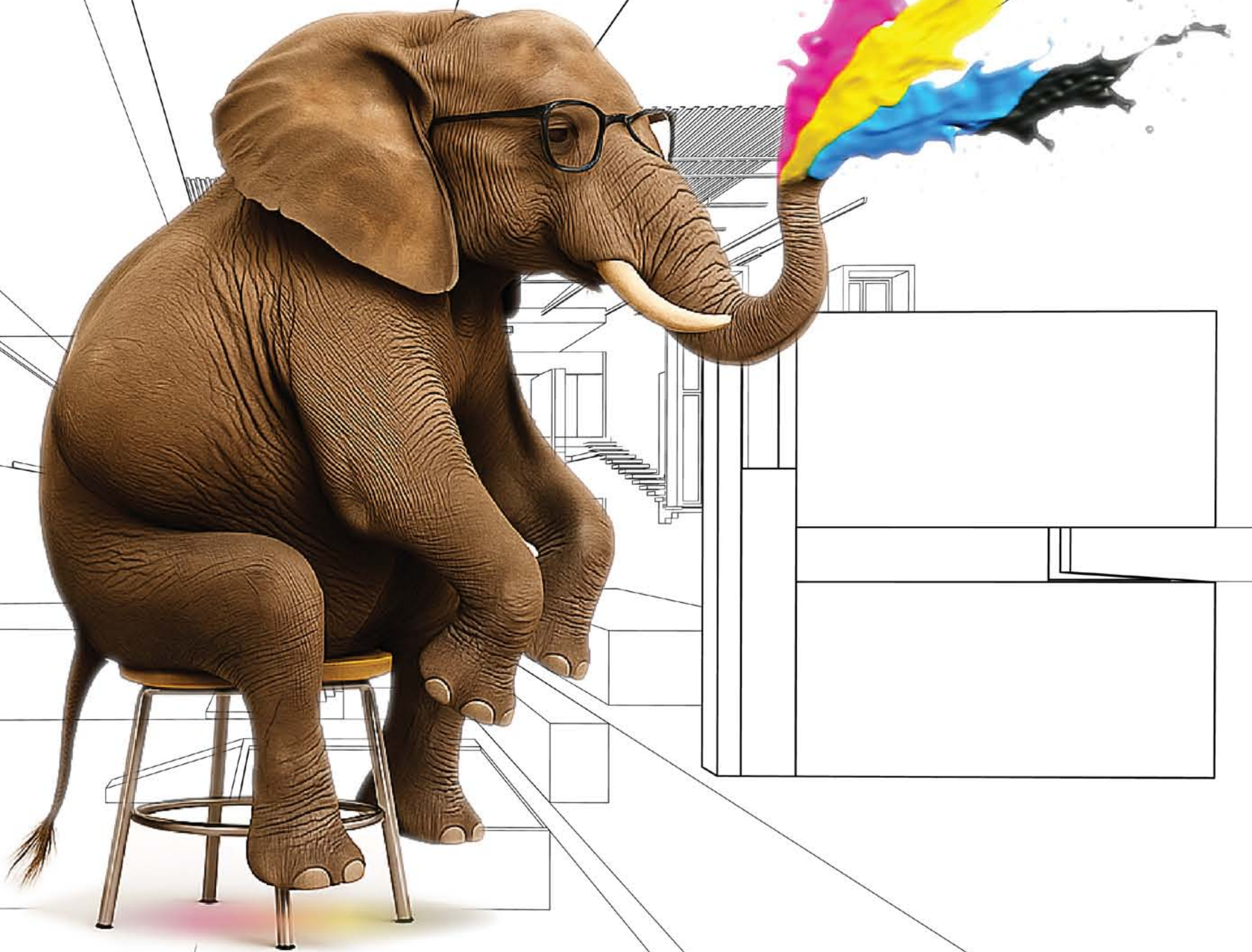


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REVIEW MEETING

Sayyid Bilarab chairs Muscat Municipal Council meeting

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, chaired the Muscat Governorate Municipal Council meeting on Thursday.

The Council commenced its session by approving the minutes of its first meeting and the recommendations contained therein, led by the adoption of its action plan for 2026.

This plan was established within a framework of interconnected operational paths reflecting a more integrated approach to performance and is centred on enhancing the Council's presence and effectiveness in monitoring local affairs and developing the quality of its institutional outputs.

Among its most prominent features, the plan is organised into several key tracks, including institutional integration with government entities, field communication, priorities of the wilayats, monitoring development projects, and developing human capital while raising performance efficiency.

The plan also placed importance on strengthening coordination channels with various relevant



authorities to contribute to unifying efforts and addressing shared challenges, alongside expanding areas of direct interaction with the community through a field presence that enhances the understanding of local priorities.

Furthermore, it included supporting directives for monitor-

ing projects with a developmental impact, as well as initiatives aimed at improving institutional performance efficiency and capacity building through training programmes to elevate the standard of work and keep pace with the development aspirations in Muscat Governorate. — ONA



Oman moving towards building a diversified, competitive economy

Economic data for the period 2020–2024 shows robust growth in non-oil foreign trade, with non-oil exports rising from OMR3.4 billion to OMR6.2 billion — a growth rate of 21.9 percent

MUSCAT: Over the past five years, the Sultanate of Oman has pressed ahead with a comprehensive reform agenda that has reshaped its business environment, strengthened competitiveness and delivered measurable progress across key economic indicators, in line with the objectives of the Oman Vision 2040 strategy.

Economic data for the period 2020–2024 shows robust growth in non-oil foreign trade, with non-oil exports rising from OMR3.4 billion to OMR6.2 billion — a growth rate of 21.9 percent. The increase reflects sustained government efforts to diversify income sources, expand the production base and open new markets for Omani products through trade promotion programmes and regional and international partnerships.

Mubarak bin Mohammed Al-Duhani, Director General of Planning at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said the achievements recorded between 2020 and 2025 underscore the effectiveness of strategic planning aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

He noted that growth in non-oil exports, rising added value in manufacturing and the doubling of foreign direct investment stock were driven by integrated financial, legislative and digital policies.

National accounts data shows that the value added of manufacturing industries increased from OMR2.4 billion in 2020 to OMR4.1 billion in 2024, while wholesale and retail trade grew from OMR2.6 billion to OMR3.3 billion, enhancing supply chain efficiency and commercial activity.

On the investment front, Khalid Hamad Al Kharousi, Director General of Investment Promotion at the ministry, said total cumulative foreign direct investment rose from OMR14.2 billion in 2020 to nearly OMR30 billion in 2024, and exceeded OMR30.9 billion by the end of the third quarter of 2025 — a 16.2 percent increase compared to the same period in 2024.

Foreign investment in manufacturing alone reached OMR2.7 billion by the end of Q3 2025.



completion by 2025, up from 46 percent in 2023.

Legislative modernisation has accompanied this transformation. The ministry issued 49 regulatory decisions covering e-commerce, marketing practices, product identity licensing, quality marks and foreign investment activities, enhancing transparency and governance.

In the industrial sector, implementation of the Industrial Strategy 2040 continued to yield results. By the end of 2025, manufacturing industries contributed OMR3.879 billion to GDP, up 7.2 percent from 2024. Industrial foreign investment rose to OMR3.49 billion in 2025, marking a 24.6 percent increase year-on-year.

Employment in the sector grew to approximately 248,000 workers.

Non-oil exports reached OMR6.885 billion in 2025, up 10.5 percent from 2024. The number of establishments holding the national product identity certificate reached 166 by the end of 2025.

In quality and standards development, Emad bin Khamis Al-Shukaili, Director General of Standards and Metrology, highlighted efforts to strengthen the national quality system through international cooperation and expanded conformity services. During 2025, more than 135,000 electronic conformity certificates were issued, alongside 166 national conformity certificates and over 2,000 energy efficiency labels.

The Sultanate signed memoranda of understanding with Bahrain, India, Belarus and Tunisia in areas related to precious metals and conformity systems, while enhancing participation in international standardisation organisations.

In competition protection, Ahmed Salem Al-Rasbi, Director General of the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Centre, said automation of services and sectoral studies have strengthened transparency and reduced unjustified market concentration, reinforcing a fair and competitive investment environment.

Collectively, these achievements reflect Oman's steady progress toward building a diversified, knowledge-based and competitive economy grounded in modern legislation, digital transformation, industrial growth and sustainable investment flows.

— ONA



Investment promotion efforts have targeted strategic sectors including manufacturing, renewable energy, advanced technologies and the circular economy, supported by the activation of the "Invest in Oman" platform and expanded in-

ternational engagement.

Oman's progress has also been reflected in global benchmarks.

The Sultanate improved its ranking in the Index of Economic Freedom from 76th place in 2020 to 58th in 2025, while advancing in

the Global Innovation Index from 84th to 69th place during the same period, driven by regulatory reforms and digital transformation initiatives.

Digital transformation has been central to reform efforts. The min-

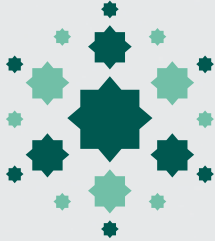
istry now operates nine integrated electronic platforms serving investors and entrepreneurs, including "Oman Business," "Invest in Oman," "Oman Exports," "Made in Oman," "Ma'roof Oman," "Hazm," and "Sanad Centres." The maturity rate of electronic services on the Oman Business platform rose to 72 percent in 2024, compared to 50 percent in 2020.

Between 2020 and 2025, more than 700,000 automatic licenses were issued, over 2.8 million electronic transactions were executed, and around 446,000 active commercial records were registered. Completed industrial licenses exceeded 103,900, while total transactions during the five-year period surpassed 3 million.

Nasra bint Sultan Al-Habsi, Director General of Trade at the ministry, said the growth in commercial registrations and e-commerce licenses reflects market vitality and confidence in the regulatory framework.

Active e-commerce licenses reached 9,637, alongside 929 licenses for social media marketing activities.

The National E-Commerce Plan (2022–2027) achieved 83 percent



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COMMENTARY

Rights of creditors during company liquidation in Oman

Under Royal Decree 18/2019, the Commercial Companies Law provides a strong safety net for those owed money, ensuring they are not forgotten when a business dissolves. When a company enters liquidation, whether by shareholder decision or court order, creditors are given clear rights that put them first in line before anyone else gets paid.

In an exclusive interview with Times of Oman, Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim Al Zadjali, Founding Partner of Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm, explains that “the moment a company dissolves, a licensed liquidator takes over. Their main responsibility is to settle the company’s obligations. A key part of this process is protecting the rights of creditors. This liquidator must immediately notify all known creditors by letter and publish a public announcement. Creditors then have 180 days from the publication date to submit their claims. This gives everyone who is owed money enough time to come forward and register what the company owes them.”

“Creditors also have the



power to stop a company from making moves that could interfere with the settlement of their claims. If a struggling company tries to merge with another or change its legal form, creditors can object within 30 days. Once an objection is filed, the process stops until the company either pays the debt or provides a guarantee that satisfies the creditor. This right prevents companies from using restructuring to escape their debts,” he said.

Dr. Mohammed stated that “when the time comes to distribute the company’s assets, creditors stand first in line. The



law requires that liquidation expenses and the liquidator’s fees be paid first, and thereafter all valid debts be settled in accordance with their statutory ranking before any money goes to shareholders. Shareholders are only entitled to receive any remaining assets after creditors’ claims have been fully satisfied.”

“Once all debts are settled, any remaining assets go to shareholders. The liquidator then prepares a final report for approval by both creditors and shareholders before the company is formally removed from the commercial register,” Dr. Mohammed noted.

“This system ensures that creditors are protected throughout the entire process,

maintaining trust in Oman’s business environment, he concluded.”

(Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm (info@mohammedibrahim.net), (+968 244 87 600) was established on 14th December 2006 and is serving clients through its offices in Muscat and Sohar, as well as operating on a request basis in other areas. It offers legal representation across a wide range of practice areas that include Labour Law, Corporate, Commercial, Contracts, Banking and Finance, International Trade, Foreign Investment, Insurance, Maritime Law, Construction and Engineering Contracts, International Arbitration, Intellectual Property and more).

ESCALATING CONFLICT

Many Muscat-bound passengers stranded at different airports

<FROM A1 “I understand safety comes first,” he said, “but some communication would have made this easier. We were left in the dark.”

The disruption was a small human ripple in a wider storm—escalating conflicts in the Gulf, airspace closures, and halted flights—but for Hari, it was a vivid reminder of how global events can suddenly touch everyday lives.

Hari was not alone. Thousands of Muscat-bound passengers were stranded at different airports after military strikes between Iran and Israel triggered widespread airspace closures across the Gulf.

An Indian expat, Varsha, who was supposed to take a flight from Dubai to Muscat, ended up making a road trip instead after her flight was cancelled. “We went with two families to spend the weekend in Dubai. After the flights got cancelled, we hired a car and reached Muscat,” she told Times of Oman.

In Muscat, Oman Airports confirmed that flight delays and cancellations were likely due to the closure of certain airspaces and advised passengers to check flight



status updates before travelling to the airport.

Oman Air said it had suspended flights to Baghdad, Moscow, Amman, and Khasab until further notice and temporarily suspended services on several Gulf routes as a precaution, while the rest of its network continued to operate as scheduled.

The airline added that flights would be rerouted where necessary depending on operational and safety assessments.

Other carriers were also affected. SalamAir announced cancellation of all its international flights, while India’s IndiGo and Air India cancelled all flights to and from several Middle Eastern destinations.



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DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman Refreshment Company SAOG, I am pleased to present to you the annual report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31st December 2025.

Business Environment

The year 2025 saw continued progress in Oman's economic transformation under Vision 2040, with ongoing reforms strengthening the foundations for sustainable, long-term growth. The Government's commitment to diversification, private-sector development, and financial discipline continued to move the national economy in a positive direction.

In this evolving landscape, the fast-moving consumer goods sector remained active and dynamic, supported by expanding consumer choice and a more competitive marketplace. Our Company remained focused on capturing opportunities, enhancing our commercial execution, strengthening customer partnerships, and investing in brand visibility.

Despite a demanding & highly competitive operating environment, we continued to build resilience, optimize efficiencies, and reinforce the capabilities that position us for future growth.

As we look ahead, we remain confident in the strength of our strategy, the commitment of our people, and the opportunities created by the Sultanate's ongoing reform agenda. Together, these pillars ensure that the Company is well placed to deliver sustainable value to all stakeholders in the years to come.

Financial Highlights

The ORC Parent Company achieved a net profit after tax of 2.27m on a turnover of 46.29m during the year 2025 against a net loss after tax of (3.99m) on a turnover of 40.87m in 2024, registering an increase in the net profit after tax by 157% and turnover by 13.3% respectively. The improved performance during the year reflects the Company's effective operational strategies, cost optimisation initiatives, and enhanced market positioning, despite continued regional geopolitical challenges and intense competitive pressures.

At the ORC Group consolidated, the group achieved a net profit after tax of 3.87m on a turnover of 68.63m during the year 2025 against a net loss after tax of (2.78)m on a turnover of 63.37m in 2024, registering an increase in the net profit after tax by 239% and 8.3% increase in the turnover vs Year 2024.

