

INBRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO
IRAN PRESIDENT



President Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran received Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, in Tehran.

President Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran received Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, during the latter’s participation in the 4th Tehran Dialogue Forum.

Sayyid Badr conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Pezeshkian, along with His Majesty’s best wishes of good health and well-being to the President. Sayyid Badr also conveyed His Majesty’s wishes of progress and prosperity for the Iranian people.

In his turn, President Pezeshkian asked the minister to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people.

Both sides reaffirmed the strong bilateral ties between Oman and Iran, exploring avenues to further strengthen cooperation across various sectors to serve the mutual interests of both nations. President Pezeshkian acknowledged Oman’s constructive role in facilitating dialogue, particularly in supporting balanced and fair negotiations between Iran and the United States.

SEE ALSO P4

FIRST DEGENERATIVE
SCOLIOSIS SURGERY

A medical team from the Spine Unit at Khoula Hospital, in collaboration with a medical team at Nizwa Hospital, successfully performed the first surgical procedure to treat a case of degenerative scoliosis at Nizwa Hospital.

This achievement is part of ongoing efforts to enhance medical cooperation and localise specialised healthcare services in the governorates’ health institutions.

Dr Sultan bin Saif al Kalbani, Head of the Spine Unit at Khoula Hospital, Consultant in Orthopaedic and Spine Surgery, and leader of the medical team, said that the surgery was performed on a patient suffering from an abnormal curvature of the spine, using the latest surgical techniques.

HM TO VISIT
SPAIN ON
TUESDAY

AIMS TO BOOST BILATERAL RELATIONS
TOWARDS WIDER HORIZONS

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK will go on a state visit to the Kingdom of Spain on Tuesday.

A statement was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court to this effect. It reads as follows: “In a manifestation of ties of friendship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Spain, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will go on a state-visit to the Kingdom of Spain during May 20-22.

The visit, which comes in response to an invitation received by His Majesty from King Felipe VI of Spain, aims to boost the relations of cooperation between the two countries and push them towards wider horizons.

His Majesty’s visit to Spain comes within the context of elevating cooperation between the two countries in various spheres to serve the joint interests and meet their current and future aspirations. The visit will address a set of regional and international developments.

His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied during the visit by a high-



ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman

Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Thamer bin Fayez al Alawi, Ambassador of Oman to Spain.

May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan in his journeys, grant him good health and well-being and guard him as a source of pride for Oman and its people!”

— ONA

Joint meeting facilitates unity and formulates common visions

MUSCAT: The Council of Ministers and the Majlis Ash’shura on Sunday held a joint meeting at the Council of Ministers’ premises in accordance with the Basic Law of the State and the Council of Oman Law.

The meeting was aimed to support ongoing cooperation among institutions of the state and formulate common visions that contribute to the implementation of public policies and the promotion of the country’s supreme interest.

HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, and members of the Council of Ministers received Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura, and members of the Majlis Ash’shura Office. At the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd underscored the importance of the Majlis Ash’shura’s coordination with the government towards enhancing



The Council of Ministers and the Majlis Ash’shura on Sunday held a joint meeting. PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

the process of comprehensive development witnessed by the Sultanate of Oman. He reviewed means of supporting cooperation between the two councils in a manner that maintains efforts to

serve the nation and its citizens.

The meeting also laid emphasis on the priority accorded by the Council of Ministers to the role of the Majlis Ash’shura as a partner in the nation-building process. In

pursuance of this approach, service ministers periodically respond to the Majlis Ash’shura’s request (to the ministers) to submit ministerial statements that explain efforts made by government units to implement

projects, according to the priorities of each phase to provide the best services to citizens.

The proposals and opinions of the Majlis Ash’shura members are studied and incorporated into economic and social plans and programmes.

The joint meeting reviewed several topics, including continued coordination and cooperation with the government, as well as ways to enhance community awareness programmes and activate the role of the Coordination Committee that liaises between the two councils.

For their part, the Majlis Ash’shura chairman and the members of the Majlis Ash’shura’s Office expressed the importance of the joint meeting and the positive outcomes that it yielded. They spoke about various matters of significance to the public interest.

SEE ALSO P3



OMAN-SPAIN RELATIONS



STEADY EFFORTS TOWARDS STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

THE Sultanate of Oman — under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik — seeks to maximise the benefits of its distinguished relations with countries around the world, fostering mutual interests and upholding the principles of international peace and security.

In this context, His Majesty’s upcoming state visit to the Kingdom of Spain stands as one of the key milestones, building upon over five decades of advanced bilateral ties rooted in mutual respect and understanding.

Over the past fifty years, the Omani-Spanish relations have been characterised by mutual respect and constructive cooperation, solidifying a robust partnership across various fields, most notably in politics and economics. This has been evident through the exchange of visions, high-level meetings and bilateral agreements, including the visit of King Felipe VI of Spain to meet His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to offer condolences following the demise of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

Furthermore, the two leaders reviewed bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional and international issues of common interest during a phone call on October 8, 2024. Additionally, former King Juan Carlos I of Spain made several visits to Oman, the latest in 2014, which saw the signing of multiple agreements and memoranda of understanding across various sectors.

Oman and Spain share collaborative efforts in numerous sectors to enhance economic and investment cooperation. Business forums, agreements and MoUs between public and private sectors, along with investment funds, contribute to integration in



THAMER BIN
FAYEZ AL ALAWI
*Oman’s Ambassador
to Spain*

this regard, strengthening mutual benefits and capitalising on opportunities in renewable energy, tourism, food security, infrastructure, technology and defence.

Thamer bin Fayeze al Alawi, Oman’s Ambassador to Spain, stated: “This historic visit reflects the depth and strength of the close friendship between our two nations. The meeting of the two leaders will serve as a powerful catalyst to elevate the strategic partnership that has existed since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972 to broader horizons across all fields.” He explained to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the Omani-Spanish relations continue to grow steadily, marked by close bilateral cooperation that has yielded multiple partnerships at various levels. Notably, economic and investment ties have flourished since the 1980s, culminating in the establishment of the Spain-Oman Private Equity Fund (SOPEF) in 2018 — a fruitful result of the economic partnership between Oman Investment Authority and Spain’s state-owned COFIDES. The fund was further bolstered in 2023, reaching a total value of approximately RO 133 million,



FRANCISCO JAVIER
SIMONE
*Spain’s Ambassador
to Oman*

with investments in 11 Spanish companies across sectors such as food industries, renewable energy, technology, healthcare and marketing.

He noted that recent years have seen a significant expansion in agreements between the two countries’ sovereign wealth funds, operating on an international scale. Oman has become the third-largest recipient of Spanish investments in the GCC, amounting to around

RO 37 million, positioning it as a reliable and attractive partner for Spanish economic sectors, including tourism, civil engineering, chemical and metal industries, water management and commercial activities.

Trade between the two nations reached nearly RO 94 million by the end of 2024, with Oman’s exports to Spain totalling RO 33.8 million and imports from Spain amounting to RO 60.4 million, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information. Key imports from Spain include ships, aircrafts, vehicles, foundry products, flooring and ammunition, while Oman’s primary exports to Spain consist of aluminium, plastics, electrical materials, organic chemical products and frozen fish.

Over 30 Spanish companies are developing strategic projects in Oman, such as Aqualia, which collaborates with Majis Company in managing water facilities at Sohar Port. Spanish company Elecnor is implementing solar and wind energy projects in Oman, while Técnicas Reunidas is involved in the new Duqm refinery. Efforts to strengthen economic cooperation were further highlighted by the first Oman-Spain Business Forum held in Madrid and Barcelona in October 2024, organised in collaboration with the two countries’ chambers of commerce.

On cultural ties, the ambassador noted the deep-rooted historical connections dating back to the Arab migration to Andalusia and their role in its civilisation. Among prominent Omani figures in Andalusia was the physician Abdullah bin Mohammed Al Uzdi Al Sohari (Ibn Al Dhahabi), author of the Encyclopedia of Water (the first linguistic-medical dictionary in history), who passed away in Valencia in 1064. Further evidence of historical ties includes Spanish researchers identifying royal Spanish insignia engraved on ancient cannons in Omani forts, particularly at Jabreen Castle.

The ambassador affirmed that Oman remains committed to promoting its cultural, heritage, tourism and academic wealth in line with Oman Vision 2040. This was vividly showcased at the FITUR International Tourism Fair, where Oman’s pavilion won the award for best innovative design, enhancing its image as a tourist destination for Spanish audiences. An Omani cultural evening held on the sidelines attracted over 300 high-profile guests, offering insights into Oman’s rich heritage and tourism attractions, he added.



Bilateral and multilateral coordination between the two nations is crucial in promoting regional and global stability through joint efforts in security, mediation and conflict resolution, stressed the ambassador. Their political stances align closely, as seen in their unified votes at the UN General Assembly on key issues, including ending the occupation of Palestinian territories, recognising the State of Palestine and supporting the two-state solution — reflecting a shared commitment to protecting international order, multilateralism, and peoples’ right to self-determination and peaceful coexistence, pointed out the ambassador.

For his part, Francisco Javier Simone, Spain’s Ambassador to Oman, emphasised that relations between the two nations are exceptionally friendly and robust, marked by mutual respect and strong institutional ties. Both countries take pride in their joint efforts to promote global understanding and cooperation, alongside advocating dialogue and adherence to international law in conflict resolution.

He told Oman News Agency (ONA) that His Majesty the Sultan’s visit holds immense significance for bilateral relations, serving as a unique opportunity to assess past cooperation and explore new collaborative avenues. Oman’s strategic regional position and trade ties with major markets like the US and India make it an ideal partner, affirmed the ambassador.

He pointed out that Spanish companies have increasingly recognised the importance of a sustained presence in Oman, with many specialising in engineering and construction having executed projects over the past two decades. Cooperation extends to energy, civil aviation, defence, logistics and tourism, with promising opportunities in space and clean energy.

When it comes to culture, the ambassador stressed the importance of learning the Arabic and Spanish language to strengthen academic relations and long-term people-to-people exchanges. He noted a growing sense of closeness between the two peoples, with Omanis frequently travelling to Spain for business and tourism, while more Spanish people express interest in visiting Oman.

On his turn, Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), stated that His Majesty the Sultan’s visit to Spain marks a pivotal moment in strengthening bilateral relations, reflecting the deep-rooted ties between the two nations. The visit underscores His Majesty’s keenness on enhancing economic cooperation and opening new avenues for trade and investment partnerships, he added.

He noted the significant progress in economic cooperation and trade between the two countries, with the OCCI working alongside its Spanish counterpart to explore promising investment opportunities across various sectors. Business forums have played a key role in fostering private-sector engagement, facilitating trade discussions, and developing joint projects that support economic diversification and mutual investment, he pointed out. — ONA



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JOINT MEETING TO SUPPORT COOPERATION AMONG INSTITUTIONS



MUSCAT: The Council of Ministers and the Majlis Ash'shura on Sunday held a joint meeting at the Council of Ministers' premises in accordance with the Basic Law of the State and the Council of Oman Law. The meeting was aimed to support ongoing cooperation among institutions of the state and formulate common visions that contribute to the implementation of public policies and the promotion of the country's supreme interest. HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, and members of the Council of Ministers received Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, and members of the Majlis Ash'shura. The Majlis Ash'shura members affirmed that the next phase of development would see more coordination envisaged to safeguard the gains made so far in the march of progress and prosperity in Oman. — **PHOTOS BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI**

Empowering persons with disabilities

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The two-day Vocational Integration Forum for Rehabilitation Centres, Schools and Colleges, titled "Skills Without Barriers," organised by the Ministry of Social Development, targeting school and university students, as well as employers from companies that employ trainees kicked off on Sunday.

The forum aims to promote the social and professional integration of persons with disabilities, highlight their capabilities and potential and develop the practical skills of trainees through interactive workshops. It also seeks to



enhance cooperation between educational institutions and rehabilitation centres to create joint training opportunities, in addition to providing a supportive environment for expressing creativity and exchanging experiences.

Talal al Hasani, Director of the Vocational Rehabilitation Centre in Al Seeb, Ministry

of Social Development, said: "The importance of organising this forum for persons with disabilities is to contribute to their integration into society in all fields by providing appropriate training and rehabilitation, highlighting their energies and capabilities, and making them a productive group that contributes to the comprehensive development process."

The first day of the forum featured several workshops, including a handicrafts workshop, including leatherwork, hand-weaving and handicrafts. The forum also featured an exhibition showcasing workshop products and awareness workshops.

Majlis Ash'shura chairman receives delegation from Iraq

MUSCAT: Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, on Sunday received a delegation from the Electricity and Energy Committee of the Iraqi Council of Representatives.

The Iraqi delegation is on an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman to exchange expertise with the Majlis Ash'shura about legislative and economic aspects.

At the outset of the meeting, Al Maawali commended bilateral relations and the strong bonds binding the peoples of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Iraq. He underscored the significance of mutual visits between legislative councils in



The delegation is on an official visit to Oman to exchange expertise about legislative and economic aspects. — **ONA**

consolidating parliamentary diplomacy, expertise and supporting bilateral relations in economic and investment fields.

For his part, Mohammed Nouri Abed Rabbo, Chairman of the Parliamentary Energy and Electricity Committee in the Iraqi Council of

Representatives, stressed the importance of maintaining communication and exchanging visits to serve the shared legislative interests of the two countries.

As part of the programme, the Majlis Ash'shura's Economic and Financial Committee held a joint meeting with the Iraqi Council of Representatives' Electricity and Energy Committee. The meeting was chaired by Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'shura's Economic and Financial Committee, and Mohammed Nouri Abed Rabbo, Chairman of the Parliamentary Energy and Electricity Committee in the Iraqi Council of Representatives. — **ONA**

JW MARRIOTT HOTEL MUSCAT APPOINTS SAMIR MESSAOUDI AS NEW GENERAL MANAGER



JW Marriott Hotel Muscat is pleased to announce the appointment of Samir Messaoudi as its new General Manager, bringing with him over two decades of global hospitality expertise and a transformative leadership style that has shaped some of the most iconic properties. Known for his exceptional operational acumen, strategic foresight, and commitment to excellence, Samir steps into this role poised to further elevate the hotel's positioning as the city's premier luxury urban resort.

A visionary leader in luxury hospitality, Samir Messaoudi has consistently redefined standards of performance, innovation, and sustainability within Oman's tourism landscape. Over the past decade, his leadership has driven measurable success across financial performance, guest experience, and associate engagement.

Samir began his journey with Marriott International in 2006 at The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay in California. Notably, Samir has led key leadership roles at flagship properties, including Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Oman, where he served as Hotel Manager, and JW Marriott Marquis City Center Doha, where

he was Acting General Manager. In 2020, he was appointed General Manager of Sheraton Oman Hotel. There, he achieved remarkable milestones, from market-leading RevPAR (revenue per available room) and record-setting revenue, to significant improvements in guest satisfaction and operational efficiency.

