slams are the ones that are basically getting me up from the bed every day, knowing that I have to hit the

It's something that I have been saying from the beginning of the year, that Grand Slams get me up from the bed every day, knowing that I have to hit the practice courts

NOVAK DJOKOVIC

practice courts," he said. Djokovic broke Herbert's serve early in the opening set with a thumping forehand winner and took the opener in 37 minutes.

But he temporarily lost his way in the second set as Herbert, who has two French Open doubles titles to his name, began to vary his serving and raid the net to knock Djokovic out of cruise control.

The top seed played a near-faultless tiebreak, roaring his approval after several points, and after that it was something of a formality despite Herbert's gritty resistance.



Novak Djokovic celebrates his victory against Pierre-Hugues Herbert in the first round of French Open on Tuesday

Tsitsipas battles past Altmaier, Alcaraz beats De Jong

Paris, France - Former runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas survived a mid-match wobble before carving out a 6-3 6-2 6-7(2) 6-4 win over Germany's Daniel Altmaier on Wednesday to book his spot in the French Open third round.

The Greek ninth-seed, winner at Monte Carlo last month and a finalist in Barcelona, is one of the title contenders, with clay his favourite surface.

He looked to be cruising to an easy win as he raced through the first two sets in less than an hour.

Tsitsipas, a French Open finalist in 2021, pummelled his 83rd-ranked opponent with his powerful forehand before Alt-



Stefanos Tsitsipas returns a shot to Daniel Altmaier

maier upped his game and became more aggressive. "Fighting yourself. This is something that will happen during a match. You have to fight your emotions and feelings," Tsitsipas said of his loss of concentration.

Spain's Carlos Alcaraz also reached the third round but suffered a worrying loss of form midway through his match against Dutch qualifier Jesper de Jong before winning 6-3, 6-4, 2-6, 6-2 on Wednesday.

The third seed was forced to work hard for a two-set lead under the Court Philippe Chatrier roof but 176th-ranked De Jong refused to be intimidated and ex-

tended the match as Alcaraz suffered a third-set slump.

An error-strewn Alcaraz continued to struggle as the first four games of the fourth set all went against serve with the 21-year-old becoming increasingly frustrated on court. But Alcaraz regained some control in the nick of time to hold serve for a 3-2 lead and he broke De Jong in the next game as his gritty opponent finally began to run out of steam.

There was some relief as Alcaraz accelerated towards victory and De Jong netted a forehand after a little more than three hours to end an absorbing contest.

Jabeur gets past Osorio to advance

Paris, France - Tunisia's Ons Jabeur beat Colombia's Camila Osorio 6-3, 1-6, 6-3 in a roller-coaster match to move into the third round of the French Open on Wednesday.

Jabeur hardly put a foot wrong in the opening set, combining power and finesse to put Osorio on the backfoot but a fall in the second set upset her rhythm.

That opened the door for Osorio to claw her way back into the contest while Jabeur made several unforced errors as the Colombian took a set off the eighth seed for the first time in three meetings.

Both players struggled on serve in the decider which had five break points converted, but it was Jabeur who raised her intensity towards the end, taking a 4-1 lead before wrapping up the match with 31 winners.

Easy for Sabalenka

Second seed Aryna Sabalenka launched her bid for a maiden French Open title and second Grand Slam crown of the year



Ons Jabeur celebrates her win against Camila Osorio

with a breezy 6-1, 6-2 first-round win over Russian teenager Erika Andreeva on Tuesday that will serve as a warning to her main rivals.

The 26-year-old, who successfully defended her Aus-

tralian Open title earlier this year, is attempting to become the first woman to triumph at Melbourne and Paris in the same year since American Serena Williams achieved the feat in 2015.

"I'm just trying to separate

myself from all those facts. I mean, I know that if I'll be able to focus on myself and I'll be able to fight for every point and try to find solution in each game I will be able to win these big tournaments," she said.

"But I just try to take it step by step."

Sabalenka arrived at Roland

Jabeur hardly put a foot wrong in the opening set, combining power and finesse to put Osorio on the backfoot but a fall in second set upset her rhythm

Garros as a top contender for the title after strong results in the European claycourt swing - losing only to Iga Swiatek and Marketa Vondrousova - and wasted little time to get going on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Goffin slams French Open crowd for 'total disrespect'

Paris, France - Belgian David Goffin accused partisan fans at the French Open of "total disrespect" and said he was spat at by a spectator during his marathon first-round victory over local favourite Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard.