Further, company has been engaged in various corporate social responsibility activities during the year hereby creating an impact to the Omani society and has invested 13.3K towards such activities.

Internal Control System

The Board has regularly reviewed the adequacy and effectiveness of the existing internal control system in the Company and found it to be satisfactory.

Dividend

The Company's dividend policy aims to reward shareholders by distributing an appropriate portion of annual profits, while ensuring sufficient retention to support future projects, investment opportunities, and working capital needs. The Board of Directors seeks to maintain a

balanced approach by providing a consistent & sustainable payout ratio.

After reviewing the Company's performance in 2025, which reflected recovery, and considering the regional business environment, liquidity considerations, projected earnings, and the long-term interests of the Company & our shareholders, the Board is pleased to recommend a cash dividend of 14 Baizas per share for the year 2025.

Looking Ahead

The Company's continued focus on operational efficiencies, enhanced productivity, strengthened systems, innovation, and disciplined expansion plans will serve as key drivers of growth as we advance into 2026. With regional geopolitical conditions showing signs of improvement, the Company remains fully aware of the evolving competitive landscape in a highly price-sensitive market and is committed to sustaining and profitably strengthening its market position. At the same time, we recognize the potential impact of global geopolitical developments, commodity price volatility, labor market challenges, and upcoming regulatory changes. Nevertheless, the Company looks ahead with confidence, drawing on its lean and efficient structure, continued productivity enhancements, innovative initiatives, and consumer-centric strategies to deliver an improved financial performance in the coming year.

Nurturing Omani talent & Omanisation of workforce

As a responsible Omani corporate citizen, the Company is totally aligned with Sultanate of Oman strategic vision to nurture Omani talent in the private sector. The company's HR strategy focusses on recruitment of right staff & their continuous development, through on the job training and by providing focused learning opportunities commensurate with the responsibilities to enable them to assume higher responsibilities in the organization.

Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to extend our sincere appreciation to the management and employees for their dedication and strong contributions throughout the year. I also take this opportunity to convey our gratitude to our consumers, customers, PepsiCo, our valued business partners, the banking community, and the various Government authorities for their continued trust and support.

Further, on behalf of the Board of Directors & the management, I take this opportunity to extend our sincere appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq and his Government for their wise leadership, guidance and direction which continue to motivate and inspire us towards greater participation in the development and service of Oman. We pray to the Almighty Allah to bestow His Majesty with the best of health and bless him with long life to lead the Sultanate of Oman on the path of prosperity.

Buti Obaid Al Mulla
Chairman

AUDITED SEPARATE AND CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2025 (EXPRESSED IN ٢٠٠٠)

ASSETS	Parent Company		Group	
	2025	2024	2025	2024
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment and Capital work-in-progress	24,767,399	26,632,400	59,661,197	57,016,130
Right-of-use assets	-	-	214,093	219,188
Investment in subsidiaries	24,471,200	24,471,200	-	-
Intangible assets	-	-	23,043	32,517
Goodwill	-	-	1,423,092	1,379,904
Financial assets at amortised cost	2,648,895	2,641,645	2,648,895	2,641,645
	882,061	620,185	882,061	620,185
Financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income	-	-	7,714	6,735
Other investments	-	-	928,940	1,379,585
Deferred tax asset	-	437,853	-	-
Total non-current assets	52,769,555	54,803,283	65,786,981	63,295,889
Current assets				
Inventories	6,613,680	6,933,795	13,230,320	12,569,819
Trade and other receivables	9,497,826	8,296,462	22,351,283	10,095,523
Due from related parties	1,113,357	834,709	60,710	101,875
Term deposits	19,000,000	19,000,000	19,000,000	19,000,000
Cash and bank balances	7,168,503	1,532,802	9,566,297	2,734,270
Total current assets	43,393,366	36,597,768	64,208,610	44,501,487
Total assets	96,162,921	91,401,051	129,997,591	107,797,376
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Capital and reserves				
Share capital	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000
Legal reserve	1,666,667	1,666,667	1,696,167	1,696,167
Foreign exchange translation reserve	-	-	-	664,081
Fair value reserve	(23,004)	-	(23,004)	-
General reserve	2,500,000	2,500,000	2,500,000	2,500,000
Retained earnings	69,723,267	67,451,442	71,622,783	67,753,514
Total capital and reserves	78,866,930	76,618,109	81,519,499	77,613,762
LIABILITIES				
Non-current liabilities				
Term loans	-	-	6,978,903	1,745,842
Provisions	-	-	6,529	121,306
Lease liabilities	-	-	128,673	130,952
Employees' benefit liabilities	1,250,969	1,279,372	1,287,804	1,304,096
Total non-current liabilities	1,250,969	1,279,372	8,381,999	3,302,196
Current liabilities				
Term loans	-	3,484,803	-	3,484,803
Short-term loans	4,946,072	-	12,796,328	7,342,154
Lease liabilities	-	-	97,137	99,563
Due to related parties	148,734	152,034	48,734	52,034
Trade and other payables	10,950,216	9,818,333	27,109,684	15,824,555
Income tax payable	-	48,400	44,210	78,309
Total current liabilities	16,045,022	13,503,570	40,096,093	26,881,418
Total liabilities	17,295,991	14,782,942	48,478,092	30,183,614
Total equity and liabilities	96,162,921	91,401,051	129,997,591	107,797,376
Net assets per share	1.577	1.532	1.630	1.552

AUDITED SEPARATE AND CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2025 (EXPRESSED IN ٢٠٠٠)

Revenue	Parent Company		Group	
	For the year ended 31 December 2025	For the year ended 31 December 2024	For the year ended 31 December 2025	For the year ended 31 December 2024
Revenue	46,292,587	40,870,748	68,632,135	63,369,118
Cost of sales	(30,876,686)	(29,801,659)	(46,069,462)	(45,513,796)
Gross profit	15,415,901	11,069,089	22,562,673	17,855,322
Selling and distribution expenses	(11,330,141)	(13,430,904)	(14,117,838)	(16,873,809)
General and administrative expenses	(3,300,934)	(3,607,707)	(5,011,399)	(5,078,330)
(Charge)/reversal for expected credit losses on trade and other receivables	(17,120)	(9,480)	82,693	199,864
Net profit/(loss) from operations	767,706	(5,979,002)	3,516,129	(3,896,953)
Other income	852,840	150,842	932,331	237,146
Finance costs	(78,750)	(231,936)	(846,970)	(854,513)
Finance income	1,109,382	1,294,585	1,109,382	1,294,585
Net profit/(loss) before tax for the year	2,661,278	(4,765,511)	4,710,872	(3,219,735)
Income tax expense	(389,453)	776,760	(841,603)	444,465
Net profit/(loss) after tax for the year	2,271,825	(3,986,751)	3,869,269	(2,775,270)
Other comprehensive income:				
Items that will be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss:				
Foreign exchange difference on translation of goodwill	-	-	43,188	(10,587)
Foreign exchange differences on translation of foreign operations	-	-	16,284	(12,433)
Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss:				
Unrealised fair value loss on financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income	(39,169)	-	(39,169)	-
Exchange gain on financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income	16,165	-	16,165	-
Other comprehensive income/(loss) for the year	(23,004)	-	36,468	(23,020)
Total comprehensive income/(loss) for the year	2,248,821	(3,986,751)	3,905,737	(2,798,290)
Basic and diluted (loss)/earnings per share	0.045	(0.080)	0.077	(0.056)



MORE THAN 5,000 PEOPLE ATTEND IFTAR IN RUWI



The event brought together prominent community leaders, families, elders, youth, and volunteers, reflecting the strong bonds of brotherhood and the true essence of Ramadan

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In a remarkable display of unity, service, and community spirit, the Deccani Wing of the Indian Social Club Oman successfully hosted its annual Hyderabad Community Iftar at the iconic Clock Tower in Ruwi, welcoming an unprecedented gathering of over 5,500 attendees.

The event brought together prominent community leaders, families, elders, youth, and volunteers, reflecting the strong bonds of brotherhood and the true essence of Ramadan.

Meticulous planning
For more than two decades, this annual iftar has stood as a symbol of togetherness and compassion, and this year's gathering further strengthened its legacy.

The evening was marked by meticulous planning and seamless coordination, ensuring a comfortable and spiritually uplifting experience for all attendees. Special arrangements were made to ac-

commodate families, elders, and children, highlighting the inclusive spirit of the Deccani community.

The atmosphere was filled with warmth and gratitude as the Maghrib call to prayer echoed through the historic landmark, followed by the breaking of the fast and congregational prayers.

Thousands of iftar meals were distributed efficiently, thanks to the tireless efforts of a dedicated

team of volunteers who worked with sincerity and devotion.

Suhail Khan, a senior community leader, expressed his heartfelt gratitude, saying:

"Alhamdulillah, witnessing over 5,500 people come together in unity and brotherhood is truly humbling. This gathering reflects the strength, generosity, and spirit of our community. It is not just an iftar, but a symbol of service, compassion, and

our shared commitment to preserving our values and traditions."

Volunteer Syed Fasiuddin shared his experience, stating:

"It is an honour to serve the community during such a blessed month. Seeing thousands of people break their fast together and knowing that we played a small role in facilitating this brings immense satisfaction and spiritual fulfillment."

Volunteer Shabaaz Ali high-

lighted the teamwork behind the success, saying:

"The scale of this event was massive, but the unity among volunteers made everything possible. Everyone worked with one intention – to serve for the sake of Allah and the community."

Community member Abdul Aziz reflected on the emotional significance of the gathering:

"This iftar is more than just a

meal. It brings back memories, strengthens friendships, and reminds us of our roots and responsibilities towards one another."

Munawaruddin, another respected member of the community, added:

"Such gatherings reinforce the spirit of brotherhood and remind us of the true message of Ramadan – unity, humility, and generosity."

The Deccani Wing extended its sincere appreciation to all sponsors, donors, volunteers, and supporters whose contributions made the event possible.

Their generosity and dedication ensured the smooth execution of one of the largest community iftars in Oman.

As the evening concluded with prayers for peace, prosperity, and unity, the event once again reaffirmed the Deccani Wing's unwavering commitment to serving the community and fostering harmony among all.



MEETING

HH Sayyid Theyyazin receives FAO Director-General

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Theyyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs received on Thursday Dr. Qu Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), and his accompanying delegation, as part of his current visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, they reviewed the cooperation relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the FAO, particularly in the agricultural, fisheries, and food sectors. They also explored ways to develop and strengthen the partnership in line with national priorities and the objectives of sustainable development.

Sayyid Theyyazin emphasised

the importance of the FAO's continued efforts in implementing its programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing global food security and addressing challenges affecting the sustainability of food supply chains, especially amid rapid global changes.

For his part, the Director-General of the FAO expressed his appreciation for the role undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman in supporting international efforts in fields related to food security. He affirmed the Organization's commitment to expanding areas of cooperation with the Sultanate of Oman and exchanging expertise, contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goals.

— OMA



Oman emerges as preferred tourist destination during winter season

The surge has been driven by increased demand from domestic travelers, GCC markets and key European countries, particularly from Germany, France and Italy



MUSCAT: The winter tourism season in the Sultanate of Oman is delivering strong results this year, reflecting the country's growing appeal as a preferred destination for regional and international travelers.

Stretching from October to April, the winter season has seen a noticeable rise in visitor numbers and hotel occupancy rates across the country. The surge has been driven by increased demand from domestic travelers, GCC markets

and key European countries, particularly Germany, France and Italy.

According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, revenues of hotels classified between three and five stars grew by 22.2 percent in 2025, reaching OMR297.3 million. The number of visitors in this category exceeded 2.37 million, underscoring Oman's strengthening position as an integrated global tourism destination. Overall hotel guests reached 4.6 million, marking a 4.6 percent increase.

Domestic tourism remains a cornerstone of the sector's performance. In 2024, local visits climbed to 13.6 million, reflecting strong community engagement with Oman's tourism offerings and contributing significantly to the sustainability of the industry.

The growth in demand has translated into improved operational and financial indicators. Experts noted increases in occupancy rates, higher average room prices and diversified revenue streams spanning leisure tourism,

business travel and conferences.

Hotel infrastructure has also expanded rapidly.

The number of hotel establishments rose to 1,368 in 2025, compared to 1,022 in 2024, while total room capacity reached 38,390 — an 8.7 percent increase. The ministry issued 383 preliminary approvals for new projects, with 114 hotels currently under development and expected to open in 2026 and 2027. Investments in integrated tourism complexes have surpassed OMR11.5 billion, reflecting contin-

ued investor confidence in Oman's tourism market.

In Al-Wusta Governorate, Saeed bin Masoud Al-Hanzali, Operations Manager at the Crowne Plaza Duqm, said the hotel recorded improved occupancy and revenue performance compared to last year. He attributed the growth to a balanced mix of business tourism linked to Duqm's economic projects and leisure travel from regional and European markets.

In Muscat, Fahad bin Mohammed Al-Husseini, Director of Sales and Government Relations at The Chedi Muscat, reported occupancy rates exceeding 85 percent during the winter season. He credited international promotional campaigns, participation in tourism exhibitions and influencer marketing initiatives for attracting visitors from Europe, Russia and China.

Musandam Governorate also recorded solid performance. Tariq bin Ali Al-Sahlan, General Manager of Atana Hotels and Resorts, confirmed a 7 percent rise in occupancy compared to last year. During peak winter periods, weekday occupancy ranged between 70 and 72 percent, rising to between 90 and 93 percent on weekends. He added that average revenue per room increased by 8 percent,

with positive spillover effects on restaurants, marine activities and tour services.

In Dhofar Governorate, Maher Bahsoon, General Manager of the Crowne Plaza Resort Salalah, described the season as particularly strong. The hotel recorded growth in individual and group bookings, longer guest stays and increased demand for sea-view accommodations. European and CIS markets showed notable expansion, supported by additional direct charter flights to Salalah.

Meanwhile, Amer bin Abdullah Al-Zadjali, CEO of Al Sawadi Beach Resort, said occupancy during November and December reached 75 percent. He noted that regional and international visitors accounted for 60 percent of total arrivals during the winter season and highlighted the importance of expanding air connectivity, particularly with Russia.

Observers believe the positive indicators reflect the success of promotional campaigns, enhanced air links, diversified tourism products and strengthened cooperation between public and private sectors. Together, these efforts are reinforcing Oman's competitiveness and laying the groundwork for continued sustainable growth in future tourism seasons. — OMA

BILATERAL COOPERATION

Omani-Bahraini Bazaar expo opens

MUSCAT: The Omani-Bahraini Bazaar Exhibition opened on Friday evening in Muscat, as part of efforts to strengthen fraternal ties and advance economic integration between Oman and Bahrain.

The exhibition is organised by the Embassy of Bahrain in Oman in cooperation with the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association, under the patronage of Ghalib bin Said Al Maamari, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Commerce, In-

dustry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry.

The event reflects the long-standing historical relations between the two countries and their peoples, translating the leaderships' directives to deepen bilateral cooperation across various sectors and enhance coordination toward economic integration.