Beyond hotel operations, Samir has participated in initiatives aimed at enhancing the hospitality sector in Oman. In 2025, he was appointed Chairperson of the Marriott Business Council Oman, to spearhead growth initiatives and innovation across the portfolio of Marriott International in The Sultanate. His reappointment for a second term as a Board Member for Oman American Business Council (AmCham) and the Chair of the Tourism Committee further reflects his commitment to strengthening diplomatic and business ties between Oman and the U.S., while bridging the gap between tourism authorities and the travel industry through strategic endeavors.

Samir has also played a pivotal role in promoting Oman as a world-class destination on the international stage. His contributions have earned him regional acclaim, including being named General Manager of the Year – Oman by Hotelier Middle East in 2024, a recognition that follows three consecutive appearances on their prestigious GM Power List. He is currently shortlisted for the 2025 accolade.

With Samir Messaoudi at the helm, JW Marriott Hotel Muscat embarks on an exciting new chapter, defined by bold vision, elevated service, and a deep-rooted commitment to excellence in every detail.

Underpinned by exceptional love of service and hospitality, JW Marriott Hotel Muscat features 304 luxurious, spacious guest rooms and suites featuring unique interior design. A short drive from Muscat International Airport in the heart of Madinat Al-Irfan, it also boasts direct connectivity to the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) and offers business and leisure travelers a haven to escape from the hustle and bustle of urban living.

For more information about JW Marriott Hotel Muscat please visit: www.jwmarriottmuscat.com

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



This step seeks to provide a secure and fully equipped environment for sheltering individuals impacted by natural events and emergencies. — ONA

AGREEMENT
INKED TO BUILD 3
SHELTER CENTRES

MUSCAT: The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority signed an agreement to establish three shelter centres in the wilayats of Al Suwaiq, Suhar and Sur. The aim is to provide a safe environment equipped with all necessary supplies to accommodate those affected by natural disasters and exceptional circumstances.

The agreement was signed by Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Operations and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, and on behalf of the executing company, Zaher bin Said al Rashdi, Chief Executive Officer. — ONA

CAMPAIGN ON
ADDRESSING SYSTEM
LAUNCHED

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The Al Sharqiyah South Municipality has launched a public awareness campaign to highlight the importance of the National Addressing System, as part of its efforts to improve public understanding of the system’s role in enhancing quality of life and optimising service delivery across sectors.

The campaign targeted several schools and universities across the governorate and focused on key themes, including educating citizens and residents on the significance of the addressing system, guiding individuals on how to use the system effectively, and underlining the importance of accurate address information for roads and residential areas. This contributes to easier and more precise location identification, as well as greater integration between the addressing system and various government services.

Majid bin Mubarak al Mukhaini emphasised the strategic value of the National Addressing System in supporting the development of the digital infrastructure in the governorate. “This initiative aims to boost community awareness about the need to register and update the national address, as it plays a vital role in enhancing the efficiency of both public and private sector services. The national address has become an essential requirement for many daily transactions,” he noted.

MAJLIS
ASH’SHURA
REVIEWS
MINISTERIAL
RESPONSES

MUSCAT: The Office of the Majlis Ash’shura held its 12th periodic meeting of the second ordinary session of the 10th term (2023–2027) on Sunday, under the chair of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura.

During the meeting, the Majlis Ash’shura Office reviewed a report by the Food and Water Security Committee regarding a submitted proposal on regulating the fisheries sector in Al Wusta Governorate. The report referenced the previous study during the ninth term on artisanal fishing and its

challenges. The committee affirmed its alignment with the ideas and developmental proposals outlined in the proposal and recommended their implementation in a manner tailored to the specific needs of each governorate involved in artisanal fishing.

The Office also discussed the response from the Minister of Finance regarding an inquiry on the ministry’s procedures for auditing service fees in the Sultanate of Oman.

The response confirmed the existence of an updated database

maintained in accordance with laws, regulations and new decisions.

Additionally, the Office examined the response from the Minister of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of the Board of the Social Protection Fund, concerning the reduction or purchase of service years for employees working outside Oman. The response clarified that the Social Protection Fund issued new rules in 2024 regarding the purchase of notional service periods, noting that pensions are determined by service duration, retirement age, and contribution values. — ONA

Dialogue is cornerstone
for conflict resolution

SAYYID

BADR BIN
HAMAD AL
BUSAIDY,
Foreign Minister,

emphasised the paramount importance of dialogue as an essential instrument for addressing challenges, while highlighting the Sultanate of Oman’s unwavering commitment to this indispensable approach — regardless of its complexity — even with parties with whom significant differences may exist. This was stated during Sayyid Badr’s address at the Fourth Tehran Dialogue Forum, convened under the auspice of President Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The forum brought together foreign ministers, senior government officials, policymakers and thought leaders from across the globe, alongside representatives of regional and international organisations.

The Foreign Minister reaffirmed the importance that the Sultanate of Oman attaches to its existing bilateral relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, while simultaneously commending the flexibility, precision and candour that the Iranian counterpart brings to Oman’s contributions in regional and international dialogues.

Sayyid Badr particularly focused on the Palestinian cause, describing the violence and genocide endured by the Palestinian people as “a global tragedy that should never have occurred” — one that could have been prevented had opportunities for dialogue been seized. This remark referenced both the refusal of successive Israeli governments to engage in substantive dialogue



Sayyid Badr addressing the Fourth Tehran Dialogue Forum, convened under the auspices of President Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran. — ONA



Oman attaches to its existing bilateral relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, while simultaneously commending the flexibility that the Iranian counterpart brings to Oman’s contributions in regional and international dialogues

SAYYID BADR
BIN HAMAD AL
BUSAIDY

with the Palestinian side and the international community’s failure to exercise effective influence.

He expressed optimism regarding developments emerging in recent months, particularly from the United States of America, which may indicate a shift towards a more realistic and flexible approach regarding potential dialogue partners. The minister noted that this development, though occurring amidst military escalation and immense humanitarian suffering, suggests a renewed willingness for genuine dialogue — even as Tel Aviv continues attempts to circumvent it through escalation on multiple fronts.

Sayyid Badr emphasised that while dialogue is not an easy option, it remains the only viable path to

achieving a just settlement. He cited what he termed “the horrific lesson” embodied by the Gaza tragedy when courage to engage in dialogue is absent.

IRAN-US TALKS

Meanwhile, Sayyid Badr met with Dr Abbas Araghchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in Tehran on Sunday. The two ministers discussed a range of ideas and proposals related to Iran-US negotiations aimed at reaching an agreement that fairly, practically and bindingly addresses the concerns and priorities of both parties while serving regional security and stability.

Additionally, a joint meeting was held between Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Dr Abbas Araghchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran; and Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar.

During the meeting, the latest developments in the Iran-US talks were discussed within the framework of Oman’s mediation efforts.

Both the Omani Foreign Minister and his Iranian counterpart welcomed Qatar’s initiative to convene this constructive meeting and consultations on ways to support and enhance dialogue while bridging viewpoints to reach understandings that would lead to the desired agreement between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Such an agreement would contribute to strengthening the foundations of regional and international security and stability. — ONA

Conference focuses on museums and their role in tourism development

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, MAY 18

The three-day International Conference on “Museums and their Role in Tourism Development” kicked off on Sunday under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, at the Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah.

Organised by the museum in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the National Records and Archives Authority, the conference brings together over 42 researchers, academics and experts from 21 countries.

Coinciding with International Museum Day, the conference aims to underscore the essential role of museums in driving sustainable tourism, preserving cultural identity and fostering intercultural dialogue. It seeks to highlight how museums can function as dynamic educational and cultural platforms, contribute



Coinciding with International Museum Day, the conference aims to underscore the essential role of museums in driving sustainable tourism and preserving cultural identity.

to economic diversification and embrace modern digital technologies to enrich the visitor experience.

Eng Al Yaqdhan bin Abdullah al Harthy, Director-General of the Oman Across Ages Museum and Chairman of the Organising Committee, stated that the conference reflects Oman’s growing stature as a regional hub for museum and cultural studies. “The museums today have become

integral pillars of sustainable tourism by transforming history into interactive experiences that engage both the senses and the intellect. Museums offer visitors an opportunity for thoughtful participation, serving not only as cultural destinations but also as platforms that encourage dialogue between civilisations, support the creative economy and promote inclusive educational content,” he said.

The organising committee received nearly 300 research submissions, of which 42 were accepted and will be presented during eight intensive scientific sessions over the three-day conference. In addition to the academic programme, the conference features a poster exhibition and six specialised workshops delivered by experts from Oman and abroad. These workshops focus on various fields

such as digital marketing for museums, heritage conservation techniques and community engagement for museum.

Dr Ech Cherki Dahmali, President of the Arab Organization for Museums and a leading member of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), provided insights on the importance of museum development and global collaboration during his keynote address. He emphasised the council’s role in enhancing museum development, supporting global collaboration and providing guidance during times of cultural crises. He also reflected on the deep cultural connections between Arab museums and international networks.

The conference programme covers four key theme areas: museum and cultural institutions, economy and museum tourism, the cultural and educational role of museums, and digital technologies in museum exhibitions.

SHORT TAKE



The programme kicked off under the auspices of Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi. — ONA

NDC LAUNCHES ICV PROGRAMME

MUSCAT: The 9th parallel programme titled “Mechanisms for Enhancing Local Content” kicked off on Sunday at the National Defence College (NDC) under the auspices of Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC).

Al Shidi delivered a speech in which he said that enhancing local content (in-country value) in government, security and private sectors has become a strategic necessity imposed by global challenges and changes.

He added that success in achieving local added value can only be achieved through integrated policies, an integrative approach across various sectors, and continuous support for knowledge innovation, local industries and the localisation of supply chains.

A briefing was presented about the general objectives of the parallel programme, most notably highlighting the importance of enhancing ICV and its role in achieving sustainable development.

The programme also highlights key national, regional and international practices and experiences in the field of enhancing local content, as well as reviewing major challenges facing the government-society partnership. The event included recommendations and initiatives that enhance ICV and guide integrated policies and practices between various sectors in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The 9th parallel programme, which runs until May 22, 2025, is conducted within the framework of the NDC’s national role to enhance the leadership skills and capabilities of government leaders and senior officers of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF). — ONA

SAF CHIEF OF STAFF RECEIVES UK MILITARY DELEGATION



Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa a delegation of the Royal College of Defence Studies in the United Kingdom. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views and discussed a set of military matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Commodore Ali bin Mohammed al Bulushi, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Administration and Supply. — ONA



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The National University of Science and Technology (NU), Sultanate of Oman

Notification of Opportunities

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for the following positions for the newly commissioned National Wellness Centre at Muscat.

Ref. No.	Position
NU/2025/VAC/0158	Physiotherapist
NU/2025/VAC/0159	Occupational Therapist
NU/2025/VAC/0160	Speech & Language Therapist

Applicants must have minimum of Bachelor Degree in the respective disciplines and Not less than 6 years of experience in Occupational field. Candidate must be licensed from Ministry of Health -Oman. Interested candidates may apply online in the link given below within 2 weeks from the date of the notification.

Job Details & Applications are Available at:
<https://nu.edu.om/careers/>

Interested candidates are encouraged to send their CVs to the following email address:
hrd-nu@nu.edu.om

Urgent appeal for O+, A+ blood

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health has issued an urgent appeal for blood donations, particularly from individuals with blood types O positive and A positive, as the Central Blood Bank in the Wilayat of Bausher reports critically low reserves. The bank has warned that the current supply of O+ blood is expected to last only three days due to the high daily demand from hospitals and healthcare facilities across Oman.

Prospects for rehab and empowerment of children

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

AS part of the nation's ongoing efforts to promote children's rights and empower children with disabilities, Children First Association is preparing to launch the second edition of the Oman Childhood Conference and Exhibition, scheduled to take place from October 14 to 16 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre under the theme: “Prospects for Rehabilitation and Empowerment of Children with Disabilities in the Era of Emerging Technologies.”

HH Sayyidah Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, Assistant Vice-Chancellor for International Cooperation at SQU and Chairperson of the Association, affirmed that this year's edition builds on the success of the first edition, which focused on talented children. She noted that the association is opening a new chapter this year to support children with disabilities, exploring ways to empower them through the latest innovations and technologies that offer them greater opportunities for inclusion, independence and achieving their aspirations.

She emphasised that the conference serves as a platform that brings together all stakeholders concerned with childhood affairs. The first edition witnessed the participation of more than 50 local and international institutions from various public and private sectors. She highlighted that the event seeks to strengthen institutional and community cooperation to build an inclusive environment that provides equal opportunities for all children to grow and contribute to national development.

Khalid al Matroushi, a member of the association, explained that the conference will address the



The conference and exhibition will witness broad participation from local and international entities.



HH SAYYIDAH DR
MONA BINT FAHD
AL SAID
Assistant
Vice-Chancellor
for International
Cooperation at SQU

challenges faced by children with disabilities, while also showcasing initiatives and the latest supporting technologies aimed at empowering them. He also mentioned that the conference will include specialised workshops for children, their families, and professionals in education, health and social services, in addition to displaying the latest technological innovations in the field.

Running alongside the conference is a comprehensive exhibition, the first of its kind in Oman, bringing together under one roof institutions, companies, and centres specialising in childhood affairs, along with stores, medical and educational centres, and psychological and educational consultancy organisations. The exhibition will also feature theatrical performances and recreational activities for children.

The conference and exhibition will witness broad participation from local and international entities, including the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Sultan Qaboos University, the Oman Human Rights Commission, Unicef, as well as local associations, rehabilitation centres and civil

society organisations.

Majda al Hinai, a board member of the association, stated that this year's edition focuses particularly on empowering children with disabilities through both the conference and the accompanying exhibition. She noted that the association aims, through this event, to align national policies with global trends to enhance the well-being of this cherished group within the framework of Oman Vision 2040, specifically under the pillar of Human and Society.

She added that the conference also seeks to explore and localise emerging technologies that can support and empower children with disabilities, stressing the importance of guiding families and raising community awareness on how to appropriately interact with and support the needs of this group.

She further pointed out that the conference will open new horizons for children to showcase their talents and abilities in arts, music, drawing, sports, and culture, aiming to enhance their integration into society and provide them with greater space to express themselves and actively participate in various community activities.

The event targets a wide audience, including families, children, school and university students, organisations interested in childhood products and services, tech and environmental companies, banks, online stores and entrepreneurs.

Through this event, the Children First Association reaffirms its commitment to continuing its role in building a society more aware of children's rights, and in enhancing children's opportunities to enjoy a better life, driven by its belief that every child possesses the energy to shape a brighter future for Oman.