Fans can often turn the usually quiet Roland Garros courts into a wild arena when a French player needs backing, with the resulting atmosphere unmatched at the other three majors, and Goffin was subjected to the experience on Tuesday afternoon. On a raucous Court 14, Goffin kept his cool to defeat wild card Perricard 4-6 6-4 6-3 6-7(4) 6-3, before the former world number seven held his hand to his ears as he left the venue to loud jeers.

"When you are insulted for 3-1/2 hours, you have to tease the public a little," Goffin told Belgian media. "Clearly, it goes

too far, it's total disrespect.

"It's really too much. It's becoming football, soon there will be smoke bombs, hooligans and fights in the stands. It's starting to become ridiculous.



David Goffin celebrate his victory against Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard

Some people are there more to cause trouble than to create an atmosphere. Someone spat out their chewing gum at me. It (the match) was getting complicated. That's why I wanted to

stay calm. If I started to get angry about it, it could have destabilised me."

Goffin urged the organisers of the year's second Grand Slam to take action.

"A lot of people are complaining, a lot of umpires feel that there is a lot of disrespect," Goffin added. "This is repeated a lot in the locker room and among the ATP authorities. We're going to have to do something about that. I think it only happens in France. At Wimbledon, obviously, there's not that. Or in Australia either. At the U.S. Open, it's still rather quiet. Here, it's a really unhealthy atmosphere."

Last year, Taylor Fritz got a reminder of how brutal the venue can be as persistent boos rained down from the stands as the American shushed fans repeatedly after beating Arthur Rinderknech.



Barcelona head coach Hansi Flick (R) with club president Joan Laporta

Barca appoint Flick as new head coach

Madrid, Spain - Barcelona have appointed former German national team and Bayern Munich manager Hansi Flick as head coach on a two-year contract, the LaLiga club said on Wednesday.

Flick, who has not managed a club since being sacked by Germany in September 2023, will be tasked with reviving Barcelona's fortunes after the Catalan side failed to win any trophies this season under Xavi Hernandez, who was dismissed on Friday.

In a statement, the club said it had "chosen a man well known

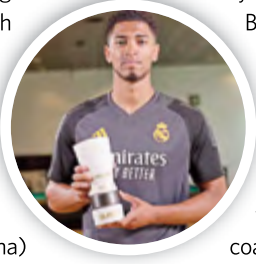
for his teams' high pressing, intense and daring style of play which has brought him great success at club level and international level, winning pretty much all there is to win in the world of football".

Barcelona highlighted the 59-year-old's success during the 2019-20 season at the helm of Bayern, with whom he won six trophies - the Bundesliga, the German Cup, the Champions League, the German Super Cup, the UEFA Super Cup and the Club World Cup.

Bellingham voted LaLiga Player of the Season

Madrid, Spain - Real Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham has been voted LaLiga's Player of the Season after the 20-year-old played a pivotal role in leading the club to their 36th league title.

Bellingham edged out teammate Vinicius Jr, Antoine Griezmann (Atletico Madrid), Artem Dovbyk (Girona) and Robert Lewandowski (Barcelona) in votes cast by fans, club captains and a panel of experts. He scored 19 goals and had six assists in 28 league games this season, and tallied 23 goals and 12 assists in all competitions for the club.



Jude Bellingham

Bellingham, who could not attend Tuesday's ceremony in Sardinia as he was preparing for the Champions League final at Wembley against his former club Borussia Dortmund, said he was honoured to have received the award.

"I would like to dedicate it to my team mates, the coaching staff and, most importantly, to the fans of the best club in the world," he said in a message. "It's a pleasure every time I play for this team. Hala Madrid!"

The Englishman also won the 2022-23 Bundesliga Player of the Season playing for Dortmund before moving to Real.



Borussia Dortmund's Marco Reus celebrates with teammates after scoring in his final Bundesliga game of the season, against SV Darmstadt, earlier this month

Reus eyes perfect ending

Dortmund star wants to leave club with Champions League trophy

Dortmund, Germany - Long considered one of the most talented players of his generation, Borussia Dortmund's Marco Reus has failed to taste major success in an injury-plagued career but the German is now ready to leave the club with the Champions League trophy.

The 34-year-old attacking midfielder is departing Dortmund after 12 years at the club.

And he hopes to do so on a high in his last match for them by beating the mighty Real Madrid in the Champions League final at Wembley stadium in England on Saturday.

"Borussia Dortmund mean

Marco was 12 years here as a pro and also as a youth. He is not yet done. In London he wants to experience an amazing game with a positive outcome to complete the circle.