The exhibition aims to boost trade exchange by opening direct marketing channels between pro-

ducers and consumers, while supporting entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises through a platform to showcase their products and services.

The exhibition also promotes the exchange of expertise in production, marketing and business management, highlights the cultural and heritage diversity of both countries, and creates opportunities for future investment partnerships.



Ministry of Defence

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

1. The Ministry of Defense (MOD) invites registered suppliers to participate in the following tender:

NO	SUBJECT	TENDER NUMBER	LAST DATE FOR INQUIRIES	LAST DATE TO SUBMIT BIDS	TENDER DOCUMENT FEES+ VAT
1	SUPPLY OF FROZEN MUTTON FOR THE PERIOD OF THREE YEARS	08/2026	06/04/2026	12/04/2026	1575 RO

2. Tenders documents and terms may be obtained on payment from the office of the Secretary of the Tender Committee, gate No. 14 of MAM Camp between 0900 to 1300 hrs on the working days.

3. Omanisation compliance certificate (Issued by Ministry of Labor) with a validity period not exceeding one month from the date of issuance must be submitted when purchasing tender's document.

4. Payment of Tender documents to be made by using of any Visa Electron Cards or "Visa credit" Cards or through Smart Card issued from all the banks are operated in oman



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TENDER NOTICE

REF: ISM/ADMIN/TENDER/2025-26/005

Sealed tenders are invited from potential service providers / contractors / consultants for the following requirements of the school.

1. General insurance coverage for Students, Staff & Properties

2. Supply & fixing of Safety Window Grills in all the Blocks (A, B, C, D & E)

Interested parties shall collect the tender documents from the school cash counter against the payment of RO.10/- as a non-refundable tender fee from 01 March to 09 March 2026 during the working days of the school between 7.30 a.m. and 12.45 p.m.

The tender should be submitted in separate sealed envelopes; one with the technical documents and another with commercial proposal clearly indicating the title on the top of the cover. The parameters for the technical evaluation are provided in the tender for the information of vendors. It is the responsibility of the vendor to submit the documents related to the technical evaluation along with the tender in a separate envelope. The tender should be in a sealed envelope, addressed to The Chairman, Purchase Sub Committee, Indian School Muscat, P.O. Box: 2470, PC: 112, Sultanate of Oman.

Note: The tender shall clearly mention the "Name of service quoted for" by the bidding party. Any tender without the name of service/supply will be considered disqualified.

Last date of tender submission: 18th March 2026



وزارة الصحة
Ministry of Health



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am THURSDAY	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/NIZH-9/828/2026	Rent Photocopy Machine nizwa Hospital	MAR/2026/15	ABR /2026 /09	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25,000 Per set R.O 10,000 FOR SME

Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose Electronic Bank Guarantee issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Priorities of the 11th Five-Year Plan to be reviewed on Monday

The session, being held at OCCI's second Ramadan evening, will highlight the strategic goals of the Five-Year Plan and its role in promoting economic diversification and improving the business environment

MUSCAT: The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) will review on Monday the priorities of the 11th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) during its second Ramadan evening.

The event will held under the patronage of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said Al Busaidi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, in the presence of Sheikh Faisal bin Abdullah Al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a number of Board members, representatives of government and private entities, and business owners. The event will take place at the Kempinski Hotel Muscat, Al Mouj.

This evening comes as part of OCCI's efforts to open a broad discussion on economic development targets and enhance private-sector readiness for the upcoming growth phase, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

The session will highlight the strategic goals of the Five-Year Plan and its role in promoting economic diversification and improving the business environment.

It will also review plans to de-



velop high value-added industries and support smart manufacturing, strategies to diversify the tourism product towards high-quality and sustainable tourism, as well as digital transformation as a key enabler, the development of digital infrastructure, and support for the adoption of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence in both the public and private sectors.

The evening will further address plans to develop infrastructure and national capabilities in productive and service sectors, contributing to increasing the private sector's role and strengthening public-private partnership in implementing the Plan (2026-2030).

Sheikh Faisal bin Abdullah Al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI, stated that or-

ganising this evening comes at an important time, as the Chamber seeks to provide a dialogue platform that brings together officials, decision-makers, experts, and business owners to discuss the priorities of the 11th Five-Year Plan, highlight promising growth opportunities for the private sector, and enhance awareness of future economic directions to support the realisation of Oman Vision 2040.

He noted that the outcomes of this evening will contribute to supporting implementation during the coming phase.

The evening will also feature a panel discussion with the participation of Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki Al Said, Chairman of OCCI Economic Committee; Eng. Ahmed bin Hassan Al Dheeb, OPAZ Deputy Chairman; Dr Nasser bin Rashid Al Maawali, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Economy; Dr Ali bin Amer Al Shidhani, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology; and Azzan bin Qassim Al Busaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism.



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DEEPLY CONCERNED

India expresses concern at Gulf developments

NEW DELHI The Ministry of External Affairs of India on Saturday expressed concern at the developments in the Middle East.

The statement asked Indians abroad to follow instructions in advisories.

"India is deeply concerned at the recent developments in Iran and the Gulf region. We urge all sides to exercise restraint, avoid escalation, and prioritise the safety of civilians. Dialogue and diplomacy should be pursued to de-escalate tensions and address underlying issues. Sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states must be respected. Our Missions in the region are in touch with Indian nationals and have issued appropriate advisories asking them to remain vigilant, stay in contact with the Missions, and follow local security guidance," the statement read.

Several countries across the region have shut their airspace amid the exchange of attacks.

The Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi on Saturday issued an advisory for Indian students in the UAE to avoid unnecessary travel.

The advisory was one of the many issued by Indian missions in the Middle East.

"In view of the current regional situation, all Indian nationals in the United Arab Emirates are advised to avoid unnecessary travel, take due care, remain vigilant, follow safety guidelines and advisories as and when issued by the UAE authorities and the Embassy. The Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi and the Consulate General in Dubai are continuing to function normally and will issue updates as necessary," the advisory

read.

"For any emergency query, the Indian nationals in the UAE can contact the following numbers: Toll free number: 800-46342 WhatsApp: +971543090571 Email: pbsk.dubai@mea.gov.in and ca.abudhabi@mea.gov.in."

The Consulate General of India in Jeddah gave emergency contact details in case any Indian needed help.

"Emergency contact details of the Consulate General of India in Jeddah are as follows: WhatsApp No.: + 966 536209704 Landline No.: 00 966 126648660 / 00 966 12 2614093 Mobile No.: +966 556122301 Toll Free No.: 800 244 0003 Email : consw.jeddah@mea.gov.in, vclab.jeddah@mea.gov.in"

The Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia also advised its citizens to be vigilant. "In view of the prevailing situation in the region, all Indian Nationals currently in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are advised to remain vigilant, strictly adhere to the safety guidelines prevalent in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and follow advisories issued by the local authorities and the Embassy." **-ANI**

LURED INTO THE CONFLICT

How Africans are being drawn into Russia's war in Ukraine

MOSCOW: More reports are surfacing across the continent of Africans fighting in Russia's war in Ukraine.

This week, South Africa's foreign minister, Ronald Lamola, met with the families of 11 South African men recently repatriated after being lured into the conflict.

The ministry said it was deeply concerned by the "suspicious circumstances" and predatory recruitment tactics used. Separately, Lamola said two South Africans had died fighting for Russia.

In Kenya, a court charged the director of a recruiting company with trafficking the victims to "Russia for the purpose of exploitation by means of deception," Reuters reported the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions as having said.

The director, 33, is accused of being a key figure in a network that sent more than 1,000 Kenyans to fight for the Russian army. He has been charged with human trafficking, the state prosecutor said.

Meanwhile, officials in Ghana say they have negotiated the release of two Ghanaian prisoners of war from Ukraine following a meeting between Minister of Foreign Affairs Samuel Okudzeto and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Tricked into fighting in Ukraine

But already, family members have been lost. In a church on the outskirts of Uganda's capital, Kampala, Caroline Mukiza, 42, dries her tears as she mourns her husband.

After her prayer, Mukiza ambles through the peaceful church garden. She told DW her 46-year-old partner, Edson Kamwesigye, was killed on the front line of Russia's war in Ukraine.

Mukiza says her husband had previously worked as a security guard in Iraq and Afghanistan.

She knows that in December, Kamwesigye boarded a flight to Moscow for another job as a security guard. But for a long time, Mukiza heard nothing from him.

Then, on January 15, she got a message: "He was like: 'People, I need your prayers. We were made to sign contracts of military nature.'"

After a short training programme, he was sent to the front.

"He said, 'Pray for us. We are not sure if we shall make it.'"

Tears again roll down Mukiza's cheeks as she tells how, towards the end of January, pictures began circulating on the internet showing a deceased man, whom acquaintances believed was Kamwesigye. They wanted to send the pictures to Mukiza for confirmation.

She said, "Please don't send them to me."

Across Africa, men have been recruited for jobs in Russia, only

to be pressed into military service. In November 2025, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha wrote on X: "At least 1,436 citizens from 36 African countries are currently fighting in the ranks of Russia's invasion army in Ukraine."

He warned African governments that their citizens were being lured to Russia and dying on the front, adding that signing a Russian military contract was "equivalent to a death sentence" and that "most mercenaries do not survive more than a month."

Ugandan recruited by Russia: 'Don't fall for the same trap'

It has been an open secret that Russia was targeting young men in Africa to fight in Ukraine. In May 2024, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) said Russia was paying African mercenaries \$2,200 (€1,860) a month to fight on the front.

Until now, recruiting methods, or even the men's fates, were largely unknown.

But the Ukrainian announcement in November triggered a chain reaction. Families came forward, searching for their missing sons and husbands who had left for Russia. Since then, videos and photos of Africans in Russian military service have circulated on social media.

In January, a smartphone video from the Ukrainian front went viral in Uganda. It showed around a dozen African mercenaries sitting in the snow, singing or dancing to song stemming from the Ugandan civil war in the 1980s.

Another video, released by the Ukrainian army, showed Ugandan Richard Akantorana explaining that he went to Russia thinking he would be working in a supermarket. He says that when he arrived in Moscow, he was told: "You will enter the Russian army."

When he refused to sign, Akantorana says: "At gunpoint, we were told: 'You sign these papers. You have to sign them.'"

During his first mission, he surrendered to Ukrainian forces.

Akantorana says: "To my fellow Africans, wherever you are, I warn you, don't fall into this trap."

But for at least 316 Africans, this warning comes too late. The names of the fallen Africans, whose bodies were recovered by Ukrainians along the front line, form part of a 15-page list in a report published by the research team INPACT. Most of them – almost 100 – are from Cameroon. The list also includes two Ugandan names, but Mukiza's husband's name, Kamwesigye, is not on it.

Africans abused on the Russian front in Ukraine

Video footage circulating online adds to the suspicion that African citizens are being used as cannon fodder. A particularly disturbing video filmed in an underground bunker shows an African mercenary with a large mine strapped to his stomach.

A rifle barrel is aimed at him, and a voice in the background says in Russian: "Run, you will create the opening today."

It appears the man is being sent on a suicide mission to surprise the Ukrainians. DW was unable to confirm the authenticity of the video. The INPACT report also suggests that most Africans are used as "cannon fodder," noting that the military service of African recruits "killed in action averages only six months."

Dubious Russian firms without licenses

Uganda's government has opened an investigation. In August 2025, nine men en route to Moscow were stopped at Entebbe International Airport. They confirmed they were hired as guards. Two days later, a Russian was arrested in Kampala who said he worked for a recruit-

ing company called Magnit.

Investigators found the firm is not registered in Uganda, even though many recruiting companies operate in the country. Most tout jobs in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia or Qatar, and Uganda's government has agreements with these nations.

Uganda has no such agreement with Russia, explains Joshua Kyalimpa, spokesperson for Uganda's Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development.

"We have heard of cases of Ugandans involved in [Russia's war in Ukraine], but these ones normally are recruited online through TikTok or things like that," he told DW.

"So the role of the ministry has been to discourage and warn Ugandans not to be lured by anybody purporting to recruit workers to go to the conflict-ridden areas of Russia or Ukraine."

Mukiza contacted the Russian embassy in Kampala. She shows a letter in which she asks for assistance in recovering her husband's body so that the family can "bury him according to our culture and family tradition."

Mukiza says she is yet to receive a response, and doubts she will receive help from her own government. Uganda's Foreign Minister Oryem Henry Okello recently told local television station NTV, "Uganda does not have the capacity to repatriate the bodies of those who die abroad."

"I think now I'm hopeless," says Mukiza.

She has not told her two children about their father's death. She fears their questions, because the children know that if someone dies, they must be buried.

"They'll ask me where he is," Mukiza says quietly and sobs into her handkerchief. **-DW**

Airlines cancel flights to Middle East region

The airlines said the decision was taken as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of passengers and crew amid developing regional tensions



MUSCAT: Air India and Indigo Airlines suspended all flights to destinations across the Middle East following the evolving security situation in parts of the region, the airlines announced in travel advisories.

The airlines said the decision was taken as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety of passengers and crew amid developing regional tensions.

“All Air India flights to all destinations in the Middle East have been suspended,” the airline said, adding that it remains committed to maintaining the highest safety standards in its operations.

The airline noted that it will continue to closely monitor the security environment and may adjust flight operations proactively depending on developments on the ground.

Air India said its teams are extending necessary assistance to affected passengers, including support related to travel changes and updates.

Passengers have been advised

to check the status of their flights through the airline’s official website before travelling and to contact Air India’s 24-hour call centres for further information.

Indigo Airlines also issued an advisory, “In view of evolving airspace restrictions around Iran and Middle East, all flights to and from Middle East are cancelled till 0000hrs. These measures have been instituted as the safety and security of our customers and crew is our highest priority. Our teams are continuously monitoring the evolving situation and recalibrating operations to minimise disruption as much as possible.”

The suspension is expected to impact travel across key Gulf routes frequently used by Indian expatriates, including passengers travelling to and from Oman and other countries in the region.

Further updates are expected as authorities and airlines continue to assess the situation.

Qatar Airways confirmed the temporary suspension of flights to and from Doha following the closure of Qatari airspace.

“Temporary Suspension of Qatari Airways Flights due to Qatari Airspace Closure. Qatar Airways Group confirms the temporary suspension of its flights to, and from, Doha due to the closure of Qatari airspace. The airline is working closely with government stakeholders and the relevant authorities to support impacted passengers and will resume operations when the airspace re-opens. Once usual operations resume, we anticipate delays to our flight schedule. We have also deployed additional ground staff at Hamad International Airport and other key airports to assist affected passengers. The safety of our passengers and employees is always our highest priority, and we apologise for any inconvenience caused,” the airline wrote on X.

A slew of global airlines have canceled flights to various destinations across the Middle East amid the volatile security situation in the region.

Some countries, including Iran, Iraq and Israel, have also closed their airspaces to civilian traffic.

German carrier Lufthansa suspended flights to and from Tel Aviv in Israel, Beirut in Lebanon, and Oman until March 7 and flights to and from Dubai on Saturday and Sunday. The airline also said it would not add Israeli, Lebanese, Jordanian, Iraqi and Iranian airspace until March 7.