TENDER NOTICE



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O.)
305/2025/MAFWR/HQ-34	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR DESIGN REVIEW & CONSTRUCTION SUPERVISION OF GROUNDWATER RECHARGE DAMS AT WADI AL-LITHLI AND WADI MSEELET AL- MILAH IN WILAYAT AL MUDAYBI, NORTH AI SHARQIYAH GOVERNORATE	Monday 12/5/2025	Sunday 1/6/2025	Monday 23/6/2025	Specialized companies registered with Excellent, First grades	(300/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
306/2025/MAFWR/HQ-35	SUPPLY AND INSTALLATION OF AUTOMATIC DEVICES FOR OPENING WAREHOUSE DOORS FOR THE FOOD SECURITY DEPARTMENT IN MUSCAT GOVERNORATE	Tuesday 13/5/2025	Sunday 1/6/2025	Sunday 22/6/2025	SMEs companies registered with Excellent, First Second, Third, Fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
314/2025/MAFWR/HQ-36	CLEANING WORKS FOR THE AREAS IN SEEB AND QURAYAT HARBOURS AND FACILITIES BUILDINGS	Tuesday 13/5/2025	Monday 2/6/2025	Monday 23/6/2025	Specialized companies registered with Excellent, First Second, Third, Fourth grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
320/2025/MAFWR/HQ-37	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR PROPOSED HARBORS AT RAKHYUTE, MIRBAT AND SHUWAIMIYAH	Wednesday 14/5/2025	Monday 2/6/2025	Sunday 22/6/2025	Specialized companies registered with Third grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
321/2025/MAFWR/HQ-38	PROVIDING TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF FISHERY HRBOURS	Wednesday 14/5/2025	Tuesday 3/6/2025	Monday 23/6/2025	Specialized companies registered with First, Second grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies ----- (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@gstb.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Displaced Sudanese girls look on as they gather near the town of Tawilla in North Darfur. — AFP

RSF SHELLING KILLS 14 IN SUDAN DISPLACEMENT CAMP

PORT SUDAN: Shelling by Sudan’s paramilitary Rapid Support Forces group (RSF) killed at least 14 people on Sunday in a famine-hit displacement camp in the war-torn country’s western Darfur region, volunteer rescuers said. The artillery attack targeted the Abu Shouk camp, according to the local Emergency Response Room, one of hundreds across the country delivering frontline aid since the war between the army and RSF began in April 2023.

It stated that “the market and other parts inside the camp including mosques and homes close to public facilities” were hit, adding that safety concerns prevented first responders from tallying all casualties. Abu Shouk shelters tens of thousands of people displaced by violence both from previous conflicts in Darfur and the current war.

Since losing control of the capital Khartoum in March, the RSF has intensified its attacks on El-Fasher — the last state capital in Darfur still under army control — and its nearby displacement camps of Zamzam and Abu Shouk. Last month, the RSF seized Zamzam after a bloody offensive that forced 400,000 people to flee the camp, once home to up to a million displaced people. — AFP

SOUTH KOREA’S CANDIDATES FACE OFF IN FIERY DEBATE



South Korea’s presidential candidates pose for photograph ahead of debate. — Reuters

SEOUL: South Korea’s presidential candidates faced off in a heated first TV debate on Sunday evening, ahead of a snap election on June 3 to choose a successor to former President Yoon Suk Yeol who was impeached over his short-lived martial law declaration in December. Lee Jae-myung, the main opposition Democratic Party’s candidate and the frontrunner in the race, has faced criticism from opponents as being too friendly to China, citing his comments that South Korea does not need to get involved in disputes.

But Lee, who considers pragmatism as key to his foreign policy, said the country “should not go all-in” on its alliance with Washington and said managing China and Russia relations was important, although security cooperation with the US and Japan is necessary. He also advocated more investment in artificial intelligence, protection for unionised workers, a 4-1/2-day working week, and putting South Korea’s interests first in responding to US tariffs. There was no need for Seoul to rush to reach a trade agreement with Washington, Lee said during the two-hour debate. — Reuters

BLAZE DISASTER

At least 17 killed in India building fire



At least 17 people died after a fire ripped through a building in the Indian city of Hyderabad. The large blaze broke out early morning in a three-storey building which houses a jewellery store. “The fire broke out on the ground floor and spread to the upper floors. Firefighting, search and rescue operations were carried out simultaneously,” a statement said. “The suspected cause of the fire is under investigation,” it said. — AFP

READY TO REBUILD ‘MUTUAL TRUST’ WITH EUROPE, SAYS IRAN

TEHRAN: Iran’s top diplomat said on Sunday his country was ready to rebuild trust with European powers considering whether to reimpose UN sanctions on the republic under a 2015 nuclear deal. “Iran is ready, should it observe genuine will and an independent approach from the European parties, to begin a new chapter in its relations with Europe,” said Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. “If Europe possesses the necessary will to rectify this path, Iran sees no

obstacle to rebuilding mutual trust and expanding relations,” he told a diplomatic forum in Tehran. On Friday, senior Iranian diplomats met with counterparts from Britain, France and Germany for talks on the status of US-Iran nuclear negotiations. Tehran has held four rounds of nuclear talks with Washington, the highest-level contact between the two foes since the US abandoned a 2015 nuclear accord. The three European powers are weighing whether to trigger

“snapback” mechanism, which would reinstate UN sanctions in response to Iranian non-compliance. Araghchi earlier this month warned of “irreversible” consequences if Britain, France and Germany moved to reimpose sanctions. The minister had previously proposed visiting London, Paris and Berlin for discussions on the nuclear issue as well as other areas “of mutual interest and concern”. — AFP

Israel starts “extensive ground operations” in Gaza

THE Israeli military said on Sunday it had begun “extensive ground operations” in northern and southern Gaza, stepping up a new campaign in the enclave where Palestinian health authorities said Israeli strikes killed dozens overnight. Israel made its announcement after sources on both sides said there had been no progress in a new round of indirect talks between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas in Qatar. The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the latest Doha talks included discussions on a truce and hostage deal as well as a proposal to end the war in return for the exile of Hamas fighters and the demilitarisation of the enclave — terms Hamas has previously rejected. The substance of the statement was in line with previous declarations from Israel, but the timing, as negotiators meet, offered some prospect of flexibility in Israel’s position. A senior Israeli official said there had been no progress in the talks so far.

Israel’s military said it conducted a preliminary wave of strikes on more than 670 targets in Gaza over the past week to support its ground operation, dubbed “Gideon’s Chariots”. Palestinian health authorities say hundreds of people have been killed including many women and children. Asked about the Doha talks, a Hamas official said: “Israel’s position remains unchanged, they want to release the prisoners (hostages) without a commitment to end the war.” He reiterated that Hamas



Italian, European parliament members hold placards during a protest in front of the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing. — AFP

Israel’s military said it conducted a preliminary wave of strikes on more than 670 targets in Gaza over the past week to support its ground operation, dubbed “Gideon’s Chariots”. Palestinian health authorities say hundreds of people have been killed including many women and children

was proposing releasing all Israeli hostages in return for an end to the war, the pull-out of Israeli troops, an end to a blockade on aid for Gaza, and the release of Palestinian prisoners. Israel’s declared goal in Gaza is the elimination of the military and governmental capabilities of Hamas, which attacked Israeli communities on October 7, 2023, killing about 1,200 people and seizing about 250 hostages. The Israeli military campaign has devastated the enclave, pushing nearly all residents from their homes and killing more than 53,000 people, according to Gaza health authorities. Israeli strikes killed at least 130 Palestinians across Gaza overnight, health officials said on Sunday, as Israel said talks with Hamas included a proposal to end the war

but sources on both sides said there had been no progress in the talks. The overnight airstrikes on Gaza hit as Israel prepares for a new ground offensive aimed at achieving “operational control” in parts of Gaza. Gaza’s Health Ministry said at least 464 Palestinians were killed in the week to Sunday as a result of Israel’s escalated bombardment. The deaths of at least 130 Palestinians overnight are in addition to that figure. “Complete families were wiped off the civil registration record by (overnight) Israeli bombardment,” Khalil Al Deqran, Gaza health ministry spokesperson, said. Israel has blocked the entry of medical, food and fuel supplies into Gaza since the start of March and has approved plans that could involve seizing the entire Gaza strip and controlling aid. — Reuters



SEVERE STORMS LEVEL HOMES IN US

MISSOURI: Severe storms that tore through the US states of Missouri, Kentucky and Virginia left more than 25 people dead, levelling homes and businesses while knocking out power for tens of thousands. At least 18 people were killed in Kentucky in the storms on Friday night, state governor Andy Beshear posted on X, while officials in Missouri said another seven were dead there. Two people were also killed by falling trees in Virginia.

More than 108,000 people were still without power across the three states late Saturday. The US saw the second-highest number of tornadoes on record last year with nearly 1,800. — AFP

DEPTH DISCUSSIONS

Pakistan foreign minister to visit China



Pakistan’s foreign minister will make a three-day official visit to China. Ishaq Dar, who also holds the portfolio of deputy prime minister, will start his visit in Beijing where he will hold “in-depth discussions” with Chinese counterpart Wang Yi “on the evolving regional situation in South Asia and its implications for peace and stability”, his office said. “The two sides will also review the entire spectrum of Pakistan-China bilateral relations.” — AFP

RENEWED SUPPORT

Morocco and Syria to reopen embassies



Morocco said that it would reopen its embassy in Damascus, signalling renewed support for Syria as Damascus announced a similar move. The Moroccan decision was announced in a letter from King Mohammed VI to Syria’s President Ahmed al Sharaa. A Syrian foreign ministry statement said top diplomat Asaad al Shaibani met with Moroccan counterpart Nasser Bourita on the sidelines of the Arab summit and that “the two sides agreed to establish bilateral diplomatic relations”. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



A voter leaves a cabin to cast her ballot at a polling station in Persani, central Romania. — AFP

ROMANIANS VOTE IN TIGHT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RERUN

BUCHAREST: Romanians were voting on Sunday in a tense presidential election re-run, a tight race between a fan of US President Donald Trump and a pro-EU mayor that could reshape the direction of the key Nato member bordering war-torn Ukraine. If nationalist George Simion wins the rerun — held after last year’s vote was annulled over allegations of election interference — he would become the country’s first far-right president. That would thrust Romania into a growing group of European Union countries with nationalist leaders critical of Brussels and keen to cut military aid to Ukraine.

Far-right leader Simion and his rival, Bucharest’s Mayor Nicusor Dan, have both campaigned on a platform of change amid anger with politicians deemed corrupt who have ruled one of the EU’s poorest countries since the end of Communism 35 years ago. Pledging to put “Romania first”, Simion has vowed to “restore the dignity of the Romanian people. He has criticised what he calls the EU’s “absurd policies” and wants to cut military aid to Ukraine. — AFP

MEXICAN SHIP HITS BROOKLYN BRIDGE



A Mexican Navy training ship is seen near the Manhattan Bridge after it slammed into the nearby Brooklyn Bridge in New York. Two people died and 19 others were injured after a Mexican Navy training ship hit the Brooklyn Bridge, New York City Mayor Eric Adams said. “At this time, of the 277 on board, 19 sustained injuries, 2 of which remain in critical condition, and 2 more have sadly passed away from their injuries.” — AFP

FRANCE PLANS SUPERMAX PRISON IN SOUTH AMERICAN JUNGLE

PARIS: France is to build a high-security prison in the South American jungle for the most “dangerous” criminals, including drug kingpins, hardline Justice Minister Gerald Darmanin said in remarks published on Sunday. The facility will open in 2028 in Saint Laurent du Maroni in French Guiana, a French overseas territory situated north of Brazil, Darmanin told the JDD weekly. “I have decided to establish France’s third high-security prison in Guiana,” said

Darmanin, who forged his tough-on-drugs reputation in his previous job as interior minister. “Sixty places, an extremely strict prison regime and one goal -- to remove the most dangerous profiles involved in drug trafficking,” he said. “My strategy is simple — hit organised crime at all levels,” Darmanin said. “Here in Guiana, at the start of the drug trafficking route. “In mainland France, by neutralising the network leaders. “And all the way to consumers. This

prison will be a safeguard in the war against narcotrafficking,” he claimed. Crucially, the prison’s location “will serve to permanently isolate the heads of drug trafficking networks” since “they will no longer be able to contact their criminal networks”. Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni is a strategic hub for so-called mules who attempt to board flights to Paris’s Orly Airport carrying cocaine originating in neighbouring Suriname. — AFP

Russia launches largest drone attack, says Ukraine

THE largest known Russian drone attack since full-scale war began in 2022 killed a woman in the Kyiv region and injured at least three people, Ukrainian authorities said early on Sunday, as Moscow stepped up strikes following peace talks on Friday.

Russia launched 273 drones by 8 am local time, targeting chiefly the central Kyiv region and the Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk regions in the country’s east, Ukraine’s air force said. Based on data provided by the air force, this was Russia’s largest drone attack on Ukraine of the war. On the eve of the third anniversary of Russia’s full-scale attack on Ukraine on February 23, Moscow launched a then-record 267 drones.

The first direct talks in three years between Russia and Ukraine on Friday failed to broker the temporary ceasefire Kyiv and its allies have been urging. The 100 minutes of talks in Istanbul yielded an agreement to trade 1,000 prisoners of war on each side. US President Donald Trump said he would speak to Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Monday.

The overnight Russian drone attack on Sunday killed a woman in the capital region and injured at least three people, including a 4-year-old child, Ukrainian authorities said. “Unfortunately, as a result of the enemy attack in the Obukhiv district, a woman died from her injuries,” Mykola Kalashnik, governor of the Kyiv region, posted on Telegram.

Kyiv and the region around it as well as the eastern part of Ukraine were under raid warnings for nine straight hours overnight before they were called off at around 9 am local time. Air defence units were engaged several times trying to repel attacks, the military said on Telegram.

“It’s been a tough night. The Russians have always used war and attacks to intimidate everyone in negotiations,” Andriy Kovalenko, head of Ukraine’s Centre for Countering Disinformation, said on Telegram about Sunday’s attack. Air defence units destroyed 88 of the drones overnight. The attack also included 128 simulator drones that were lost along the way without



People stand next to their houses, heavily damaged by a Russian drone strike, outside of Kyiv. — Reuters

hitting anything, Ukraine’s air force said in a statement on Telegram.

On Saturday, a Russian drone attack killed nine civilians after hitting a shuttle bus in the Sumy region in northeastern Ukraine, Kyiv said. Zelensky called the attack “deliberate” and urged stronger sanctions on Moscow, which said it had attacked a military facility.

All of those injured in the Obukhiv district just south of Kyiv city were hospitalised, Kalashnik said. Several residential buildings were damaged in the area, he added. In the city of Kyiv, fragments of a destroyed drone damaged the roof of a non-residential building, the city’s military administration said on Telegram.

