

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The interactive platform aims to engage young audiences and simplify statistical concepts.

NCSI LAUNCHES
CARTOON DUO TO
TEACH STATISTICS

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) has launched two new cartoon characters, ‘Mazen’ and ‘Muzna,’ both 12-year-old Omani children, as part of an innovative interactive platform aimed at engaging young audiences and simplifying statistical concepts.

The initiative is designed to present data and general information in an easy, engaging and age-appropriate manner, while strengthening children’s connection to national identity through relatable characters rooted in Omani values.

NCSI said the launch is part of its efforts to enhance its visual identity and develop modern educational content tailored to younger generations. The characters have been designed to reflect Omani values in behaviour, knowledge and communication, improving the effectiveness of awareness messaging.

The initiative also aligns with the centre’s communication strategy (2026–2030), which focuses on developing institutional communication tools and expanding outreach through innovative and interactive content that promotes a data-driven culture among future generations.

The names ‘Mazen’ and ‘Muzna’ were carefully chosen for their cultural and symbolic significance. ‘Mazen’ refers to rain-bearing clouds associated with goodness and generosity, while ‘Muzna’ signifies a cloud carrying rain, symbolising abundance and growth. Together, the names reflect the role of data and information in enriching knowledge and supporting informed decision-making.

NCSI noted that the characters embody key institutional values, including partnership, accessibility, professionalism, knowledge management and transparency, ensuring consistency with its communication identity.

Through ‘Mazen and Muzna,’ the centre aims to deliver an interactive educational experience using digital publications, videos, educational activities, smart applications and other modern tools. The characters may also be integrated into future interactive platforms to strengthen public engagement.

The design process also considered cultural and educational factors, including inspiration from the Omani environment, ease of pronunciation for children, and suitability for the target age group, alongside the integration of values that encourage analytical thinking and positive behaviour.

The initiative is expected to enhance statistical awareness among children and encourage early interest in data and numbers by presenting them in a simplified format that combines education and entertainment. — ONA

MUSCAT AIRPORT RECORDS 7.6% DROP IN PASSENGER TRAFFIC

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MAY 30

Muscat International Airport has recorded a decline in international passenger traffic in April 2026, continuing a downward trend compared to the preceding months of February and March, according to aviation data.

Passenger numbers fell from 939,921 in February to 728,588 in March, and further edged down to 727,668 in April, reflecting a sustained softening in travel demand.

Overall, passenger traffic in the first four months of 2026 dropped by 7.6 per cent, falling to 3,585,485



Passenger levels edged down to 727,668 in April, reflecting a continued softening in travel demand.

compared to 3,879,774 during the same period in 2025.

According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), global international demand in

April 2026 declined by 5.3 per cent compared to April 2025. When excluding the Middle East, however, demand registered a 1.9 per cent increase.

Capacity globally was down by 5.1 per cent year-on-year, while the load factor stood at 83.9 per cent, a marginal decrease of 0.2 percentage points compared to April 2025.

IATA Director General Willie Walsh noted that the sharp contraction in Middle Eastern carriers significantly impacted global figures.

“The 46.6 per cent fall in demand for carriers in the Middle East due to war in the region was so acute that it dragged overall demand

down by 3.4 per cent,” Walsh said.

He added that Middle Eastern airlines experienced a 48.1 per cent year-on-year drop in demand, while capacity declined by 38.4 per cent and load factor fell to 70.1 per cent, down 13.1 percentage points from April 2025.

Walsh further noted that the aviation sector remains highly volatile, with rising jet fuel prices — which more than doubled in April — contributing to higher airfares and cautious capacity planning by airlines. Forward scheduling data, he said, indicates a reduced supply in the coming months as airlines adjust to weaker demand conditions and elevated operating costs.

Sultan Haitham City to
receive residents in Oct

YUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, MAY 30

SULTAN HAITHAM City, the iconic future urban centre of the Sultanate of Oman, is witnessing rapid progress with the implementation of numerous infrastructure packages and strategic projects.

On the third anniversary of the inauguration of the Sultan Haitham City, which falls on May 31, the total value of awarded construction service packages has reached RO 280 million, distributed across 10 different packages.

The investment value of new real estate partnerships and developments has exceeded RO 500 million.

Omanis and investors are looking forward to October 2026, which will represent a historic turning point for the Sultan Haitham City project, with the gradual relocation of residents to live there.

This coincides with the readiness of the roads adjacent to Al Wafa neighbourhood, the readiness of the tender for the primary electricity stations and the private school, and the start of the actual implementation of the central park, the valley, and the rehabilitation complex for people with disabilities.

The latest construction indicators show that the overall infrastructure completion rate for the city has reached 40 per cent, with 70 per cent of the total infrastructure tenders awarded and all are currently under construction and



Omanis and investors are looking forward to October 2026, which will represent a historic turning point for the Sultan Haitham City project, with the gradual relocation of residents to live there.



ENG NASSER
AL HADHRAMI

The total value of awarded construction service packages has reached RO 280 million as Sultan Haitham City marks its third anniversary since inauguration

parts of the streets and services will be ready for use within the next few months. The past period also witnessed a significant event, namely the inauguration of the Experience and Sales Centre, which opened at the beginning of May as the City’s first iconic building.

Eng Nasser al Hadhrami, Executive Director of the Future Cities Office at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, said, “As we commemorate the third anniversary of the inauguration of Sultan Haitham City, we are witnessing an exceptional scene. The city is currently experiencing an accelerated pace in the implementation of infrastructure packages and is actively engaged in the comprehensive development of all its residential neighbourhoods.

The first phase of this iconic project is registering significant

progress, with the preparation and levelling work 100 complete. The initial power stations, bridge construction and sewage networks are nearing completion.

This coincides with the actual commencement of construction operations in leading residential neighbourhoods such as Al Nuha, Al Ahlam, Wadi Zaha, Al Sarouj Oasis, and January Residences, establishing a vibrant and integrated urban environment.

This anniversary also coincides with the launch of the Greater Muscat Master Plan.

Sultan Haitham City, along with its partners, seeks to achieve its strategic goals: to be a green city through the implementation of the central park, which covers an area of 1.6 million square metres to become a vibrant city with open spaces and integrated services.

Dr Amira selected for prestigious Humphrey Fellowship Programme

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAY 30

Dr Amira al Raidan, Supervisor for Drug Awareness and Training at the Prevention Committee of the National Committee for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, has been selected to participate in the prestigious Humphrey Fellowship Programme, becoming the first Omani participant in more than a decade.

The Humphrey Fellowship Programme is one of the most prominent exchange initiatives of the United States government, bringing accomplished professionals to the US for academic study, leadership development and collaboration with American counterparts.

US Ambassador to the Sultanate



US Ambassador Ana Escrogima congratulating Dr Amira al Raidan.

of Oman, Ana Escrogima, met Dr Al Raidan to celebrate the achievement and extended her best wishes for success during the fellowship year.

The Ambassador said Dr Al Raidan was one of the most prominent supporters of mental health and addiction prevention initiatives in Oman through her work at the Ministry of Health. “We look forward to seeing the impact her experience at the Humphrey Fellowship will have on this vital field,” she said.

Speaking to Observer, Dr Al Raidan expressed her delight at being selected for the prestigious programme, describing it as both an honour and a responsibility.

“I am very glad to have been chosen for the Humphrey Fellowship Programme. It is a dream for many, and I see it as

another opportunity to fulfil my responsibility towards society and to exchange ideas and expertise,” she said.

Dr Al Raidan has been a leading advocate for mental health and addiction prevention initiatives in Oman through her work with the Ministry of Health and in her role as Senior Medical Officer at the Addiction Unit of the Muscat Taafi Center. She has also previously served at Al Massara Hospital.

She has served as Head of the Mental Health Department within the Ministry of Health’s Non-Communicable Diseases Department, is a dedicated public speaker, and a board member of NGOs including the Omani Autism Association. She is also the former president of the Al Hayat Association for Drug Awareness.

SHORT TAKES



Nepal Embassy hosted a beach clean-up and peace walk to mark International Everest Day

EVEREST DAY SEES BEACH CLEAN-UP, AND PEACE WALK

MUSCAT: The Embassy of Nepal in Muscat organised a Peace Walk and beach cleaning event at Qurum Beach to mark International Everest Day on May 29.

The walk began at 5 am, with participation from members of the Non-Resident Nepali Social Club, Nepali community organisations and friends of Nepal. Participants also took part in a beach clean-up drive as part of environmental awareness efforts.

Ambassador Dornath Aryal who spoke on the occasion expressed gratitude to all participants, highlighting the importance of such initiatives in strengthening community unity and enhancing the image of the Nepali diaspora in Oman.

This year, Everest Day coincided with Nepal’s Republic Day, which was also marked with a special ceremony at the Embassy of Nepal in Muscat. During the event, Ambassador Aryal hoisted the national flag and addressed attendees on the significance of Republic Day, the constitution, and Nepal’s republican system.

The Ambassador also formally inaugurated the Embassy’s e-Museum by activating a kiosk machine, describing it as an important step toward preserving historical records and strengthening cultural and diplomatic ties. He encouraged community members to explore the digital archive and share feedback.

Members of the Nepali community attended the events dressed in traditional attire, adding cultural vibrancy to the celebrations.

First Secretary and e-Museum Committee Convenor Bishesh Kumar Sah outlined the efforts taken to collect and curate materials for the digital museum and said the platform would soon be made available on the Embassy’s website.

The events reflected a blend of environmental awareness, cultural celebration and digital innovation, highlighting the Embassy’s efforts to engage the community in meaningful initiatives.

NAMAT SCHOOL COMPETITION SET FOR SEPTEMBER

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAY 30

The Namat School Competition and Capacity Building Programme, one of the Environment Society of Oman’s (ESO) key environmental education initiatives in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, and Veolia, will be held in September 2026.

ESO has also renewed its partnership with Veolia until 2028, with a memorandum of understanding signed on the sidelines of Oman Sustainability Week, reinforcing long-term cooperation aimed at empowering youth, strengthening environmental expertise, and advancing sustainability education in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The Namat School Competition encourages government schools to form teams comprising students, teachers and parent council members to design and implement impactful environmental projects within their communities.

Since its inception, the programme has expanded its reach and impact, fostering environmental awareness among young people while equipping participants with practical skills through hands-on engagement.

The Capacity Building Programme continues to train young Omanis in areas such as science communication, field research, environmental education, community engagement and sustainability management.

The initiative is designed to provide a structured and multidisciplinary learning approach that strengthens national capacity in environmental conservation and prepares participants to contribute to a more sustainable future.

MILITARY HAJ MISSION PILGRIMS COMPLETE RITUALS

MUSCAT/MECCA: Pilgrims of the military Haj mission successfully completed the Haj rituals for this year after a deeply spiritual journey marked by devotion, discipline and an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity.

The pilgrims moved between the holy sites of Arafat, Muzdalifah and Mina, performing the sacred rituals with ease and reassurance amid a well-coordinated system of services, care and organisation designed to



Major General Hassan Ihsan Naseeb (Retd) received the military Haj mission at Seeb Air Base upon their return from the Holy Land.

ensure their comfort and safety.

The completion of the pilgrimage reflected the extensive preparations and logistical efforts undertaken to provide the pilgrims with an environment conducive to worship, enabling them to carry out the rituals smoothly and with peace of mind. Officials overseeing the mission maintained continuous field-level supervision throughout the pilgrims’ movement and stay at the holy sites, ensuring that all

aspects of support and care were efficiently delivered. The integrated organisational and service framework contributed significantly to the successful implementation of operational plans, helping pilgrims complete their spiritual journey under favourable conditions.

The military Haj mission forms part of Oman’s broader efforts to facilitate a smooth and spiritually fulfilling pilgrimage experience for all participants. — ONA

E-transport document to regulate freight sector

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 30

THE MINISTRY of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has introduced an Electronic Transport Document system aimed at improving regulation, transparency and operational efficiency across the Sultanate of Oman’s truck freight industry.

The initiative forms part of broader efforts to modernise and organise land transport through a unified digital platform capable of documenting freight operations before shipment movement begins, while enhancing compliance and oversight within the logistics sector.

Haitham al Zadjali, Director of the Land Transport Department at the Directorate-General of Roads and Land Transport, said the transport document is an electronic record issued through the ministry’s online system prior to any freight movement by truck.

The document contains detailed information related to shipments, carriers, cargo owners and transport routes.

“The transition toward mandatory implementation comes in response to the significant expansion in freight movement and logistics services across the Sultanate of Oman,” Al Zadjali said. “The system helps regulate the sector, reduce irregular practices, document transport routes and minimise violations and random freight operations.”

He explained that the transport document had previously existed as an optional service used by some companies to safeguard the rights of consignors and recipients. However, with the rapid growth of Oman’s logistics and trade sectors, a mandatory and unified system became increasingly necessary.



Stakeholders described it as a major step toward improving governance within the freight sector

According to Al Zadjali, the system is expected to address long-standing challenges within the freight transport industry by enabling authorities to verify shipment details, carrier information and transport routes, while also allowing customers to track shipments until delivery.

He stressed that the document serves not only as a regulatory tool but also as a mechanism to protect the rights of all parties involved, thereby strengthening trust and reliability in commercial transport operations.

Industry stakeholders have welcomed the move, describing it as a major step toward improving governance within the freight sector.

Naser al Barwani, owner of a transport company operating between ports and industrial zones, said the initiative would improve market organisation and reduce disputes arising from insufficient shipment documentation.

“A unified electronic transport document will significantly improve market organisation and increase credibility for professional transport

companies,” he said. “Having shipment data digitally available will also simplify procedures and improve workflow efficiency, especially for operations linked to ports and logistics hubs.”

Al Zadjali noted that the system applies to all trucks transporting goods, including container carriers, liquid cargo transporters and general freight vehicles operating from ports, factories and industrial areas across the Sultanate of Oman.

The transport document can be issued directly through the ministry’s electronic platform, supported by a 24-hour hotline to assist users.

While penalties have been introduced for non-compliance, Al Zadjali emphasised that the ministry’s objective is to regulate and improve standards rather than impose fines.

As Oman advances its ambitions to position itself as a regional logistics hub, the Electronic Transport Document initiative marks another step toward building a more efficient, transparent and digitally governed freight transport sector.

The initiative forms part of broader efforts to modernise and organise land transport through a unified digital platform

Multi-career trend grows among young people

MUSCAT: The concept of ‘professional success’ among the younger generation is increasingly shifting away from a single job title or fixed career path, evolving instead into a more flexible, multi-dimensional model that blends employment, creative work and digital engagement.

In the context of rapid labour market transformation and expanding digital platforms, a growing number of young people are embracing “composite professional identities,” combining multiple roles simultaneously and redefining traditional ideas of work and specialisation.

Observers say this shift does not signal a rejection of expertise or academic focus, but rather reflects a desire to move beyond restrictive definitions of professional identity. Today, an individual can be an employee, content creator and entrepreneur at the same time, supported by digital tools that enable creativity and production outside



conventional frameworks.