Pakistan International Airlines also suspended its Middle East flights on Saturday.

Air France, meanwhile, cancelled its Tel Aviv and Beirut flights for Saturday.

British Airways canceled flights to Tel Aviv and Bahrain until March 3. Nordic airline Norwegian Air suspended all flights to and from Dubai until March 4.

Virgin Atlantic said it had decided to reroute flights to temporarily avoid Iraqi airspace, and cancelled the London to Dubai service on Saturday.

Spanish airline Iberia also canceled flights to Tel Aviv, while Wizz Air suspended flights to and from Israel, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Amman with immediate effect until March 7. **Agencies**

Gulf countries condemn Iranian missile attacks

DOHA: The United Arab Emirates announced that its air defenses had intercepted Iranian ballistic missiles, responding with high efficiency and successfully intercepting several of them.

Abu Dhabi said it “reserves its full right to respond,” slamming the attacks as “a dangerous escalation”.

Qatar also condemned an Iranian ballistic missile attack on its territory after several explosions were heard in Doha.

In a statement, the country’s Foreign Ministry said Qatar considers this a blatant violation of its national sovereignty and reserves the right to respond to the attack.

Kuwait’s Chief of Staff said in a statement that “air defense systems engaged incoming missiles detected in the airspace.”

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia strongly condemned the Iranian strikes on US military targets in the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Jordan, which were in response to US-Israeli attacks launched earlier on Saturday.

In a Foreign Ministry state-

ment published by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, the kingdom expressed solidarity with the five countries and promised support for any measures they take in response.

Iran confirms it attacked US sites in region

Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) confirmed targeting several US facilities in the region, saying it was in retaliation for attacks on Iran by Israel and the US.

“The IRGC’s missiles and drones have struck the headquarters of the US Navy’s 5 Fleet in Bahrain and other American bases in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, as well as military and security centers in the heart of the occupied territories, with severe blows,” the Guard said in a statement carried by the Tasnim news agency.

Apart from one death in the United Arab Emirates, there have been no reports of damage in these areas.

The IRGC added that Iranian attacks with missiles and drones are ongoing, and that more information will be released later. **-aw**



OMPREHENSIVE INSPECTIONS

IAEA urges Iran to allow inspection of its nuclear sites



VIENNA: The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has called on Iran to allow comprehensive inspections of all its nuclear facilities, highlighting concerns over activities at the Isfahan site, where a new enrichment facility and near-bomb-grade uranium are reportedly located.

In a report circulated to member states ahead of next week’s quarterly meeting of the agency’s 35-nation Board of Governors, the IAEA described access to the sites as “indispensable and urgent.” The

discussions come amid ongoing nuclear negotiations between the United States and Iran, with the latest round held yesterday.

The agency said a successful outcome to the US-Iran talks would positively affect the effective implementation of safeguards measures in Iran and help resolve outstanding issues outlined in the report.

According to IAEA estimates, Iran possessed 440.9 kilograms of uranium enriched up to 60 percent prior to last year’s Israeli and

US attacks. The agency noted that such material, if further enriched, would be sufficient to produce up to 10 nuclear weapons under its standard calculations.

The report also provided new details regarding activities in Isfahan.

Diplomats indicated that a substantial quantity of Iran’s most highly enriched uranium had been stored in a tunnel complex that appeared to have escaped destruction during strikes last June.

For the first time, the IAEA con-

firmed that uranium enriched to levels of up to 20 percent and 60 percent uranium-235 was stored at the site. Satellite imagery reviewed by the agency showed “regular vehicle activity around the entrance to the tunnel complex in Isfahan,” where the enriched material was kept.

The findings are expected to feature prominently in deliberations at the upcoming Board meeting, as diplomatic efforts continue to address the future of Iran’s nuclear programme. **-ona**

GROWING DISPUTE

Trump orders agencies to stop using Anthropic AI

WASHINGTON DC US President Trump on Friday ordered all federal agencies to immediately stop using Anthropic technology amid a growing dispute between the AI company and the Pentagon.

He accused the firm of trying to interfere with how the US military operates and threatening further action if it does not cooperate during a six-month phase-out period.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump said, “The United States of America will never allow a radical left, woke company to dictate how our great military fights and wins wars! That decision belongs to YOUR COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, and the tremendous leaders I appoint to run our Military. The Leftwing nut jobs at Anthropic have made a DISASTROUS MISTAKE trying to STRONG-ARM the Department of War, and force them to obey their Terms of Service instead of our Constitution. Their selfishness is putting AMERICAN LIVES at risk, our Troops in danger, and our National Security in JEOPARDY.”

“Therefore, I am directing EVERY Federal Agency in the United States Government to IMMEDIATELY CEASE all use of Anthropic’s technology. We don’t need it, we don’t want it, and will



not do business with them again! There will be a Six Month phase out period for Agencies like the Department of War who are using Anthropic’s products, at various levels. Anthropic better get their act together, and be helpful during this phase out period, or I will use the Full Power of the Presidency to make them comply, with major civil and criminal consequences to follow,” the post read.

“WE will decide the fate of our Country -- NOT some out-of-control, Radical Left AI company run by people who have no idea what the real World is all about. Thank you for your attention to this mat-

ter. MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN!” the post read.

Criticised the CEO of Anthropic

A day earlier, the US Department of War (DOW) sharply criticised the CEO of Anthropic, Dario Amodei, after the US-based artificial intelligence firm declined to remove certain safeguards on its AI systems for military use.

US Under Secretary of War Emil Michael accused Amodei of attempting to control military decision-making while calling him a “liar” who has a “God complex”. **-ant**

IN EUROPE

Scientists from Spain, China discover Jurassic lizard tracks

BELJING- A team of international scientists from China and Spain has identified two well-preserved fossilized lizard trackways in Asturias, Spain, marking the first record of Jurassic lizard trackways in Europe.

Conducted by the team led by Laura Pinuela from the Jurassic Museum of Asturias (MUJA), in collaboration with scholars including Xing Lida from the China University of Geosciences (Beijing), the study provides key data for the extremely scarce record of Late Jurassic lizard tracks.

It also highlights a “field fossil discovery plus lab simulation” cooperation model, setting a good example for interpreting the behavioral evolution of ancient reptiles, according to the scientists.

The tracks were found in the Lastres Formation on the coastal cliffs of Villaviciosa, known as the “Dinosaur Coast” due to the discovery of numerous dinosaur and other ancient reptile footprints.

One of the trackways consists of seven footprints, with the trackmaker estimated to be nearly 50 centimeters in body length; the other trackway comprises six footprints, with the trackmaker approximately 30 centimeters in body length.

The discovery sets a new record as the most recent find of this footprint type worldwide, and it offers new clues for understanding the diversity of Jurassic small rep-



tiles, the study noted, which was published in the journal Ichnos on Thursday.

Xing said that the Chinese researchers conducted comparative lab tests in Wuxi, east China’s Jiangsu Province, to compare with the ancient footprints. They studied the crawling behavior of two types of modern lizards by watching them move in containers filled with sand.

By comparing traces of modern and ancient creatures, the researchers have confirmed that certain locomotor mechanisms and alert postures of modern lizards may have existed as early as 150 million years ago, reflecting “a de-

gree of conservatism in the evolution of life,” said Xing, adding that the study provides valuable evidence for the study of evolutionary behaviour.

According to co-author Jose Carlos Garcia-Ramos, also a European expert in the study of ancient vertebrate relics, the aid of modern technology enables scientists to reconstruct the scene where these prehistoric creatures crawled, turned, and possibly paused to observe in the delta wetlands, providing a new window for the global study of Jurassic lizard evolution.

These fossils are currently preserved and on public display at the MUJA. **-xinhuu**

SPORTS

Pakistan win but exit T20 WC

The record stand between Farhan and Zaman went in vain, as Sri Lanka restricted Pakistan's NRR - a result that allowed NZ to advance to the semifinals

PALLEKELE: Pakistan were knocked out of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 despite a narrow five-run win over Sri Lanka in the Super Eight clash in Kandy on Saturday. A record partnership by Fakhar Zaman and Sahibzada Farhan powered Pakistan to 212/8, but they needed to restrict Sri Lanka for 147 to make the cut. However, the co-hosts scripted a miracle recovery from 94/4, taking the contest to a nail-biting finish, before falling short at 207/6 in 20 overs. The result means New Zealand



qualify through superior net run-rate (NRR), and join England and South Africa in the semis. The winner of Sunday's Super Eight clash between India and West Indies will complete the knockouts line-up. Sri Lanka captain Dasun Shanaka won the toss and elected to field first. Going into the key clash, Pakistan decided to drop former captain Babar Azam. On a day they needed quick runs, Pakistan's new opening duo of Zaman and Farhan stepped in with intent. Zaman set

the ball rolling with a boundary in the cove corner. Not to be outdone, Farhan timed a ball to perfection between cover and point. It was game on. On a flat track at the Pallekele, Pakistan batters brought the house down with one hit after another. The team breezed past through the check posts, 64 in powerplay, 100 inside 10 overs, 150 in 14 overs, and 200 in the 19th over. They put on an opening stand of 176, the highest for any wicket in T20 World Cups.



Pakistan's premier batter this World Cup, Farhan also notched a few personal records. Scoring 100 off 60 balls, Farhan became the only batter to hoist two centuries at a single edition of a T20 world event. During his innings, Farhan also overtook India's Virat Kohli for most runs in one T20WC edition. He has accumulated 383 runs so far, beating Kohli's tally of 319, which he had achieved during World T20 in Bangladesh in 2013/14. Promoted up the order, Zaman

matched his partners shot for shot. He brought up his fifty in 27 balls with a four. Dushmantha Chamera gave Pakistan the breakthrough, as he castled Zaman, who had slammed nine fours and four sixes in an explosive innings of 84. But Pakistan faltered once Zaman was dismissed, losing eight wickets for just 34 runs in less than five overs. Dilshan Madushanka made sure Pakistan did not accelerate towards the end, as he claimed three

wickets, including that of Farhan. Defending 147, Pakistan made a decent start as they held Sri Lanka held to 49/2 in powerplay. Naseem Shah and Abrar Ahmed marked their return to the playing XI with early wickets. Pacer Shah provided the breakthrough as he had the in-form Pathum Nissanka mishit a slower ball to extra cover after stepping away and making room. It was Ahmed who pegged Sri Lanka back with three crucial wickets. He started his spell by casting Kamil Mishara and ended it by getting through the defence of Kamindu Mendis off a ball that stayed low. In between, he also clean bowled the experienced Charith Asalanka and finished with incredible figures of 3/23. Down and out at 101/5, Sri Lanka roared back to life with a 59-run partnership between captain Dasun Shanaka and Pavan Rathnayake. While it was Rathnayake's swashbuckling 58, with the help of four fours and three sixes, helped them sink their teeth into the contest, it was Shanaka who took them to the brink of victory. **Brief scores:** Pakistan 212/8 (Sahibzada Farhan 100, Fakhar Zaman 84; Dilshan Madushanka 3/33, Dasun Shanaka 2/42) beat Sri Lanka 207/6 (Pavan Rathnayake 58, Dasun Shanaka 76*; Abrar Ahmed 3/23). - Agencies

SUPER EIGHT AT EDEN GARDENS

India meet West Indies in virtual T20 World Cup quarter-final

KOLKATA: India's title defence will be put to the test on Sunday as they face the West Indies in Kolkata in what has effectively become a virtual quarter-final for a place in the T20 World Cup semi-finals. Both teams enter the clash following big recent performances: India smashed Zimbabwe for a tournament-high total before crushing them by 72 runs to keep their hopes alive. However, West Indies' defeat to South Africa have turned this Group 1 Super Eights clash into a do-or-die contest, making it a high-stakes battle at the Eden Gardens. The winner will get a place in the second semifinal against England on March 5 in Mumbai. West Indies have put together scary six-hitters who have hit form. They have hit more sixes than any side at any T20 World Cup, and India are three behind them with 63 so far. It is with the ball that India



hold an advantage. India's bowlers are match-winners. They have pace and mystery. It gives them room for error. West Indies are a strictly defensive bowling unit. They'll need everything to go their way to get the better of India. India's batting revival against Zimbabwe was just perfect and long-awaited. In a rejigged line-up, with Sanju Samson returning to the top, all the top six contributed in unison.

India ticked all the boxes with the bat, posting 256/4—the highest total of this T20 World Cup—but that does not mean they arrive at Eden Gardens without concerns. Left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh picked up a triple strike against Zimbabwe, while Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik Pandya have been clinical. It is spin ace Varun Chakravathy who has looked a shadow of his past. The mystery spinner has



failed to find the right length and appears guilty of experimenting excessively. It remains to be seen whether the team management continues to back Chakravathy or gives him a breather by bringing in left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav, who has played just one match so far (against Pakistan). Another worry is seam all-rounder Shivam Dube's erratic show with the ball. Dube leaked 46 runs in just two overs against Zim-

babwe, including four wides and two no-balls in a 10-ball over. With some grass likely on the Eden surface, the pace trio of Bumrah, Arshdeep and Pandya should receive some assistance. Their combined 12 overs could be decisive, especially since the spin attack currently offers no complete assurance. **Windies' power and depth** The West Indies have been the

team to beat from day one of the tournament. Their strategy has been clear: a steady start until the halfway mark followed by a fearless assault in the final overs. That blueprint brought them five successive wins before South Africa halted their run with a clinical display. Even then, despite being reduced to 83/7 inside 11 overs, West Indies showed depth by recovering to 176/8, thanks to a fighting unbeaten fifty from Romario Shepherd at No. 9. Shimron Hetmyer's move to No.3 has also been a major positive. With a dry Eden surface on offer, West Indies might consider bringing back left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein, who was dropped after returning 3/28 against Zimbabwe at the turning Wankhede. His ability to operate effectively in the powerplay and control the middle overs gives him an edge over Gudakesh Motie. - Agencies

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DREAM CAR ART CONTEST

Saud Bahwan Automotive has officially announced the launch of the 19th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest, a creative platform that invites the children of Oman to “Draw Your Dream, Drive the Future.”

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



AUTO FINANCE OFFER

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the launch of its special Ramadan “Sayyarati” Auto finance offer, available from 15 February to 15 April.