EDIN TERZIC

everything for me," Reus said this week. "When you are 12 years at a club then it just has to mean everything."

The former Germany international, who also spent a decade at the Ruhr Valley club as a youth player, has scored 170 goals in 428 matches for Dortmund while setting up another 131.

Known for his sublime skills, goalscoring ability and clever play, Reus has been dubbed a "living legend" by Dortmund coach Edin Terzic, captaining the team for five years until 2023 and winning two German Cups.

But apart from those trophies he failed to win any other for club or country in a career constantly

hampered by serious injuries.

He missed out on Germany's World Cup win in 2014 after suffering an injury in their last warm-up game before leaving for Brazil, while other injuries ruled him out of Euro 2016 and the 2022 World Cup.

Reus also lost out on the Bundesliga trophy in 2023 after then-leaders Dortmund slipped up against Mainz 05 on the final matchday.

"Marco was 12 years here as a pro and also as a youth. He is not yet done," said coach Terzic on Tuesday.

"In London he wants to experience an amazing game with a

positive outcome so as to complete the circle.

"I need him on Saturday. I need his qualities because he has this experience and he has played on this stage before."

Reus is no stranger to a Champions League final or to Wembley, having lost the 2013 showcase to Bayern Munich.

"That was 11 years ago. Now it is a different opponent and different players," Reus said.

"There are worse ways to complete your career at a club than to start with a Champions League final in 2013 and end it with a Champions League final in 2024."

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BRITNEY SPEARS CLAIMS 'ALL' OF HER JEWELLERY WAS STOLEN

Britney Spears revealed on social media that all her jewellery was stolen from her home on Sunday, May 26. "So, you can see for real all my jewellery was stolen... it's hard to buy new now because I'm scared it will go missing. So, I buy it cheap and fake, but it's hard because some of my pieces were originally made for me... and my 'baby cross' that I wore since I was 4 is gone... it's so thin," the 42-year-old singer said in an Instagram video.

The Toxic singer documented her evidence, opening all the drawers showcasing a jewellery box with very few accessories inside. "I'll show you guys, for real, all my jewellery was stolen," she said. "It's all gone... All my jewellery is gone."



MIKE TYSON SUFFERS MEDICAL EMERGENCY ON AIRPLANE

Mike Tyson reportedly experienced a medical emergency while en route to Los Angeles from Miami. On Sunday, May 26, paramedics tended to the 57-year-old boxer after it was announced on an airplane that he needed medical care, according to a report.

"Mike had some kind of medical emergency on the plane and paramedics boarded," an eyewitness said. "Before the paramedics arrived, the flight issued an announcement asking for a doctor - the message even came on everyone's screens."

KELLY ROWLAND BREAKS SILENCE ON CANNES FILM FESTIVAL SPAT

Kelly Rowland has spoken out about her heated exchange on the red carpet for the Cannes Film Festival on May 21. The *Destiny's Child* alum, 43, spoke about the experience in an interview last week. While she didn't say directly what happened, Kelly did hint at some discrimination against her, while speaking about her thoughts.

When asked about the incident, Kelly explained briefly what had happened from her perspective.

"The woman knows what happened. I know what happened, and I have a boundary, and I stand by those boundaries," she said. "I stood my ground, and she felt like she had to stand hers. And I stood my ground, and that's it."



THE BEIBERS ARE PREGNANT

Hailey Bieber and Justin Bieber announced that they were expecting a kid recently this month and now she has seemingly announced the gender of her baby on social media. The model shared a photo of her pink and white manicure. Alongside the image, she wrote, "Little cherry blossoms on my nails, little cherry blossom in my belly." Fans were quick to speculate that her caption means she is expecting a girl. She also flaunted her baby bump in a set of candid Instagram photos on Thursday.

AAMIR KHAN... WAITING FOR CHRISTMAS

Aamir Khan's last film *Laal Singh Chaddha* bombed badly at the box office. However, there's a tremendous expectation from his upcoming film, *Sitaare Zameen Par*. Earlier this year, Aamir confirmed that he and his team are trying their best to release the sports film on Christmas this year. However, co-producer Ravi Bhagchandka, who earlier produced *Sachin: A Billion Dreams* (2017), has confessed that the team is yet to decide on the release date. *Sitaare Zameen Par* is a remake of the Spanish film *Campeones* (2018).



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Omantel's international and local strategic partnerships contribute to Oman's digital economy

Establishment of the first sovereign cloud services center in the Sultanate of Oman in cooperation with Amazon Web

Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, has a packed calendar for COMEX, dominated by new signings with global technology giants, showcasing its diversified products and services portfolio and media interaction events. Omantel stands out with a slew of new signings, involving global and local companies.