However, the trend has also sparked debate over whether such diversity strengthens productivity or leads to professional distraction and reduced focus.

Chemistry teacher and educational content creator Naif bin Ibrahim al Alawi believes that combining multiple career paths has become a necessity shaped by the demands of the modern era.

He sees no contradiction between teaching and content creation, describing the two as complementary roles that enhance one another.

He noted that classroom experience helps him understand student needs more effectively, while digital content creation allows him to simplify and communicate knowledge in more innovative ways.

“Real-world experience and digital content complement each other and create greater impact,” he said.

University of Technology and Applied Sciences student in Nizwa, Shamail al Hosni, presents another example of this evolving trend. She believes life cannot be confined to a single path, and that exploration is essential for self-discovery and career clarity. She said her experiences across design, media, theatre and volunteer work helped her develop a deeper understanding of her strengths and interests. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT



KABEER
YOUSUF

WHILE

OMANI
CITIZENS
and government
employees continue
to benefit from free

healthcare at public institutions, concerns are mounting among sections of society over the rising cost of medicines and private healthcare services in the Sultanate of Oman, particularly for expatriates and low-income residents. A recent social media post by an Omani citizen questioning the high cost of prescribed medicines has reignited public debate over healthcare affordability in Oman.

The individual expressed shock after discovering that a medicine prescribed by a physician cost nearly RO 30 in Oman, while a similar medication was available for the equivalent of around RO 3 in another country.

“This incident prompts us to ask an important question: is it truly reasonable for the price of medication in Oman to be ten times higher than in other countries?” the citizen wrote on social media. “Medication is not a luxury commodity; it is a fundamental human necessity intrinsically linked to the lives and well-being of patients.”

Healthcare services in Oman remain heavily subsidised for citizens and GCC nationals through public hospitals and clinics, with government spending estimated at around RO 300 per person annually. Emergency care is also provided free of charge to all residents and visitors, regardless of nationality.

However, expatriates relying on private healthcare often face considerable out-of-pocket expenses or depend heavily on insurance coverage. Private consultation fees typically range between RO 15 and RO 30, while treatment costs can escalate for specialised care.

Dental procedures, for example, can range from RO 15 to RO 30 for routine check-ups, while dental implants may cost anywhere between RO 500 and RO 1,200. Maternity care in private hospitals can cost approximately RO 180 for a natural delivery and RO 450 for a caesarean section.

Dr Benny Panakkan, Medical Director at Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, acknowledged that medicine costs remain a limiting factor in the treatment of chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension.

“Even though older medicines are available in generic formulations at comparatively lower prices, it is still difficult for low-income patients to bear the expenses if they are not covered by insurance,” he said.

To ease the burden, Dhamani health insurance has been mandatory for private-sector expatriates since 2023, with employers required to provide basic health coverage.

Insurance premiums vary, with basic worker plans costing around RO 40–60 annually, while family packages can range between RO 250 and RO 400, offering a basic coverage limit of RO 4,500 per year.

A representative from a private healthcare provider noted that Oman’s healthcare costs are moderate when compared to some Western nations. “Compared to private healthcare costs in certain

Western countries, Oman’s costs are moderate. However, compared to the free public healthcare enjoyed by citizens, expatriates often pay out of pocket or through insurance. That is why private insurance remains strongly recommended,” the representative said.

Medical professionals, however, agree that rising medical costs can significantly affect healthcare accessibility and patient outcomes.

Dr Dilip Kumar Singvi, Specialist in Internal Medicine at Burjeel Hospital,

said medication — particularly for chronic diseases — constitutes a major component of healthcare spending and can place a substantial burden on household finances.

“In Oman, rising medication and healthcare costs are being driven by health-related inflation and increasing demand for private medical services. At the same time, the growing prevalence of chronic illnesses such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, asthma and kidney-related ailments is contributing to rising healthcare expenditure,” Dr Dilip observed.

Dr Mahmoud al Rahbi, Head of Emergencies at Samayil Hospital under the Ministry of Health, warned that expensive medicines could discourage patients from adhering to treatment.

“When medicines become too expensive, several problems emerge. Patients may delay or avoid treatment, skip medications, reduce doses or stop treatment entirely. This is especially dangerous for chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma and cancer,” he said. As public debate continues, many are calling for a comprehensive review of medication pricing, stronger regulatory oversight and wider access to affordable alternatives that take into account the income realities of both citizens and residents.



When medicines become too expensive, patients may delay or avoid treatment altogether; skip doses, reduce prescribed medication, or discontinue therapy entirely. This is particularly concerning in chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and cancer.

DR MAHMOUD
AL RAHBI
Head of
Emergencies
Samayil Hospital

SHORTTAKES



Azerbaijan Independence Day celebrations were held in Muscat recently.

OMAN–AZERBAIJAN
TIES EXPANDING
ACROSS TRADE
AND LOGISTICS

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAY 30

Bilateral relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Sultanate of Oman are witnessing rapid expansion across trade, transport, and logistics, supported by growing political engagement and new diplomatic facilitation measures, according to the Azerbaijani diplomatic mission in Muscat.

The relationship has been further strengthened by the opening of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Muscat in late 2025, alongside recent political consultations and a visa exemption agreement for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports.

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of Azerbaijan's Independence Day celebrations in Muscat, Ambassador Rashad Ismayilov said ties between the two countries, established in 1992, are built on mutual respect and a shared commitment to expanding cooperation across political, economic, and humanitarian fields.

He said both sides are actively working to deepen collaboration, particularly in developing joint economic initiatives and enhancing connectivity between key logistics hubs, including the Port of Baku and Alat Free Economic Zone with SOHAR Port and Frezone.

The envoy noted that these efforts are creating new opportunities for trade and investment, while also strengthening cultural and people-to-people exchanges between the two friendly nations.

The reception marking Azerbaijan's Independence Day was attended by Anwar bin Hilal al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, as the guest of honour, along with undersecretaries, diplomats and officials from the Foreign Ministry.

The event also brought together heads and representatives of diplomatic missions accredited to Oman.

Oman Across Ages Museum marks ‘Joy of Generations’

MANAH: The Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah organised the ‘Joy of Generations’ event during the Eid Al Adha holiday, offering a festive atmosphere filled with cultural and recreational activities for visitors of all ages.

The event featured a diverse programme aimed at strengthening family engagement and celebrating Omani cultural traditions. Activities included folk performances by the Manah Folk Arts Troupe, face painting, colouring plaster sculptures for children, and an interactive storytelling segment that revived the art of storytelling in an engaging and entertaining manner.

The celebration attracted families



The ‘Joy of Generations’ event strengthens Omani cultural heritage.

and visitors seeking to enjoy the Eid festivities in an environment blending culture, heritage and entertainment. Eng Abdullah bin Al

Yaqdhan al Harthy, Director-General of the Oman Across Ages Museum, said the annual “Joy of Generations” initiative is designed to enhance the

festive spirit of Eid while deepening intergenerational connections to Omani heritage and social values.

“The ‘Joy of Generations’ event comes annually to add an atmosphere of joy to the holiday and strengthen the connection of generations to Omani cultural heritage and its social values, in a framework that enriches the visitor experience and reflects the atmosphere of Eid,” he said.

The event also forms part of the museum's broader efforts to offer interactive cultural experiences that encourage public engagement and celebrate the richness of Oman's traditions in a contemporary setting. — ONA

Tiwi breakwaters project
to enhance sustainability

THE Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has completed the breakwaters rehabilitation project in the Niyabat of Tiwi in the Wilayat of Sur, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. The project enhances infrastructure readiness for the fisheries sector and supports the safety and sustainability of maritime activities.

Eng Abdulnoor bin Issa al Balushi, Director of the Breakwaters Rehabilitation Project in Tiwi, said the project has reached 100 per cent completion at a cost of approximately RO 2.9 million.

He explained that the initiative aims to protect the coastline from strong waves and tidal impacts, while upgrading maritime infrastructure to improve fishing and mooring facilities.

The rehabilitation works included strengthening breakwaters and improving navigation safety, thereby enhancing protection for fishermen and supporting the sustainability of marine resources.

The project aligns with national efforts to develop fisheries



ENG ABDULNOOR
BIN ISSA
AL BALUSHI

The project has reached 100 per cent completion at a cost of approximately RO 2.9 million



The rehab project enhances infrastructure readiness for the fisheries sector.

infrastructure and improve ports and coastal harbours across the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Balushi noted that the project contributes to supporting the fisheries sector and promoting sustainable development in coastal communities by providing a safer environment for fishermen and facilitating the movement of fishing boats. He added that it also helps boost fisheries production, stimulate local economic

activity, and expand investment opportunities linked to the sector, while offering better protection for boats and equipment during varying weather conditions.

The project's location in Tiwi gives it strategic importance due to the area's active fishing operations and maritime activity, reinforcing its role in serving coastal communities and delivering sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits. — ONA

Qurayat fishing port undergoes major infrastructure boost

QURAYAT: The fishing port in the Wilayat of Qurayat in Muscat Governorate is undergoing a series of development and investment projects aimed at strengthening infrastructure and enhancing services for fishermen and investors, in a move expected to support the local economy and stimulate maritime-related commercial and tourism activities.

Eng Abdullah bin Khalfan al Hinai, Project Manager, said Qurayat fishing port is among the oldest and most significant fishing ports in the Sultanate of Oman due to its strategic location and role in supporting a range of maritime activities.

Al Hinai said the ongoing projects are part of wider efforts to modernise fishing ports and reinforce their developmental and economic role.

He noted that the project involving the addition of a fixed pier to the breakwater at Qurayat fishing port has reached a completion rate of 100 per cent, with investments exceeding RO 2.9 million. The project includes the construction of a 185-metre-long fixed marine pier, designed to facilitate docking for fishing vessels and boats while enhancing marine operations and service efficiency at the port.

Al Hinai added that the project also includes the creation of a new investment area spanning 33,000 square metres, designated for commercial and service activities linked to the fisheries sector. The initiative is expected to

Investments exceeding RO 2.9 million have been directed towards the fixed pier added to the breakwater at Qurayat Fishing Port, with the project now fully completed



The ongoing projects are part of wider efforts to modernise fishing ports.

attract quality investments and generate direct and indirect employment opportunities for local residents.

He further explained that the project incorporates a dedicated site for a marine crane to support the maintenance and repair of vessels and fishing boats, helping improve technical services for fishermen while reducing

time and operational costs.

Qurayat Port is also home to several fisheries-related investment ventures, including a fish processing and packaging facility operated by Blue Waters Company, a fish farming site run by Taj Al Bahr Company, as well as workshops specialising in the repair of fishing engines, boats and

marine equipment. Additional facilities include shops selling fishing gear and marine supplies, an ice factory, a fuel station, a fish market, fish grilling and sales outlets, and a tuna preservation warehouse.

Al Hinai stressed that these projects contribute significantly to enhancing the added value of the fisheries sector, stimulating economic activity within the port and supporting supply chains and logistics services associated with marine fishing.

According to official figures, fish landings at Qurayat port's fish market reached approximately 7,849 tonnes in 2025, with a total value exceeding RO 8.6 million, underscoring the port's economic importance and role in strengthening food security and fisheries-linked commerce.

Al Hinai emphasised that the development of marine fishing ports extends beyond service improvements to encompass broader social and economic goals, including improving working conditions for fishermen, promoting local investments, creating jobs, supporting coastal communities and boosting tourism through the sustainable use of marine resources.

He added that these projects represent an important step towards ensuring the sustainability of the fisheries sector and upgrading port infrastructure in line with Oman's efforts to diversify sources of income and strengthen the national economy. — ONA

US WARNS CAPABLE OF RESUMING WAR <i>The United States warned it was “more than capable” of resuming war with Iran after President Donald Trump said any peace deal must adhere to his red lines.</i>	ISRAELI STRIKE WOUNDS TWO LEBANESE SOLDIERS <i>Lebanon’s military said that a “targeted” Israeli strike wounded two soldiers in southern Lebanon, a day after delegations from the two countries met in Washington.</i>	IRAN SAYS TRUMP ‘BETRAYING DIPLOMACY’ <i>Mohsen Rezaei, an adviser to Iran’s Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei, said that Trump was “betraying diplomacy for the third time” by continuing a naval blockade.</i>	TRUMP MAKING FINAL DECISION ON IRAN DEAL <i>US President Donald Trump said that he was making his decision on a potential deal with Iran, though Tehran insisted there was still “no final agreement”.</i>	OIL FALLS, STOCKS MIXED ON TRUCE PROSPECTS <i>Stock markets were mixed while oil prices fell again on investor optimism that the United States and Iran would reach a deal to extend their ceasefire.</i>
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Plume of smoke rises following an Israeli strike, in Choueifat, Lebanon. — Reuters

US ‘CAPABLE’ TO RESTART IRAN WAR

THE UNITED STATES warned on Saturday it was “more than capable” of resuming war with Iran after President Donald Trump said any peace deal must adhere to his red lines, including Tehran never being able to develop nuclear weapons. The White House had signalled Trump was close to a decision on an initial deal after weeks of mixed signals in tenuous negotiations, though Tehran denied there was a final agreement on ending the Middle East conflict that has jolted the global economy.

US sources said the deal was waiting on Trump’s sign-off, but the president had made no decision after a two-hour meeting in the White House Situation Room on Friday in Washington. Meanwhile, Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth, while attending a major Asia defence summit in Singapore, said on Saturday local time that Washington could restart the war if it wanted. “Our ability to recommence if necessary is (that) we are more than capable, our stockpiles are more than suited for that, both there and around the globe because of how we balance exquisite and more plentiful munitions,” he said.

That echoed the US Central Comand (CENTCOM), which posted on X that American forces “remain present and vigilant across the region.”

The efforts to strike a deal mediated by Pakistan, were thrown into question this week by US strikes on the southern Iranian port of Bandar Abbas countered by retaliatory fire from Iran. Nevertheless diplomacy continued including in a parallel process to stop fighting in Lebanon - which Iran has insisted be included in any formal end to the war and where Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced Israeli forces had advanced further even as military delegations from both nations met at the Pentagon in Washington.

Trump’s priorities in any deal included Iran agreeing to never developing nuclear weapons and the re-opening of the blockaded Strait of Hormuz maritime route, he said in a social media post in which he also announced the Situation Room meeting. “President Trump will only make a deal that is good for America and satisfies his red lines,” a White House official said after the meeting. “Iran can never possess a nuclear weapon,” the official added.

Iranian foreign ministry spokesman

US sources said the deal was waiting on Trump’s sign-off, but the president had made no decision after a two-hour meeting in the White House Situation Room in Washington. Meanwhile, Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth, while attending a major Asia defence summit in Singapore, said on Saturday local time that Washington could restart the war if it wanted.