Oman’s stock market cap rises by OMR2.77bn to OMR36.28bn

The market cap benefited from the gains recorded by stocks, with increased purchases by local investment funds and institutions, at a time when public shareholding companies announced improved financial results during the past year

MUSCAT: The market capitalisation of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) recorded gains of OMR2.77 billion to OMR36.28 billion in February after achieving gains of more than OMR1.50 billion in January. The market cap benefited from the gains recorded by stocks, with increased purchases by local investment funds and institutions, at a time when public shareholding companies announced improved financial results during the past year. In February, the Muscat Stock Exchange recorded a positive performance in most of its indices. The main index of the exchange rose by 16.7 percent and closed at 7,393 points, recording an increase of 1,063 points. The financial sector index rose above 12,000 points and closed at 12,404 points, an increase of 1,486 points. The industrial sector index rose by 636 points and closed at 9,645 points. The services sector index recorded an increase of 349 points and closed at 2,882 points. The Sharia index rose by 59 points and closed



at 648 points, recording an increase of 10 percent. Trading value in February increased by 54.7 percent, exceeding OMR1.294 billion, compared to trades worth OMR836.8 million in January. The number of transactions executed increased by 26 percent from 96,000 transactions to more than 122,000 transactions. In February trading, investors targeted shares of banks, telecommunications and OQ Group. Bank Sohar International topped the list of most traded companies in terms of trading value, with trades worth OMR241.2 million, representing 18.6 percent of the total trading value. The stock recorded a rise of 36.5 percent during February, rising from 164 baisa to 224 baisa, and climbed during trading to 230 baisa before reducing its gains. The stock witnessed the execution of more than 18,000 transactions. OQ Exploration and Production saw trading worth OMR191 million, ranking second among the most traded companies in terms of trading value, accounting for 14.7 percent of the total trading value. The company's stock saw a rise of 17.8 percent in February, from 397 baisa to 468 baisa, and the company's market value rose to OMR3.74 billion, recording gains of OMR568 million. OQ Basic Industries recorded

a 152 percent increase in its trading value in February, rising from OMR74.2 million in January to OMR187.4 million in February, accounting for 14.4 percent of the total trading value. The stock closed at 229 baisa, registering a rise of 19.8 percent. Bank Muscat ranked fourth among the most traded companies in terms of trading value, after witnessing trades worth OMR186.3 million. The bank's stock rose from 361 baisa to 426 baisa, registering an increase of 18 percent. Omantel ranked fifth with trades at OMR140.8 million, accounting for 10.8 percent of the total trading value. The stock rose by 18.5 percent from OMR1.103 to OMR1.308. February also saw prices of 70 securities rise, compared to 26 securities whose prices declined and 13 securities that remained unchanged at their previous levels. National Aluminium Products, Raysut Cement, Bank Sohar International, Al Jazeera Services and International Financial Investments Holding led the winning stocks, while Al Batinah Development and Investment, Al Madina Investment Holding, Takaful Oman Insurance, Salalah Port Services and Oman Chlorine led the losing stocks, recording declines ranging between 15.5 percent and 6.3 percent. -ONA

MSX rises for the fifth consecutive week

MUSCAT: Cement sector shares on the Muscat Stock Exchange recorded strong demand from investors last week amid optimistic expectations of a recovery in the construction sector during the current year and its impact on cement companies listed on the exchange. This is on the back of projects like the Sultan Haitham City and integrated residential neighbourhoods within the Sorouh initiative and other real estate developments. Raysut Cement's stock rose by 29 percent in the week amid expectations that the company would be able to overcome the challenges it has faced for several years and improve its financial results. The stock witnessed strong buy orders that pushed it up from 117 baisa to 151 baisa. The number of transactions executed reached 194 transactions with a volume of 2.9 million shares and a value exceeding OMR400,000. During the week, investors showed more interest in Oman Cement Company's stock, which rose 50 baisa from 502 baisa to 552 baisa amid high buy orders. Trading volume on the stock reached 1.1 million shares worth OMR617,000. The company said it intends to distribute cash dividends of 46.54 baisa per share, and the proposal will be presented at the Annual General Meeting on March 28. The Muscat Stock Exchange witnessed a rise in the shares of a number of industrial companies last week, which pushed the industrial sector index up by 216 points, benefiting from the rise in the shares of Oman Cement, Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles, Oman Cables Industry,



OQ Basic Industries, Voltamp Energy and a number of other shares. The services sector index rose 75 points, benefiting from the rise in shares of Omantel, Ooredoo, Abraj Energy Services, OQ Gas Networks, and a number of other companies. The Sharia index rose 12 points, while the financial sector index recorded a decline of 11 points, affected by the decline in shares of Ominvest, Bank Nizwa, the National Bank of Oman, and a number of other shares. Trading data issued by the Muscat Stock Exchange indicated a decline in the value of trading during the past week to OMR339.7 million, compared to OMR360.8 million in the week before, recording a decline of 5.8 percent. The number of executed transactions declined by 10.4 percent to fall to 27,462 transactions compared to more than 30,000 transactions executed in the week before. Bank Sohar International topped the list of most traded companies in terms of trading

value, with trades worth OMR66.8 million, representing 19.6 percent of the total trading value. Bank Muscat came in second with trades worth OMR66 million and Omantel came in third with trades worth OMR46.1 million, representing 13.6 percent of the total trading value. The total market capitalisation of the Muscat Stock Exchange rose to OMR36.28 billion by the end of the week's trading, recording weekly gains of OMR347.7 million. These gains were supported by the rises recorded by stocks during the past week, with the prices of 44 securities rising, compared to 38 securities whose prices declined and 14 securities that remained stable at their previous levels. Raysut Cement stock recorded the highest rise, increasing by more than 29 percent, followed by Oman Cement stock, which came in second place, rising by about 10 percent. Ooredoo stock came in third place, rising by 7.4 percent and closing at 360 baisa. Dhofar International Development and Investment stock jumped by 6.6 percent and closed at 320 baisa, and Oman Packaging stock rose to 180 baisa, recording an increase of 6.5 percent. The shares of Oman United Insurance led the list of losing stocks, declining by 8.2 percent and closing at 390 baisa. The shares of National Aluminium Products declined by 7.6 percent and closed at 301 baisa. The shares of Financial Services fell by 6.7 percent and closed at 110 baisa, and the shares of Oman Chlorine declined by 5.1 percent and closed at 220 baisa. -ONA

DURING 2026



ESCWA anticipates Arab Economic growth of 3.7%

BEIRUT: The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has forecast a gradual resurgence for the Arab economy during 2026, with the growth rate ascending to 3.7 percent, compared to 2.9 percent in the previous year. The report issued by the UN Commission, entitled “Macroeconomic Projections for the Arab Region,” elucidated that this improvement materializes notwithstanding escalating geopolitical tensions and the persistence of global financial pressures. It indicated a likely decline in the regional inflation rate to 5.4 percent by the year 2027, propelled by the stabilization of supply chains and the expansion of non-oil sectors. The report noted a disparity in growth indicators among Arab states; it is anticipated that high-income nations will register growth of 4.2 percent, while middle-income countries are projected to achieve growth

of 3.3 percent. Conversely, low-income nations confront acute financial and humanitarian strains, with expectations of only a limited recovery over the forthcoming two years. In the occupied Palestinian territories, the report cast a stark light upon the magnitude of the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip as a consequence of the ongoing Israeli aggression, estimating the cost of reconstruction at USD 70 billion, amidst devastation that has afflicted 78 percent of buildings, alongside grievous human and material losses. In its conclusion, ESCWA urged Arab states to accelerate digital transformation, invest in human capital, and diminish reliance on hydrocarbons. It further called for the alignment of investments with national priorities to fortify economic stability and engender sustainable employment opportunities. -ONA

MINISTRY OF ENERGY AND MINERALS

Oman produces 240 tonnes of sulphur daily to support industrial demand

MUSCAT: Oman produces on a regular basis about 240 tonnes of Sulphur per day that ensures the continuity of its industrial use. Sulphur production is linked to gas processing operations at a number of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) facilities, most notably the Jebel Khuff station and the Taysir area, where Sulphur is recovered as a by-product of desalination operations. These sites are an important hub for sour gas management and enhancing operational efficiency. Sulphur is of great industrial importance due to its multiple uses; it is a key component in the manufacture of phosphate fertilizers, industrial chemicals, and the paper and pulp industry, in addition to its role in the steel industry, metal refining, and the production of batteries and dyes. Investing in locally produced Sulphur contributes to supporting industrial supply chains and reducing dependence on imports, in addition to achieving financial returns that strengthen the national economy as its production operations expand. The Ministry of Energy and Minerals continues its efforts to maximise the benefit from the resources associated with oil and gas production operations, starting from turning operational challenges into economic and industrial opportunities. Hydrogen sulfide gas is one of the most prominent of these challenges due to its high toxicity and environmental impacts. It accompanies the production of heavy oil and natural gas and requires treatment to ensure the safe operation of facilities. Through the applica-



tion of advanced technologies in gas desalination, it has become possible to convert this gas into an important industrial resource in the form of Sulphur, which supports value chains in the chemical industries and enhances revenues. Dr. Salah bin Hafeez Al-Dhahab, Director General of Investment at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, confirmed that the move towards marketing raw Sulphur comes in line with the Ministry's efforts to make optimal use of natural resources in the Sultanate of Oman, and to transform the resources associated with production operations into economic opportunities with added value. He told the Oman News Agency that managing production operations is not limited to operational aspects only, but has become based on maximising economic returns from available resources, which contributes to supporting economic diversification and enhancing non-oil revenues. Al-Dhahab pointed out that the experience of recovering and producing Sulphur began in limited areas within gas processing facilities, and achieved positive results at the

operational and economic levels. He indicated that the Ministry hopes during the coming period to enter new fields that will expand the scope of Sulphur exploitation, which will enhance the related manufacturing industries in the Sultanate of Oman and raise the efficiency of exploiting the resources associated with the oil and gas sectors. Regarding industrial technologies for Sulphur production, hydrogen sulfide is removed through advanced desalination processes, most notably the Claus process, which is the most common technology for Sulphur recovery. The process begins by separating the gas using amine solutions or physical solvents. Then, partial oxidation is carried out by burning part of the gas to produce Sulphur dioxide. After that, the remaining hydrogen sulfide reacts with the sulfur dioxide in the presence of a catalyst to form elemental Sulphur, which is condensed and collected in liquid form in preparation for its use or transport. This process allows for the reduction of harmful emissions and the conversion of a dangerous by-product into a raw mate-

rial of high economic value. The ministry launched an initiative to issue a tender to find sustainable solutions for managing and utilising stored Sulphur. After evaluating the bids, the project was assigned to the “Green Fertilizers” company, which will handle the accumulated quantities and invest in the current production within an integrated industrial system. The Green Fertilizers Company is working on establishing a modern fertilizer production plant in the industrial area of Ibri State, with a production capacity of up to 400 tonnes per day. The project is expected to contribute to meeting the needs of the local market for agricultural fertilizers, while exporting the surplus to foreign markets. The company is also considering developing additional products that enter vital areas such as oil refining and tyre manufacturing, which enhances the diversification of sulfur-related industries and increases its economic value. The exploitation of hydrogen sulfide and its conversion into Sulphur is a practical example of the circular economy approach in the energy sector, where a hazardous by-product is transformed into an industrial resource that supports economic development and promotes environmental sustainability. The Ministry continues its efforts to develop this system in accordance with best global practices, in order to achieve a balance between safety, environmental protection and maximising its impact on local content, and to enhance the Sultanate of Oman's position as a promising regional centre in industries related to energy and natural resources. -ONA

MARKET

Bank Muscat Ramadan auto finance offer is back with competitive features

The seasonal campaign responds to the growing demand for new and pre-owned vehicles during the holy month and reflects the bank’s dedication to offering flexible, financing solutions to both Omanis and expatriates, while supporting financial inclusion and shift toward ecofriendly mobility

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its commitment to delivering innovative financial solutions tailored to evolving customer needs, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the launch of its special Ramadan “Sayyarati” Auto finance offer, available from 15 February to 15 April 2026.

The seasonal campaign responds to the growing demand for new and pre-owned vehicles during the holy month and reflects the Bank’s dedication to offering flexible, financing solutions to both



Omanis and expatriates, while supporting financial inclusion and shift toward ecofriendly mobility.

This year’s Auto Finance offer introduces a comprehensive range of exclusive benefits, with competitive rates designed to make vehicle ownership more accessible than ever.

The campaign extends to a wide spectrum of customers, including first-time borrowers, Asalah and Al Jawhar customers, as well as Omani and expatriate employees working in government, quasi-government entities, and Tier 1 & 2 companies, reflecting Bank Muscat’s continued flexible financing solutions that cater to diverse customer needs.

Commenting on the launch, Abdullah Tamman Al Maashani, General Manager of Products at Bank Muscat, said: “The annual Ramadhan offer reflects our commitment to delivering genuine value and easy financing solutions to our customers. Sayyarati Auto Finance continues to be one of

our most popular products across the Sultanate. In response to this strong demand, we continuously enhance our collaboration with automotive dealerships and showrooms nationwide to ensure customers receive the best banking facilities and services. We invite our valued customers to take advantage of this exclusive offer and enjoy its competitive rates and benefits. We appreciate their continued trust in the Bank’s products and services.”

Customers can apply for Sayyarati Auto Finance by visiting any Bank Muscat branch across the Sultanate, the dedicated Sayyarati Centers in Wattayah (Muscat) and Salalah (Dhofar), or by sending the word (“CAR”) to 90090. Applicants are required to provide a copy of the ID card for Omani nationals, a copy of the passport for expatriates, vehicle valuation documents, driving license. In the case of pre-owned vehicles, a copy of the vehicle registration and the seller’s ID must be submitted.

EMPOWERING CHILDREN



Saud Bahwan Auto launches 19th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest for children

MUSCAT: Saud Bahwan Automotive has officially announced the launch of the 19th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest, a creative platform that invites the children of Oman to “Draw Your Dream, Drive the Future.”

This year’s edition continues a long-standing tradition of empowering children to visualize the next frontier of mobility through the lens of art. Since its global inception in 2004, the contest has inspired millions of children worldwide to recognize the power of their own ideas. In Oman, the competition has grown into a massive celebration of talent, encouraging young artists to think beyond boundaries and consider how cars can positively impact society and the environment. The deadline for submission is 10th March 2026 and participants can collect official drawing sheets from any Toyota showroom or service facility. Participants can also visit their nearest Toyota showroom, on 4th March to take part in the contest directly from 9am to 1.30pm and 8pm to 11.30pm.

A spokesperson for Saud Bahwan Automotive highlighted the significance of the initiative, noting that every groundbreaking advancement in the automotive world began as a simple spark of imagination. By hosting the 19th edition, we aim to provide a canvas for the children of Oman to share their visions of the future. The organization remains consistently amazed by the depth of creativity found in the Sultanate and eagerly anticipates how this year’s participants will redefine the possibilities of mobility.

The competition is open to all legal residents of the Sultanate of Oman aged 15 and under, with participants divided into three

age-specific categories: Under 8 years, 8 to 11 years, and 12 to 15 years. This year features a revised prize structure for national winners, offering gift vouchers worth OMR 150 for first place, OMR 125 for second place and OMR 100 for third place.

Beyond these national rewards, top entries from Oman will earn the prestigious opportunity to represent the Sultanate in the Global Contest, where they will be judged alongside young artists from across the globe.

To participate, young artists are encouraged to use traditional hand-drawn mediums such as watercolors, crayons, or markers to bring their masterpieces to life, as digital artwork is not eligible for entry. Each submission must feature a fully realized background and must be submitted with a completed entry form signed by a parent or legal guardian to be considered by the distinguished panel of judges.

Since its inception in 2004, the Toyota Dream Car Art Contest has inspired young artists worldwide with the theme ‘Your Dream Car,’ encouraging them to imagine a brighter and more innovative future.

Parents and guardians can visit the nearest Toyota showroom to collect the drawing sheets and encourage their children to participate in this exciting journey of creativity.