Talal Al Mamari, Chief Executive Officer of Omantel said on the sidelines of the agreements signing ceremony that these agreements reflect Omantel's strategic transformation from a telco into a technology company. These agreements will also solidify our position as the enabler of digital transformation in the public and private sectors.

Localization of new technologies

Omantel signed a key strategic partnership with Amazon Web Services to establish a sovereign cloud services center and build and operate an integrated e-commerce platform in Oman. The partnership also includes the setting up of a center of cloud excellence and providing solutions in generative Artificial Intelligence.

Omantel also signed another strategic partnership with Google Global to set up the first-ever edge cloud computing services center in the region (Middle East, Africa, and Asia) and provide generative AI and data analytics services.



Omantel and Amazon

The third agreement was signed with MERP and Microsoft for a strategic framework. MERP is a leader in innovative technology solutions. This collaboration aims to revolutionize digital infrastructure and services by leveraging Microsoft's AI solutions to drive digital transformation across Omantel's departments and subsidiaries. The agreement marks a significant milestone in the partnership

between MERP Systems and Omantel, focusing on enhancing operational efficiencies, improving customer service, and developing new digital products to meet the evolving needs of consumers and businesses in the Sultanate of Oman.

Emphasizing digital innovation, the agreement will utilize AI to create innovative solutions that enhance data analytics, cloud computing, and customer

interface systems. It also aims to strengthen Omantel's digital infrastructure, supporting high-speed connectivity and advanced services for businesses and customers alike. Additionally, the partnership commits to developing local talent through training programs designed to equip Omani professionals with advanced AI technological skills, furthering the nation's digital transformation goals.



Omantel and Google



Omantel and Microsoft with MERP



Omantel and Virtusa

organizational enablement and development, marked by the signing of an innovative IT Operating Model contract. This collaboration represents a significant advancement in Omantel's adoption of Agile/DevOps methodologies, ensuring a swift market presence and the highest standards of service delivery. Guided by Virtusa's Engineering First approach, the partnership will leverage advanced engineering practices to

drive efficiency and innovation. The agreement encompasses a broad range of services, including the provision of commercial and organizational enablement applications, along with robust operational support for IT applications and infrastructure.

The agreement was signed by Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of "Omantel" and Vasudev Telikicherla - Senior Vice President | Head - Middle East.

Local Partnerships to boost digitization in Oman

Partnering with Omantel, the Ministry of Health is implementing an innovative asset management and IoT cybersecurity solution. This partnership comes to align with Oman Vision 2040, the Sultanate of Oman is transforming its healthcare sector through digitization and enhanced connectivity. The Ministry of Health, adopting advanced medical and IoT devices, robust infrastructure, and IT systems, aims to improve patient care and healthcare outcomes. This initiative will streamline operational insights, enhance care delivery, and fortify cybersecurity.

The agreement was signed by His Excellency Dr. Hilal Ali Al-Sabti, Minister of Health, and Talal Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel.

In local partnerships, and as part of enhancing digital transformation locally, the Supreme Judicial Council and Omantel have signed an agreement to provide telecommunications services and a digital switchboard for the Council. This will boost productivity and improve the efficiency of internal and external communications. Additionally, the agreement aims to offer an exceptional experience for reviewers and provide high levels of security through advanced digital systems. The agreement was signed by His Excellency Issa bin Hamad Al Azri, Secretary-General of the Supreme Judicial Council, and Talal Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel.

Moreover, Omantel announced its strategic agreement with Oman Housing Bank to provide Full Banking migration to cloud, making it the first bank in Sultanate of Oman to migrate its complete Data Center to Cloud. This agreement sets the stage for seamless and efficient access to cutting-edge cloud services aiming to strengthen and empower Oman Housing Bank in processing customer data with unprecedented speed and efficiency,



Omantel & Ministry of Health



Omantel and Supreme Judicial Council



Omantel and OQGN



Omantel and Oman Airports



Omantel & PDO



Omantel & Oman Housing Bank



Omantel and Bank Dhofar



Omantel and Bank Nizwa

while also delivering innovative solutions tailored to the banks and customers' needs. The agreement was signed by Aladdin Bait Fadhil, Chief Commercial Officer of Omantel and Arif Al Zaabi, general manager at Oman Housing Bank.