There were no reports of injuries, it added. Witnesses in and around Kyiv heard blasts that sounded like air defence units in operation. There was no immediate comment from Russia.

Both sides deny targeting civilians in the war, but thousands have been killed in the conflict, the vast majority of them Ukrainian.

Ukraine’s military intelligence agency also said on Sunday Russia planned to conduct a “training and combat” launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile to intimidate Ukraine and the West. The overnight launch was ordered to be implemented from Russia’s Sverdlovsk region, the GUR agency said in a statement on the Telegram app. It added the flight range for the missile was more than 10,000 kilometers.

“In order to demonstratively pressure and intimidate Ukraine, and also EU and Nato member states, the aggressor state of Russia intends to make a ‘training and combat’ launch of the RS-24 intercontinental ballistic missile from the Yars complex,” GUR said in the statement.

There was no immediate comment from Russia on the Ukrainian military intelligence statement. Russia does not answer questions about its plans to test launch nuclear missiles, the details of which it classifies as a military secret, although it issues statements after such launches. — Reuters

Pope Leo XIV warns against exploitation at inaugural mass

VATICAN CITY: Pope Leo XIV set the tone for his papacy on Sunday with a call to stop exploiting nature and marginalising the poor at a mass attended by world dignitaries including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and US Vice-President JD Vance.

Ten days after Chicago-born Robert Francis Prevost became the first US head of the world’s 1.4 billion Catholics, an estimated 200,000 people gathered to see his inaugural mass in St Peter’s Square.

The 69-year-old made his debut tour in a popemobile, smiling, waving energetically and blessing the cheering crowds at the Vatican.

In front of leaders including Zelensky and Vance, he then gave a homily where he called for the Church to be a transformational force in a world of division and hatred.

“In this our time, we still see too

much discord, too many wounds caused by hatred, violence, prejudice, the fear of difference, and an economic paradigm that exploits the Earth’s resources and marginalises the poorest,” he said.

Prevost, who was made a cardinal only in 2023 and is unknown to many Catholics, has repeatedly emphasised the importance of peace and social justice in his first few days as pope.

“The martyred Ukraine is waiting for negotiations for a just and lasting peace to finally happen,” Leo said during a prayer at the end of the ceremony.

Leo has made history as the first pontiff from the United States, and his home country was represented on Sunday by Vance, who converted to Catholicism in 2019, and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, also a Catholic.

Vance queued up to shake Leo’s hand along with the other



Pope Leo XIV greets the crowd from the popemobile, in St Peter’s square. — AFP

dignitaries. He did not have a private audience scheduled for Sunday but this could still happen as he is not due to return to Washington until Monday.

Before becoming pope, Leo reposted on his personal X account criticism of US President Donald Trump’s administration over its approach to migration and also

pilloried Vance. On Sunday, the pope — who spent many years as a missionary in Peru — warned against “closing ourselves off in our small groups”.

“We are called to offer God’s love to everyone, in order to achieve that unity which does not cancel out differences but values the personal history of each person and the social and religious culture of every people,” he said.

Leo’s elevation has sparked huge enthusiasm in the United States, but also some consternation elsewhere that a country with an already outsize political and military role in the world now boasts one its foremost spiritual leaders.

Other guests on Sunday included German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. — AFP

OPINION

Negotiating the challenges of education at a crossroad



**SANDHYA
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THERE is no doubt that education at every level is seeing unprecedented levels of challenges. They are facing us in many forms: challenges in technology, changing employment opportunities, shifts in learning styles and resulting shifts in motivation levels among learners. How we cope with these challenges will determine how we think of education in the future.

This may sound like an exaggeration, but consider this: almost 49 per cent of respondents in the United States said that a university degree was not important for a good career, according to a PEW research. The typical attention span of an adult student in a college is proved to be 10 minutes, and more worryingly, the attention span of Generation Alpha, those between 10-15 years, on mobile devices has reduced from two and a half minutes to 47 seconds, according to research by Dr Gloria Mark of University of California, Irvine.

Of course, this is not the only time that such challenges have faced society.

References to the invention of the printing press, television and the Internet are often made as historically important moments when traditional forms of learning hit a boulder and had to re-invent itself.

The uniqueness of today's challenge is that too many factors are coming together at an unprecedented speed. Schools and colleges are having to confront learner motivation and the challenges of AI together, along with a rapidly globalising and then, a de-globalising world.

All of this required taking a long and deep look at the role of education today, its purpose and methods. Of course, we can no longer depend on traditional methods of teaching that separate teachers and students. Learning is a cooperative and collaborative process that needs continuity of purpose and method across all levels and disciplines.

If there is one reality in education today, it is constant innovation. Teachers need to be constantly on the look out for new techniques, methodologies as well as strategies that will keep students engaged and motivated. Of course, that does not take away

The uniqueness of today's challenge is that too many factors are coming together at an unprecedented speed. Schools and colleges are having to confront learner motivation and the challenges of AI together

responsibility from all other stakeholders like parents, the administration or even students themselves.

Placing the onus of innovative teaching on teachers alone could be daunting but there is no minimising their role in the education process. Whether it is to inculcate values and habits to a young child, or motivate learning and encourage curiosity in an adult learner, teachers are front and centre in education.

But none of this is possible without a clear outlook on what the future of education could be. If the goal of education is shifting from knowledge seeking to critical and creative thinking, these changes need to be implemented from early stages. For example, integrating AI in education is a good idea but the implementation requires continuous professional development.

It is clear that the future of education is not in actually knowing facts and figures that are easily accessible in the palm of one's hand. It is more important for learners to know what to do with these facts. This requires a kind of classroom experience which is still at a nascent stage.

50 YEARS SINCE
FIRST WOMAN
SCALED EVEREST

VALENTIN RAKOVSKY

On May 16, 1975, Japan's Junko Tabei became the first woman to climb to the top of Mount Everest. Half a century later, the world's highest mountain is set to record its thousandth ascent by a woman.

Scaling the 8,849 metre-high (29,032-foot-high) peak has mainly been a male achievement. By May 2025, women had reached the top 962 times, while men had got there 11,955 times, according to an analysis of figures from the Himalayan Database.

When Tabei reached the peak of Everest in 1975, 38 men had preceded her. With her all-woman team, she had struggled to find sponsors for her expedition, often being told that they would be better off looking after their children.

"All men limit our likes and I do not want to be limited," Tabei wrote in her notebook upon her return. Eleven days later, a Tibetan woman, Phantog, reached the peak from the opposite side. She believed she had got there first, only learning that she had been pipped at the post by Tabei after she completed her descent.

In her notebook, Tabei laid out her next objectives: climb K2, the world's second highest peak, and return to work for a scientific journal.

Since then, Everest has been climbed by 870 different women of 85 different nationalities, some having succeeded several times. After Nepali climbers, the United States, India and China have sent the most men to the summit — and sent 39 per cent of the women.

Everest's home Nepal accounts for half of the ascents by men, but only nine per cent of those by women: 90 ascents by 66 different women.

Dawa Yangzum Sherpa, who climbed in 2012, is currently the only woman to be a certified Nepali guide who received an international diploma in 2018. "This is a challenging field, even more so if you are a girl. There were people who said this is not a girl's job, that I won't get work," she said.

Before her, Pasang Lhamu in 1993 became the first Nepali woman to reach the top of Everest.

During her descent, she remained back with a colleague who was suffering from altitude sickness and both died of exhaustion. She became a national heroine and the trek from base camp at Everest today starts with an arch paying tribute to her. Her successor Lhakpa Sherpa, the second Nepali woman to reach the summit in 2000, has since claimed the female record for the number of ascents: by May she had done 10.

Thirteen years after Junko Tabei, New Zealand's Lydia Bradey became in 1988 the first woman to reach the summit without an oxygen bottle.

While women are still in a minority at the top of Everest, the ratio of women getting there is increasing: they were one to 16 men in the 2000s, and one to 10 two decades later. — AFP

WHO looks ahead to
life without the US

HUNDREDS of officials from the World Health Organization will join donors and diplomats in Geneva from Monday with one question dominating their thoughts - how to cope with crises from mpox to cholera without their main funder, the United States.

The annual assembly, with its week of sessions, votes and policy decisions, usually showcases the scale of the UN agency set up to tackle disease outbreaks, approve vaccines and support health systems worldwide.

This year - since US President Donald Trump started the year-long process to leave the WHO with an executive order on his first day in office in January — the main theme is scaling down.

"Our goal is to focus on the high-value stuff," Daniel Thornton, the WHO's director of coordinated resource mobilisation, said.

Just what that "high-value stuff" will be is up for discussion. Health officials have said the WHO's work in providing guidelines for countries on new vaccines and treatments for conditions from obesity to HIV will remain a priority.

One WHO slideshow for the event, shared with donors and seen by Reuters, suggested work on approving new medicines and responding to outbreaks would be protected, while training programmes and offices in wealthier countries could be closed.

The United States had provided around 18 per cent of the WHO's funding. "We've got to make do with what we have," said one Western diplomat who asked not to be named. Staff have been getting ready — cutting managers and budgets — ever since Trump's January announcement in a rush of directives and aid cuts that have disrupted a string of multilateral pacts and initiatives.

The year-long delay, mandated



The United States had provided around 18 per cent of the WHO's funding.



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under US law, means the US is still a WHO member — its flag still flies outside the Geneva HQ — until its official departure date on January 21, 2026. Trump — who accused the WHO of mishandling Covid, which it denies — muddied the waters days after his statement by saying he might consider rejoining the agency if its staff "clean it up".

But global health envoys say there has since been little sign of a change of heart. So the WHO is planning for life with a \$600-million hole in the budget for this year and cuts of 21 per cent over the next two-year period. As the United States prepares to exit, China is set to become the biggest provider of state fees — one of the WHO's main streams of funding alongside donations.

China's contribution will rise from just over 15 per cent to 20 per cent of the total state fee pot under an overhaul of the funding system agreed in 2022.

"We have to adapt ourselves to multilateral organisations without the Americans. Life goes on," Chen Xu, China's ambassador to Geneva, told reporters last month.

Others have suggested this might be a time for an even broader overhaul, rather than continuity under a reshuffled hierarchy of backers. "Does WHO need all its committees? Does it need to be publishing thousands of publications each year?" said Anil Soni, chief executive of the WHO Foundation, an independent fund-raising body for the agency.

He said the changes had prompted a re-examination of the agency's operations, including whether it should be focussed on details like purchasing petrol during emergencies. There was also the urgent need to make sure key projects do not collapse during the immediate cash crisis. That meant going to donors with particular interests in those areas, including pharmaceutical companies and philanthropic groups, Soni said.

The ELMA Foundation, which focuses on children's health in Africa, has already recently stepped in with \$2 million for the Global Measles and Rubella Laboratory Network known as Gremlin - more than 700 labs which track infectious disease threats, he added.

One patient at a time...



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHANI

The writer is an author, translator and communications professional

If you walk down the quiet corridors of any hospital in the early hours of the morning, you will likely pass someone moving with a clipboard in hand, eyes alert and heart wide open. They are not looking for recognition or waiting for applause, yet they are the heartbeat behind the scrubs.

Nurses are not only highly trained professionals; they are also deeply compassionate individuals. They provide care in hospitals, clinics, community health centres, schools, nursing homes, and even in patients' homes. Their responsibilities go far beyond administering medications or monitoring machines. Nurses assess patients' health, develop care plans, collaborate with doctors and specialists, assist in surgeries, and help patients manage chronic conditions.

What often sets nurses apart is their unique ability to blend clinical expertise with empathy. They are the comforting presence during moments of fear, pain, and uncertainty. A nurse might hold a patient's hand during a frightening diagnosis, explain complex medical instructions, or detect subtle signs others might overlook.

Nursing is not without challenges. Long shifts, high patient loads, emotional exhaustion, and constant exposure to illness are part of their everyday reality. The

Covid-19 pandemic cast a spotlight on the immense pressures nurses face, highlighting the urgent need for better support, mental health resources, and fair compensation.

Nurses are both scientists and artists. With one hand, they adjust ventilators; with the other, they gently brush away a tear. They interpret lab results with the precision of a physician and catch the whispered "I'm scared" that others may not hear.

They are fluent in a language that transcends words spoken in the squeeze of a hand, the arch of an eyebrow, the calming stillness they bring to chaos. They read heart monitors like poetry and listen not just to lungs, but to the silence between words.

Nurses are there when a mother cries tears of joy at her newborn's first cry and when she cries again for the child slipping away far too soon. Nurses walk the corridor between miracles and mourning, sometimes within the same hour, often within the same breath. They are not made of steel. They are not invincible. They carry grief home in invisible pockets and still, they return again and again. They take pain and turn it into peace.

As a patient, it is often the nurse who stays by your side before the doctor arrives and long after the lights dim. They are the first warm hand you feel after surgery, the calm voice explaining a diagnosis, the last person

Nurses walk the corridor between miracles and mourning, sometimes within the same hour, often within the same breath

to whisper, "It's okay," when a life slips away. Nurses are not just professionals; they are witnesses to humanity at its most vulnerable and resilient. Think of all the times you have felt helpless in a hospital. It was probably a nurse who grounded you. During the beeping of monitors and the disturb of movement, nurses are the translators of hope. Studies may show that nurse-to-patient relations impact survival rates, but numbers cannot quantify a nurse's true impact. How do you measure the comfort of a warm blanket offered before it's requested? Or the strength of someone holding your hand through pain?

When you see a nurse, you see a mind that notices what machines miss, a heart that breaks and beats for strangers, a soul stitched with resilience and empathy. Behind every dressing change and every calm voice saying, "You're going to be okay," is a nurse carrying a thousand stories and still writing more, one patient at a time.

Being a nurse means choosing compassion over convenience, science oversleep, people over paperwork. So next time you meet a nurse, look beyond the scrubs. See the courage, see the sleepless nights and see the empathy that doesn't fit on a résumé. Say, thank you, not just because they deserve it, but because without them, the world would be a much colder place to heal.

POLAND VOTES IN TIGHT ELECTION AS EUROPE WATCHES

DARIO THUBURN

Poles vote on Sunday in a tight presidential election that will be decisive for the future of the country's centrist government. Pro-EU Warsaw mayor Rafal Trzaskowski is expected to get 30 per cent, ahead of nationalist historian Karol Nawrocki's 25 per cent, according to opinion polls.

That would put both through to the runoff on June 1 at a particularly fraught moment for Europe as Russia's war on Ukraine drags on, far-right populists continue to rise and ties with Washington come under strain.

Polls opened at 7:00 am (0500 GMT) and close at 9:00 pm when exit polls are to be released. There are 13 candidates in total and definitive results are expected only on Monday. Ever since former EU leader Donald Tusk's coalition came to power in 2023, key government initiatives have been blocked by the veto of President Andrzej Duda. Some Poles are hoping that logjam is about to end.