To explore previous submissions and gain inspiration, please visit <https://www.toyota-dream-carart.com/meca/en/> and take a look at the artistic marvels created by children from across the region.

Don’t miss out on this extraordinary opportunity to turn dreams into reality with the 19th Toyota Dream Car Art Contest.

MEGAMERGER

Paramount strikes \$110 billion agreement for Warner Bros. Discovery

NEW YORK: Warner Bros. Discovery Friday signed a formal agreement to be acquired by Paramount, the two companies said.

Paramount’s bid, that stands at more than \$110 billion (€93 billion), comes after Netflix dropped out of its bidding war for the storied Hollywood studio.

The acquisition also means that Paramount will be the new owners of the HBO Max streaming business and major news broadcaster CNN.

Paramount-WBD sign merger deal: What to know

The deal will see Paramount pay \$31 a share for Warner Bros. Discovery as well as a \$7 billion regulatory termination fee in the event the transaction falls through because of regulatory matters.

Paramount has deep political connections to the Trump administration, which could get it federal regulatory approval for its deal.



California State Attorney General Rob Bonta said on Thursday that California is already investigating the deal and will be “vigorous” in its review.

Paramount, which owns CBS and MTV, was sold last year to media company Skydance.

Paramount Skydance is led by David Ellison, the son of tech titan Larry Ellison, who is one of the richest people in the world and a close ally of President Donald Trump.

Paramount-WBD merger raise media concerns

The new merger will put CNN un-

der the same corporate umbrella as CBS News. CBS News, whose parent company was Paramount, has undergone many changes since being taken over by Skydance.

Bari Weiss, the editor-in-chief of CBS News, has accused mainstream media of liberal bias and has earned praise from Donald Trump. Weiss was handpicked by David Ellison to lead the news organization.

“CNN employees and viewers have serious concerns about whether Paramount CEO David Ellison will uphold the news network’s editorial independence amid severe political turbulence,” CNN media analyst Brian Stelter wrote on Friday.

Paramount and Warner Bros. Discovery said they expect more than \$6 billion in savings, driven by technology integration, corporate efficiencies and streamlining operations. -aw

RESHAPING TRAVEL PATTERNS AND LIFESTYLES

Knowledge-driven experiential consumption gains popularity in China

CHONGQING: In a pottery studio in the Rongchang district of southwest China’s Chongqing Municipality, 9-year-old Yang Hanlin holds his breath, his small hands carefully shaping a mound of clay spinning on a wheel as his instructor offers careful advice.

This winter break, Yang, accompanied by his mother and sister, traveled to Chongqing from Luzhou in the neighboring Sichuan Province with a clear purpose: crafting his own piece of Rongchang pottery, a traditional art form with a history of over 1,000 years.

“I played with clay at school and it was so much fun,” Yang said. “Today, I wanted to make a teapot. I didn’t succeed this time, but I will make a better one next time.”

The standard travel routine of visiting scenic areas, taking photos and buying souvenirs is undergoing change. Yang’s holiday is part of new trend of “knowledge-driven experiential consumption,” where travelers seek hands-on experiences and practical skills based on their personal interests.

The trend is reshaping travel patterns and lifestyles across China, unfolding in diverse forms across the country. At the Wuxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Theme Park in Huaihua City of central China’s Hunan Province, visitors spend hours sitting beside Dong ethnic weavers, learning traditional brocade techniques and watching intricate patterns take shape in their own hands. And in Rizhao, east China’s Shandong Province, even British university students could recently be found enthusiastically practicing the movements of Chinese martial arts.

The most important travel souvenir is no longer a factory-made keychain, but a new skill or a deep-



er cultural understanding.

Huang Xia, owner of the Shanyutang pottery studio in Rongchang, has felt the shift firsthand. “Today, tourists are looking for more than food and entertainment,” Huang said. “Many who try pottery here come to love it, gradually developing new skills and hobbies.”

This growing desire to learn something new is also extending into urban spaces. In a barista training room in the Jiefangbei business area of Chongqing’s Yuzhong District, trainees gather around the counter, practicing latte art by shaping milk foam into clear heart and flower patterns as it blends with the espresso.

To meet growing demand from travelers and coffee enthusiasts, training institutions have rolled out short, engaging courses. Zheng Xinle, head of the Professional Coffee Athletics (PCA) coffee training program, said that it launched

two-to-three-hour hobby courses in 2025, attracting strong interest. Nearly 1,000 participants obtained its enthusiast certificates in the first year of the program.

Even museums -- typically seen as serious institutions -- have joined the trend. At the “Pipashan treasure house” at the Chongqing Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute, the boundaries of conventional museum visits are being redefined.

Visitors can step into a simulated archaeological dig site, using trowels and brushes to carefully remove soil and uncover replica artifacts like professional archaeologists. In the artifact restoration area, they can piece together broken pottery replicas and mend them with special adhesives.

“Our weekend excavation and restoration experiences are incredibly popular,” said Lu Dingli, a docent at the venue. “Many fami-

lies traveling to Chongqing make special reservations, hoping their children can gain a hands-on understanding of the archaeological process.”

From pottery and coffee to simulated archaeology, these diverse experiences reflect a broader shift in China’s consumer market. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics shows that from January to August 2025, retail sales of services grew 5.1 percent year on year, outpacing that of goods. Increasingly, consumers -- and younger generations, in particular -- are channeling more spending into experience-based services that offer both personal enrichment and skills development.

In 2024, the State Council unveiled a guideline on boosting the high-quality development of services consumption, calling for the improved supply of services in sectors such as culture, tourism and education, and the cultivation of new growth drivers in services consumption.

“There has been a notable shift in consumer preferences, from material goods to services,” said Long Shaobo, deputy director of the Center for Public Economy and Public Policy at Chongqing University. “Standardized products in traditional cultural tourism can no longer fully meet demand. Experiential consumption, by contrast, emphasizes user participation and better reflects people’s pursuit of richer and more fulfilling lives.”

Long said that the trend is injecting new vitality into the cultural tourism sector, and transforming intangible cultural heritage and museum resources from static exhibits into interactive experiences. It is opening new pathways that combine cultural preservation with market value. -xinhua



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I, **NISHANT THAKUR** (holder of Indian Passport No. P9683433) S/o Bipan Kumar having permanent residence in B-4, Gali No-10, Shahstri Park Extn. Nathupura Mode, Burari Delhi and presently residing at Oman (Muscat) Post Box. No. 513 Postal Code 117 Sultanate of Oman, intend to marry **MS. MICHAELA NADIA RICHARD** (Holder of Indonesian Passport bearing No. E1484850 D/o Richard Sugiharto at Embassy of India, Muscat. I swear that I am marrying her at my own free will and not under any duress and intimidation. Any objection towards this marriage may please be communicated to Embassy of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, P.O.Box No. 1727, Postal Code No.112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman within 30 (thirty) days of publication of this newspaper advertisement.

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MBA finance & marketing professional with expertise in Excel, Power BI, SAP, MIS reporting, banking operations, digital marketing, and operations. Seeking roles in Oman. Contact: 71857404 sreekuttannr84@gmail.com.

US backs Pakistan’s ‘right to defend itself’ against Afghanistan attacks

The US Embassy in Pakistan has issued a security alert advising citizens to exercise caution in major cities due to heightened tensions with Afghanistan



WASHINGTON DC: US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Allison Hooker on Friday (local time) expressed condolences to Pakistan for the lives lost in the recent conflict with Afghanistan and affirmed support for Pakistan's right to defend itself.

In a post on X, Allison Hooker wrote, "Spoke with Pakistan Foreign Secretary Baloch to express condolences for lives lost in the recent conflict between Pakistan and the Taliban. We continue to monitor the situation closely and express support for Pakistan's right to defend itself against Taliban attacks."

The US Embassy in Pakistan has

issued a security alert advising citizens to exercise caution in major cities due to heightened tensions with Afghanistan and potential terrorist threats targeting law enforcement, military, and commercial sites.

As per the statement, "Due to heightened tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Pakistani security forces have increased their presence in major cities in response to potential terrorist threats. Law enforcement facilities, military installations, and major commercial centres remain likely targets for terrorist organizations. The U.S. Mission advises citizens to exercise caution when

visiting these locations, particularly during peak hours."

"We remind U.S. citizens to observe good personal security practices, including being aware of your surroundings, avoiding large crowds, and ensuring your STEP registration is up to date," the statement reads.

Tensions between Kabul and Islamabad have escalated, with both sides accusing one another of retaliatory strikes, raising fears of a wider military conflict in the region.

Islamabad declared "open war" on Kabul after carrying out airstrikes in parts of Kabul, Kandahar and Paktia, further intensifying

tensions between the two neighbouring countries.

Earlier, Pakistan's Information Minister, Attaullah Tarar, said that Afghanistan carried out drone attacks on Abbottabad, Swabi, and Nowshera, as per Tolo News.

He also added that anti-drone systems brought down the drones and that there was no loss of life.

The Pakistan government announced a nationwide ban on all drone operations after tensions intensified due to border clashes. The Ministry of Interior issued a notification enforcing the prohibition on all commercial and privately operated drones across the country, as per Geo News. -ANI

Afghanistan open to talks after Pakistan airstrikes

KABUL : Afghanistan said it is open to negotiations after Pakistan carried out airstrikes on several major cities, with Islamabad's defence minister declaring the two countries in "open war" following months of escalating tensions and reciprocal attacks, as reported by Al Jazeera.

On Friday, Pakistan carried out strikes on Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, the Taliban stronghold of Kandahar, and other towns, while fighting continued along the border, with both sides reporting significant casualties.

Islamabad declared "open war" on Kabul after carrying out airstrikes in parts of Kabul, Kandahar and Paktia, further intensifying tensions between the two neighbouring countries.

In a post on X, Pakistan's Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif, issued a strong statement declaring the "open

war" against Afghanistan, stating that Islamabad has lost its patience and accusing the Taliban-led administration of harbouring militants.

"After the withdrawal of NATO forces, it was expected that there would be peace in Afghanistan and that the Taliban would focus on the interests of the Afghan people and peace in the region...They gathered all the terrorists of the world in Afghanistan and began exporting terrorism. They deprived their own people of basic human rights. They snatched away the rights that Islam grants to women," his post read.

"Our cup of patience has overflowed. Now it is open war between us and you. Now it will be 'Dama Dam Mast Qalandar'. Pakistan's army did not come from across the seas. We are your neighbours; we know your ins and outs. Allahu Akbar," the Pakistani Defence Minister added. -ANI

SEEKS A REHEARING

Donald Trump raises alarm over Supreme Court’s tariffs ruling

WASHINGTON DC President Donald Trump on Saturday criticised the recent decision by the Supreme Court on tariffs, alleging that it could result in "ripping off" the US of billions of dollars. He also hinted at seeking a rehearing of the case.

The US President made the remarks in a post on Truth Social and said, "The recent Decision of the United States Supreme Court concerning TARIFFS could allow for Hundreds of Billions of Dollars to be returned to Countries and Companies that have been 'ripping off' the United States of America for many years, and now, according to this Decision, could actually continue to do so, at an even increased level. I am sure that the Supreme Court did not have this in mind!

It doesn't make sense that Countries and Companies that took advantage of us for decades, receiving Billions and Billions of Dollars that they should not have been allowed to receive, would now be entitled to an undeserved "windfall," the likes of which the



World has never seen before, as a result of this highly disappointing, to say the least, ruling. Is a Rehearing or Readjudication of this case possible???"

His statement comes after last week, the US Supreme Court ruled against most of Trump's sweeping tariff measures. Trump later signed an order making 10 per cent

global tariff on all countries, effective "almost immediately".

The Court ruled 6-3 that the administration exceeded its authority by using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977 to impose broad-based import tariffs, affirming that the power to levy taxes resides primarily with Congress.

Following the ruling, Trump announced a new 10 per cent global tariff on all countries under Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974, describing it as a temporary import surcharge (up to 15%) allowed for 150 days to address balance-of-payments deficits.

He later raised it further to the "fully allowed, and legally tested, 15% level," effective immediately.

In a Truth Social post, Trump stated that this adjustment responds to the Supreme Court's "ridiculous, poorly written, and extraordinarily anti-American decision," while his administration would determine new, legally permissible tariffs in the coming months to continue "Making America Great Again." -ANI

EL ALTO

15 killed, 30 injured in Bolivian plane crash

EL ALTO : A Bolivian military plane crashed in El Alto, near La Paz, into a busy urban area, killing 15 people and injuring at least 30 others on Friday evening, according to China Daily.

As per a UK-based news agency, the plane was carrying new banknotes from the country's central bank when it crashed onto a busy avenue due to inclement weather. The plane was travelling from Santa Cruz to La Paz (El Alto International Airport).

The aircraft was transporting currency to the interior of the country, Unitel said, citing the Bolivian Ministry of Defence.

According to the report by China Daily, the military plane crashed in the western city of El Alto. It further mentioned that Bolivia's national airline, Boliviana de Aviacion, announced the temporary closure of El Alto International Airport following the crash.

The incident happened shortly after takeoff, and emergency services rushed to the scene. Videos



showed chaotic scenes with people picking up scattered banknotes, prompting authorities to use water hoses to disperse the crowd.

The massive transport plane struck approximately a dozen vehicles on the highway before eventually coming to a rest in a nearby field.

Social media footage showed residents rushing to the site to collect the scattered money. Security forces were forced to use water hoses and tear gas to disperse the crowds and secure the

crash site.

The Central Bank of Bolivia has since issued a statement declaring that these specific notes are not legal tender and hold no purchasing power, as they were destined for replacement/distribution and had not been officially activated.

The Bolivian Ministry of Defence has launched a formal investigation to determine if the crash was caused by mechanical failure or the severe weather conditions present at the time.

-ANI

STEPS TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

India and Bangladesh move towards resetting relations

DHAKA: Ties between India and Bangladesh frayed after Bangladesh's ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to Delhi amid violent protests that toppled her 15-year rule in 2024.

Now, the South Asian neighbours are taking steps towards reconciliation by resuming visa services. Bangladesh's diplomatic missions across India will now fully reopen tourist visa services.

India's visa operations in Bangladesh will reopen in phases, with the Indian High Commission currently issuing medical and double-entry business visas.

Full restoration for all categories, including tourist, student and employment visas is expected in the coming weeks.

Why were visa services suspended?

Bangladesh froze Indian tourist visas in December 2025 following violent protests outside Bangladeshi missions in New Delhi and other Indian cities over the lynching of a Hindu man, allegedly at the hands of an Islamist mob in Bangladesh.

Officials cited security considerations ahead of Bangladesh's February general election as a reason for the suspension. Only business and employment visas were pro-



cessed during this period.

India had already suspended most of its visa services in Bangladesh in late 2024 following unrest after Hasina's ouster. It closed visa centers in Dhaka and Chittagong in late 2025, citing security concerns.

India, Bangladesh seek 'recalibration'

Tensions began to resolve somewhat after Bangladesh elected a new government earlier in February, with new Prime Minister Tarique Rahman promising a reset of ties with India.

Longstanding bilateral ten-

sions include disputes over water resources, the political fate of Hasina's Awami League party, and border management.