Omantel unveiled a digital cooperation agreement with Bank Dhofar to carry out First Islamic

Core Banking migration to cloud. Bank Dhofar becomes the first major Bank in Oman to migrate its Islamic Core Banking platform to Cloud. The agreement was signed by Aladdin Bait Fadhil, Chief Commercial Officer of "Omantel" and Dr. Tariq Taha, General Manager of IT at BankDhofar.

As part of the ongoing cooperation

between Omantel and Bank Nizwa, Omantel being the digital partner of Bank Nizwa will provide the Bank with innovative cloud solutions that will enable the bank to save costs, optimize efficiency and enhance cyber security. The agreement also entails providing 5G, smart mobile app and IoT solutions.

The agreement was signed by

Talal Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel and Khalid al Kayed, CEO at Bank Nizwa.

In relation to the gas sector, Omantel and OQ Gas Networks - the exclusive operator of Oman's Natural Gas Transmission Network, have penned an awarding ceremony to recognize the successful leverage of the satellite technology for surveillance purposes through Etco. Etco Space

will provide satellite images from the Omani satellite "Aman-1" under its strategic partnership with Omantel. This collaboration will offer space imagery and related data analytics along with AI-powered monitoring and surveillance solutions.

The agreement was signed by Talal Said Al Mamari, CEO of

Omantel and Mansoor Al Abdali, Managing director of OQGN.

Omantel and Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) have signed a project completion certificate, marking the start of a five-year contract to provide Dedicated Internet Access (DIA) and Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) Protection services. This agreement, featuring a managed, dedicated, high-availability service with a fully diverse FOC route, will enhance PDO's corporate communication and operational efficiency. This partnership significantly boosts Oman's economy and supports PDO in achieving its business objectives more effectively.

The agreement was signed by Eng. Aladdin Baitfadhil, Chief Commercial Officer at Omantel, and Hasan Al Barwani, General Manager of Information Technology at Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

In addition, Oman Airports signed a partnership agreement with Omantel to provide "Wi-Fi 7" service at airports in the Sultanate of Oman, making it the first airport company in the world to use this advanced technology.

This agreement comes at a time when the Sultanate's airports are witnessing significant growth, necessitating the adoption of the latest technologies and modern services. It aims to develop the wireless network infrastructure in all Oman's airports with the latest global technologies, as part of the ongoing proactive steps by "Oman Airports" to enhance the digital infrastructure and provide advanced technological solutions that contribute to achieving Oman Vision 2040 for digital transformation and the development of the aviation sector.

The agreement was signed by Sheikh Aimen bin Ahmed Al Hosni, CEO of "Oman Airports", and Sheikh Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, in the presence of Huawei Global.

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Among all end-users, the commercial sector is projected to dominate the GCC air conditioner market with the largest share over the next five years



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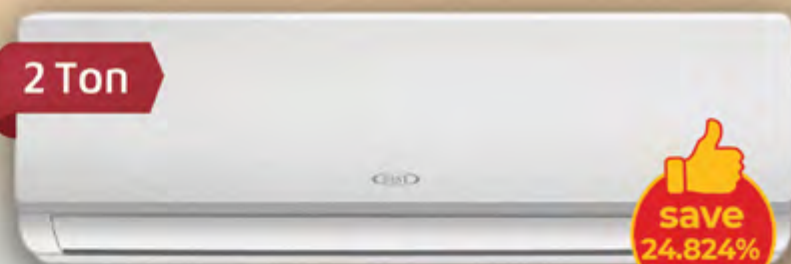
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Cooling solutions on the rise in GCC



geoning need for facility management services, which is positively influencing the sales of air conditioners. Additionally, the growing focus of regional governments on infrastructural developments, leading to the development of various facilities like airports, metro and railway systems, educational institutes, shopping malls, etc., is also surging the demand for air conditioners across the commercial sector and fuelling overall market growth.

On the other hand, the hospitality sector is expected to witness the fastest market growth in the coming years, owing principally to the rapidly expanding tourism sector, leading to increasing developments of hotels, resorts, and other such facilities. This, in turn, is driving the demand for air conditioners to enhance hospitality services for people and projecting lucrative growth opportunities for the market through 2028.

UAE to dominate GCC AC market

Of all countries in the GCC region, the UAE is likely to dominate the air conditioner market with the largest share during 2023-28. This is principally attributed to the increasing government support through favourable policies and initiatives for market players to manufacture energy-efficient air conditioners equipped with advanced technologies.

Moreover, the growing establishment of multinational companies and start-ups across the UAE, entwined with the massive tourist influx, is further augmenting the demand for air conditioners across the commercial, corporate, and hospitality sectors and, in turn, fuelling market growth across the country.

zoning capabilities, cooling efficiency, and centralised control, making these variants highly suitable for commercial establishments.