Esmaeil Baqaei pushed back on Trump’s conditions, telling state media that the Islamic republic “said goodbye to the language of ‘must’ 47 years ago.” Exchanges of messages were continuing, he added, but “no final agreement has been reached yet.” In a phone call with the Emir of Qatar, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said Iran was ready to achieve a “dignified framework” to end the war, according to state news agency IRNA. In his post, Trump said Tehran would remove mines from the Strait of Hormuz and end its closure of the waterway with “no tolls,” while the US would lift its parallel blockade of Iranian ports.

The two countries would also coordinate on removing and destroying Iran’s enriched uranium, he said, adding that “no money will be exchanged, until further notice.” Iran’s Fars news agency, however, cited sources as saying Tehran was demanding “the immediate release of \$12 billion in frozen Iranian assets” before moving to the next phase of negotiations. On the toll-free reopening of Hormuz, the sources said “no such clause appears in the text of the agreement,” while Trump’s comment on destroying Iran’s nuclear material “is

fundamentally baseless.” Ali, a resident of the city of Tonekabon north of Tehran, said there would likely be more strife to come. “Both sides are speaking in a way that keeps their supporters satisfied. It’s not clear who is telling the truth,” the 49-year-old said.

Separately, The heads of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and International Energy Agency warned on Friday of the risks to fuel security during peak demand summer months if oil shipping through the Strait of Hormuz does not return to normal.

“Global oil inventories are being drawn down at a record pace in response to the major loss of supply through the Strait of Hormuz,” the heads of the agencies said in a joint statement. “If shipping flows do not return to normal, continued rapid depletion of global oil inventories ahead of peak summer oil demand in the Northern Hemisphere would present increasing risks for fuel security, market conditions, and broader economic resilience.”

Meanwhile, Iran will have an answer from US authorities over their World Cup visa applications “this week”, their football federation vice-president Mehdi Mohammad Nabi said. — AFP

Hamas calls Israeli advance in Gaza ‘blatant violation’ of truce

GAZA: Hamas accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of a “blatant violation” of the October 2025 ceasefire after he ordered the army to seize more territory in the Gaza Strip. “In a blatant violation of all agreements, as is their usual practice, Netanyahu announced expanding control over 70 per cent of the Gaza Strip, while the killing and starvation continue,” Hamas political bureau member Bassem Naim said.

Hamas spokesman, Hazem Qassem, also condemned the “complete silence” of US President Donald Trump’s Board of Peace and its high representative for

Gaza, Nickolay Mladenov, on the topic. “Failing to condemn Israel’s expansionist policies and forced displacement plans raises serious questions about the extent of the sponsoring parties’ commitment to obliging Israel to adhere to its obligations” under the ceasefire deal, Qassem said in a separate statement.

On Thursday, Netanyahu had announced his intentions to have the military expand its control of Gaza from 60 per cent now, to 70 per cent. He said the military had controlled 50 per cent of Gaza under the terms of the ceasefire, adding: “My directive is to move to... 70 per cent”. “We’re squeezing them from all



Palestinian women look from a damaged house at the site of an Israeli strike at Shati (Beach) refugee camp, in Gaza City. — Reuters

(sides). We’ll deal with what’s left afterwards.”

The UN warned on Friday that an Israeli plan to take control of 70 per cent of Gaza will increase suffering among children already hit by the impacts of severe overcrowding. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ordered the military to take control of more territory in the Gaza Strip, flouting the terms of a fragile ceasefire that took effect in October.

He said the military had controlled 50 per cent of the Palestinian territory under the terms of the ceasefire, then advanced to take over 60 per cent.

The United Nations children’s agency Unicef warned that this would deepen the health crisis among children in the war-ravaged territory, suffering from acute lack of food, water and hygiene. Israel controls the flow of aid into the territory along with all entry points into Gaza, which has been under an Israeli blockade since 2007.

Even before Hamas’s October 7, 2023 attacks inside Israel triggered the war in Gaza, the territory was already very densely populated. Now “people have been crammed into around 40 per cent of the space”, Unicef spokesman Salim Oweis said, speaking from Gaza. — AFP

SUPREMELEADER



A woman holds an image of late Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei during a rally in Tehran. — Reuters

IRAN PREPARING FUNERAL FOR SLAIN SUPREME LEADER

TEHRAN: Iranian authorities are laying the groundwork for a “grand” funeral for slain supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, official media reported, following a lengthy postponement due to the Islamic republic’s war with the United States and Israel. Though the timing was still uncertain, “a special headquarters has been formed to prepare for the funeral ceremony, and various agencies are currently planning and making arrangements”, state TV reported, citing Mohsen Mahmoudi, head of the Tehran Coordination Council for Islamic Propaganda. Khamenei, who led the Islamic republic for more than three decades, was killed in the first wave of US-Israeli strikes that launched the war on February 28.

His son and successor Mojtaba Khamenei was also wounded in the attacks and has not been seen in public since assuming office. An event paying tribute to the elder Khamenei was organised in April, but a state funeral that was initially announced could not be held because of the war. “The enemy’s blind plan, after the imposed war, the economic pressure and the political and propaganda siege, is to create divisions and disintegration in order to compensate for military defeats and bring the nation to its knees,” said Khamenei, who has not appeared in public since before he took office in March.

State TV, citing Mahmoudi, said “different organisations are working to provide the necessary conditions so that, once officially announced, a ‘grand’ ceremony can be held”, adding “widespread attendance” was expected. Though a ceasefire has largely held since coming into effect in April, a deal to definitively end the conflict has proven elusive. — AFP

NUCLEAR STOCKPILE

Kazakhstan offers to take Iran’s uranium



Kazakhstan has offered to take Iran’s uranium stockpile if the United States and Iran reach an accord on Tehran’s contested nuclear programme, UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi said. The head of the IAEA met with Kazakhstan’s President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in Astana. The Financial Times said the Kazakh leader had expressed his country’s “openness” to store the stockpile enriched to near weapons grade level. — AFP

RESTRICTING EQUIPMENT

US sanctions Iranian buyers of military tech



The United States announced that it is “dismantling a sophisticated Iranian network” used to obtain sensitive military technology. The network “impersonated and defrauded” dozens of American technology companies out of millions of dollars to “acquire advanced equipment — including spectrum analysers and security detection devices — for Iran’s defence sector,” State Department Tommy Pigott said in a statement. — AFP

STORAGE OF WEAPONS

Iraqi group vows to keep fighting act



The influential Iraqi armed group Kataeb Hezbollah pledged on Saturday to keep up its fighting action, as Baghdad faces mounting US pressure to disarm factions backed by Iran. In a statement on Saturday, Kataeb Hezbollah security chief Abu Mujahid al-Assaf said that fighting is today a collective duty and we will carry it out on behalf of the brothers who have decided to abandon it. Some factions have agreed to operate under state institutions. — AFP

OPINION

Kaizen and the science of sustainable growth



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

A COLLEAGUE recently told me about his son, who is in his late twenties and works as an IT specialist, spending much of his day seated behind a desk.

His routine consists of long working hours, snacking between meals and struggling to maintain a healthy lifestyle. He has tried different diets, each promising quick results, yet none seemed to leave a lasting impact.

Like many others, he even signed up for a gym membership, only to find that by the end of a demanding workday, his motivation to exercise had quietly faded.

His experience reflects a common pattern. Many of us approach health with bursts of enthusiasm, often driven by the desire for rapid transformation. But when change feels too drastic or overwhelming, it rarely lasts.

The problem is not a lack of intention, but the way we think about change itself.

Recently, I came across the concept of Kaizen, a Japanese philosophy centred on continuous improvement. The term combines Kai (change) and Zen (good), reflecting the idea that meaningful progress

does not come from dramatic shifts but from small, consistent steps taken over time.

At first glance, the idea may seem too simple to be effective. How can small actions compete with structured diets or intense workout plans?

Yet, this is precisely where Kaizen offers a different perspective. Instead of attempting sweeping lifestyle changes, it encourages individuals to accept almost uncomfortably small changes.

A five-minute walk in the evening, choosing to take the stairs once a day, reducing one sugary drink, or stretching briefly at the end of the day.

These actions may appear insignificant, but they serve an important purpose. They lower resistance and make change feel manageable. More importantly, they create momentum. Over time, these small adjustments begin to accumulate, quietly shaping behaviour in a way that feels natural rather than forced.

Kaizen also shifts attention from outcomes to processes. Rather than focusing solely on the goal, such as losing weight, it encourages

In a world that often celebrates rapid results, Kaizen offers a quieter message that lasting change is rarely sudden

individuals to examine the daily habits that either support or hinder progress.

Why do certain patterns persist? What value do healthier choices bring? This type of reflection transforms change from a vague ambition into a practical and structured journey.

At the heart of Kaizen lies a simple cycle made of the following: plan, do, verify and act. Choose a small habit, practise it consistently, evaluate its impact and adjust when needed. Then repeat. It is a cycle that mirrors how real change often occurs, not in dramatic leaps but in steady, thoughtful progression.

For my colleague's son, the lesson is a reassuring one. A healthier lifestyle does not have to begin with strict diets or exhausting gym routines. It can start with something much simpler, and perhaps more sustainable, one small step taken today, and repeated tomorrow. In a world that often celebrates rapid results, Kaizen offers a quieter message that lasting change is rarely sudden. More often, it is built gradually, one small decision at a time.

UK PLANS AI FACIAL SCANS FOR ASYLUM AGE CHECKS

CHRISTOPHER MCKEON

The UK Home Office is set to begin using AI facial recognition tests to estimate the age of asylum seekers claiming to be children.

Harlow-based IT company Akhter Computers has been awarded a \$431,900 contract to provide ‘an algorithm that can accurately predict the age of a subject,’ according to an official notice published on Friday.

It added that the Home Office could use the technology to determine the age of people who lack “verifiable identity documents,” such as those arriving in the UK on small boats. The technology is expected to be used alongside existing methods of age estimation, with the Home Office saying it had shown “promising performance and accuracy” in initial tests. Unaccompanied children seeking asylum are treated differently from adults, and being under the age of 18 can, in some cases, have an impact on whether asylum is granted. Age assessments are currently carried out by immigration officers in cases where the age of an asylum seeker is disputed.

But a report last year found some staff at the Western Jet Foilreception centre in Dover lacked adequate training.

The report by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration also noted it was ‘inevitable’ some assessments would be wrong “in the absence of a foolproof ‘test’ of chronological age”.

In the year to March 2026, some 6,420 people were subject to an initial age assessment - 7 per cent of all those claiming asylum in the UK - and 43 per cent were found to be adults. But those decisions can be challenged.

Official figures show 17 per cent of those initially found to be adults in the second half of 2025 were later found to be children, with more awaiting a reassessment.

The Home Office notice lists German company Cognitec as a subcontractor, with the firm already working with border agencies in Germany and Australia to verify passengers’ identities at airports.

The technology is expected to be brought into use in 2027, with the Home Office saying it will undergo “rigorous” testing beforehand.

Border security minister Alex Norris said: “For too long, adult migrants making false age claims have exploited the system and diverted vital support away from children at risk. “

That is why we are rolling out AI technology to put a stop to this, ensuring those who game the system are identified, detained and removed without delay, and those who deserve support and protection are given it.”

Labour has pledged to slash the number of people crossing the Channel in small boats. — dpa

I am learning how cruel
Lewy Body dementia can be

“IF YOU loved someone, you loved him, and when you had nothing else to give, you still gave him love.” ~ George Orwell

I have lost my lifelong friend, William, and I am struggling to cope with it. He is still alive, yet the friend I knew has gone. That is the hardest truth to put into words. We were closer than brothers. We knew each other’s quirks, shared the same eccentric sense of humour, were schoolmates, went to the same university together, became teachers and came from modest backgrounds.

After university, we opened our first school together as the youngest School Principals in the UK. Those early years in Cambridge were the most demanding of my life, but also the most exhilarating.

When my friend left to open his school in Brighton, life for me was never quite the same.

I went on to open two more schools and, in worldly terms, I made my mark. My friend chose a different path. He kept his school small, faithful to the principles we had started with.

At the time, I thought he was wrong, but he was proven right. He kept alive the spirit of real education. He gave students room to think for themselves, encouraged critical thought, and cared just as much for the less academic student as for the gifted one.

He had no interest in glittering prizes, in headlines, or in the gimmickry of league tables, easily manipulated to flatter a school. He cared about his students’ well-being and his school earned respect because it offered excellent results without sacrificing its soul. He was, in educational terms, better than me in the ways that truly matter. He was kind, generous, loyal and the best friend I could ever have wished for.

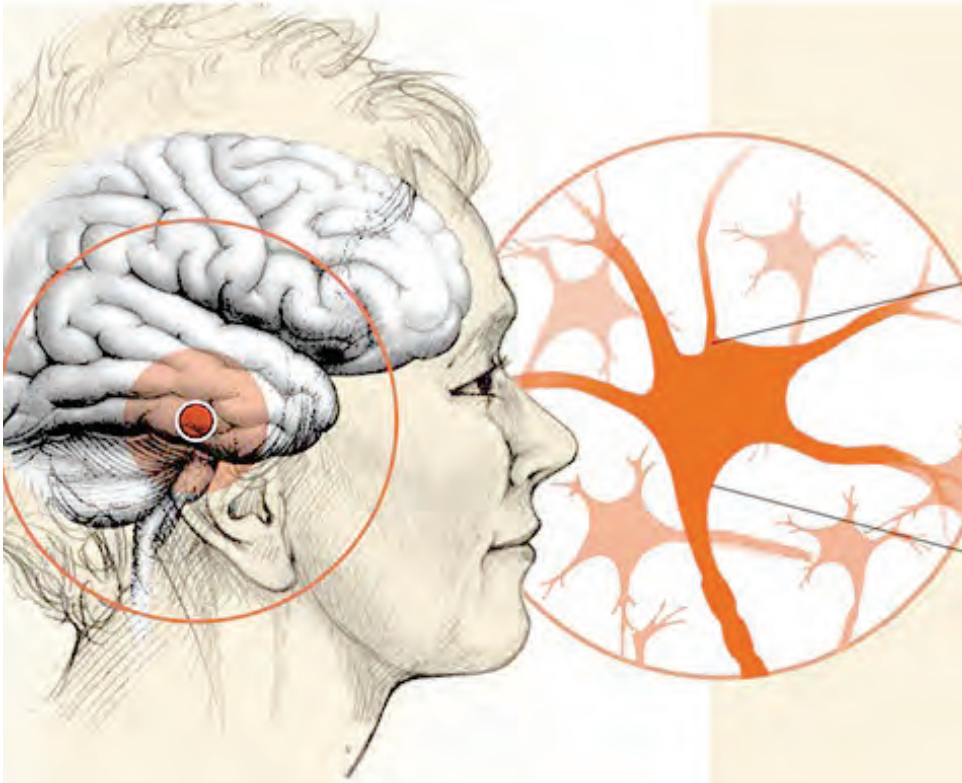
Our friendship grew even closer after he moved to Brighton. Now that he has gone in the way that Lewy Body dementia can take a



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

Lewy Body dementia robs a person of personality, confidence and the ability to trust what is real. Hallucinations can become part of daily life



Lewy Body dementia is cruel to the patient and those closest. It doesn’t just take life. It takes people while they are still alive.

person before death, I feel as though I have lost part of myself. I use the past tense, yet grammar feels wrong here, because my friend is still alive.