"Both India and Bangladesh are seeking a recalibration of bilateral ties. The unfreezing of visas signals policy intent to that effect. But this is the start of a trust-building exercise, not an end," Avinash Paliwal, reader in international relations at London's School of Oriental and African Studies, told DW.

Paliwal said negotiations on long-standing issues such as water-sharing, trade asymmetry and the Awami League's situation will

determine whether a true reset is underway.

"Domestic political opinions about each other remain riddled with mistrust in both India and Bangladesh. To navigate foreign policy recalibration in this context is a challenge," Paliwal added.

The analyst said that Bangladesh's new leadership under the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), now have strong mandates and political space to maneuver towards better ties.

Bangladesh's new government looks to the future

After he was sworn in, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Rahman said his government would pursue a forward-looking relationship with New Delhi based on mutual respect and national interest, signaling that engagement, not confrontation, would shape Dhaka's approach going forward.

Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty, a former Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh, told DW that the visa move is a people-centric step that will benefit thousands of Bangladeshis who travel to India for medical treatment.

He added that other steps are also being taken to improve ties.

"The collateral steps of restarting bus and passenger train services will address connectivity," Chakravarty said.

He added that the removal of some non-tariff barriers will boost trade and economic activity, and the next step will be to restart projects that were frozen by the Bangladeshi interim government. These could cover issues like river water sharing, illegal migration, treatment of Hindus, security, counter-terrorism and border management.

"There are over 60 bilateral mechanisms for bilateral engagement on a gamut of issues," added Chakravarty.

Changing public perceptions

In Bangladesh, there remains a perception that India is still aligned with Hasina's Awami League. In November 2025, the ousted prime minister was sentenced to death in Bangladesh over the violent crackdown against protests that left more than 1,400 dead.

Hasina still lives in exile in India, and Bangladesh's government expressed outrage that she was allowed to speak publicly in January.

In India, concerns centre on the treatment of the Hindu minority and the direction of Bangladesh's domestic politics.

Sreeradha Datta, a Bangladesh expert at the Jindal School of International Affairs, told DW that opening visas is a "start" that will "create goodwill."

"Rahman will have to convince a certain section of society that working with India is going to be beneficial for Bangladesh. It is a mutually dependent relationship. India can offer needed economic support while also considering and reviewing other concerns Dhaka may have," Datta said.

"There is no need to rush, but both sides will have to be cognizant of each other's needs and expectations," she added. -DW



LIFESTYLE

STUDY REVEALS PROGRESS IN DEVELOPING A VACCINE AGAINST THE EPSTEIN-BARR VIRUS



The study, published in Cell Reports Medicine, reported that researchers developed ten antibodies, each targeting one of two proteins on the surface of the virus.

A recent scientific study has highlighted researchers' progress toward developing a vaccine that protects against the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), a common virus associated with infectious mononucleosis, multiple sclerosis, certain types of cancer, and other serious diseases, after successfully testing laboratory-developed antibodies in mice.

The study, published in Cell Reports Medicine, reported that the researchers developed ten antibodies, each targeting one of two proteins on the surface of the virus. The first protein, known as gp350, enables the virus to bind to cellular receptors, while the second, gp42, facilitates viral entry into cells. The study explained that one antibody directed against gp42 demonstrated efficacy in preventing infection when mice with humanized immune systems were exposed to the Epstein-Barr virus. Another antibody targeting gp350 contributed to partial protection.

Dr. Andrew McGuire, one of

the study's authors from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center, said that after many years of searching for an effective way to protect against the Epstein-Barr virus, these findings represent an important step forward for the scientific community and for individuals at higher risk of complications associated with this virus."

For her part, Dr. Rachel Bender Ignacio, a physician and co-author of the study, emphasised that effective prevention of Epstein-Barr virus presence in the bloodstream remains an urgent need. She added that the vaccine would make a significant difference. - **ONA**

SPORTS

FRIENDLY

Inter Miami’s Messi wrestled to ground by pitch invader

PUERTO RICO: Argentina captain Lionel Messi was hauled to the ground by a pitch invader during Inter Miami’s friendly win against Independiente del Valle in Puerto Rico on Friday. Messi, who was brought on as a half-time substitute, was wrestled to the turf by a spectator with two minutes remaining of normal time. Several fans had already invaded the pitch in order to get close to Messi, who was taking a selfie with one when another grabbed the former Barcelona playmaker around his waist. Security were quickly on the scene, with Messi, the fan and one

security guard hitting the ground in a clinch. Messi appeared unharmed and made his way over to the other side of the pitch as security reinforcements arrived. He netted from the penalty spot in the 2-1 win, with Santiago Morales scoring Miami’s other goal. The match had originally been scheduled for 13 February but was cancelled because Messi was struggling with a hamstring injury. Miami, who are co-owned by David Beckham, started their Major League Soccer (MLS) season with a 3-0 defeat by LAFC last weekend. They face a trip to state rivals Orlando City on Sunday. - Agencies



Bezzecchi beats Marquez to pole at season-opener



The Italian rider topped the timesheets in all three practice sessions in the city of Buriram, and he continued his impressive form with a fastest qualifying lap of 1 min 28.652 sec at the Thailand MotoGP

BURIRAM: Marco Bezzecchi took pole position for the MotoGP season-opening sprint and grand prix in Thailand on Saturday, with defending world champion Marc Marquez starting from second on the grid. Italian Bezzecchi topped the timesheets in all three practice sessions in Buriram, and he continued his impressive form with a fastest qualifying lap of 1 min 28.652sec. Marquez, who is launching his bid for a record-equalling eighth world title this week, was 0.035sec behind Bezzecchi. “It will be tough

this afternoon, also tomorrow, but we are quite strong so we will try to fight with the top guys,” said Bezzecchi. Trackhouse’s Raul Fernandez was third, followed by VR46’s Fabio Di Giannantonio and 2024 world champion Jorge Martin of Aprilia. Bezzecchi led the way from the start of the qualifying session but he ended it with a heavy crash. The 27-year-old took some time to get up before walking gingerly off the track, but later said that he was “OK”. “A small mistake in the end but

fortunately the lap time was good enough not to lose pole position,” said Bezzecchi. Marquez begins the season still suffering the effects of a shoulder injury that forced him to miss the final four races of last season. He was off the pace early in qualifying but then burst through to secure his place on the front row. “It was tough, especially because on the first tyre it felt not so good, and then I said ‘OK, what’s going on here?’” said Marquez. “On the second time attack I felt much better,” he added. Marquez’s Ducati teammate Francesco Bagnaia will start from 13th on the grid after an error-strewn performance in qualifying. Bagnaia, the 2022 and 2023 world champion, had to start in Q1 after struggling in Friday’s practice, and he was unable to force his way into Q2. He is coming off a disappointing 2025 season where he finished fifth in the championship standings. Fernandez was also involved in Q1 but he booked his place in Q2 and took his chance in style, finishing 0.224sec behind Bezzecchi. - Agencies

DUBAI TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIP



Medvedev wins Dubai crown after Griekspoor withdraws

DUBAI: Russia’s Daniil Medvedev won his second Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships title in four years following the injury-related withdrawal of the Netherlands’ Tallon Griekspoor on Saturday. Griekspoor, who suffered a left hamstring injury during his semi-final victory over Andrey Rublev on Friday, was deemed unfit to play in the ATP 500 men’s final following a medical assessment. Organisers had confirmed earlier on Saturday that the title match at the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Stadium was set to go ahead despite Iranian attacks on the UAE throughout the day. Earlier on Friday, former world No.1 Medvedev demolished top seed Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-4, 6-2 in an 83-minute semi-final. Medvedev, who has won 22 titles at 22 different tournaments, arrived in Dubai with a point to prove after early exits in Rotterdam and Doha. However, the third seed has been in scintillating form in Dubai, dispatching Shang Juncheng, Stan Wawrinka, Jenson Brooksby and Auger-Aliassime - all in straight sets. “It has been an amazing four matches, probably playing better and better each match, today being the best performance,” said Medvedev after his semi-final win.



Also, Griekspoor continued his giant-killing run by beating fifth seed Andrey Rublev 7-5, 7-6(6) in the other semi-final. The Dutchman denied the 2022 champion, who also finished runner-up the following year, another shot at the Dubai trophy, saving two set points in the second-set tiebreak. “No idea how I pulled off this one, I could barely walk at the end of the first set,” said Griekspoor, who took a medical timeout for treatment in the opening set. “He served extremely well. I got very lucky in the tie-break to win it in two sets ... I landed with a serve and felt something in my hamstring. “If he had won the tie-break, I don’t know if I would have continued.” It marked three consecutive top-20 wins for Griekspoor for

the first time in his career after he beat second seed Alexander Bublik and Jakub Mensik en route to the final. Griekspoor has won three ATP 250 titles in his career. **Cobolli, Tiafoe in final** Elsewhere, fifth-seeded Italian Flavio Cobolli outlasted Miomir Kecmanovic 7-6 (7/5), 3-6, 6-4 on Friday to book a title clash with Frances Tiafoe in the ATP hard-court tournament in Acapulco. “I think we both played an amazing match,” Cobolli said. “I was a little bit lucky at the end, because at the crucial points, sometimes you need luck. I’m really proud of myself because it wasn’t easy to come back,” he added. Eighth-seeded Tiafoe rallied from a set and a break down to beat fellow American Brandon Nakashima 3-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-4. - Agencies

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE DRAW

City have learnt lessons from Madrid clashes: Guardiola

LONDON: Pep Guardiola said Manchester City have learnt valuable lessons from its long-running Champions League rivalry with Real Madrid after it was pitted against the Spanish club in Friday’s last-16 draw. Guardiola’s side will face Real over two legs in March in its latest showdown with the 15-time European champion. City and Real have met in 15 previous matches in the Champions League, including a 2-1 win for the Premier League club in the group stage in Madrid in December. Real have knocked City out of the Champions League for the past two seasons, winning 6-3 on aggregate in the play-off round last term and triumphing in a quarter-final penalty shoot-out in 2023-24. They also met in the 2022 and 2023 semi-finals, with Real winning the first clash and City going through three years ago.



Guardiola believes the challenge of facing the most successful club in Champions League history has sharpened his squad’s desire to succeed at the highest level. “For our club when you play against the best teams in the whole history of this competition, you learn and improve and are better for the future,” Guardiola

said. Guardiola led City to their first Champions League crown in 2023 as part of the club’s iconic treble-winning campaign. **PSG meet Chelsea** Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) have been drawn against Chelsea in a rematch of the FIFA Club World Cup final in the

Round of 16. Table-topper Arsenal have been drawn against Bayer Leverkusen, while runner-up Bayern Munich face Atalanta. Barcelona face against Newcastle United in a rematch of the group-stage game which the Catalans won 2-1. The remaining two English sides, Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur, have been drawn against Galatasaray and Atletico Madrid respectively. Bodo/Glimt will take on Sporting Club. The Round of 16 matches will take place across two legs, the first of which will be on March 10 and 11, and the second on March 16 and 17. **Round of 16 draw:** Real Madrid vs Manchester City; Bodo/Glimt vs Sporting Club; Paris Saint-Germain vs Chelsea; Newcastle United vs Barcelona; Galatasaray vs Liverpool; Atletico Madrid vs Tottenham Hotspur; Atalanta vs Bayern Munich; Arsenal vs Bayer Leverkusen. - Agencies

BRAZILIAN LEAGUE

Neymar scores historic double for Santos FC

SAO PAULO: Neymar broke into the top 10 of Santos FC’s all-time leading goalscorers this week after scoring twice in a 2-1 win against Vasco da Gama in the Brazilian league. He also gathered more support in his bid to make Brazil’s squad for the World Cup. The match on Friday was only the third of the year for the 34-year-old Neymar. He suffered an ACL injury in October 2023 and underwent another knee surgery in December. Critics were impressed not only by Neymar scoring twice but also by the way he did. The first came from a crossed shot that showed more power and accuracy than he had recently displayed. The second came after a run and a gentle lob over the goalkeeper.



“Last week some said I was the worst player in the world,” Neymar told local media after the game, in reference to a 2-1 defeat to Novorizontino in the Sao Paulo state championship. “But today I scored twice, and that’s what matters. One day you’re no good, you should retire; on the other, you have to go to the World Cup.” - Agencies

Change of the guard: Kulkarni at the helm after Mendis era

“Big shoes to fill,” admits the new national head coach as Oman Cricket blends continuity with fresh direction for its next phase

MUSCAT: An era that defined modern Omani cricket has given way to a new chapter. After nearly 14 years of transformation under Duleep Mendis, Oman Cricket (OC) has handed the reins of the national team to Sulakshan Kulkarni as it renews its push toward future challenges at continental and world stage.

Kulkarni, who has worked closely with the squad as deputy head coach in recent months, will formally assume charge of the national team head coach from March 1.

Mendis transitions into an expanded strategic role as Chief Development Officer and team mentor, overseeing the broader direction of Oman Cricket’s national programmes - a move designed to blend continuity with fresh tactical direction for the crucial ODI World Cup qualification cycle.

Oman Cricket secretary Madhu Jesrani described the leadership shift as both timely and purposeful.



“It is time for changes as we aim for fresh goals and fresh ideas. With new thinking and new challenges, we are confident that Sulakshan’s [Kulkarni] experience will bring new vigour and lead the team to new heights,” Jesrani said. “He brings a wealth of coaching experience from top teams in India and has already worked closely with our players over the past few months.”

Jesrani also paid tribute to Mendis’ transformative impact. “Duleep’s contribution to Oman cricket is unparalleled, having led Oman to four T20 World Cups. That achievement, the maximum World Cup appearances by an Asian Associate nation, reflects the remarkable progress made under his leadership. We are grateful

for his service and confident he will continue guiding the team in his overall leadership role.”

Kulkarni acknowledged the magnitude of the responsibility he inherits. “To fill Duleep Mendis Sir’s legacy is a big task, but I am confident of doing well. He has done wonders for Oman cricket,” said Kulkarni. “It is a great honour to be appointed as Oman head coach. I am deeply grateful for the trust shown in me and committed to building on the team’s success with a clear vision for the future.”

The 59-year-old brings extensive experience as both player and coach. A former first-class cricketer from India’s domestic powerhouse Mumbai, Kulkarni featured in the national circuit for more than 15 seasons from 1985–



86. Across 61 first-class matches, the wicketkeeper registered 117 catches and 21 stumpings - credentials that laid the foundation for a coaching career defined by structure and discipline.

He coached Mumbai’s Under-19 side before leading Vidarbha for two seasons and guiding the Central Zone team. As head coach of Mumbai, he steered the side to the Ranji Trophy [top India domestic tournament] title in 2012–13 following a semifinal finish the previous season. His subsequent assignments included roles with Nepal [batting coach], India’s Physically Challenged World Cup-winning side, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra before arriving in Oman last August.

“At the moment, I am taking it one step at a time,” Kulkarni add-

ed. “My primary focus is on the upcoming Cricket World Cup (CWC) League 2 series in Nepal, where we aim to set a strong tone for the season ahead.”