"I hope that these elections will complete the change," said Hubert Michalowski, a self-employed 50-year-old. Michalowski said he was opposed to any rightward turn for Poland and instead wanted his country to "stay in the centre and reverse this trend in Europe as well".

The electoral campaign in the European Union and Nato member has largely revolved around foreign policy, showcasing a clash of philosophies over Poland's engagement with the EU and the US.

But social issues have also played a major part. The Law and Justice party (PiS), which backs Nawrocki, was frequently at odds with Poland's Western allies and EU institutions in Brussels over rule-of-law concerns. It lost power in 2023.

Nawrocki, 42, admires Donald Trump and said the US president told him "You will win" when they met at the White House earlier this month.

The key to the election could be whether supporters of Slawomir Mentzen, a far-right candidate polling in third position with around 12 per cent, cast their ballots for Nawrocki in the second round. Mentzen is a Eurosceptic libertarian staunchly against migrants. He has accused the country's one million Ukrainian refugees of taking advantage of Poland.

Echoing some of Mentzen's rhetoric, self-employed 25-year-old Radoslaw Wiecek said he did not want Poland to be "totally subject to the EU".

Wiecek said he wanted "a fresh wind" to end the dominance of the two main political groups — Law and Justice and the Civic Coalition (KO) which backs Trzaskowski. For Anna Urbanska, a 74-year-old pensioner, the key electoral issue is immigration. "I don't want these immigrants to be allowed in here, in Poland. I want us to be able to live more peacefully," she said.

The governing coalition is hopeful a victory by Trzaskowski would enable it to fulfil its hitherto undelivered campaign pledges. Tusk's administration has been stymied from easing Poland's stringent laws and introducing other changes by the head of state's veto power, to the disappointment of some voters. — AFP

Trump's Gulf visit... what it means for the region

PRESIDENT

Donald Trump's visit to the Gulf in May

2025 marked the beginning of his second term with a bold diplomatic and economic statement. In just five days, he secured a series of agreements with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates worth more than \$4 trillion. While some critics claim that Trump came to the region merely to "milk" its wealth, a closer look at the details reveals a broader strategy anchored in mutual interests, long-term planning, and shifting global alliances.

In Riyadh, the United States and Saudi Arabia announced a new strategic partnership built on investments and defence cooperation. The Saudi government pledged \$600 billion in new investments into the American economy, while a \$142 billion defence package was signed, reportedly the largest in US history. These agreements were not limited to arms deals. They extended into sectors such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy, infrastructure, and healthcare. Saudi companies like Data Vault committed to major data centre projects in the US, while American firms such as Google and Oracle expanded their collaborative ventures in the Kingdom.

Qatar followed with a series of headline-making announcements. The total value of its agreements with the US reached \$1.2 trillion, including a record-setting order of over 200 Boeing aircraft. This deal alone is expected to support over 150,000 American jobs annually during the production phase. In addition, Qatar launched a joint quantum computing initiative with the US-based firm Quantinuum and confirmed a major expansion of its defence capabilities, including the purchase of cutting-edge systems for drone defence and surveillance. The two nations also signed a statement of intent for deeper long-term military cooperation, and Qatar committed to investing further in the development of Al Udeid Air Base.

In the United Arab Emirates, the focus turned towards technology and energy. President Trump and



US President Donald Trump during the final stop of his Gulf visit, in Abu Dhabi, last Friday. — Reuters



BADR
AL DHAFARI

The writer works for Oman Daily Observer

These initiatives positioned the Gulf states not just as clients but as strategic partners, with shared ambitions in fields like artificial intelligence, energy transition, and regional security

UAE leaders finalised agreements worth more than \$200 billion. These included a significant deal for Etihad Airways to purchase new Boeing aircraft and a bold plan by the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) to increase its investment in the US energy sector to \$440 billion by 2035. Perhaps the most notable development was an agreement allowing the UAE to purchase advanced AI chips from Nvidia – previously restricted under export controls. In return, the UAE agreed to stringent export compliance measures and to establish major data centres within the United States.

While the scale of these agreements has drawn international attention, their context is just as important. This recent tour builds on groundwork laid during Trump's first term, which included historic arms deals, the Abraham Accords, and expanded economic cooperation across multiple sectors. These initiatives positioned the Gulf states not just as clients but as strategic partners, with shared ambitions in fields like artificial intelligence, energy transition, and regional security. Reactions to Trump's Gulf tour were mixed. Supporters viewed it as a demonstration of economic diplomacy at its most effective. By securing investments, creating jobs, and reinforcing Washington's position in a competitive global

environment, the administration offered a model of transactional engagement that resonated with Gulf leaders. In a time when other powers, particularly China, are vying for influence in the region, the United States reaffirmed its central role. However, scepticism was not absent. Some US lawmakers and analysts questioned the transparency of the figures and the security risks of transferring sensitive technology. Others expressed concern over the absence of discussions around regional conflicts.

Despite the criticism, the nature of these agreements makes clear that Gulf states acted with strategic intent. Their investments are focused, diversified, and designed to advance national visions of economic modernisation and technological advancement. These are not mere displays of generosity, but deliberate choices in a world where influence and innovation are increasingly linked.

In sum, President Trump's Gulf tour was not a one-sided affair. The agreements forged during his visit are likely to shape regional and global dynamics for years to come. They signal a renewed era of strategic alignment between the United States and its Gulf partners – one defined by collaboration, mutual benefit, and a shared pursuit of economic and technological leadership.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



The Royal Cavalry presented traditional Oman's horse sports and music, with riders showing skills like Ardah

OMAN’S HORSES SHOW AMAZES UK AUDIENCE

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

The Royal Court Affairs (RCA) represented by the Royal Cavalry joined the third day of the Royal Windsor Horse Show 2025, under the auspice of king Charles III, at the stunning private grounds of Windsor Castle in the United Kingdom from May 15 to 18.

The event was attended by Badr bin Mohammed al Mantheri, Ambassador of Oman to the UK, Eng Hilal al Waeli, Head of Horses, Camels, Farms and Royal Gardens Affairs, and Dr Sarhan al Zeedi, Director General of the Royal Cavalry.

The Royal Cavalry presented traditional Oman's horse sports and music, with riders showing skills like Ardah ‘traditional horse running’ and horse sleeping shows, along with played Omani, Arabic, and international music.

The Oman show started with a video called ‘Oman, the Jewel of Arabia’ which is showing the country’s beauty and culture.

Then, two horse carriages carrying the flags of Oman and the UK entered the arena, riders spread Omani Luban’ frankincense’ around the arena, which excited the crowd.

The riders and band entered the arena to the music “Jewel of Arabia.” They formed beautiful shapes to music like “Desert Nights” and “The Distance Became One.”

The audience cheered during the Ardah show and the horse “sleeping” display with bagpipe music. Later, they formed the English letters RWHS (Royal Windsor Horse Show) while the band played “Two Shores and One Song.” They ended the show with the famous English tune “Greensleeves.”

Ambassador Al Mantheri said “This event shows the strong historic ties between Oman and the UK. And horse sports are a key part of Omani identity”.

Harry Guthrie, Director of the Windsor Show, said: “We are always happy to welcome the Oman Royal Cavalry. Their rich culture and amazing shows are a joy to see. Their music, drums and horses are always a big part of our event.”



The band entered the arena to the music “Jewel of Arabia.”

Oman gear up for closed friendly match with Niger

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

OMAN all set to play against Niger team on Tuesday in a match closed to media and fans at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Oman's coach Rasheed Jaber decided both matches against Niger and Lebanon will be behind closed doors to ensure gaining the maximum output from these fixtures and prevent sharing any information about the match with others.

The Oman national football team's training sessions are under way in a highly motivated and focused atmosphere, under the direct supervision of the national experienced coach Rasheed Jaber. The ongoing domestic camp is part of the team's crucial preparations for the two upcoming fixtures in the FIFA World Cup 2026 Asian Qualifiers.

Coach Rasheed, alongside his technical and medical teams, is closely monitoring all aspects of the players' performance and well-being. Oman's goalie Ibrahim al Mukhaini is currently under medical observation due to a recent injury concern during the last training sessions.

The medical team is awaiting results from an X-ray examination, which will determine the next course of action regarding his participation in the upcoming matches. Meanwhile, Oman's other goalie Fayez al Rushaidi is back to action after an absence in last period due to an injury too.

As part of their set preparation



The ongoing domestic camp is part of the team's crucial preparations for the Fifa World Cup 2026 Asian Qualifiers

schedule, Oman team will face their readiness against Niger in a closed doors friendly match on Tuesday in Muscat.

The Niger national team arrived in Muscat and commenced their own training sessions in Bausher. Following that, the Red Warriors will host Lebanon in a second friendly match on May 28 to further sharpening the team's competitive edge ahead of their decisive qualifiers.

The coaching staff focusing in this phase of the camp to ensure proper evaluations of each player's technical and tactical



Coach Rasheed monitors the players during the training session

abilities. These assessments are critical in finalizing the final squad and selecting starting lineup that will take the field in the all-important World Cup qualifying matches. Oman is set to face Jordan at home on June 5, followed by an away match against Palestine on June 10 in Jordan.

Red Warriors are determined to build momentum through the upcoming friendlies and enter the final qualifiers fully prepared to secure their spot on the global stage for the first time in history.

Ahli Sidab edge Seeb as Al Amerat crush Salalah 6-1



Ahli Sidab and Seeb player fight for the ball

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

Ahli Sidab claimed an important 2-1 victory over Seeb in the final round match held at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat.

The match was highly competitive, with Seeb's Imad al Hosni, Hamad al Hosni, and Fahad al Lawati standing out thanks to their energetic play and chance creation. On the other hand, Ahli Sidab's Metham al Wahaibi, Ammar al Shoaibi, and Aseel al Moaini played decisive roles in securing the win for their team.

The first quarter was evenly contested, with both teams sharing possession but failing to find the net, ending the period goalless.

Ahli Sidab asserted their dominance early in the second quarter, with Ammar al Shoaibi converting a penalty

corner into the opening goal five minutes in. Seeb pushed back with offensive pressure, but Ahli Sidab's defense and goalkeeper stood firm, ending the quarter with a 1-0 lead for Ahli Sidab.

Seeb improved in the third quarter and managed to equalize in the 35th minute through Imad al Hosni after a well-organised attack, bringing his team back into the match to the delight of their fans. The third quarter ended with the teams tied at 1-1.

In the final quarter, both sides searched for the winning goal. Aseel al Moaini capitalised on a defensive error by Seeb to score a decisive goal in the 55th minute.

Despite Seeb's late efforts to find another equalizer, Ahli Sidab's defense held strong until the final whistle, securing a 2-1 victory.



Salalah and Al Amerat players in action

AL AMERAT THRASH SALALAH 6-1

In another match, Al Amerat overwhelmed Salalah with a commanding 6-1 win.

Al Amerat started strongly with clear attacking intent. Osama Ramadan opened the scoring in the second minute after a quick counter-attack that caught Salalah's defense off guard. Al Amerat maintained their dominance as Salalah struggled defensively, earning a penalty corner in the 10th minute that Sami Awadh successfully converted to double the lead. A minute later, Adnan al Hasani added a third goal with a well-executed team move, ending the first quarter with Al Amerat leading 3-0.

Salalah improved in the second quarter, with Muhannad al Balushi threatening on a fast break, followed by a powerful shot from Mohammed al Toubi from outside the area. However, Al

Amerat's defense remained solid, thwarting all attempts to keep their 3-0 advantage intact.

Both teams exchanged attacks in the third quarter, with Al Amerat seeking a fourth goal to seal the result, while Salalah looked to reduce the deficit. Neither team managed to change the scoreline, which remained 3-0 heading into the final quarter.

Early in the last quarter, Hussein Hatim scored for Salalah in the 52nd minute to give his team a glimmer of hope. Al Amerat, however, quickly responded, with Adnan al Hasani scoring again in the 54th minute to make it 4-1. Three minutes later, Mohamed al Noufali extended the lead to 5-1, taking advantage of Salalah's defensive lapses. In the final moments, Elias al Noufali capped off the scoring with a sixth goal, sealing a dominant 6-1 victory for Al Amerat.

SHORT TAKES



French driver Sebastien Ogier (R) and co-driver Vincent Landais celebrate on the podium winning the World Rally Championship (WRC) Rally of Portugal, at the end of the SS24 stage in Fafe. — AFP



France's Sebastien Ogier and his co-driver Vincent Landais of France compete in their Toyota GR Yaris Rally 1 during the SS21 stage of the World Rally Championship (WRC) Rally of Portugal in Fafe. — AFP

FRENCH VETERAN
OGIER WINS RALLY
OF PORTUGAL

MATOSINHOS: Eight-time world champion Sebastien Ogier chalked up the 63rd victory of his WRC career in the Rally of Portugal on Sunday, the fifth of 14 rounds of the world championship.

The 41-year-old French Toyota driver finished 8.7 seconds ahead of Hyundai's Ott Tanak (Hyundai) with Ogier's Finnish teammate Kalle Rovanpera completing the podium a further 3.50sec behind.

"I think it's something I can be proud of, the way I have managed to stay competitive after all these years," said Ogier who claimed a record seventh victory in Portugal.

"Thanks to the team — it was great to drive this weekend.

"Ott was just flying (like) crazy, but maybe a bit too much. I don't know. On our side, race management is definitely a craft we have, so I'm happy. Seven times here in Portugal, not too bad.

Ogier's win means Toyota have a one hundred percent record in the first five rallies this season with Ogier, Rovanpera and Elfyn Evans all winning. Filling out the top five were reigning world champion Thierry Neuville (Hyundai) and Japan's Takamoto Katsuta (Toyota) while championship leader Evans could only finish sixth.

Ogier spent a long time trailing in the rally behind Tanak before hitting the front late on Saturday when the Estonian suffered a mechanical problem.

He went into Sunday's race with a 27-second advantage and was able to take control to claim his third podium in three races this season. He won the season-opener in Monte Carlo at the end of January and took second in the Canaries at the end of April. Evans still tops the standings with 118 but Rovanpera's third place means he is now just 20 points adrift of the Welshman, Ogier a further two points back in third. The next rally is in Sardinia in June. — AFP



Sporting CP's Morten Hjulmand lifts the trophy as he celebrates with teammates after winning the Primeira Liga. — Reuters

Sporting beat Vitoria to
clinch Portuguese title

SPORTING were crowned Portugal champions after beating Vitoria Guimaraes 2-0 in Primeira Liga on Saturday as both the title race and the relegations were decided on the final match day.

Pedro Goncalves put the defending champions in front after 55 minutes before Viktor Gyokeres doubled the advantage late on, sealing the points with a low strike inside the bottom right corner.