But the man I knew has been taken from me by a terrible illness. Lewy Body dementia robs a person of personality, confidence and the ability to trust what is real. Hallucinations can become part of daily life. Fear and depression can follow. A person may recognise those around him, or may not. The body remains, but the person you knew disappears.

My friend’s illness suddenly worsened, caused by an infection on top of the dementia. He is now hospitalised. He is childless and has lived alone since his wife died. His sister is doing all she can, but it now seems likely he will need round-the-clock care.

Lewy Body dementia is cruel to the patient and those closest. It doesn’t just take life. It takes people while they are still alive. It leaves

loved ones standing by, unable to stop the loss, unable to bring back the mind that made the person they were.

There is no clean break, no clear moment to begin grieving. Instead, one watches the person fade, day by day, and one suffers a kind of endless grief.

I miss my friend’s intelligence, wit, loyalty, decency and the way he understood me as few people ever have. Above all I miss his humour and our shared laughter. I still love him. I always will. But I mourn the man who once walked beside me through life.

His illness has left me with a sadness that is hard to name. It is sorrow, helplessness, disbelief and the pain of watching your friend vanish. This disease also places a heavy burden on those closest.

You grieve without closure, you hope for a return that may never come. I have lost my friend and yet he is still here. And I miss him so.

Seneca’s stoicism, or Orwell’s truth a grand debate



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

BEING WEALTHY, or not, is not wrong... it is more often the hand we are dealt, and while most of us would rather have our ‘more,’ most of us would rather have our ‘more’ honesty, and respect. The philosopher Seneca wrote, “It is not the man who has too little, but the man who craves more, that is poor,” but it’s a platitude, not profound, not insightful and gratuitous. Hollow words from a man who served the debauched Caligula and Nero, who ‘fiddled while Rome burned.’ Seneca, in fact, was born into wealth, and manipulating his influence became indecently wealthy, yet his philosophies are icons of stoicism, the understanding that we can only control our reactions to external events, having no influence over the events themselves. That implies that we should simply accept everything that ‘happens,’ but given the traumatic nature of that ‘evolution,’ as we cast our eyes towards the American/ Iranian, Russian/Ukrainian, ‘conflicts,’ the unsettling Palestinian, Cuban, Ecuadorean, and even Greenland ‘issues,’ the immigration ‘problems’ uncomfortably destabilising Europe, the thoroughly discomfiting, continuing, Jeffrey Epstein revelations, the extent of global corruption, the global environmental response, the effect on societies of illegal substances, and the threat of another pandemic through hantavirus. Should we be stoical, or should we be seeking answers? George Orwell’s observation that “During times of universal deceit, telling

the truth becomes a revolutionary act,” is probably what most terrifies the denizens of the political depths. Our greatest issue, as I see it, is that we can ask all the questions we like, but our intellect is continually being insulted by evasion and artifice, by disguise and obfuscation, delivered with such contempt and dismissal as to make us feel unworthy of response. President Trump mutters, President Putin intimidates, Prime Minister Starmer denies, President Ramaphosa repudiates, Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un threatens, Prime Minister Netanyahu gloats... and so it goes on, with only a few treated with any dignity or respect. Whether you agree with that statement or not, check out online videos of the conduct of participants in US House of Representative House Committee Sessions where the refusal to answer questions, the evasion, the filibustering, and the absence of accountability are simply astounding. How do these people sleep at night knowing that we now know they are strangers to the truth, with the temerity to dismiss questions and concerns as ‘none of your business.’ Similarly, the UK Parliament has seen plenty of questions and few answers during their volatile week. So, what can the ordinary citizen do, apart from the denial that stoicism offers, to seek accountability, and with it, change? The answer, I believe, lies in education, but not education as we know it. The world has changed, yet education has

The world has changed, yet education has not, as we are still teaching, as a hundred years ago, with the most basic of objectives, to read and write..., while forgetting the most important of questions, the why?

not, as we are still teaching, as a hundred years ago, with the most basic of objectives, to read and write... how or what we say, while forgetting the most important of questions, the why? Memorisation remains the thrust of assessments, and the format of thoughtful response by way of analysis is given greater importance than interpretation. That’s so wrong! Think about this... millions of exams take place every year, when students are told to put their best academic foot forward, yet they never get their papers back to review or discuss their thoughts, or the motivation behind them. I know... you’re going to say it’s impossible! But the reality is that trusting teachers, in the exact same way that university lecturers are trusted, where assessments are concerned, would be a simple first step. More work, yes, but more effective, more rewarding work, for teachers and students. The process of education is currently failing, it’s too generic, and it’s not asking the right questions. In learning to ask and answer questions better, education will enable us to trash stoicism as the dark presence it is, and to seek the truth it conceals. For now, we don’t have the answers, because nobody answers our questions. Just check out the conduct of the, let’s call them civil servants, the government employees and elected officials of the United States.

MYANMAR FARMERS FACE FERTILISER, FUEL DEARTH

LYNN MYAT

Under monsoon skies leaden with rain, Myanmar rice farmers despondently tend their paddy fields, doubtful the deluge will bring bountiful harvests during a fuel and fertiliser crisis caused by the Iran war. “If prices continue to rise, I will be a beggar,” says veteran farmer Soe Naing, perched on a sack of rice seed overlooking his 30 acres of rented land outside the delta town of Kawhmú. “I may give up working as a farmer, but growing rice is my calling,” the 49-year-old said between thunderous sheets of rain heralding the start of planting season across Myanmar’s riverine south. The Southeast Asian nation imports 90 per cent of its fuel oil, according to official figures. Up to 95 per cent of its chemical fertilisers — produced in abundance in the Gulf where natural gas is burnt to synthesise ammonia — is also imported, according to the UN’s World Food Programme. Spiking prices of both commodities have left Myanmar farmers struggling to fuel rotavators needed to till fields or buy fertiliser to boost their seedlings at a crucial time in the agricultural calendar. The WFP warns a 50 per cent drop in fertiliser use could result in farming output dipping up to 15 per cent in Myanmar, where food insecurity is already widespread. “The current situation is the most difficult time we have faced,” said Soe Naing. “As for my hope, I have nothing other than my fields.” More than 4,000 kilometres from the embattled Strait of Hormuz, Moe Aung’s paddy — situated a 15-minute boat ride up a serpentine creek — is beholden to the shock of the global shipping crisis. He sows seed onto the mud but plans to ration half a bag of fertiliser per acre this year — one-sixth of what his crop needs to thrive. “I am just doing it because I own fields, but I don’t want to do it,” says the 53-year-old. “I have no willingness to continue if this situation doesn’t end.” Prices for a 50-kilogramme bag of fertiliser have multiplied up to five times, he estimates, now costing as much as \$48. Moe Aung works with his hands in the sucking mud of the humid paddy fields. But much of his profession now entails complex mental arithmetic and accountancy as he struggles to manage a cycle of high-interest debt worsened by the far-off Middle East war. Buying fertiliser on credit and paying the bill after the harvest is common, but this year Moe Aung fears the sums will simply not add up. “I don’t think the expense and the revenue will be equivalent,” he says. “Previously, we were comfortable; we could look after our parents, we could go for some social activities, our family was peaceful and happy,” he said. — AFP

Youth party channels anger, faces hurdles

THE LARGEST online expression of dissent against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s 12-year rule began with a satirical riposte to a jibe about young people, triggering death threats to its founder and pushback from ruling party politicians. The rapid fame of 30-year-old Abhijeet Dipke and his Cockroach Janta Party, which says it represents “the lazy, the unemployed, and the chronically correct”, is driven by the concerns of the young in a country where those below 30 are estimated to number more than half a population of 1.42 billion. “If all was well with the country and the economy, 20 million young people would not rally around something like this,” said political activist Yogendra Yadav, who was a top leader of a national movement against corruption in 2011. “This is a critical moment that tells us something about the state of our polity: underlying all the claims of total dominance, there is a latent but widespread disquiet.” But the new movement, fuelled by persistently high youth unemployment and recurring leaks of examination papers that threaten to derail the careers of millions of students, hints at cracks in a carefully cultivated image of stability and control. “This is their moment, but they need to walk carefully,” said prominent lawyer Prashant Bhushan, a founding figure of the anti-graft movement. “If they want to take it forward, they will have to organise and then come on the streets protesting on the issues which they have been raising online.” Critics say its tactics include wielding investigative agencies against senior opposition politicians, but the government has responded by saying authorities had been given a free hand to tackle corruption. Senior cabinet minister Kiren Rijiju has said Dipke’s group was



The Cockroach Janta Party logo is seen in this illustration. — Reuters



TORA AGARWALA

The writer is an independent journalist



SAURABH SHARMA

The writer is a journalist at Reuters

undermining the world’s biggest democracy by choosing the name of an insect, while accusing it of seeking social media. In interactions from the US, where he has lived for the past two years, Dipke described sleepless nights creating social media content and doing media interviews. “The Indian government has declared me a national security threat,” he said by telephone from Chicago. “They are trying to defame me. But democratically, within our constitutional rights, we will do what needs to be done.” He said he has worked to free his X account from a government block, regain control of his CJP Instagram page from unknown hackers, and ensure the safety of family members in both countries after receiving threats of physical harm on WhatsApp. Police in the western state of Maharashtra, from which he hails, have assured him they will ensure his family’s safety, he said. Dipke has publicly shared data showing that about 95 per cent of the nearly 23 million followers of the Instagram account are based in

India, followed by countries such as the US, home to large groups of overseas Indians. More than two-thirds of these followers are Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2007, said Dipke, a public relations strategist, who graduated from Boston University and was a social media intern with India’s opposition Aam Aadmi Party. “They know I started this as a joke, as satire,” Dipke said. “But the country’s Gen Z wants me to actually do something. They don’t want this to be just another meme.” He has challenged the block of the X account in a Delhi court. X and India’s home and infotech ministries, as well as Modi’s office, did not respond to requests for comment. “The rise of web blocking in India shows how dissent and satire are being treated not as democratic expression, but as administrative threats,” said Apar Gupta, a lawyer and director of the Internet Freedom Foundation in New Delhi. Dipke said his followers want him to go beyond memes and he is discussing ways to turn the campaign into a credible movement, but no decision has been made on becoming a political party. The furor was set off by Dipke’s X post on May 16 that quickly went viral, asking, “What if all cockroaches come together?” He said the post was a response to comments by India’s top judge, Chief Justice Surya Kant of the Supreme Court, who compared some unemployed youth to cockroaches. Kant later said he did not mean to criticise young people but was referring to those with “fake and bogus degrees” whom he likened to “parasites”. CJP adopted a manifesto and took as its mascot the image of a cockroach on a mobile phone. With its message amplified by Indian social media influencers and content creators, it amassed a massive following on Instagram within days. — Reuters

SPORTS

SOLIDSHOW



Gujarat Titans' Shubman Gill plays a shot against Rajasthan Royals in the IPL second qualifier. — Reuters

GILL CENTURY STEERS GUJARAT PAST RAJASTHAN INTO IPL FINAL

NEW CHANDIGARH: Shubman Gill struck a sublime century as Gujarat Titans surged into the Indian Premier League final with a seven-wicket win over Rajasthan Royals in the second qualifier on Friday.

Chasing 215, Gujarat made a flying start through Sai Sudharsan and Gill, racing to 69 without loss in the powerplay before accelerating further to seal victory in 18.4 overs at a packed New PCA Stadium.

Rajasthan, who opted to bat, stumbled early after losing two wickets inside the first two overs before teenage sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and Ravindra Jadeja rebuilt the innings to post 214-6.

Rajasthan's bowlers struggled to make early inroads with Gujarat absorbing any pressure with ease as local favourite Gill and Sudharsan put on a decisive 167-run opening partnership, rotating the strike effectively and punishing loose deliveries.

GUJARAT REACH IPL FINAL WITH 7-WICKET WIN OVER RAJASTHAN

SHUBMAN GILL NAMED PLAYER OF THE MATCH

GUJARAT TO PLAY ROYAL CHALLENGERS BENGALURU IN FINAL

SOORYAVANSHI'S 47-BALL 96 GOES IN VAIN

"We complement and understand each other's game very well, and when we are batting out there, our communication is very good," Gill said after being named player of the match.

"We know one of us has to take down one of the bowlers, and I think we are very good at deciding who's going

to take down what bowler."

Captain Gill led from the front with 104 off 53 balls, including 15 fours and three sixes, while Sudharsan made 58 off 32 before falling in an unusual fashion. He was out after his bat slipped onto the wickets — remarkably, the same mode of dismissal that had befallen him in the previous match. "I don't think anyone has seen that happen in two games. I saw some video on social media about taping his hands, and I think I'll have to do that," Gill chuckled.

Sooryavanshi was once again the standout performer for Rajasthan as he smashed 96 off 47 laced with eight fours and seven sixes that drew strong support from the crowd.

The 15-year-old was handed a reprieve on 46 when Sudharsan dropped a diving catch, and he made the most of it but fell just short of another century. "The way Sooryavanshi's batted, it's not just slogging... he calculates, he assesses conditions. He does literally everything well," Rajasthan captain Riyan Parag said.

"I still can't figure out how, but hopefully he keeps doing that. Hopefully he represents our country and brings more laurels to the country."

Jadeja, who briefly left the field with a suspected elbow issue after the eighth over, returned in the 13th and combined with Donovan Ferreira to provide late impetus as Rajasthan built a competitive total, though not enough to challenge Gujarat.

Gujarat will face Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the final on Sunday at their home ground in Ahmedabad, where they will look to avenge their heavy defeat in the first qualifier and lift their second IPL title. — Reuters

Oman para athletes gear up for Tunisia, Asia events

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 30

THE NATIONAL para athletics team will resume intensive training on Sunday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher as part of its ongoing preparations for upcoming international assignments, including the Grand Prix in Tunisia from June 16 to 19, 2026, and the Asian Championship in Japan next October.

The training programme comes as part of the Oman Paralympic Committee's efforts to raise the technical and physical readiness of the athletes and increase the number of qualifiers for the Asian event. Eight athletes have already secured their places in the continental championship following the qualifiers held recently in Morocco.

A total of 20 male and female athletes are taking part in the current preparatory programme under the supervision of the national technical staff, led by head coach Sami al Zarli, alongside national coaches Awf al Maamari, Abdullah al Anbari and Asaad al Qarni.

The programme includes specialised track-and-field sessions, gym-based physical conditioning and focused technical drills designed to improve performance ahead of the next stage of competition.