Commercial sector to dominate AC market

Among all end-users, the commercial sector is projected to dominate the GCC air conditioner market with the largest share during 2023-28. This is principally due to the increasing establishment of several multinational companies and start-ups in the region due to favourable government policies for attracting foreign direct investments.

This is leading to the development of more corporate spaces and a bur-

residential buildings such as apartments while exhibiting easy installation and minimal modifications to the existing structure. Being practical and cost-effective solutions for compact homes, their demand is more prevalent than cassette or centralised AC systems. Additionally, benefits like hassle-free cleaning and easy repair and maintenance further contribute to the massive adoption of split and window ACs in the Gulf countries.

On the other hand, cassette and centralised AC systems are gaining traction in the GCC region owing to their rapidly growing adoption in office buildings, retail spaces, and restaurants, among others. This is backed by their remarkable benefits in terms of



Set your AC at 24°C to rationalise electricity consumption

- Air conditioning consumes a large portion of the electricity generated during summer. You can follow these cooling tips to rationalise your AC consumption:
- Keep your thermostat set at 24°C, or higher. Each degree increase in set point temperature can save up to 5% on AC consumption.
 - The optimal lifetime of an AC is ten years. If yours are older, consider replacing them with new energy-efficient ACs with 4 or 5 stars rating. This will help you save up to 25% of cooling consumption.
 - Use fans to circulate air. They use about as much electricity as a light bulb and can make you feel comfortable at higher thermostat settings, and do not forget to turn fans off when you leave the room.
 - Clogged or dirty AC filters can block the normal airflow and reduce the system's efficiency significantly. It is recommended to clean your AC filters periodically or at least once a month during summer.
 - During summer, use curtains, drapes, shades, awnings and reflective materials to reduce the heat entering through your glass or windows.
 - Apply weather stripping and caulking around all doors and windows to keep the cooled air inside your house and to prevent hot air from entering into your home.
 - Use a programmable thermostat (Smart Thermostat) to better control the room temperature and AC operation duration. This will in turn reduce AC consumption.

(Source: Dubai Electricity & Water Authority)

Stay cool, stay happy with new inverter ACs from GENERAL

KR Air Conditioning and Appliances business, the exclusive distributor of GENERAL air conditioners in Oman, has played a pivotal role in helping the brand establish a strong foothold in the local market. As a progressive company committed to staying relevant to the evolving market needs, the new environment-friendly air conditioner places innovation at its core and has been engineered to deliver optimal performance even when temperatures are soaring.

Incorporating additional heat exchangers, it also enhances cooling whilst ensuring energy efficiency. KR Air Conditioning and Appliances business is strongly committed to sustainability of the nation and continuously supports its efforts to transition to a green, circular economy. Working in tandem, GENERAL also mirrors these values and the new inverter air conditioners are a testament to the same.

Khimji Ramdas Air-Conditioning Division and Fujitsu GENERAL have enjoyed a long-standing partnership nearing five decades. Today, GENERAL is a household name and has become synonymous with reliability and superior performance, especially in challenging weather conditions. As a brand, GENERAL has led with innovation, embracing the most modern technologies and versatile de-

signs. It has therefore been revered as the most trusted air-conditioner brand in the Sultanate.

Khimji Ramdas AC business has consistently gone the extra mile to honour the promise that their customers are offered the best of products and premium levels of services. This approach has helped them establish a distinct position in the local market.

Renowned for its keen emphasis on reliability and durability, GENERAL air conditioners have set new benchmarks for quality across the Middle East, par-

needs. The KR Air Conditioning's dedicated Design Engineering Team works closely with clients to customise solutions, solidifying its position as a preferred provider of HVAC solutions.

Whilst Fujitsu GENERAL Japan has been at the forefront of developing innovative technologies in the air conditioning industry, KR Air Conditioning and Appliances business places great emphasis on providing exceptional after-sales service. Providing quick and efficient service is the backbone of this technology-intensive industry.

As GENERAL's strategic partner in the Sultanate, KR Air Conditioning and Appliances business has been complementing the brand's innovative line of air

conditioners with unparalleled after-sales service through its dedicated AC Division. KR's extensive fleet of Mobile Service Centres have been instrumental in ensuring quick, efficient and hassle-free services. In addition, the company currently has over 100 channel partners and six KR Air Conditioning and Appliances business owned showrooms across Oman. With KR Air Conditioning and Appliances business network, GENERAL's range of air conditioners has found its application in a number of industries and has been the preferred choice in residential villas as well as large commercial establishments.