Sporting finished top of the standings on 82 points, two points above local rivals Benfica who were held to a 1-1 draw at 10-man Sporting Braga in a simultaneous kickoff.

Sporting and Benfica played out a 1-1 draw last weekend to stay level on points but Sporting's 1-0 win in the reverse fixture in December meant they held a head-to-head advantage, and only needed to match Benfica's result on final day.

Sporting, who became champions for the 21st time, won first consecutive league titles since they claimed four in a row from 1951-54. Sporting were the better side in the opening half but failed to make it count as Vitoria goalkeeper Bruno Varela thwarted good efforts by Gyokeres and Francisco Trincao.

Goncalves gave Sporting the lead after the interval, sending the ball inside off the left post.



Sporting CP's Viktor Gyokeres and Morten Hjulmand celebrate with the trophy after winning the Primeira Liga. — Reuters

Defender Zeno Debast sent a low cross into the box before Maximiliano Araujo teed up Goncalves, who struck first time.

Midfielder Geny Catamo hit the post for Sporting soon after before league's leading

scorer Gyokeres doubled the advantage eight minutes from fulltime, scoring his 39th league goal of the campaign.

The Sweden striker leads the European golden boot standings ahead of Kylian Mbappe and Mohamed Salah, both with 28 goals.

Sporting were without the suspended captain Morten Hjulmand, after the Danish midfielder picked up a booking in the derby.

SLIM HOPES GONE FOR BENFICA

Benfica, who were seeking a 39th championship, needed a better result than Sporting on the last day but instead were pushed further away from the title when they fell behind in the 24th minute after Braga were awarded a penalty.

Rodrigo Zalazar confidently converted from the spot after a lengthy VAR review showed that Benfica defender Tomas Araujo took down Braga forward Ricardo Horta.

Vangelis Pavlidis levelled for Benfica after the hour mark, scoring from close range inside the near post from an Angel Di Maria pass.

Braga were then left with 10 men in the 66th minute after midfielder Joao Moutinho was shown a second yellow card.

Sporting and Benfica meet again on May 25 in the Portuguese Cup final.

Boavista and Farense were relegated from the top flight while 16th-placed AVS will face Vizela, who finished third in the second tier, in the playoffs. — Reuters

More and Armstrong secure spot in Audi quattro Cup final

MUSCAT: The St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort proudly marked the successful conclusion of the 2025 Audi quattro Cup Qualifier. Following an intense and closely contested competition, Andrew More and Josh Armstrong emerged victorious, securing the coveted opportunity to represent Oman at the Audi quattro World Cup at Al Mouj Golf from November 22nd to 24th, 2025. This global event annually attracts approximately 70,000 golfers from 38 countries, underscoring the qualifier's significance at an international level.

The winning team was celebrated during an elegant prize ceremony luncheon at The St. Regis, where they received premium awards



Andrew More and Josh Armstrong emerged victorious, securing the coveted opportunity to represent Oman at the Audi quattro World Cup

from Audi and The St. Regis. The ceremony also recognised outstanding performances with honors for nearest the pin, longest drive, and an exciting hole-in-one challenge. Additional raffle prizes further enhanced the excitement of the event.

"Hosting this event highlights our resort's dedication to luxury, precision, and excellence," remarked Wassim Daageh, General Manager of The St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort.

"We were delighted to offer our renowned hospitality to golfers and guests alike, creating an unforgettable experience for all."

Christian Nehme, General Manager of Premium Motors, added, "The Audi quattro Cup represents the perfect fusion of precision and passion, values closely shared with our partners, The St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort and Al Mouj Golf. We are proud to host an event that unites sporting excellence with exceptional hospitality."

Scott McCaw, General Manager of Al Mouj Golf, stated, "Our championship

course, designed by Greg Norman, challenged the competitors while offering breathtaking views of the Sea of Oman. We look forward to seeing the winning team represent Oman on the world stage."

The tournament, a seamless collaboration between Audi, The St. Regis, and Al Mouj Golf, brought together over 90 skilled amateur golfers competing in teams of two under the Greensomes Stableford format, delivering a day defined by exceptional sportsmanship, thrilling competition, and exquisite hospitality. With its world-class golfing facilities, luxurious accommodations, and stunning natural beauty, Oman continues to establish itself as a premier destination for international events.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Red Bull's Max Verstappen celebrates on the podium with a trophy after winning the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix. — Reuters

VERSTAPPEN WINS EMILIA ROMAGNA GRAND PRIX

IMOLA, Italy: Defending four-time champion Max Verstappen delivered a reminder of his unmatched racing prowess on Sunday when he drove his Red Bull to a commanding victory at the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix.

The 27-year-old Dutchman came home 6.1 seconds clear of Lando Norris, who was second, ahead of McLaren team-mate and championship leader Oscar Piastri. Like Verstappen, Ferrari's seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton profited from two safety car interventions to finish fourth, after starting 12th on the grid, ahead of Williams' Alex Albon and Charles Leclerc, in the second Ferrari. George Russell was seventh for Mercedes, ahead of Carlos Sainz in the second Williams, RB rookie Isack Hadjar and Yuki Tsunoda, a notable 10th in the second Red Bull after his high-speed crash in qualifying.

It was Verstappen's second win this year and the 65th of his career, delivered in Red Bull's 400th Grand Prix. His success lifted him to 124 points in third place in the drivers' title race behind Piastri on 146 and Norris on 133. "Thank you everyone for a great job today and on Saturday," said Verstappen, whose performance made clear he and Red Bull will not relinquish the title easily.

"It was a great weekend." Piastri said he had lost the race at the opening corner. "But it was a great move by Max and then we had a few wrong calls so it was not one of our best Sundays." Norris conceded that Verstappen and Red Bull had been stronger and faster than his team.

RAMOANT VERSTAPPEN
The race, marking the 75th anniversary of the world championship's maiden race at Silverstone on May 13, 1950, started in glorious warm sunshine with everyone on medium tyres, except Hamilton, Kimi Antonelli and three others, including Tsunoda, who chose hards for strategic reasons.

Piastri won the initial start, but left enough room for a rampant Verstappen to lunge past him at Tamburello and take the lead in a thrilling thrusting move that stirred a roar from the big sun-kissed crowd, part of an Imola record weekend attendance of 240,000. — AFP

Palace clinch FA Cup after win against Man City



Crystal Palace's Joel Ward celebrates with teammates and the trophy after winning the FA Cup. — Reuters

CRYSTAL Palace stunned Manchester City 1-0 in the FA Cup final on Saturday to win the first major trophy of their 164-year-old history thanks to a goal from local boy Eberechi Eze.

At a sun-baked Wembley in front of delirious Palace fans, local boy Eze volleyed home after 16 minutes against the run of play while goalkeeper Dean Henderson performed heroics in goal and City wasted a sack-load of chances including a penalty. England forward Eze's goals in the last eight and semis had carried his team into the final for only the third time and after he struck again, Palace survived a City siege to spark a massive party for the south London fans.

"We will feel however we have to feel today, but tomorrow wake up strong and ready to go again," defender Ruben Dias said.

In the game's second decisive moment, Erling Haaland made way for Omar Marmoush to take a first-half penalty — but it was brilliantly tipped away by Henderson.

For Palace's massed ranks, it was third time lucky after defeats in their previous two FA Cup final appearances in 1990 and 2016.

Oliver Glasner took charge of the club 15 months ago and had suffered a poor start to this campaign with Palace failing to win a Premier league game until late October.

Now he is the first Austrian coach to win the FA Cup. Palace had heroes aplenty, none more so than Henderson though he was perhaps lucky not to have been sent off in



Crystal Palace manager Oliver Glasner celebrates with the trophy after winning the FA Cup. — Reuters

the first half. "Incredible. We had a feeling it would be our day today. We deserve this so much," he said. "Haaland might have stepped up (for the penalty) but he gave it to Marmoush. I knew which way he was going. I knew I would save it."

City have been a pale imitation of the side that has dominated the English game for most of the past decade. But the way they began at Wembley suggested Pep Guardiola's side were determined to prove that talk of their demise had been greatly exaggerated.

Having picked an ultra-attacking lineup shorn of defensive midfielders, City hemmed Palace deep inside their own half for the opening 15 minutes with Kevin de Bruyne pulling the strings on what was his last Wembley appearance in City colours.

When Palace finally got past the halfway, they ripped through City's lines to devastating effect.

Jean-Philippe Mateta played in Daniel Munoz and his cross was met by Eze who flashed a first-time volley past Stefan Ortega for his sixth goal in his last five games.

Ismaila Sarr nearly made it 2-0 but Ortega saved his close-range shot. Palace's hearts were in their mouths when Henderson clawed the ball away marginally outside his area under pressure from Haaland, but a VAR check spared him, to Guardiola's annoyance. "The ball carried into my box and I knew it was fine — who cares?" England international Henderson said.

Palace defender Tyrick Mitchell was not so lucky when he tripped Bernardo Silva and referee Stuart Attwell pointed to the spot. Surprisingly, Haaland did not take it and instead Marmoush stepped forward for his first penalty since joining City in January, but Henderson dived to his right to save.

The inspired Henderson then made a flying save to keep out Jeremy Doku's curling effort as Palace reached halftime ahead despite having only 19 per cent of possession. Munoz thought he had made it 2-0 just past the hour mark but a lengthy VAR check ruled his effort out for offside.

Seven-time winners City swarmed forward and went close numerous times after the break with Henderson saving a deflected effort by Claudio Echeverri and his defenders throwing their bodies on the line to preserve Palace's lead. — Reuters

IPL returns to action with Punjab edging Rajasthan

JAIPUR, India: Afghanistan's Azmatullah Omarzai marked the restart of the Indian Premier League with a fine all-round contribution as Punjab Kings closed in on a play-off spot with a 10-run win over Rajasthan Royals on Sunday. It was the first completed match since the resumption of the T20 tournament which had been paused because of an India-Pakistan conflict.

Saturday's scheduled return ended in a washout with the game between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Kolkata Knight Riders abandoned without a ball being bowled.

The weather was more clement in Jaipur as Punjab posted 219-5 when they elected to bat first in high-scoring match.

Left-handed Nehal Wadhwa top-scored with 70 off 37 balls before Shashank Singh made the team finish strong with his unbeaten 59.

Omarzai boosted the total with his unbeaten nine-ball 21 before he returned with two key wickets to restrict Rajasthan to 209-7.

Punjab are second in the 10-team table topped by Royal Challengers Bengaluru. Both teams are on 17 points in 12 matches.

Impact substitute Harpreet Brar stood out with figures of 3-22 with his left-arm spin and South African left-arm quick Marco Jansen took two wickets in the final over when Rajasthan needed 22 for a win.

Explosive opening knocks by Yashasvi Jaiswal and 14-year-old Suryavanshi Vaibhav Suryavanshi



Punjab Kings' Azmatullah Omarzai in action. — Reuters

went in vain after the two left-handers fired Rajasthan to 89-1 in the first six overs.

Jaiswal hit a 25-ball 50 and Suryavanshi made 40 off 15 balls.

Suryavanshi, who hit an IPL century in 35 balls last month to shatter records, hammered the opposition bowlers for four fours and four sixes.

Punjab introduced spin in the fifth over and Brar dismissed both openers in quick succession, Suryavanshi chipping a leading edge to mid-off and Jaiswal, just after he had passed 50, failing to clear Mitch Owen at long-off. The chase took another hit when skipper Sanju Samson fell for 20 off pace bowler Omarzai, who later removed the dangerous Shimron Hetmyer for 11.

Dhruv Jurel made a valiant 53 off 31 deliveries but fell to Jansen in the final over as he failed to meet the increasing asking rate.

Earlier Punjab's top three fell cheaply as Australian batsman Owen's IPL debut ended with a two-ball duck and Punjab slumped to 34-3. The mercury in the afternoon soared above 42 degrees Celsius (107.6 degrees Fahrenheit) when Wadhwa steadied the innings and hit back with his attacking play as he put on 67 with skipper Shreyas Iyer, who made 30.

Iyer fell but Wadhwa kept up the charge with Shashank, who hit five fours and three sixes in his 30-ball knock. Wadhwa departed in the 16th over but Shashank and Omarzai added 60 off 24 balls. — AFP



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This strategic move aims to ensure the continued development of the Mahzaina oil field.

OMAN EXTENDS AREA 53 OIL CONCESSION TO 2050, UNLOCKING \$30 BILLION INVESTMENT

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Energy and Minerals has signed an agreement to extend the Concession Area 53 licence until 2050 with Occidental Mukhaizna and its consortium partners: OQ Exploration and Production, Indian Oil Corporation, Liwa and PTT Exploration and Production.

This strategic move aims to ensure the continued development of the Mahzaina oil field, which currently boasts the highest daily crude production in the Sultanate of Oman. The extension will also advance oil recovery through cutting-edge steam injection technology and development of the Thulaylat reservoir.

Under the new agreement, investments are expected to reach around \$30 billion over the concession period. These include both capital and operational expenditures to boost production efficiency and implement state-of-the-art extraction techniques for better resource utilisation.

The planned investments will also bolster the sustainability of the sector’s supply chain and service contracts, stimulating broader economic activity and generating new employment opportunities in Oman’s oil and gas industry.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, stated: “The extension of Concession Agreement No 53 represents a pivotal step towards ensuring the continued contribution of this vital field to the national economy.

The anticipated investment volume will contribute to developing production and enhancing the added value of the energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman.”

Oman targets quarterly spot gas auctions

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 18

BIDS close on May 30, 2025, for Oman’s second spot sale of natural gas this year, organised by Integrated Gas Company (IGC) — the country’s sole aggregator and supplier of natural gas. The auction reflects Oman’s ongoing commitment to maximising government revenues from this vital resource.

On offer in the current round is a supply of 75,000 MMBTUs per day of natural gas, available for a mutually negotiable term, extendable by a similar period, according to IGC CEO Abdulrahman bin Humaid al Yahyaiei.

Speaking to the Observer, Al Yahyaiei noted that the latest auction is part of a broader series of competitive mechanisms introduced by IGC to enhance the value derived from natural gas. “These platforms enable



ABDULRAHMAN
BIN HUMAID
AL YAHYAEI
CEO – IGC

of market-driven resource optimisation and value creation,” he stated. Launched less than a year ago, IGC’s spot gas auctions have already attracted significant interest, particularly from the industrial sector. The first auction of 2025 — offering 175,000 MMBTUs per day over a 1+1-year term — was the largest to date.

Commenting on market interest in that round, the CEO noted: “There was strong demand, particularly from existing industrial customers who already

investors to compete beyond our baseline requirements, helping us secure optimal value for Oman. This approach aligns with our broader strategy



On offer in the current round is a supply of 75,000 MMBTUs per day of natural gas.

have agreements with IGC. These customers expressed interest in expanding their production capacity, which would require additional gas.