The squad includes Mohammed al Mashaikhi, Taha al Harrasi, Mohammed al Qasmi, Fawzi al Hubaishi, Talib al Balushi, Sultan al Sinani, Maktoum al Muqbali, Qusai al Rawahi, Othman al Habsi, Saif al Muqaibli, Sagr al Qasmi, Maryam al Badi, Sharifa al Hatmi, Sarah al Anbouri, Rawan al Hasani, Shaikha al Hammadi, Aisha al Balushi, Iman al Shamsi, Amer al Rashdi and Muhanna Awlad Thani.

IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY

The team's participation in the Tunisia Grand Prix represents an important opportunity for athletes who did not compete in the Morocco qualifiers to achieve the required qualification marks and join their teammates who have already booked their places for the Asian Championship.

The event will also serve as a key



Oman para athletes during a training session at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.



National para athletics team members step up preparations ahead of the Tunisia Grand Prix.

technical test for the squad, offering the athletes valuable exposure and competitive experience against strong international participants in para athletics.

Coach Abdullah al Anbari said the technical staff is dealing with the current phase with great focus, as it represents an important step in the team's preparation for the coming assignments.

The team includes a group of ambitious athletes who are eager to improve and

compete at higher levels. During this period, we are working to prepare them in the best possible way, both technically and physically.

The Tunisia Grand Prix will be an important station for achieving new qualification marks, and our target is to increase the number of athletes who qualify for the Asian Championship, Al Anbari said.

He added that the training programme is progressing according to a clear plan that takes into consideration the different events and levels of the athletes.

He added, We have seen clear progress in performance and commitment during the recent period, and this gives us confidence that the athletes can deliver positive results in the upcoming competitions.

The Oman Paralympic Committee is looking to make the most of the coming stage by providing the team with the right environment to compete strongly in Tunisia, while continuing its efforts to expand Oman's representation at the Asian Championship in Japan and strengthen the presence of Omani para athletics at the continental level.

Oman women eye ACC Premier Cup breakthrough

MUSCAT: Oman women, skippered by Priyanka Mendonca, will head to Malaysia for the ACC Women's Premier Cup 2026 brimming with confidence as they look to secure a place in the knockout stage and move closer to qualification for the Asia Women's Cup.

The T20I tournament, featuring 18 teams from across Asia, will be played from June 3 to 13 across multiple venues in Malaysia. Oman have been drawn in Group B alongside UAE, China, Saudi Arabia and the Philippines.

According to the latest ICC Women's T20I rankings released on April 27, Oman are ranked seventh among the participating teams. While UAE are the highest-ranked side in the group at No 2, Oman hold a rankings advantage over China (10th), the Philippines (15th) and Saudi Arabia (18th), boosting their hopes of progressing to the knockout stage. The top two teams from each group will advance to the quarterfinals, with the four semifinalists securing



Oman are ranked seventh among the participating teams.

qualification for the Asia Women's Cup, making every group match crucial.

Oman coach Desmond Berhardt believes the tournament presents an excellent platform for his players to showcase their abilities against some of the continent's strongest teams.

"An 18-team tournament is a really good opportunity for the players to showcase their talent as they will be playing against some of the leading teams in the region," Berhardt said.

"We have worked tirelessly over the last calendar year. We have played some good series, worked on combinations and

clearly defined the roles of players through those matches. We played in the GCC Cup and couple of bilateral series and also brought in some young players. The girls are confident. We are ranked seventh and will take it game by game," the coach added.

Berhardt has urged his players to remain positive and trust the work they have put in over the past year. "I have told the players to play their natural game and make the right decisions on the field. We hope to reach the second round and make the country proud."

Oman open their campaign against China on June 3 before

taking on the formidable UAE the following day in what could be a key contest in determining the group standings. They then face Saudi Arabia on June 6 and conclude their group-stage campaign against the Philippines on June 7.

With a year of preparation behind them and a favourable ranking against three of their four group opponents, Oman will be aiming to make a strong impression in Malaysia and keep their hopes of Asia Women's Cup qualification alive.

OMAN SQUAD: Priyanka Mendonca (captain), Fiza Javed (vice-captain), Jayadhanyha Gunasekar, Hina Javed, Amanda Dcosta, Trupti Pawde, Cynthia Mary Saldanha, Sameera Khan, Nitya Joshi, Alifiya Sayed, Lujaina Sajid, Afida Aftab, Sahana Jeelany, Sushanthika Ashok; **Support staff:** Desmond Berhardt (head coach), Amir Ali (assistant coach), Damith Warusavithana (manager).

Oman fixtures (Oman time): June 3: Oman vs China, 10am; June 4: Oman vs UAE, 5.30am; June 6: Oman vs Saudi Arabia, 10am; June 7: Oman vs Philippines, 5.30 am.



Sohar beat Al Nahda 1-0 in the Jetour Cup final to claim their first ever title.

Oman 2025-26 football season provides impressive achievements



Seeb players celebrate with the Jindal League shield.



Al Nahda claimed the HM Cup for the season.



Al Musannah topped the First Division League.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 30

THE CURTAIN came down on the Oman 2025-2026 football season after more than nine months of intense competition, memorable moments and impressive achievements across various domestic and regional tournaments. Organised by the Oman Football Association (OFA), the season featured 10 major local competitions and witnessed the continued development of football at all levels. The season officially kicked off on July 26 with Al Shabab crowned as champions of the Super Cup and concluded on May 23 when Seeb Club lifted the Jindal League shield, capping a dominant campaign.

SEEB SHINE WITH THREE TITLES
Seeb emerged as the undisputed star of the season after securing the Jindal League title with 67 points, one of the club's most impressive league campaigns. The Muscat-based side demonstrated remarkable consistency throughout the 26-round competition, collecting 21 victories, four draws and suffering only one defeat. Seeb's dominance extended beyond the senior level. The club also captured the Under-19 League title for the third time in its history after defeating Al Musannah Club 2-1 in the final last March. In addition, Seeb's young talents won the Under-10 Football Festival after securing victories in all their matches, while Sohar Club and Al Oruba Club finished second and third respectively. However, Al Shabab prevented Seeb from completing a clean sweep of domestic silverware after winning the Super Cup on penalties following a goalless draw at Al Saada Sports Stadium in Salalah. Al Nahda were crowned champions of the HM Cup following their 2-0 win over Oman Club at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in February and it was the second title for Al Nahda as they previously won the prestigious title in 2023.

SOHAR'S FIRST CROWN
Sohar celebrated one of the finest moments in its history by winning the Jetour Cup for the first time after defeating Al Nahda Club 1-0 in the final. Al Musannah claimed the first division league title with 32 points, while historic club Fanja Club secured promotion back to the top flight as runners-up. In beach soccer, Al Amerat Club continued its supremacy by winning a third consecutive league title. The team completed a perfect campaign and sealed the championship with a dramatic 7-6 victory over Al Oruba in the final round. Masirah Club finished second. At youth level, Al Suwaiq Club won the Under-21 League after defeating Al Oruba 2-1 in the final, while Izki Club celebrated its first-ever

football title by winning the Under-17 League following a 1-0 victory over Al Khabourah Club. **REGIONAL CAMPAIGNS** On the continental stage, Al Shabab reached the quarterfinals of the 2025-26 AFC Challenge League before bowing out following a 5-3 defeat to Kuwait SC in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Meanwhile, Al Nahda's journey in the 2025-26 AGCFF Gulf Club Champions League ended at the group stage as Qatar's Al Rayyan SC and Saudi Arabia's Al Shabab FC progressed to the knockout rounds.

JINDAL LEAGUE STATISTICS
The Jindal League produced an impressive 455 goals across the season, with 229 goals scored during the first round and 226 during the second round. Al Shabab's attacker Maleko Kenyan led the top scorers with 21 goals while Abdulsalam al Shukaili from Bahla came in second with 20 goals and Seeb's Nasser al Rawahi in third place with 18 goals. The highest-scoring round was the final 26th round which registered 26 goals while Round 9 recorded the lowest tally with only 11 goals. A total of 17 goals was the most frequently recorded scoring figure, occurring in seven different rounds. Seeb led almost every major home statistics as they had managed to earn 33 points from home matches with 10 wins. They managed to score most goals at home by 32 goals and unbeaten at home throughout the season. At the opposite end, Al Khabourah failed to register a single home victory, while Ibri Club suffered 10 home defeats. Seeb also dominated away from home with the most away points by 34 and 11 wins. Seeb club were the fewest away goals conceded by three goals and only one away defeat all season. Meanwhile, Dhofar Club struggled away from home, collecting only six points and managing just one away victory. The season concluded with Al Rustaq Club and Al Khabourah relegated to the First Division League. Al Rustaq endured a difficult campaign, finishing bottom after suffering 17 defeats, while Al Khabourah ended second from bottom with 12 losses.

VAR DEBUT
The 2025-26 campaign also featured a remarkable achievement as this season introduced the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system to the Omani top-flight league for the first time. The implementation marked a significant step forward in the modernisation of domestic football and provided valuable experience for referees, clubs and match officials ahead of future seasons. It is expected that the OFA will organise a closing season ceremony in the coming days as the top clubs, officials, players and sponsors will be awarded with the prizes and awards.

SPORTS

‘CHANGE OF DIRECTION’



Liverpool manager Arne Slot looks dejected after the EPL match against Manchester United at Old Trafford on May 3. — Reuters

LIVERPOOL SACK
SLOT, IRAOLA IN LINE
TO TAKE OVER

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool sacked manager Arne Slot on Saturday, saying the club were seeking a “change of direction”, after a disastrous defence of their Premier League title.

The Reds finished fifth in the table, 25 points behind champions Arsenal, despite spending a Premier League record of nearly £450 million (\$605 million) on new players in one transfer window last year.

Outgoing Bournemouth boss Andoni Iraola is reportedly set to take over at Anfield after leading the Cherries into Europe for the first time in the club’s history.

Just over a year ago Slot was heralded as a hero after taking on the daunting role of succeeding Jurgen Klopp and leading Liverpool to a record-equalling 20th English top-flight title in his debut season in charge.

Yet fans turned on the Dutchman this season after a series of lacklustre performances. There was also sign of dressing room disharmony, most notably from Mohamed Salah on his way out of the club.

In an explosive social media post earlier this month, which was liked by multiple members of the Liverpool squad, Salah called for a return to “heavy metal football”, referring to Klopp’s high energy style of play, in a perceived dig at Slot’s more cautious approach. Liverpool’s return of 60 points was their lowest since the 2015/16 season.

Despite their troubles, it had been reported that Slot would be handed a stay of execution after securing Champions League qualification.

‘DIFFERENT APPROACH’

However, the club’s owners, the American-based Fenway Sports Group, have succumbed to fan pressure to axe the former Feyenoord boss.

“We have collectively come to the conclusion that change is necessary in order for the club to keep moving forward. Again, it must be stressed that this is not a decision which has been reached lightly, anything but,” the club said in a statement.

“The conclusion we have come to is built on a belief that the team’s trajectory is best addressed through a change of direction. That does not diminish the work Arne has done here, or the respect we have for him. Nor is it a reflection of his talents. Rather, it is indicative of the need for a different approach.”

“Arne leaves with our gratitude, with a Premier League title to his name, and with the knowledge that he and his family will always be welcomed back at Anfield.”

Liverpool added that “the process to appoint a successor is under way”.

Many fans were keen for the return of Xabi Alonso to Anfield, but the club’s former midfielder will instead take charge of Chelsea next season.

Iraola’s stock is high after an 18-game unbeaten league run to finish the campaign in sixth, just three points behind Liverpool despite vastly inferior resources.

The Spaniard also worked together with Liverpool sporting director Richard Hughes, who previously held a similar role at Bournemouth.

Slot ultimately paid for failing to get a return on Liverpool’s huge investment last summer.

British transfer record signing Alexander Isak was beset by fitness problems, while Florian Wirtz struggled with the transition to the Premier League after a £100 million move from Bayer Leverkusen.

Slot, though, also had to deal with emotional turmoil caused by the death of forward Diogo Jota in a car accident in July. — AFP



Aryna Sabalenka plays a forehand return to Australia’s Daria Kasatkina in French Open on Court Suzanne-Lenglen at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris. —AFP

Sabalenka, Osaka set up
last-16 clash in Paris

TOP SEED Aryna Sabalenka and four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka on Saturday set up a blockbuster last-16 meeting at the French Open.

Sabalenka beat Australia’s Daria Kasatkina 6-0, 7-5 in just 76 minutes to stamp her ticket to the fourth round.

After racing through the first set, Sabalenka went an early break down to her 53rd-ranked opponent before battling back.

“I was happy in the tough moments I never gave up,” she said on court as Roland Garros goes through the last day of the heatwave that has sat over Paris since the beginning of the tournament.

With victory, the Belarusian world number one has set up a meeting with her fellow quadruple major winner, Osaka.

Sabalenka and Osaka, both 28, have won two Australian Opens and two US Opens apiece. Sabalenka has beaten Osaka twice this season, but Osaka won their only meeting at a major — at the same stage in the 2018 US Open, the first of her major titles.

The Japanese 16th seed battled past American starlet Iva Jovic 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (3/7), 6-4 to progress. In a match dominated by serve with the first two sets decided by tie-breaks, Osaka gained the decisive break against the 18-year-old 17th seed in the 10th game of the third set.

“I was a lot calmer than in my first matches... In a Slam the further I get the calmer I am. It such an honour to be here. It’s the furthest I have ever been here,” Osaka, who had never before gone past the last 32 at Roland Garros, said.

Ukrainian Oleksandra Oliynykova, who in the build-up to her third-round match accused her Russian opponent Diana Shnaider of “taking money” from a “company financing war crimes” and of liking social media posts by “propagandists”, lost 7-5, 6-1.

‘MATCH BY MATCH’

With the men’s side of the draw wide open following the shock early exits of top seed Jannik Sinner and 24-time major winner Novak Djokovic, Flavio Cobolli laid down a marker with an emphatic victory over Learner Tien. The Italian 10th seed beat the American 6-2, 6-2, 6-3 in one hour and 45 minutes on centre court.

“I want to think match by match. That’s the way that I want to think this week,” Cobolli said.

“I know that... for sure we (will) have a new Grand Slam champion, but I don’t want to think about this. For sure I have now another tough match.”

Cobolli will next meet Zachary Svajda with a spot in the quarterfinals on the line.



Italy’s Flavio Cobolli plays a backhand return to US’ Learner Tien on Court Philippe-Chatrier. — AFP



Japan’s Naomi Osaka celebrates after beating Iva Jovic of the US. — Reuters

American world number 85 Svajda upset 25th seed Francisco Cerundolo to continue his best ever run at a Grand Slam.

The 23-year-old had never got beyond the second round of a major but ensured his debut French Open would extend into the second week with a 6-3, 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 6-3 win over Argentina’s Cerundolo.

PARRY STUNS ANISIMOVA

Diane Parry, the last Frenchwoman standing in the French Open women’s draw, pulled off a stunning 6-3, 4-6, 7-6(3) victory over American Amanda Anisimova on Saturday, advancing to the fourth round of a Grand Slam for the first time in her career.