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Oman’s air conditioner market seen growing by 8.2% annually till 2029

Our Correspondent
Muscat

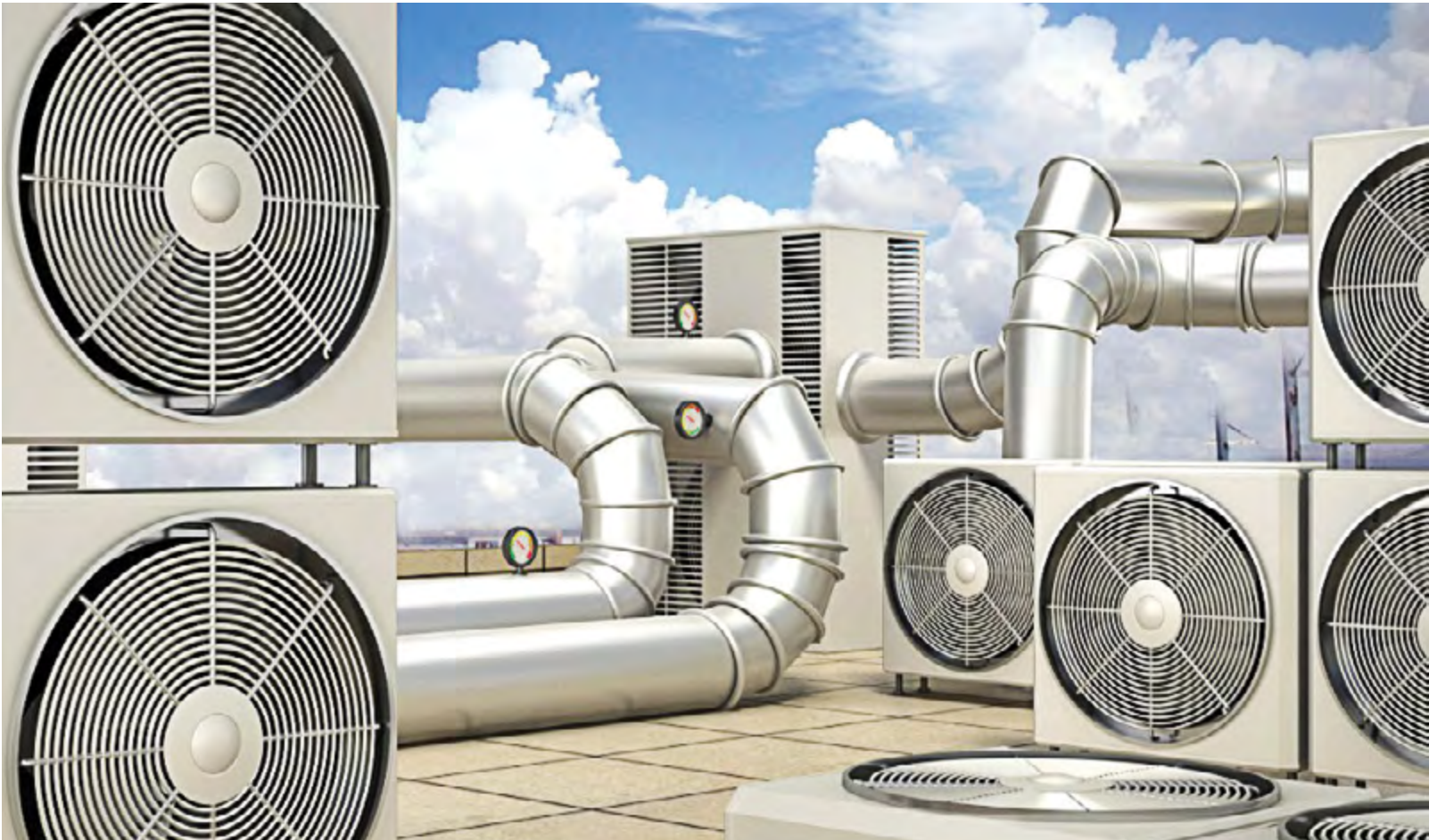
With growing demand amid the expansion of Oman's retail, mixed-use, and corporate sectors, the sultanate's air conditioner market is projected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.2% until 2029, according to a research report released by 6Wresearch.

'With the rise in retail, mixed-use, and corporate projects across Muscat, Sohar, Nizwa, and other regions, coupled with Oman's Vision 2040 which aims to attract investment across various sectors, the demand for air conditioners will increase in the future,' the report said.