The interest mainly came from the industrial sector, including petrochemical and other manufacturing operations.”

Significantly, these auctions have served as a valuable learning experience for both market participants and IGC — a wholly state-owned enterprise operating

Duqm project joins Oman’s green energy framework

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 18

PROJECT development and usufruct agreements have been signed on May 18, Sunday, to integrate Phases 2 and 3 of a green hydrogen and ammonia project in Al Duqm into Oman’s national hydrogen framework. The agreements, involving Hydrom (the orchestrator of Oman’s green hydrogen industry), the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and India-based ACME Group, mark the formal inclusion of one of the Sultanate of Oman’s earliest hydrogen initiatives into Hydrom’s unified national portfolio.

The signing ceremony was attended by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of Hydrom; Shaikh Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ); and Gursharan Jassal, ACME’s Country Manager in Oman.

The two new project phases will cover 80 square kilometres within the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) and are expected to each produce 71,000 tonnes of green hydrogen and 400,000 tonnes of green ammonia annually.

This expansion builds on the ongoing construction of ACME’s Phase 1, designed to produce 100,000 tonnes of green ammonia per year under an offtake agreement with Yara Birkeland AS. Once all three phases are complete, ACME aims to reach a total production capacity of 0.9 million tonnes of green ammonia annually.

Eng Abdulaziz al Shaitani, Managing Director of Hydrom, stated: “Integrating ACME’s project into our national framework is a major milestone in Oman’s green hydrogen journey.



(R-L) Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Chairman of Hydrom; Shaikh Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of OPAZ; and Gursharan Jassal, ACME’s Country Manager in Oman.

It strengthens investor confidence, streamlines development, and reinforces Oman’s status as a serious global player in this emerging sector.”

Hydrom’s portfolio has now expanded to nine large-scale green hydrogen projects across Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates,

This expansion builds on the ongoing construction of ACME’s Phase 1, designed to produce 100,000 tonnes of green ammonia per year under an offtake agreement with Yara Birkeland AS.

with combined expected investments exceeding \$50 billion and an annual production capacity target of 1.5 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2030.

These projects will be powered by approximately 35 GW of renewable energy and coordinated through a centralised strategy to ensure scalability and international competitiveness.

Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO of SEZAD, highlighted Duqm’s rising

prominence as a green energy hub. He noted the zone’s 2025–2030 strategy prioritises green hydrogen investments, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and the national goal of Net-Zero emissions by 2050.

ACME’s Country Manager Gursharan Jassal added: “This agreement represents a major step toward a cleaner and more sustainable energy future for Oman. It reflects our shared ambition to support the country’s long-term vision and global leadership in the green hydrogen economy.”

The agreement comes as Hydrom progresses with its third land auction round, underscoring the Sultanate of Oman’s accelerating hydrogen strategy.

By integrating early-stage and new developments under one framework, Oman is building a complete green hydrogen value chain — from renewable resource development to infrastructure and export — offering investors and offtakers a stable, scalable, and future-ready ecosystem.

BUSINESS

TECHPOWERHOUSE

OMANTEL REVENUE HITS RO 3 BILLION IN 2024

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 18

OMANTEL, Oman's leading telecommunications and digital solutions provider, reported consolidated revenues of RO 3.03 billion in 2024, reinforcing its transformation into a regional technology powerhouse.



TALAL AL MAAMARI
CEO – Omantel

The company's evolution is anchored in robust financial performance, digital innovation, strategic international partnerships and strong alignment with Oman Vision 2040. Omantel's net profit attributable to shareholders rose

by 4.4% year-on-year to RO 78.1 million, with earnings per share increasing to RO 0.104. Domestically, revenues reached RO 622.6 million, a 2.7% increase, supported by 6% growth in postpaid mobile and 7% in fixed broadband services. The Group maintained a 40.2% mobile market share and a 54.4% fixed broadband share, with mobile subscribers reaching 3.96 million and fixed broadband users surpassing 311,000.

Regionally, Zain Group — in which Omantel holds a 21.9% stake — contributed RO 2.47 billion in revenues, with double-digit growth in Iraq (11%) and strong gains in Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Chairman Mulham bin Basheer al Jarf noted that the company's shift to a tech-native enterprise will “shape a future where every connection enriches lives.”

CEO Talal al Maamari confirmed that Omantel is entering a new growth phase, creating long-term value across markets and communities.

In 2024, Omantel achieved RO 25 million in procurement savings through synergies with Zain Group. The two operators also launched Zain Omantel International (ZOI), a major regional wholesale gateway serving eight countries.

Omantel's global connectivity footprint expanded with the launch of the SN1 data centre in Salalah, in partnership with Equinix. With 10 submarine cables landing in Salalah, the city has become the second most connected location in the Middle East, after only Fujairah.

Omantel now operates a subsea network spanning 120,000 km, with connections to over 120 international cities, supported by two carrier-neutral data centres and six cable landing stations.

Following the successful completion of its “Shift Gear” strategy, Omantel launched its new five-year road map — “Portal to the Future” — focusing on AI, cloud computing, fintech and smart infrastructure. Group-level ICT revenue rose 55.5%, supported by digital subsidiaries including Oman Data Park and Future Cities (Tadom).

Notable product launches included the OmPay fintech platform, a new API marketplace and 300+ AI-driven customer engagement campaigns. Strategic cloud collaborations continued with Amazon Web Services, Google, Oracle and Huawei to support national digital infrastructure under the National Cloud initiative.

Omantel intensified its sustainability efforts in 2024, completing full GHG baseline assessments for Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions; and rolling out AI-powered energy optimisation across its networks. Over 200 metric tonnes of e-waste were recycled, while solar-powered infrastructure was deployed at key sites.

The company invested RO 750,000 in CSR programmes, reaching over 260,000 beneficiaries. Key initiatives included:

- Completion of the RO 1 million “My House, My Shelter” campaign
- Launch of “Maqroo”, the world's first Arabic font for dyslexic readers

RAISING PRICES

Trump tells Walmart to ‘eat the tariffs’



US President Donald Trump said on Saturday that Walmart should “eat the tariffs” instead of blaming duties imposed by his administration on imported goods for the retailer's increased prices. “Walmart should STOP trying to blame tariffs as the reason for raising prices throughout the chain. Walmart made BILLIONS OF DOLLARS, far more than expected,” he said. — Reuters

OMAN LNG SIGNS LNG OPTIMISATION PACT WITH VITOL ASIA

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 18

UNDER the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Oman LNG signed an agreement with Vitol Asia Pte Ltd to optimise Oman LNG's LNG supply portfolio, marking another significant step in strengthening its global partnerships.

The agreement, commencing in 2026, entails optimising up to 0.8 million metric tonnes per annum (MTPA) of liquefied natural gas (LNG) with Vitol on a Delivered Ex-Ship (DES) basis. This collaboration builds upon Oman LNG's strategic portfolio and leverages the flexibility from its DES commitments, particularly aligning with evolving market demands.

Hamed al Numani, Chief Executive Officer



The agreement, commencing in 2026, entails optimising up to 0.8 MTPA of LNG.

of Oman LNG, commented, “This agreement with Vitol reflects our agility and continuous adaptation to market dynamics. We are pleased to

see continued positive market response to Oman's strategy in gas and LNG. Vitol is a key portfolio trader and a trusted partner; and we are pleased to extend our cooperation through this deal which supports our long-term growth and value delivery.”

Mahmoud al Balushi, Chief Commercial Officer of Oman LNG, added: “This optimisation agreement with Vitol is a testament to our proactive commercial strategy, enhancing our portfolio's adaptability and responsiveness to global market shifts. It allows us to further capitalise on our established reputation and experience to unlock new value.”

The signing ceremony for the agreement was held in Muscat, reflecting the continued support of the Omani government in advancing the nation's strategic energy objectives.

Semiconductor design hub launched in Oman

THE Sultanate of Oman has taken a significant step towards strengthening its position in the global digital economy with the signing of a cooperation programme to establish a large-scale integrated circuit (IC) design company in the country.

The agreement was inked on Sunday, May 18 by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) and the Ministry of Labour with Indian technology firm Kinesis Semicon. The initiative aims to boost innovation in semiconductor design while nurturing local engineering talent.

As part of the programme, 80 Omani engineers will undergo a 12-month intensive training in semiconductor design, funded by the Ministry of Labour. The initiative is aligned with



The initiative is aligned with efforts to build a skilled national workforce capable of contributing to Oman's digital transformation.

efforts to build a skilled national workforce capable of contributing to Oman's digital transformation.

“This cooperation is a milestone in building a robust semiconductor industry in Oman,” said Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and

Information Technology. “The new company will serve as a regional hub for chip design and will be powered by trained Omani professionals,” he added.

Kinesis Semicon, a global player in semiconductor design and manufacturing, is committed to transferring advanced technological expertise to Oman, supporting the localisation of high-tech

PACT SIGNED TO JOINTLY DEVELOP HYDROGEN TRANSPORT NETWORK

MUSCAT: OQ Gas Networks SAOG (OQGN), the exclusive operator of Oman's natural gas transmission system, has signed a Term Sheet Cooperation Agreement with Belgium-based Fluxys to jointly develop a hydrogen transportation network in the Sultanate of Oman.

Under the agreement, Fluxys will join as a minority shareholder, co-owning and operating the planned infrastructure alongside OQGN.

The agreement builds on an earlier Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in September 2023 and strengthens their partnership following Fluxys' acquisition of a 4.9 per cent stake in OQGN during its Initial Public Offering.

Both companies share a vision for leading the energy transition and see this collaboration as a key step towards realising Oman Vision 2040 and its national hydrogen production targets.

With complementary infrastructure and expertise, OQGN and Fluxys aim to fast-track the rollout of hydrogen transport systems to support



OQGN and Fluxys aim to fast-track the rollout of hydrogen transport systems to support Oman's clean energy ambitions.

Oman's clean energy ambitions. The partnership also reflects a broader goal to exchange knowledge

and best practices to accelerate low-carbon developments.

The agreement was signed by Eng Mansoor bin Ali al Abdali, CEO of OQGN and Pascal De Buck, Managing Director and CEO of Fluxys, during a ceremony at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Muscat, held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

“We are excited to work with Fluxys in developing hydrogen transportation infrastructure to support Oman's green hydrogen and decarbonisation goals,” said Eng Al Abdali. “This collaboration reflects our commitment to delivering cost-effective, sustainable energy solutions for the future,” he added.

De Buck added, “Partnering with OQGN marks a major step in our strategy to build international low-carbon value chains. We look forward to contributing to Oman's energy transition while bringing renewable hydrogen to Belgium and Europe.”

PROBE RESULTS

China slaps anti-dumping duties on plastics



China on Sunday announced anti-dumping duties as high as 74.9 per cent on imports of POM copolymers, a type of engineering plastic, from the United States, the European Union, Japan and Taiwan.

The ministry's findings conclude a probe launched in May 2024, shortly after the US sharply increased tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, computer chips and other imports.— Reuters

INFLATION RISKS

ECB says central bank may need to cut rates



The European Central Bank may need to cut interest rates to “slightly below” 2 per cent as global trade tensions pose downside risks to inflation and growth, Belgium's central bank governor, Pierre Wunsch, said on Saturday.

Wunsch said that recent shocks and uncertainty could justify a mildly supportive monetary policy, including a potential cut below the current 2.25 per cent deposit rate. — Reuters

OPINION

Why ballast-less T-Track technology is ideal for Oman



JAN VAN WYK

The writer is an Oman-based businessman and investor with interests spanning rail technology, metal industries, and innovation. Email: jvwyk@omantel.net.om

THE harsh desert environments of Oman and the broader Arabian Peninsula present distinct challenges for railway infrastructure. Wind-blown sand, extreme temperatures and limited maintenance access create conditions in which conventional ballast-based track systems rapidly deteriorate and become unsustainable. In this context, ballast-less T-Track technology emerges as a highly suitable and proven solution. This system has already demonstrated remarkable success in Namibia, where it was used to upgrade railway infrastructure in the Namib Desert — the oldest desert in the world. One of the primary advantages of T-Track technology is its elimination of ballast and related vulnerabilities. In desert conditions, traditional ballasted tracks are prone to sand infiltration, which fills the voids between ballast stones, compromises track stability and renders essential maintenance activities such as tamping ineffective. Furthermore, during intense sandstorms, the ballast itself can be displaced or blown away entirely, leaving rails unsupported and hazardous. T-Track completely avoids these issues by removing the need for ballast altogether. The design of T-Track is both robust and innovative. It comprises prefabricated, twin steel-reinforced concrete beams linked

by galvanised steel tie bars at carefully engineered intervals. The rails are fastened using proven Pandrol or Vossloh clip systems, with resilience provided by a continuous rubber-bonded cork strip placed underneath. The result is an integrated system that maintains fixed vertical and horizontal geometry, dramatically reducing the need for maintenance and ensuring long-term operational reliability. Moreover, the absence of sleepers and the elimination of tamping requirements further reduce life-cycle maintenance costs and simplify track management. T-Track is specifically engineered to meet defined axle loads and train speeds. The substructure and formation layers are an integral part of the system’s overall design, delivering continuous support and reducing rail stress. This allows for the use of reduced rail sizes, which can lead to material savings without compromising safety or performance. T-Track’s modular components also allow for rapid and simplified construction, significantly reducing labour and time costs. Its adaptability makes it well-suited for diverse rail infrastructure, including tunnels, turnouts, low-lying flood-prone zones, mining yards and passenger platforms. The success of T-Track in Namibia underscores its durability and effectiveness in some of the most unforgiving conditions on earth. The system has operated there for

One of the primary advantages of T-Track technology is its elimination of ballast and related vulnerabilities. In desert conditions, traditional ballasted tracks are prone to sand infiltration, which fills the voids between ballast stones, compromises track stability and renders essential maintenance activities such as tamping ineffective

over three decades without a single reported issue related to its fastening mechanisms. In addition, ongoing research — such as that conducted by the University of South Africa — continues to refine and enhance the system’s performance and economic benefits. For Oman, the adoption of T-Track technology represents an opportunity to develop a future-proof rail network that withstands the challenges of desert terrain while minimising maintenance burdens and operational disruptions. T-Track technology can also be transferred to the proposed Oman Rail Institute for future track construction here in the Sultanate of Oman. Given the country’s shared environmental conditions with regions like Namibia and Saudi Arabia, where T-Track’s performance has been validated, its application in Oman is both logical and strategic. T-Track eliminates many of the pitfalls associated with ballast systems, allowing rail authorities to redirect focus towards operational excellence and strategic expansion. In conclusion, ballast-less T-Track technology offers Oman a resilient, low-maintenance and economically viable alternative to conventional railway systems. Its proven success in desert environments makes it an ideal choice for building and sustaining a modern, efficient rail network in the Arabian Peninsula.