The 23-year-old, ranked 92nd in the world,

delighted the home crowd on Court Philippe Chatrier as she eliminated Anisimova, the sixth seed and a two-time major finalist at Wimbledon and the US Open in 2025, as well as a Roland Garros semifinalist in 2019.

With her second career victory over a top-10 player, Parry ensured a local representation in the second week of the French Open women’s draw for the third straight tournament. She will face Poland’s Maja Chwalinska, ranked 114th in the world, in the fourth round. Chwalinska, on her maiden appearance at the French Open, has been the surprise package of the tournament with a remarkable run to the last 16.

— Agencies

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

MEN (THIRD ROUND)

Flavio Cobolli (ITA x10) bt Learner Tien (USA x18) 6-2, 6-2, 6-3; Zachary Svajda (USA) bt Francisco Cerundolo (ARG x25) 6-3, 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 6-3

WOMEN (THIRD ROUND)

Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x1) bt Daria Kasatkina (AUS) 6-0, 7-5; Naomi Osaka (JPN x16) bt Iva Jovic (USA x17) 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (3/7), 6-4; Diana Shnaider (RUS x25) bt Oleksandra Oliynykova (UKR) 7-5, 6-1; Anna Kalinskaya (RUS x22) bt María Camila Osorio (COL) 6-3, 0-6, 6-2; Maja Chwalinska (POL) bt Maria Sakkari (GRE) 1-6, 6-3, 6-2; Diane Parry (FRA) bt Amanda Anisimova (USA x6) 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (10/3)

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The extended trading window is also expected to contribute to greater market depth, increased stability and stronger investor participation.

TRADING HOURS EXTENSION TO BOOST MARKET LIQUIDITY

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) will extend its trading hours from Monday in a move aimed at enhancing market liquidity, improving price discovery and broadening opportunities for investors to execute trades.

Market analysts believe the decision will support trading activity over the medium to long term by aligning the exchange more closely with international market practices. The extended trading window is also expected to contribute to greater market depth, increased stability and stronger investor participation.

Adel Waleed, Brokerage Manager at United Securities, said the initiative would strengthen the attractiveness of the Omani capital market, particularly as the Sultanate of Oman continues to advance its privatisation programme and prepare for new listings. He noted that the move comes at a time when expectations are growing that the MSX could be considered for inclusion in emerging market indices, potentially attracting additional foreign investment.

According to Waleed, trading volumes are likely to recover during the second half of the year, supported by the anticipated listing of several companies owned by the Oman Investment Authority. These listings are expected to diversify the market’s sectoral composition and draw a broader base of both retail and institutional investors.

He added that the exchange could be placed on the FTSE watch list towards the end of the third quarter, a development that would further enhance market visibility and encourage foreign investor participation.

The MSX recorded strong gains during trading sessions on Sunday and Monday, with the benchmark index rising by more than 1.8 per cent to close above the 7,750-point level. Waleed attributed the rally to increased buying by domestic investors and foreign institutions.

He also highlighted the banking sector’s leading role in the market’s recent recovery, following weakness in the previous week’s trading. — ONA

Oman secures \$1 billion battery materials project

OMAN has secured a major investment in the fast-growing global battery supply chain with the launch of a \$1-billion project to produce lithium-ion battery anode materials in Sohar Freezone.

The project, led by China’s Zhongke Electric through its subsidiary Zhongke Shenzhen (Hong Kong), marks the establishment of one of the company’s largest overseas production facilities and reinforces Oman’s ambitions to become a regional hub for clean energy and advanced manufacturing.



Invest Oman continues to focus on attracting high-quality investments, streamlining procedures and strengthening partnerships with global investors to support industrial localisation and sustainable economic growth.

IBTISAM BINT AHMED AL FAROOJI
Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion



The investment reflects the collaborative efforts of Invest Oman, Sohar Freezone, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm and the project developer.

Construction work has officially commenced following the laying of the foundation stone for the facility, which will have a planned production capacity of 200,000 tonnes of anode materials annually. The development will be implemented in three phases to meet rising international demand for battery components driven by the global energy transition.

The investment reflects the collaborative efforts of Invest Oman, Sohar Freezone, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm and the project developer. It also highlights the Sultanate of Oman’s growing appeal as a destination for high-value industrial investments, supported by its strategic location, advanced logistics infrastructure and competitive investment incentives.

Ibtisam bint Ahmed al Farooji, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment Promotion, described the project as a significant addition to Oman’s advanced manufacturing sector and evidence of increasing international confidence in the country’s investment climate.

She said the investment aligns with national efforts to diversify the economy and expand industries linked to clean energy and emerging technologies. Invest Oman, she added, continues to focus on attracting high-quality investments, streamlining procedures and strengthening partnerships with global investors to support industrial localisation and sustainable economic growth.

Zhongke Electric said Oman was selected because of its favourable business environment, strategic access to international markets and industrial ecosystem capable of supporting renewable energy and technology-related industries.

The project is expected to strengthen Oman’s position within global battery value chains while creating new opportunities to attract further investments in future-oriented industries. — ONA

IMF, WORLD BANK, OTHERS WARN MIDDLE EAST WAR IS STRAINING ENERGY SUPPLIES

WASHINGTON: The heads of the International Energy Agency, International Monetary Fund, World Bank and World Trade Organisation warned on Friday that the war in the Middle East was straining global energy supplies and hitting vulnerable economies hardest.

The US-Israel war on Iran has disrupted trade, rattled financial markets and raised concerns over global energy supplies, particularly through the Strait of Hormuz, a key route for oil and gas shipments. The global institutions said that the world economy remained resilient, but the conflict was



A pump jack operates in the Permian Basin oil field in Texas. — Reuters

disproportionately affecting poorer countries through higher fuel and fertiliser prices, increased uncertainty, and risks to jobs.

The heads of the groups met on Thursday to discuss how they should

respond to the economic impact of the war, they said.

US President Donald Trump has said he would decide over a potential deal with Iran to extend their ceasefire that would need to include opening the waterway and dismantling Tehran’s capacity to make a nuclear weapon.

“If shipping flows do not return to normal, continued rapid depletion of global oil inventories ahead of peak summer oil demand in the Northern Hemisphere would present increasing risks for fuel security, market conditions, and broader economic resilience,” the institutions said. — Reuters

Oman launches investment projects with guaranteed buyers

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has unveiled a new package of investment opportunities backed by guaranteed purchase agreements, a move designed to reduce investor risk and improve the bankability of projects across key sectors.

Under the initiative, local and international investors will have access to projects supported by pre-arranged commitments from buyers to purchase part or all of the output. The mechanism provides greater certainty over future revenues, strengthens financing prospects and enhances the attractiveness of investment opportunities.

The ministry said the initiative forms part of a broader strategy to develop investment-ready projects that are closely aligned with market demand and local supply chains. By linking production directly to confirmed customers, the model is expected to accelerate



KHALED BIN HAMAD AL KHAROUSI
Director-General of Investment Promotion

investment returns, improve operational efficiency and support long-term business sustainability.

The investment package spans a range of industrial and healthcare sectors and is based on detailed technical and economic studies assessing domestic demand, export potential and commercial viability.

Among the featured projects is a refrigerator manufacturing plant covering 10,000 square metres with an estimated investment of RO 6.545 million. The facility will produce refrigeration units for residential, commercial and industrial applications. Other opportunities include a textiles and fabrics factory valued at RO



The initiative forms part of a broader strategy to develop investment-ready projects.

4.608 million, a computer and accessories manufacturing plant worth RO 6.152 million, and an office supplies and stationery factory requiring investment of RO 2.5 million.

The package also includes plans for a tyre manufacturing plant valued at RO 6.545 million, a military uniform accessories factory worth RO 6 million and an air-conditioning manufacturing

facility with an investment value of RO 6.545 million. All three projects are designed to support domestic demand while targeting regional markets. Khaled bin Hamad al Kharousi, Director-General of Investment Promotion at the ministry, said the initiative represents a shift from traditional investment promotion towards opportunities anchored in verified market demand.

He said the projects were developed in coordination with relevant government entities to ensure alignment with actual market requirements and supply chain needs. This approach, he noted, improves project viability, facilitates expansion and strengthens investor confidence from the earliest stages.

Al Kharousi added that pre-purchase agreements offer a more mature investment framework by reducing operational risks and enhancing access to financing and strategic partnerships.

This, in turn, accelerates project implementation and increases their contribution to economic diversification. The initiative supports the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to expand private sector participation, increase the contribution of quality investments to GDP, promote innovation and sustainability, and generate employment opportunities for Omani citizens. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The financial sector led the advance, gaining 217 points on the back of stronger bank and investment company shares.

MSX rebounds as market capitalisation gains 327 million

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) staged a strong recovery last week, with its benchmark index rising 143 points to close at 7,775 points after four consecutive weeks of decline.

The rebound was driven by renewed investor buying following the market’s recent correction, while all sectoral indices ended the week in positive territory.

The financial sector led the advance, gaining 217 points on the back of stronger bank and investment company shares. The services sector rose 68 points, supported by energy stocks and several other listed companies, while the industrial sector index climbed 42 points. The Sharia-compliant index also posted gains, rising around 10 points to close at 622 points.

Market sentiment improved significantly, with 50 stocks recording gains, compared with 14 decliners and 20 unchanged securities. As a result, total market capitalisation increased by approximately RO 327 million to reach RO 37.12 billion.

Trading activity was concentrated into two sessions due to the Eid Al Adha holiday. Despite the shortened week, total turnover reached RO 103.2 million across 12,683 transactions.

OQ Base Industries emerged as the most actively traded stock by value, accounting for RO 28.05 million, or 27 per cent of total trading. Sohar International followed with RO 14.68 million, while Bank Muscat recorded trades worth RO 14.05 million.

OQ Exploration and Production and OQ Gas Networks completed the top five, generating RO 12.25 million and RO 12.09 million, respectively.

National Gas posted the week’s strongest gain, rising 7.5 per cent to close at 115 baisas. Al Anwar Investments advanced 7.4 per cent to 173 baisas, while Al Anqa Energy added 6.5 per cent to finish at 245 baisas.

Among the decliners, Al Hassan Engineering fell 27 per cent to 8 baisas. Oman Fisheries lost 8 per cent to close at 23 baisas, while Building Materials Industries dropped 5 per cent to 76 baisas.

In corporate developments, Sohar International completed the issuance and allocation of 259.5 million mandatory convertible bonds worth RO 25.9 million. The bonds, listed on the MSX on May 24, carry an annual coupon rate of 5.25 per cent.

Meanwhile, National Oman Engineering and Investment Company announced the award of two operation and maintenance contracts from a government entity valued at RO8.5 million over three years, beginning on July 1. — ONA

Amouage unveils scent for Mandarin Oriental

THE House of Amouage and Mandarin Oriental hotels share many values, not least an appreciation of the lessons to be learned from tradition, a tireless commitment to innovation, and a deep respect for the wishes of their devotees. So, it is not surprising that when the award-winning, luxury hotel group wanted to create a bespoke collection of perfumed amenities for their guests, they turned to Amouage.

“It was an honour to be asked to create a unique scent for Mandarin Oriental,” says Amouage’s Chief Creative Officer, Renaud Salmon, “and in order to treat the composition process with the seriousness it deserved, I knew straight away that the starting point would have to be the origin of what is now a globally-respected symbol of quality and hospitality.”

The beginning of what we now know as the Mandarin Oriental can be traced back to two points. The first is in Hong Kong in the middle of the 20th century, when the original Mandarin Hotel was founded. The second goes further back, to the late 19th century, and the opening of the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok. Brought together in 1985 under one name – Mandarin Oriental – the two establishments have since become a byword for understated opulence.

“It was clear to me,” explains Salmon, “that I would have to spend some time getting to know both of the original hotels, as well as the cities which are home to them. It was equally clear that this was a journey not to be undertaken alone.”

To accompany him on this voyage, Salmon turned to Suzy Le Helley, an acclaimed young perfumer with a particular talent for achieving both clarity and subtlety in her work.

Instinctively, Salmon knew that her



The Whispers Of The Fan perfume forms part of six different amenity products.

sensibilities would complement the codes and aesthetics of the Mandarin Oriental group.

IN SEARCH OF A WHISPER

To claim that the pair’s stay in Hong Kong and Bangkok provided them with a wealth of inspiration would be an understatement.

“In many ways, the journey was totally overwhelming,” says Salmon. “There was so much to see, touch and smell.

There was so much history to consider. There were so many contrasts and clashes – nature and technology, slowness and speed, pristine tranquillity and glorious chaos. Indeed, at one point, Suzy and I wondered if it would ever be possible to somehow distil the essence of everything around us into a single scent.”

However, just when they felt their goal might be out of reach, they recalled the symbol that had accompanied them during

their entire trip: the elegant, eleven-bladed fan that forms the Mandarin Oriental’s instantly-recognisable emblem.

“The fan made us realise what we would remember most powerfully after we had returned home – after the colours and noise and crowds had faded away. Genuine contact between people, a true devotion to attentive hospitality and, above all, an understanding that everyone can contribute to making our shared environments welcoming and beautiful – that was the feeling that had gradually worked its way under our skin,” says Salmon.

In a flash of insight, the principles that would guide the formation of the scent had become clear: eleven distinct notes – one for each blade of the fan – coming together to form a whole that possesses the ability to remain discreet while creating an indelible impression. A whisper of scent – hence the name Whispers Of The Fan.

ahlibank supports ‘The Local’ SME exhibition

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its position as ‘Partner in Excellence’, ahlibank once again extended its strategic support to the SME sector through its sponsorship of The Local SME Exhibition, held from May 21-24, at Mall of Oman.

The initiative reflects the bank’s ongoing efforts to empower local small and medium enterprises by supporting impactful platforms that foster business growth. It also underscores ahlibank’s long-term commitment to supporting economic diversification and strengthening Oman’s entrepreneurial ecosystem, in line with the national priorities outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

The Local SME Exhibition brought together a diverse array of homegrown businesses in a vibrant showcase featuring traditional handicrafts, clothing, jewellery, handmade products, artwork and cosmetics. The exhibition provided local entrepreneurs



The Local SME Exhibition brought together a diverse array of homegrown businesses.

with a valuable platform to engage directly with the public, strengthen brand visibility, and expand their customer base.

Through its support for the event, ahlibank reaffirmed its commitment to meaningful community engagement and its continued efforts to foster collaboration,

enhance market access, and create sustainable growth opportunities for SMEs across the Sultanate of Oman.

ahlibank has an established legacy of championing SME development, providing businesses with valuable opportunities to build long-term business sustainability.

Among its notable initiatives is the bank’s annual Ramadhan Souq, which brings together a wide range of SMEs and serves as a strategic platform to empower Omani entrepreneurs and support business development.

Notably, ahlibank recently signed a cooperation agreement with the SME Development Authority ‘Riyada’ as part of a joint programme designed to unify public and private sector efforts in empowering entrepreneurs through comprehensive financial and non-financial solutions that support business growth, scalability, and long-term success.