Renewed focus after T20 World Cup setback

The leadership transition comes at a pivotal juncture for the Oman national team, which is seeking to regroup after a forgettable T20 World Cup campaign.

The team will assemble for a preparatory camp with a 30-player pool ahead of its next assignment in the ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 tri-series in Nepal from March 10 to 20, featuring hosts Nepal and the United Arab Emirates.

Oman have also roped in two more staff in their coaching set-up

for the Nepal tri-series. They have hired Shyam Iyer as a high-performance analyst, who has worked with quite a few state teams in India, and Ashim Narang as a fielding coach. They will join existing support staff comprising Dr Ashish Awasthi (physio), and Shiva Manhas (trainer).

Oman currently sit fourth in the eight-team standings with 24 points from 20 matches, behind leaders the United States of America, along with Scotland and Netherlands. A top-four finish secures direct qualification to the Cricket World Cup Qualifier.

With the new changes, Oman Cricket’s message is unmistakable: Evolution is not a departure from its journey, but the next step in sustaining its rise on the global stage.

ICC T20 WORLD CUP

‘Baz said play like Sehwag’: England’s Ahmed

COLOMBO: A win against one of the world’s best teams on Friday. England dragged a win back from the brink, defeating New Zealand in their ICC Men’s T20 World Cup Super Eight match to preserve their perfect Super Eight record and secure a semi-final berth.

Will Jacks and Rehan Ahmed, two 20-somethings bursting with talent, were arm in arm in the middle of the pitch as smiles beamed from the sidelines.

It was England as they used to be. Jacks and Ahmed were two of the first kids of Bazball.

Both made their Test debuts on the 2022 tour of Pakistan, when Ben Stokes’ side were riding the crest of a wave.

Jacks took six wickets in his first match, and Ahmed took five as he became the youngest man to play Test cricket for England.

Three and a half years on in Colombo, the same pair crashed England to a T20 World Cup win over New Zealand that gives them a similar feeling of momentum.

Back then, Ahmed pipped Harry Brook to win a six-hitting contest among the Test squad in Pakistan and was England’s first night hawk during his debut in Karachi.

Here he emerged to bat with England needing 43 runs from 19 balls and hit his second ball high over long-on for six to reignite a chase. Jacks struck Glenn Phillips for a six of his own and followed with two fours, before Ahmed ef-



fectively sealed the deal by hitting Mitchell Santner over the rope at long-off.

From staring at a momentum-busting defeat, England had a fifth successive win to take with them going forward.

“Baz actually sent one of the walkie talkie messages downstairs, saying ‘tell Reh to bat like Sehwag,’” Ahmed explained - a reference to India’s aggressive former opener Virender Sehwag.

It is a long time since it felt that simple. Those words could not be any more 2022. The excitable spark Ahmed and Jacks provided has been lost by England at some point over recent months.

“Weak men” in Australia. Noosa. A team’s entire identity being pulled apart.

Something here at the World Cup feels more like a flashback to the times of old.

McCullum appears suited to helping build something with a talented, sometimes inspirational, captain. That is a place England have certainly been in before.

“This group is the era of Harry Brook as white-ball captain,” Jacks said.

“He has got us to play a certain way and the environment around the group is absolutely brilliant.

“Hopefully everyone can see we are having fun and are approaching the game in the right way.”

This was England’s best win since the third Test against India last summer - the week of Jofra Archer’s return in whites, Rishabh Pant’s cartwheeling off

stump, and Shoaib Bashir’s charging towards the Lord’s grandstand with a bandaged finger.

At this World Cup, they have scrambled an escape against Nepal, scraped past Scotland and Italy when the walls threatened to crumble in, and beat Pakistan with one of the great one-man shows.

“If you can get yourself out of some tricky positions and end up winning games it does wonders for your confidence,” Jacks said.

“There’s no better team than one that fights and finds a way of winning.”

And Harry Brook’s men now leave Sri Lanka - a country that has provided a sanctuary for them over the past weeks and returned six T20 wins from six - for India and the semi-finals.

There they could meet the co-hosts or West Indies or South Africa - this tournament’s three most-feared teams. There are only so many times you can go back to the well.

“Everyone knows about India and they have beaten us in Mumbai. We know how tricky that will be. We will watching that game on Sunday. We will be prepared. We go in with optimism.”

“We’ve won six out of seven games and we’ve qualified for a semi-final,” he said. - Agencies

IPL 2026 to begin on March 28, final scheduled for May 31

MUMBAI: IPL 2026 will start on March 28, two days after what the BCCI had originally planned.

The IPL had informed the franchises on December 15 2025, a day before the last auction, which the 2026 edition would start on March 26, but *ESPNcricinfo* has learned that the IPL has internally decided to change the start date to March 28, and have the final on May 31.

It is understood that the IPL Governing Council will meet next week to finalise the plan for releasing the schedule. The schedule has been delayed because the dates for assembly elections in Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu have not been announced yet.

While Kolkata (in West Bengal) and Chennai (in Tamil Nadu) are the home bases for Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) and Chennai Super Kings (CSK) respectively, Assam’s capital Guwahati is the second venue for Rajasthan Royals (RR).

Since the IPL began in 2008, whenever the country has had general elections - in 2009, 2014, 2019 and 2024 - or a state has had assembly



elections, the schedule has been announced in two parts. The GC is expected to decide whether to use the same plan this time too, or wait for the Election Commission of India to announce the poll dates for the three states first.

The IPL Governing Council is also expected to discuss where the opening match of the tournament will be played, as it will feature defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB). Following the stampede during RCB’s victory celebrations at Bengaluru’s M Chinnaswamy Stadium last June, which resulted in the death of 11 fans, RCB has been involved in discussions with the Karnataka State Cricket Association on whether the team’s seven home matches would be played at that venue or moved elsewhere. - *ESPNcricinfo*

SOUTH AFRICAN OPEN

Italian golfer Pavan seriously hurt after lift shaft fall in S Africa



JOHANNESBURG: Italian golfer Andrea Pavan said he has “a lot of rehab and hard work” ahead of him after he fell multiple floors down an open lift shaft before the start of the South African Open.

The accident occurred on Wednesday at Pavan’s private accommodation near Stellenbosch Golf Club; the lift doors opened but there was no lift car in the shaft, causing him to tumble three stories down.

Pavan, 36, was rushed to a local hospital with significant injuries to his shoulder and back, including severe shoulder damage and fractures to several vertebrae. He has since undergone major surgery.

In a statement via the DP World Tour, Pavan thanked fans for their kind words and said the care and support he has received while in hospital “has been incredible”.

He added: “The past two days

have been difficult, but I am in very good hands and to have so many players, caddies and staff visit and contact me has meant a lot to me.”

The European-based tour had initially said Pavan had withdrawn from the tournament, which began on Thursday, due to injury, but they did not provide further details because of “medical confidentiality”.

A former team-mate of Pavan’s, Matt van Zandt, has set up a fundraiser to help Pavan’s wife Audra and their three children with medical bills.

Van Zandt said doctors expect Pavan to remain in South Africa for “many weeks before he can be safely evaluated for travel back to the United States.”

Pavan is a two-time DP World Tour winner, claiming victory at the Czech Masters in 2018 and the BMW International Open in 2019.

ROUND-UP

Celebrate Ramadan with Jetour: Drive home exclusive benefits and stand a chance to win all-new G700

Running until 10 April, the Ramadan offer from Jetour delivers unmatched benefits on every new Jetour purchase, designed to offer peace of mind, practicality, and premium lifestyle rewards

MUSCAT: This Ramadan, Jetour at MHD Automobiles invites customers across Oman to experience a season made more enriching with exceptional value, exclusive rewards, and the opportunity to drive home a brand-new Jetour G700. Running until 10 April, the Ramadan offer from Jetour delivers unmatched benefits on every new Jetour purchase, designed to offer peace of mind, practicality, and premium lifestyle rewards. With every new Jetour purchased during the campaign period, customers will enjoy a range of exclusive benefits designed to enhance their ownership experience. These include a service package of up to 100,000 km and fuel benefits of up to OMR 1,000, both available through an exciting Scratch & Win promotion. In addition, customers



will receive complimentary first-year insurance and registration, while G700 owners will also benefit from complimentary window tinting (applicable to side and rear windows only). Additionally, each new vehicle purchase provides an entry into the Grand Raffle Draw to win a Jetour G700 2026 Model (G700 4WD PHEV, 5-Seater). Walk-in customers during the

Ramadan campaign period will also have the opportunity to enter a raffle draw to win one of 50 exclusive gifts from Amouage, celebrating the spirit of generosity and luxury this holy month represents. **Attractive model pricing** Customers can explore Jetour's dynamic SUV lineup, now available at highly competitive starting prices. The range begins with the

Jetour X50 from OMR 5,990, followed by the stylish Jetour Dash-ing from OMR 6,990. For those seeking greater capability, the Jetour T1 starts from OMR 9,990, while the more advanced Jetour T2 is available from OMR 11,990. At the pinnacle of the lineup, the flagship Jetour G700 starts from OMR 18,990, offering elevated performance and presence. Commenting on the Rama-

dan campaign, Mohsin Hani Al Bahrani, CEO – MHD ACERE, said: "Ramadan is a time of reflection, gratitude, and giving. At MHD, we are committed to ensuring that our customers experience not only exceptional vehicles but also meaningful value during this special season. Through Jetour's Ramadan campaign, we are proud to offer enriching benefits that provide long-term peace of mind,

while also giving customers the exciting opportunity to win a Jetour G700. This initiative reflects our continued dedication to delivering value, trust, and rewarding ownership experiences across Oman." This Ramadan, customers are invited to visit Jetour showrooms across Oman and experience a season made more rewarding with exceptional SUVs, remarkable value, and exclusive surprises.



Pakistan School Seeb hosts memorable Iftar dinner and celebrates Teachers' Day

MUSCAT: Pakistan School Seeb witnessed a memorable and heart-warming evening as an Iftar Dinner and Teachers' Day celebration was organised by the School Management Committee. The event beautifully combined the spiritual essence of Ramadan with a sincere tribute to the dedicated educators of the institution. We extend our deepest gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for his gracious gesture in recognizing the sincere efforts of teachers and granting them a day off in appreciation during the blessed month of Ramadan. This noble act reflects his wise leadership and profound respect for educators, whose role Islam holds in the highest esteem. By honouring teachers in this sacred month, His Majesty reaffirms the nation's commitment to knowledge, gratitude, and the elevated status of those who shape future generations. The gathering commenced with the recitation of the Holy Quran, creating a serene and respectful atmosphere. Members of the School Management Committee, Principal and teachers attended the event in large numbers. As the Maghrib call to prayer was made, participants opened their fast together, reflecting unity, gratitude, and community spirit. The Iftar arrangements included a variety of traditional and delicious dishes thoughtfully organized by the School Management Committee. The collective breaking of the fast strengthened

the bond among staff and the management members emphasizing the values of harmony and togetherness that the school promotes. Following the Iftar dinner, the Teachers' Day celebration began with a formal program. The Principal of Pakistan School Seeb addressed the audience, expressing heartfelt appreciation for the teachers' dedication, hard work, and commitment to shaping the future of students. The speech highlighted the vital role teachers play in nurturing not only academic excellence but also moral and ethical values. Teachers were presented tokens of appreciation, adding an emotional and joyful touch to the ceremony. The School Management Committee also recognized teachers by presenting certificates and shields in acknowledgment of their exceptional service. The audience applauded warmly, celebrating the invaluable contributions of the teaching staff. The school administration appreciated the initiative taken by the School Management Committee, noting that the combined celebration of Iftar and Teachers' Day made the event meaningful and memorable. The program concluded with a collective prayer for the continued success and prosperity of Pakistan School Seeb. The event reflected Pakistan School Seeb's commitment to fostering respect, unity, and appreciation within the school community, leaving a lasting impression on all who attended.

FINANCING SOLUTION

Sohar International and Sohar Islamic introduce Ramadan auto financing campaign with rates starting from 3.45%

MUSCAT: As a bank that has consistently advanced customer-focused financing solutions aligned with evolving lifestyle needs, Sohar International, along with its Islamic banking window, Sohar Islamic, recently launched its Ramadan auto finance campaign. Under the initiative, Sohar International is offering competitive interest rates starting from 3.45% on auto loans, while Sohar Islamic is providing Shariah-compliant auto financing with profit rates also starting from 3.45%. Positioned to enable customers to make timely and well-considered decisions during the holy month, the campaign underscores the bank's continued emphasis on responsible lending practices, disciplined pricing frameworks, and value-oriented financial solutions designed to serve diverse customer segments. Commenting on the offering, Abdul Qadir Al Sumali, Chief Retail & Premier Banking Officer, stated, "Ramadan represents a period of heightened consumer activity, and our responsibility as a leading financial institution is to respond with solutions that balance accessibility with prudent financial discipline. "This campaign has been structured within a clearly defined risk and pricing framework, ensuring that competitiveness does not come at the expense of sustainability. Our objective is not merely to stimulate demand, but to enable informed financial decisions through transparent pricing, structured tenors, and value-added features that enhance overall affordability. "By aligning our auto finance proposition with evolving customer behavior during the Holy Month, we reinforce our commitment to responsible lending, portfolio quality, and long-term customer financial wellbeing. At Sohar International, growth must be deliberate and sustainable. Through disciplined execution and customer-centric structuring, we continue to strengthen our



retail franchise while maintaining the credit integrity that underpins our performance." Fahad Akbar Al Zadjali, Head of Sohar Islamic, said, "Our approach to Islamic auto finance is rooted in delivering solutions that uphold ethical principles while remaining practical for modern financial requirements. This campaign reflects our focus on transparency, fairness, and responsible structuring, ensuring customers benefit from financing that is both Shariah-compliant and aligned with their long-term financial wellbeing. We continuously work to refine our offerings so they not only meet market expectations but also reinforce trust, clarity, and value at every stage of the customer journey, particularly during Ramadan, a time when financial decisions often carry deeper personal significance." The Ramadan auto finance campaign offers tenors of up to 10

years, providing customers with the flexibility to structure repayments in alignment with their income cycles and overall financial planning priorities. Beyond competitive pricing, the campaign incorporates practical value enhancements, including complimentary vehicle registration coverage of up to OMR 40, alongside motor protection support of up to OMR 100 when the insurance or takaful policy is obtained through the bank's approved partners. These features are designed to strengthen overall affordability while delivering measurable and immediate customer value. The offer is extended to both Omani nationals and expatriate residents, subject to applicable income, employment, and age criteria, with eligibility commencing from 18 years for Omani nationals and 21 years for expatriate residents and extending up to a maxi-

mum age of 65 years at finance maturity. Available under both salary transfer and non-salary transfer arrangements, the campaign is supported by a clearly defined documentation framework to ensure a transparent and efficient application process for customers financing either new or used vehicles. By maintaining structured credit standards while enabling flexibility across employment segments, the bank continues to balance accessibility with prudent risk management principles. Sohar International closely monitors market dynamics and customer purchasing patterns, remaining deliberate in refining its product propositions to reflect prevailing market conditions and consumer sentiment. The ongoing campaign exemplifies this adaptive approach, combining timely market responsiveness with sound financial discipline.



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