Residential sector dominates AC market

By application, the residential sector captured the highest market revenue share in 2022 and is expected to lead the market till 2029 due to the development of new residential projects such as the Oman Liwa Housing Project 2024, Mina Sultan Qaboos Waterfront 2024, and The Address Harbour Point 2023, which will create a demand for air conditioners in the residential sector in the coming years.

According to the 6Wresearch report, the residential sector, followed by the hospitality sector, dominates the market due to the Oman Vision 2040 which focuses on developing infrastructure projects. Additionally, the Omani government has launched several initiatives to promote affordable housing. Projects such as Yenkit Hills: Phase 1 and the Sohar three-star hotel, among others, will also contribute to this growth.



Tourism to drive growth

As per the report, Oman's hospitality sector is projected to record a compound annual growth rate of 6.3% between 2020 and 2026 to reach \$900mn. Moreover, the number of international tourists to Oman is expected to reach 3.7mn by 2026 with a compound annual growth rate of 36.9%, which will contribute to the construction of hotel projects and thereby increase the market for air conditioners.

The 6Wresearch report mentioned that the Omani government will invest

Residential sector captured the highest AC market revenue share in 2022 and is expected to lead the market till 2029 due to the development of new residential projects across Oman

\$963.3mn in various development projects by 2024. Moreover, in 2020, Muscat had the largest hotel stock in Oman with 298 hotel establishments

and is expected to add 11,000 more keys by 2025. Additionally, Oman unveiled its National Strategy for Tourism 2040 with the objective of increasing

international tourist arrivals to almost 12mn visitors per annum by 2040, which would drive investment in tourism and thereby increase the demand for air conditioners.

The report added that stringent government regulations for air conditioners and affordable alternatives can serve as a restraint for the Oman air conditioner market.

Centralised AC to record highest growth

According to the report, centralised air

conditioners are expected to register the highest growth rate during the forecast period owing to a variety of benefits such as centralised thermostats, enabling more accurate temperature control and energy management. They are mostly used in large-scale commercial or residential buildings as they are more dependable and require less upkeep than standalone room air conditioners.

Ravi Bhandari, Research Head at 6Wresearch, said, "Centralised air conditioners are anticipated to register substantial growth over the forecast period due to advantages like more accurate temperature control, centralised thermostats, and energy management. These air conditioners are majorly used in large-scale commercial and residential buildings."

Oman's Madayn Vision 2040 targets the completion of 10,000 projects with an investment of \$39bn. These initiatives will contribute to the growth of the air conditioner market in Oman, the report added.

The Oman air conditioner market witnessed steady growth in recent years owing to the expansion of the residential, commercial, and infrastructure sectors. However, the market was negatively impacted in 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic due to the complete lockdown enforced by the government to prevent the spread of the virus, which disrupted the supply chain, manufacturing processes, and halted all developmental activities across all sectors.

However, this decline was temporary, and the market recovered in 2021, returning to a healthy growth rate thereafter with the resumption of all developmental activities.

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OTE Electronics & Home Appliances start Mega Warehouse sale



The highly anticipated annual Warehouse Sale by OTE's Electronics & Home Appliances started today, offering unbeatable discounts on a wide range of products. From May 29th to June 2nd, 2024, visit the Ghala Warehouse in Muscat and experience unmatched savings on all your favourite brands.

This five-day event is the perfect opportunity for both residents and expats to prepare for the upcoming Eid celebrations and upgrade their homes with top-quality electronics and appliances at incredible prices. Whether you're furnishing a new apartment, refreshing your existing space, or preparing to travel back home during the vacation season, this sale offers the chance to find exactly what you need at unmatched prices.

OTE's vast selection caters to every need and budget. Discover amazing deals on top brands like LG, Bosch, Admiral, ChiQ, and

Prolux. From televisions and refrigerators to air conditioners, washing machines, dishwashers, and more, you'll find everything you need to enhance the comfort and convenience of your home.

About OTE Group: As the exclusive distributor for leading home appliance brands in Oman, OTE Group boasts an extensive and diverse business portfolio spanning global automotive brands, auto ancillaries, electronics, home appliances, manufacturing, financing, and training institutes. With a dedicated team and expansive network, OTE provides comprehensive sales, service, and after-sales support to its discerning clientele. The Group maintains a global presence across 15 business verticals through over 30 companies. As a privately owned corporation with well-established credentials, OTE Group prides itself on its over 2000 employees and an extensive network in Oman, comprising over 200 customer touchpoints.

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