Kia, The Ocean Cleanup expand plastic interception project

MUSCAT: Kia Corporation and its global mission partner The Ocean Cleanup, the non-profit organisation dedicated to ridding the world’s oceans of plastic pollution, have announced plans to expand operations in Greater Los Angeles to intercept plastic waste flowing from rivers into the Pacific Ocean.

The project is scheduled for completion ahead of the LA28 Olympic Games and has secured backing from Los Angeles County officials, the City of Long Beach, and the City of Seal Beach.

Research by The Ocean Cleanup reveals that Los Angeles rivers emit between 380 and 570 tonnes of plastic annually into the ocean.

Globally, just 1,000 of the world’s three million rivers are responsible for nearly 80% of all ocean plastic emissions.



Kia has been The Ocean Cleanup’s global mission partner since 2022.

To develop tailored solutions for Los Angeles, The Ocean Cleanup conducted a comprehensive “Smart Rivers Survey” using drones, AI-enhanced remote-sensing cameras, and GPS drifters to map pollution patterns and inform deployment strategy.

The new deployments will complement Interceptor 007, already operational in Ballona Creek, which entered its permanent operating phase in 2024 following unanimous approval by the LA County Board of Supervisors. To date, Interceptor 007 has prevented 386,945 pounds of trash from reaching the Pacific Ocean and local beaches.

Both new river deployments are supported by independent feasibility studies commissioned by the City of Long Beach and the City of Seal Beach, which

assessed hydraulics, trash volumes, technology options, and permitting pathways. Together, the three Interceptor installations will create a coordinated, city-wide ocean protection system across Los Angeles’ three major waterways.

CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP DRIVES REAL-WORLD SOLUTIONS

Kia has been The Ocean Cleanup’s global mission partner since 2022, supporting the development and deployment of proven, scalable solutions to reduce marine plastic pollution, while creating a circular value chain for recovered legacy ocean plastic waste.

“Kia believes the future of mobility comes with a responsibility to the communities we serve,” said Eric Watson, Vice-President, Sales Operations, Kia America.

SHORTTAKES



A woman walks in a supermarket in London. — AFP

INFLATION FIGHT PUTS CENTRAL BANK INDEPENDENCE UNDER STRAIN

DUBROVNIK, Croatia: Central bank independence is again coming under pressure as policymakers push through unpopular measures to curb surging prices, prompting political interference that could erode trust and deepen the crisis, current and former officials said.

Inflation has picked up worldwide since the war in Iran drove up oil prices, forcing central banks to raise interest rates or delay previously signalled cuts to stop a one-off shock becoming entrenched.

“It’s easy to be an independent central banker member when inflation is low .. and it’s much more complicated when inflation is up and you have to do things that people do not like,” Helge Berger, deputy director at the IMF’s European Department, told a conference on Saturday.

“It’s hand-to-hand combat,” he said. “We need to get the current situation right.”

The most visible challenge to independence has been US President Donald Trump’s repeated calls for lower interest rates, but political pressure has been widespread and often more subtle in other places, policymakers said.

Some central banks are asked to tailor policy to support industrial goals, others face pressure to transfer profits to state budgets, while some are given conflicting mandates.

High government debt levels also act as a de facto constraint on independence, limiting room to tighten policy because higher interest rates - the usual cure for inflation - risk triggering a debt crisis.

Once markets doubt that a central bank is acting independently to fight inflation, they begin to price in policy accommodation, making it even harder to rein in price rises. — Reuters

Oman pilot well boosts case for natural hydrogen

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 30

A pilot well drilled into the Semail Ophiolite formation has produced significant hydrogen gas flows, further strengthening evidence that peridotite rocks — abundant in Oman — may represent a promising source of low-carbon, naturally occurring hydrogen.

The findings have been welcomed by Australian exploration company HyTerra Ltd, which earlier this year announced a partnership with ARA Natural Resources, a subsidiary of Omani upstream firm ARA Petroleum, to assess the potential for geologic hydrogen — also known as natural or “white” hydrogen — in the Sultanate of Oman.

Geologic hydrogen refers to hydrogen gas generated naturally within the Earth’s subsurface through geological processes such as water – rock reactions in iron-rich ultramafic rocks like peridotite.

In a recent interview, HyTerra CEO Riley Kemp described the Semail Ophiolite — which extends from Oman into the UAE — as “one of the best source rock systems for geologic hydrogen” in the industry.

The pilot not only produced hydrogen “bubbling” to the surface, but laboratory testing also indicated that when the source rocks were appropriately heated, they generated additional hydrogen volumes, which Kemp described as “an exciting data point.”

The landmark study — known



A natural spring in the Semail Ophiolite through which geologic hydrogen seeps to the surface.

as the Rock-Hydrogen Pilot Well — was led by Prof Alexis Templeton of the University of Colorado, who has since joined HyTerra as an adviser. She has been quoted in international media as saying the field results exceeded expectations.

Drilled to a depth of just over one kilometre, the pilot well was flooded with water and left to react underground for about a year. Subsequent flow testing unexpectedly revealed sustained gas production rather than water.

The produced gas was predominantly hydrogen, with smaller amounts of nitrogen and methane, and flowed consistently alongside water

over several days without decline.

Kemp said the results demonstrate “an interesting and exciting play” for further exploration, while noting the technology remains at an early stage but continues to advance toward potential commercial development.

He added that geologic hydrogen represents a major emerging opportunity, with the potential to supply a large global hydrogen market currently dominated by higher-carbon “grey” hydrogen produced from methane.

He also pointed to growing demand from transport, energy security, and industrial

decarbonisation applications, which could further support the adoption of low-cost natural hydrogen.

Listed on the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX), HyTerra also holds interests in the Nemaha High natural hydrogen and helium play fairway and the Geneva Project in Nebraska, United States.

US authorities have estimated that geologic hydrogen could potentially be produced at below 1 per kilogramme, making it cheaper than hydrogen derived from fossil fuels and roughly one-sixth the cost of hydrogen produced via wind- or solar-powered electrolysis.

Bond and sukuk listings in Oman reach 589 million

MUSCAT: New listings on the Muscat Stock Exchange’s bonds and sukuk market have exceeded RO 589 million this year, underscoring growing activity in fixed-income instruments and expanding investment options for both institutional and retail investors.

The new listings comprise four Government Development Bond issuances worth a combined RO 312.3 million, a sovereign sukuk valued at RO 200 million, and several bond issues from banks and corporates.

The additional offerings provide investors with a broader range of lower-risk investment products that generate regular income streams and offer an alternative to equity investments.

Government Development Bond issues numbered 80, 81, 82 and 83 were listed during the year with total value amounting to RO 312.3 million and annual interest rates ranging from 4.05 per cent to 4.30 per cent.



The new listings comprise four Government Development Bond issuances worth a combined RO 312.3 million, a sovereign sukuk valued at RO 200 million, and several bond issues from banks and corporates.

Corporate listings included Sohar International’s RO 25.9 million mandatory convertible bonds carrying an annual coupon of 5.25 per cent, ahlibank’s RO 15.9 million mandatory convertible bonds offering a 6-per cent annual

return, and Dhofar International Development and Investment Company’s RO 30 million perpetual subordinated bonds with a 4-per cent annual coupon.

In the sukuk segment, the exchange listed the tenth sovereign

sukuk issuance valued at RO 200 million with an annual profit rate of 4.15 per cent, as well as Dhofar Islamic’s inaugural RO 5 million sukuk offering a 5-per cent profit rate.

The Muscat Stock Exchange currently hosts 68 listed bond and sukuk issuances. Of these, 50 are bonds, including 22 Government Development Bond issues, 12 commercial bank issuances, 10 finance and leasing company issues, two issuances by Oman Investment and Finance Company, and individual issuances from several other corporates.

The sukuk segment comprises 18 listings, including seven sovereign sukuk issues, six issuances by Islamic banks and banking windows, and additional offerings from takaful insurers, investment firms and real estate developers.

The market capitalisation of listed bonds and sukuk has risen by RO 375 million since the beginning of

the year to approximately RO 5.3 billion, representing 14.2 per cent of the MSX’s total market capitalisation of RO 37.1 billion.

Bank Muscat’s Tier 1 perpetual bonds remain the largest listed fixed-income instrument with a market capitalisation of RO 340.4 million. The eighth sovereign sukuk ranks second at RO 293.6 million, followed by the 67th Government Development Bond issue at RO 283.1 million.

The 65th Government Development Bond issue and the third sovereign sukuk complete the top five with market capitalisations of RO 207.7 million and RO 202.4 million, respectively.

Bonds and sukuk continue to play a vital role in financing development projects and supporting government funding requirements, while also providing banks and companies with access to long-term capital, stronger liquidity positions and greater financial resilience. — ONA

FOOD INDUSTRY

South Korea food exports hit record high



South Korea’s food industry exports rose 8.3 per cent year-on-year to \$7.86 billion in 2025, according to data. Ready-made meals and convenience foods generated \$776 million in exports, while roasted seaweed exports reached \$562 million.

The industry’s total output climbed 4.3 per cent to 119.73 trillion won, accounting for 4.5 per cent of national GDP and 16.4 per cent of manufacturing output. — ONA

TRADE BALANCE

US trade gap narrows



The US goods trade deficit narrowed more than expected in April. The deficit fell 3.4 per cent to \$82.4 billion, supported by a 4-per cent increase in exports to \$219.7 billion.

Capital goods shipments, consumer products and industrial supplies helped improve the trade balance, although economists warned that robust investment in AI could continue driving imports higher. — Reuters

DIGITAL FINANCE

China expands digital yuan use



China is accelerating efforts to expand the use of its digital yuan, or e-CNY, across domestic and international transactions. The People’s Bank of China is encouraging wider adoption in areas including fiscal spending, utility payments and cross-border trade linked to the Belt and Road Initiative.

The move reflects Beijing’s broader strategy to strengthen its digital currency ecosystem. — Reuters

OPINION

Eid Al Adha: Celebrating faith, family and tradition



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

Eid Al Adha, the Festival of Sacrifice, is meaningful for millions of people globally. In the Sultanate of Oman, the occasion is valued by both citizens and residents. It combines faith, family and traditions. Eid commemorates Prophet Ibrahim’s (PBUH) obedience when he was commanded to sacrifice his son. Allah, recognising his obedience, replaced his son with a ram to be sacrificed. This story reminds Muslims of the value of sacrifice, generosity and faith in Allah. In Oman, many families start preparing for Eid Al Adha long before the date. They shop for new clothes and make festive food to welcome their family members. People also clean and decorate their homes. The markets get busier as people buy livestock for the Udhhiyah. Eid worshippers gather at mosques and open prayer grounds to perform the special Eid prayer. Celebrating families greet each other saying “Eid Mubarak.” Many families partake in the sacrificial ritual in accordance with Islamic principles after the prayer. The meat is split into

designated portions for family and friends, as well as for those in need. It reflects the essence of compassion. Charitable giving remains a part of Eid, and the less-privileged members of society are not neglected as part of the Eid celebration, especially in Oman. Family gatherings, especially those with blood relatives, are the most preferred things to do during Eid Al Adha. Relatives from various parts of the country travel to the family destination, making the family stronger and extending the ancient Omani tradition to all parts of the country. It is customary to visit, and in some instances, host the older members of the family. Children are also honoured, and heavy capitations are paid to each child in the family as gifts. This is known as Eidiya and contributes to the joy of Eid. No Eid feast is ever complete without the presence of Omani ethnic dish. Oman is famous for many of its unique ethnic dishes and shuwa is one such dish. It serves as the meat for family gatherings. This is the marinated meat with ancient traditional spices, and after the meat is baked

In Oman, many families start preparing for Eid Al Adha long before the date. They shop for new clothes and make festive food to welcome their family members. People also clean and decorate their homes. The markets get busier as people buy livestock for the Udhhiyah.

in the holes for many, many hours to produce a heavy and rich meal, other types of rice, meat, and other desserts and dates to guests are also served. During Eid, the celebration of undiluted culture all around the country serves as a cross-sectional display of the rich heritage of Oman. It is cultural and traditional art, entertainment as well as communal events. This sustains the identity of the country and strengthens the sense of community. It serves a dual purpose of uniting all the citizens and hosting a celebration. Eid Al Adha is a time of gratitude and contemplation. It allows the community to practice generosity as a commitment to family and community health. Eid prompts Omanis to appreciate family and health. Eid values unite the communities all year long. Oman values unity and faith, and so Eid Al Adha is celebrated. Charitable acts, family, friends, and the principles of Omani society are present during celebrations. Communities unite to celebrate Eid. Welcoming each other and sharing joy is the Islamic values of sacrifice and generosity.

Billion-dollar-a-day solar boom is changing energy rules

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

A decade ago, building a large solar power plant was still viewed by many as a long-term environmental investment. Today, it is increasingly becoming a financial decision. According to the International Energy Agency’s latest World Energy Investment report, global spending on solar energy is expected to reach \$365 billion in 2026, equivalent to around \$1 billion every day. The figure reflects more than growing confidence in renewable energy. It signals a shift in how countries, utilities and investors view the economics of power generation. One of the most striking findings in the report is not the amount being invested, but how much cheaper solar power has become. The IEA notes that the cost of developing solar projects has fallen dramatically over the past decade, allowing countries to install far more capacity for the same level of investment. This change is reshaping energy planning around the world. Historically, nations built power systems around fuel supply. Access to coal, oil or natural gas often determined how electricity was generated and how economies developed. Today, technology costs are becoming just as important as fuel resources. The rapid decline in solar costs means that countries blessed with strong sunlight now possess a different kind of competitive advantage. Rather than relying solely on underground resources, they can increasingly draw value from the energy arriving from above. These developments present important opportunities; the Sultanate of Oman is well known for its hydrocarbon resources, yet it also sits within one of the world’s most favourable solar belts. As global investment continues flowing into solar energy, countries with high solar irradiance are becoming increasingly attractive locations for energy-intensive industries seeking stable and affordable electricity. This could influence decisions far beyond the power sector itself. Manufacturing, data centres, desalination facilities and future hydrogen projects all require large amounts of electricity. In an increasingly electrified global economy, access to competitively priced power may become a key factor in determining where industries choose to invest.

The IEA report suggests that electricity is emerging as the foundation of future energy systems. Investment is no longer flowing only into generation capacity. Significant capital is also being directed toward battery storage, transmission networks and technologies capable of supporting a more flexible grid. This broader transition reflects a changing understanding of energy security. For many years, energy security was associated primarily with fuel reserves and supply chains. Increasingly, it is also about resilience, affordability and the ability to generate power from domestic resources. Recent geopolitical events have reinforced that lesson for governments around the world. The rise of solar investment therefore represents more than an environmental story.

Beyond visibility: Credible economic communication



A professional economic report becomes part of a broader national record that tracks promises, implementation and results over time.

A polished video can fill a screen in 15 seconds. It cannot tell an investor when a project will reach financial close, how much capital has actually been committed, how many Omani jobs will materialise, or what happens if the timetable slips. In economic policy, that difference is not cosmetic. It is the difference between visibility and credibility. That distinction matters more in Oman today because the numbers are no longer small. Official statistics show Oman’s foreign direct investment stock rose to RO 29 billion in 2024, within total foreign investment of RO 38.5 billion. Foreign-investment enterprises employed more than 191,000 people and paid RO 2.91 billion in wages. Non-oil activities, meanwhile, continued expanding as the country pushed deeper into economic diversification. These are not abstract figures. They represent jobs, supply chains, infrastructure commitments, industrial expansion and long-term expectations linked directly to Oman Vision 2040. For that reason, economic communication cannot be treated purely as a branding exercise. Global investor research consistently shows that predictability, regulatory clarity and access to reliable information matter more to long-term investment decisions than publicity alone. Serious investors do not ask first whether a project was promoted well. They ask whether approvals are predictable, milestones measurable, data accessible and execution credible. When institutions announce an industrial zone, logistics project, hydrogen initiative or privatisation programme, the important questions are practical ones: What is the investment size? What is the funding structure? What are the timelines? Who is accountable? How many jobs will be created? What are the local-content implications? And crucially, what happens if targets are missed? Oman’s own policy framework already supports this logic. Vision 2040 and the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan are built around measurable indicators, governance standards and long-term outcomes. The country has already accepted the principle



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer

When communication becomes overly dependent on visibility-driven content, institutions may gain short-term exposure while weakening something more important: long-term credibility. Investors, analysts, businesses and citizens ultimately require information ecosystems built on consistency, transparency and follow-up.

that progress should be tracked, measured and explained. Economic communication should evolve in the same direction. This is where specialised economic journalism becomes indispensable. At its best, economic journalism does not simply transmit announcements; it builds institutional memory. It records what was promised, when it was promised, under what assumptions, and whether implementation matched expectations. A promotional campaign may capture public attention for a day. A professional economic report, however, becomes part of a broader national record that tracks promises, implementation and results over time. That distinction matters because economies are built on continuity, not moments. This is also why specialist journalists return months after launch ceremonies and signing events. They ask whether memoranda became contracts, whether budgets changed, whether timelines slipped, whether promised jobs appeared and whether public benefit was measured rather than implied. None of this means digital creators are irrelevant. The opposite is true. Audience behaviour has shifted dramatically towards digital and video-led platforms, and institutions are right to adapt to those changes. Content creators can play an important role in awareness, accessibility and public engagement, particularly among younger audiences. But content creation and economic journalism perform different public functions. Creators are generally rewarded for speed, reach and relatability. Economic journalists are expected to verify,

compare, revisit and challenge. One delivers attention. The other delivers accountability, continuity and context. When communication becomes overly dependent on visibility-driven content, institutions may gain short-term exposure while weakening something more important: long-term credibility. Investors, analysts, businesses and citizens ultimately require information ecosystems built on consistency, transparency and follow-up. Oman already offers examples of a stronger model. Hydrom, for instance, has not relied solely on promotional messaging around the green hydrogen sector. Instead, it has placed investor-facing processes into the public domain through auction structures, published timelines, implementation updates and readiness tracking systems linked to infrastructure, logistics and local-content development. That approach moves communication closer to governance and investor relations rather than publicity alone. Regionally, similar thinking is emerging elsewhere in the Gulf. The focus is increasingly shifting towards combining digital reach with credible economic information, stronger verification standards and specialist reporting skills. For Omani institutions, the next step is practical rather than ideological. Major economic announcements should increasingly be accompanied by accessible project data: investment value, implementation phases, job targets, Omanisation indicators, completion rates and measurable milestones. Specialist media engagement should also be treated as part of institutional governance rather than simply public relations. Ultimately, visibility has value. But for a country building a diversified and investment-driven economy, credibility remains the most important currency. Visibility can attract attention. Economies, however, are not built on attention alone. They are built on trust, continuity, measurable results and the credibility of the information surrounding them. For Oman’s next economic phase, that credibility may prove more valuable than visibility itself.

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> 20

NATURAL HISTORY

SWEDISH EXPERT ON MISSION TO BRING JURASSIC ERA TO LIFE



Two hundred million years ago, the land that became southern Sweden was covered in lush vegetation where crocodiles and dinosaurs roamed, an era palaeontologist Vivi Vajda and her team have set out to reconstruct.

In a wing of the Museum of Natural History in Stockholm, the researcher recently welcomed AFP to her office, scattered with books and fossil samples.

Sitting behind her microscope, Vajda examined specimens collected in Sweden's southern Skane province, projecting them onto the wall.

"This is a pollen sample that I collected in the field", she said, pointing to brown and yellow spots, round and rectangular in shape.

Most Jurassic-era fossils found in Sweden have been discovered in Skane, preserved thanks to deep cracks in the ground that protected them from ice ages that erased traces elsewhere.

"I'm interested in what forests there were during the Jurassic period, so when I see a pollen grain, I actually see the tree and the ecosystem in front of me", she said.

The idea of showing the public what appeared in her mind when studying fossils gradually took shape during her fieldwork.

"I really felt that we lacked a book with illustrations that actually shows scientifically what it looked like in Sweden 200 to 100 million years ago", Vajda explained.

With her team, she set out to reconstruct entire ecosystems from the period. The illustrations were published in a book in October 2025.

Starting from fossil fragments — such as footprints, teeth, or leaves — the researchers identified species and pieced them together with an illustrator to recreate a Jurassic ecosystem.

"I was surprised about the biodiversity, because it was the first time we actually put all the animals and plants together in one ecosystem", she said.

The result likely reflects what life looked like, "because we find them in the same area, within a few hundred metres of rock".

"It was surprising to see such lush vegetation", she noted.

The dense greenery included ferns, primitive conifers and marsh plants — a far cry from today's Scandinavian landscapes.

The fossils provide "only a snapshot of one time interval... a window into the past", she said.

"But we can compare older and younger fossils to see how climate change and biodiversity evolved over time".

"It's always nice to see what it actually looked like and make the plants and animals come to life". — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



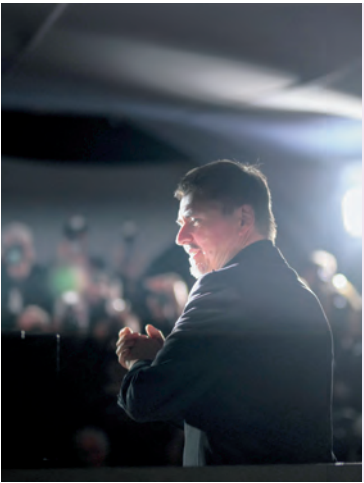
CULTURE

A child participates in the "Piu Sik" parade on the island of Cheung Chau during its annual Bun festival in Hong Kong. — AFP



MUSIC

Belgian singer and songwriter Eleonore Aziza known as Mentissa poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP



AWARDS

Romanian director, screenwriter and producer Cristian Mungiu poses with the trophy during a photocall after winning the Palme d'Or for the film "Fjord" during the 79th edition of the Cannes Film Festival. — AFP

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FRENCH FASHION HOUSE
Louis Vuitton combined ruffles, biker leather and the graphic art of Keith Haring for its celebrity-packed cruise 2027 show at a New York museum last week.
Under the gaze of Zendaya, Anne Hathaway and Cate Blanchett, Louis Vuitton’s artistic director for women’s wear Nicolas Ghesquière presented a collection built on contrasts and bright pops of colour.
Structured leather jackets were paired with fluffy Medici collars. Ensembles were punctuated by the Pop Art movement’s orange, pink and green, while also giving way to deep purple, dusty pink and teal.
Whether the models donned heels or sneakers, the shoes were metallic and legs were on display with boxer shorts, biker shorts and tailored Bermuda suits.

RUFFLES, BIKER LEATHER AND CELEBS AT LOUIS VUITTON’S NEW YORK SHOW

bucket or brimless — topped models’ heads when hair wasn’t left loose and marked with the horizontal streaks popularised by figure skater Alysa Liu, the brand’s new ambassador.
The show was held at The Frick Collection, marking the first time a fashion show has been hosted by the museum since its renovation last year.
Formerly the mansion of a steel magnate, the museum teems with an impressive collection of European paintings and art dating back to the Renaissance. Models stalked down the runway, passing under archways and past famed artworks.
“Within the timeless rooms of The Frick Collection, beauty and art transcend time in a quiet dialogue, while beyond its walls, New York City pulses with constant reinvention a convergence of contrasts”, the fashion house posted on Instagram, with the brand and the museum announcing a three-year patronage partnership.

— AFP

Women directors close Cannes, spotlighting gender gap



‘The Dreamed Adventure’ by Germany’s Valeska Grisebach premiered on the final day. — AFP

FILMS
BY TWO WOMEN directors wrapped up the main competition at the 2026 Cannes Film Festival on Friday, with men once again dominating the lineup, highlighting an industry where progress towards gender parity has stalled.
Only five of the 22 films in the main competition this year were directed by women, including “The Dreamed Adventure” by German filmmaker Valeska Grisebach and “The Birthday Party” by French director Lea Mysius, both of which premiered on the festival’s final day.
“I can’t really explain it because I’m not the committee. I’m not the one who decides”, Grisebach said. “I’m surrounded by many great female filmmakers”.
Only three women have won the Palme d’Or in the 79-year history of the Cannes Film Festival. In 1993, Jane Campion became the first woman to win for The Piano. French directors Julia Ducournau and Justine Triet followed with victories for Titane and Anatomy of a Fall respectively.
French director Geraldine Nakache, whose latest film Si Tu Penses Bien screened in a parallel section of the festival, said she felt “a bit powerless”.
“I’m here with my film and I tell myself, ‘I’m lucky to be here’, that things are moving forwards and then someone shows me the statistics”, she said.
Festival organisers also faced criticism this year for using Thelma and Louise on the official poster. Feminist collective Collectif 50/50 accused organisers of “feminism washing” by featuring actors Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon in promotional material.
“Programming is a political act”, Fanny De Casimacker from the collective said. “If only 23 per cent of directors in competition are women, we’re going to miss out on some



‘It’s not endemic just to the film industry, it’s global’, said Julianne Moore. — AFP

stories”.
Festival director Thierry Fremaux defended the selection process, noting that Cannes juries and governing bodies are gender balanced, while acknowledging that the festival alone cannot solve wider industry inequalities.
“If we are hesitating between two films ... and that hesitation is between a film by a male director and a film by a female director, we will choose the film by the female director”, Fremaux said at the start of the festival.
Women directed 34 per cent of all feature films selected across the festival’s official programme, including parallel sections, according to Cannes figures.
“The figures show that things are moving forwards, that it’s slow, that it’s not enough”, Fremaux said.
The imbalance extends beyond Cannes. A study by the University of Southern California’s Annenberg
Inclusion Initiative found that only nine of the 100 biggest US films last year were directed by women.
Speaking at Cannes, actress Julianne Moore said the number of women and girls in top-grossing films had dropped to 37 per cent, marking a 10 per cent decline in one year.
“It’s not endemic just to the film industry, it’s global”, Moore said after receiving a Women In Motion award from luxury group Kering.
“There’s not representation in the media, there’s not representation in higher education. There are lots of places where we don’t have the representation we deserve”, she added.
Actress Cate Blanchett also said progress since the 2017 #MeToo movement had slowed.
“I’m still on film sets and I do the headcount every day... there’s 10 women and there’s 75 men every morning”, Blanchett said. — AFP

FEATURES



The helmet design was showcased at the Oman Pavilion during Expo 2025 Osaka, marking its debut on an international stage.



Zainab al Lawati standing at the Oman Pavilion during Expo 2025 Osaka as her helmet design was unveiled to an international audience.



The moment Zainab al Lawati's design was unveiled at Expo 2025 Osaka.



Zainab al Lawati standing at the Oman Pavilion during Expo 2025 Osaka as her helmet design was unveiled to an international audience.



The finished helmet design featuring motifs of water, land and people connecting Oman and Japan.



BUTHAINA AL RIYAMI

AFTER MORE than a decade spent building her artistic career, Omani manga artist Zainab al Lawati received the phone call she had long hoped for: her helmet design had been selected for champion racer Ahmed al Harthy to wear during his international endurance races. The news arrived early on a Sunday morning and quickly turned into a family celebration. Years of persistence, self-doubt and long nights spent drawing suddenly felt worthwhile. For Zainab, the moment marked the realisation of a dream she had carried for 13 years. Winning the helmet design competition, organised by the Oman Pavilion and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, became more than a personal

achievement. It confirmed that the years she dedicated to manga and visual storytelling had shaped a creative voice capable of reaching an international audience. More importantly, it reminded her that this milestone was only the beginning. Zainab was inspired by three elements: water, land and people — a triad of connection she believed closely reflected the relationship between Oman and Japan. She wanted the design to narrate a story that whoever saw it could feel as much as see. She gave each element and colour a soul. Red, the dominant colour, served as a bridge between cultures, symbolising strength and determination while representing the shared spirit of both nations. White, meanwhile, offered purity and expansiveness, reflecting land, sky, resilience and the generosity

deeply embedded in both societies. Looking closely, viewers realise that nothing in the design is random. The helmet tells a richer story through famous landmarks from both cultures. On the Omani side are Jabal Shams, Muttrah Fort and the iconic Al Riyam center. On the Japanese side are Mount Fuji, Osaka Castle, and a traditional torii gate. Together, they document history. The helmet is also layered with symbolism. Earth, represented as motherhood, was depicted through Omani and Japanese women, while the future and leadership appeared through the presence of men. At the top of the helmet, the national emblem was adorned with Omani frankincense flowers and Japanese sakura cherry blossoms, binding the design with elegance and meaning. Water stands as the anchor of the entire composition, flowing across

the helmet to form a visual bridge between the two cultures, like a steady handshake. It carries heritage, history and people. “I wanted to carry both nations in harmony”, she explained. “Their people, their heritage, their land — all connected by the water between them”. As many artists do, Zainab usually slows down and layers her creative process. Her sketches become refined drawings, which turn into inked lines and eventually evolve into deeply detailed, multi-toned compositions. But this project demanded something different. As she learned about the competition late, she had only a few hours to conceive and submit her idea, requiring both speed and instinct. Traditional measuring alone consumed the first three hours, as she constructed the helmet’s foundational shapes by hand.

The entire creation took 11 hours in one sitting, from dusk until early morning. There were no second drafts and no room for perfectionism — only trust. It was an intense sprint of determination and clarity. The first time she saw her design come alive was at the Oman Pavilion during Expo 2025 Osaka in Japan. Standing there as her work was revealed to an international audience felt surreal. Another unforgettable moment came when she watched Ahmed al Harthy race at Fuji Speedway wearing her design. When she later met Ahmed in person, his reaction humbled her. He revealed that her design had stood out to him from the moment it appeared during the judging process. Those words from the champion himself became a moment she says she will carry forever.

MEET THE OMANI ARTIST

BEHIND AHMED AL HARTHY’S AWARD WINNING HELMET