FRANCO-GERMAN DEFENCE IPO HITS PRIVATE EQUITY SNAG

BY PIERRE BRIANCON

KNDS was about to bag a great deal. The Franco-German tank maker had a call option to up its stake in Renk , a \$6 billion German-based maker of gearboxes for armoured vehicles, from 7% to 25%. With the call price at 20 euros a share and Renk currently trading at nearly 60 euros, KNDS faced a nice-to-have paper profit of more than 730 million euros. Yet Triton Partners, the buyout firm owning the shares, is having second thoughts about handing them over. The dispute is now for a German court to decide, but it could alter plans by KNDS’s shareholders for an initial public offering this year. The options deal dates back to Renk’s February 2024 listing, four years after Triton bought the unit from Volkswagen. The shares soared 20% on their first trading day, have risen threefold since then and outperformed all other European defence companies this year. Triton says KNDS failed to get Italian regulatory approval, which KNDS alleges it didn’t need. The lawsuit at least gives time for the two parties to seek a compromise, via a higher price for the Renk shares — although maybe not the current market price. The gearbox maker said on Wednesday its revenue had jumped 14.7% year-on-year in the last quarter with order intake up 163.5%, but the share price only rose 0.5% on the news. The wild ride of defence stocks could be subsiding, as markets have digested and anticipated higher defence spending in Europe. Triton may find this is a good moment to sell, while it’s not in KNDS’s interest for a prolonged dispute. The group is the key architect of the “tank of the future” being developed by France and Germany after years of haggling. Its governance is already odd, forcing a German family group and the former division of France’s defence ministry to work together. KNDS is yet to confirm its listing plans. Yet based on the 3.8 billion euros of sales it booked in 2024, the company could fetch an enterprise value of up to 19 billion euros if based on the same revenue multiple as Renk — or 14 billion euros on the same metric as Hensoldt, the German defence electronics firm. As such, 730 million euros of option winnings constitute a material swing factor. The tank maker could instead sell a stake to another industry player, as European authorities want more consolidation in the defence sector. Raising its holding in Renk to 25% would also offer the group another possibility: a reverse merger with its listed supplier that would remove the need for an IPO. Its current smallish Renk stake would however make that option less attractive for its owners. Another reason to cut a deal with Triton.

— Reuters

Agentic commerce: The paradox of tech advances

WITH the evolution of technology, business, society and humans have increased their capacity to absorb change and developments. The new buzzword in the marketplace is agentic commerce, which was approximately \$5-\$6.7 billion in 2024. This includes the worldwide adoption of agentic AI solutions across various sectors like retail payments and customer service. It is expected to reach \$10.41 billion by the end of 2025. It is forecasted that by 2030 to 2040, it will touch \$41 to 200 billion. The annual growth rates are expected to be 35 per cent to over 55 per cent . The estimates are indicative of an explosive growth trajectory. Rapid digitalisation and automation across industries are leading to increasing reliance on AI. Furthermore, the advancements in AI models, integration with payment systems and the demand for hyper-personalisation and seamless, autonomous shopping experiences, coupled with cost reduction and operational efficiency across enterprises, fuel the exponential growth of agentic commerce. For those wondering what this is all about, agentic refers to the ability to act independently and exhibit or achieve outcomes with external directions. Agentic is a rapidly emerging terminology in the field of AI. Agentic are AI systems that can autonomously pursue complex goals, make decisions, adapt and execute multiple complex steps with minimal human interference. These systems are functioning beyond traditional automation. They are highly adaptive systems that can learn from experience and self-optmise based on real-time feedback. Agentic AI can potentially use advanced reasoning to solve people’s problems. Agentic AI uses sophisticated reasoning and iterative planning to solve complex, multi-step problems. The new transformative model in



Agentic is a rapidly emerging terminology in the field of AI.



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat.

digital retail is called agentic-based commerce. Within the e-commerce system, AI agents act independently, execute and complete transactions for users and businesses. AI agents power agentic commerce and are built from large models and other advanced AI technologies. Agentic systems, in terms of technological advancement in artificial intelligence, mark a significant step towards the creation of truly autonomous, adaptable and proactive machines that can handle complex, dynamic tasks with minimal human oversight. The pace of technological advancement in artificial intelligence is applaudable. Humans have harnessed technology’s potential to enhance efficiency; and convenience and alleviate human suffering to some extent. However, artificial intelligence risks are eclipsing and/or eroding human-centric life experiences and amplifying systematic vulnerabilities. Innovations like AI-driven personalisation, virtual fitting rooms, smart shopping, AR and VR tools that allow customers to visualise products remotely have arrived to revolutionise shopping experiences. Yet, these developments cannot replicate or replace the social bonding or spontaneity of in-store experiences. The paradigm shift witnessed

towards hyper-convenience comes with a risk of commodifying human interactions; and experiencing and prioritising speed over human connections. Human dependency on technological revolutions also exposes critical systemic weaknesses. For instance, the recent outages, such as Europe’s April 2025 blackout, which affected 60 million people and Microsoft’s March 2024 service collapse, demonstrate systemic fragility. These events, which occurred in scant numbers, disrupted financial transactions, healthcare and transportation; and cost billions in lost productivity. Such technological developments can also increase AI-driven fraud and cloud infrastructure breaches that could threaten global stability. Psychologically speaking, excessive technology dependence correlates with increased levels of anxiety, social isolation and attention deficits, which are more prevalent among adolescents. Research affirms that excessive screen time correlates with reduced empathy and emotional resilience, as online AI algorithms prioritise customer engagement over well-being. Artificial intelligence has had transformative effects and has demonstrated its potential to uplift society, yet it needs to be dealt with sufficient safeguards. Humankind’s grave challenge lies in its ability to balance technological developments with safeguards and ensure that technology integration in daily activities does not lead to psychological disruptions or an increase in malicious intentions. As a society, we need to embrace and prioritise sustainability, resilience and the well-being of people beyond efficiency. I leave my readers with a question they must ponder seriously: “As we all navigate this paradigm shift in duality, will technology fortify and enhance our future or render us perpetually vulnerable to systems we have created?”

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GRADUATED female candidate seeking finance, HR, Accounts, Data entry related jobs. Contact details as follows: Mobile: +968 92637030, Email: athiraanilkumarhh@gmail.com

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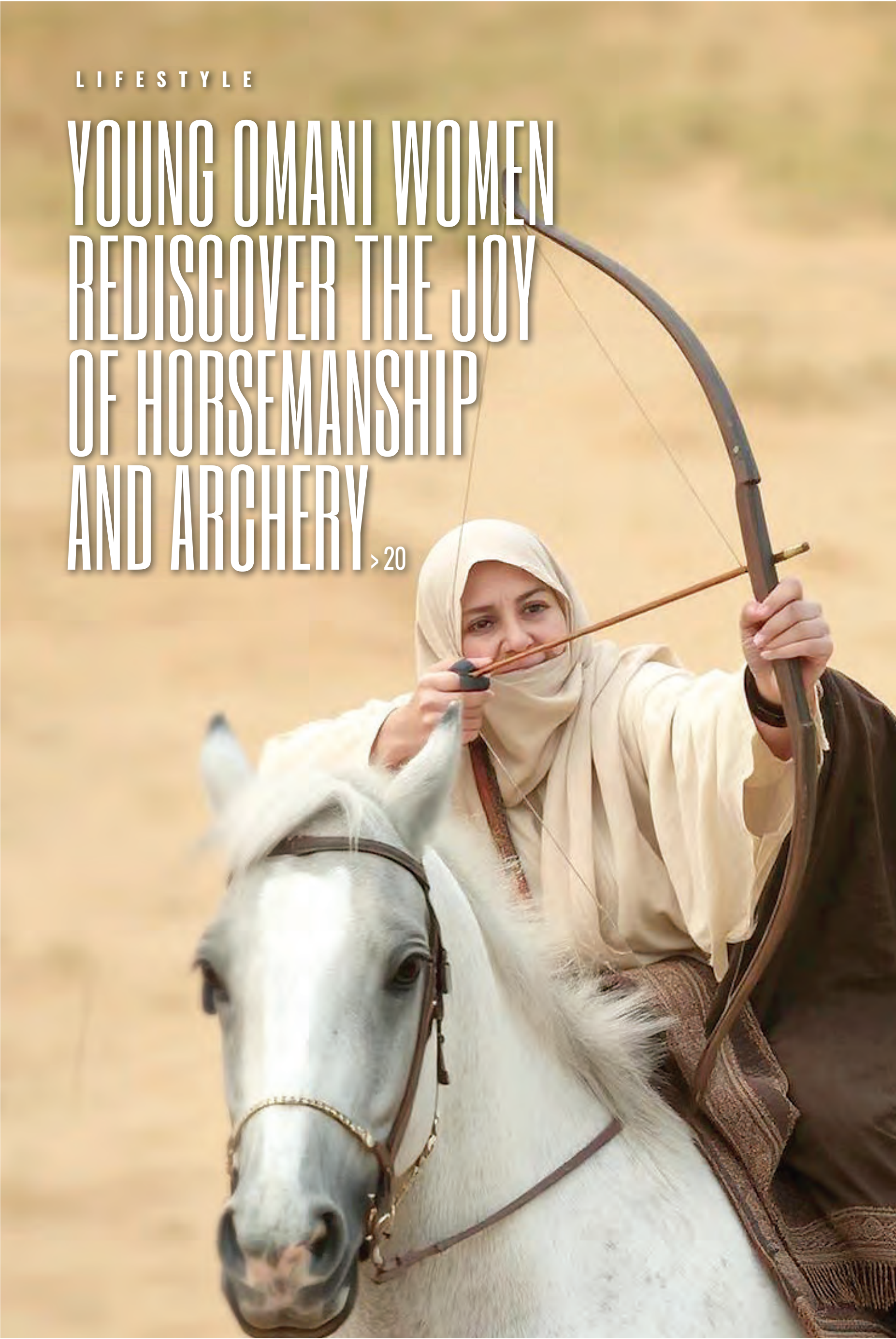


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ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

YOUNG OMANI WOMEN REDISCOVER THE JOY OF HORSEMANSHIP AND ARCHERY > 20

ENTERTAINMENT

Daredevil Tom Cruise and his ‘Mission: Impossible’ wow Cannes



CRUISE’S “Mission: Impossible — The Final Reckoning” made its big grandstand premiere at the Cannes film festival on Wednesday, with the first reviews saying it more than lives up to its steamroller hype. “What a rush!” The Guardian declared in its five-star love letter to Cruise’s \$400-million behemoth, calling him a modern “superhuman action hero Harold Lloyd... forever young, forever fit, never saying die in the face of this preposterous Armageddon clock.”

The Hollywood Reporter had earlier quoted critics emerging from the first press screenings calling its action sequences “astonishing”, “jaw-dropping” and “just insane”.

With some fretting that the near-three-hour epic — the eighth in the high-octane franchise — could be the last, Cruise and director Christopher McQuarrie have dropped contradictory clues about its future.

Both have also gone on a gruelling globetrotting tour to promote one of the most expensive movies ever made after being delayed by Covid lockdowns and Hollywood strikes.

But all the blood, sweat and dollars appear to have been worth it — though European film industry site Screen complained that it was “more stunt than substance” and too “in service to its own lore and its hero”.

Hours before the premiere, McQuarrie revealed Cruise — who does his own stunts — took his risk-taking a little far during a shoot in South Africa.

The crew feared the 62-year-old star had passed out after climbing out on the wing of a stunt biplane he was piloting alone.

“Tom had pushed himself to the point that he was so physically exhausted” after spending 22 minutes being blasted by the propeller — more than twice the time safety guidelines allowed, McQuarrie told an audience in Cannes.

“He was laying on the wing of the plane, his arms were hanging over the front of the wing. We could not tell if he was conscious or not,” said the American filmmaker, who has shot the four last movies of the franchise. — AFP

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



HERITAGE

Buddhist devotees prepare lanterns during Waisak (or Vesak) celebrations in front of Borobudur Temple, the world’s largest Buddhist monument and a Unesco World Heritage Site, in Magelang, Central Java. — AFP



FILM

Actress Yui Suzuki poses during a photocall for the film “Runowaru” (Renoir) at the 78th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP



ART

A visitor enjoys the “A Ecologia de Monet” (Monet’s Ecology) exhibition at the Sao Paulo Museum of Art in Sao Paulo, Brazil. — AFP

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Toymakers were around 4,500 years ago: study



TOYMAKERS have been around far longer than many people realise, a Danish researcher said on Friday after the discovery of 19 ancient rattles some dating back at least 4,500 years.

Mette Marie Hald, co-author of the study detailing the discovery published in the scientific journal “Childhood in the Past”, laid out her findings to AFP.

“We argue that the rattles served as toys to amuse and calm infants, rather than as musical instruments, based on the low noise level of the rattles and the relatively small size of their handles,” says the summary of the paper.

Hald even suggested museum curators should take a second look at their collections in case objects originally classified as religious artefacts were actually carefully crafted toys.

“If you wanted to entertain your child, you could just give them a wooden spoon or a stone,” she said.

But even then, parents had the option to spoil their young ones with fancier alternatives.

“4,500 years ago, parents

would go to the market and buy toys made by professionals,” she explained.

Researchers discovered pieces of 19 clay rattles made in Hama, Syria, dating back to the Bronze Age, in the collections of the National Museum of Denmark.

According to Hald, the quality of the rattles means they couldn’t have been made by the parents themselves.

She hopes the discovery will encourage professionals to look at clay fragments more carefully because other objects, light figurines, might turn out to be toys.

“They are often considered religious figurines placed in a temple... but we wonder if these can be toys made for children, as there is a lot of variety and they look very funny,” the researcher noted.

Mostly, such finds are unearthed as shattered fragments so the toys are difficult to recognise.

As such, researchers have developed an identification guide specifically designed to identify rattles. — AFP



Austria’s JJ wins Eurovision 2025 with opera-techno fusion

AUSTRIA’S JJ won the 2025 Eurovision Song Contest on Sunday, with his operatic song “Wasted Love” triumphing at the world’s biggest live music television event.

After votes from national juries around Europe and viewers from across the continent and beyond, JJ gave Austria its first victory since bearded drag performer Conchita Wurst’s 2014 triumph.

After the nail-biting drama as the votes were revealed running into Sunday morning, Austria finished with 436 points, ahead of Israel — whose participation drew protests — on 357 and Estonia on 356.

“Thank you to you, Europe, for making my dreams come true,” 24-year-old countertenor JJ, whose real name is Johannes Pietsch, said after his triumph in the Swiss city of Basel.

“Love is the strongest force in the world. Let’s spread more love,” the Austrian-Filipino singer said.

“Wasted Love” saw him hit the high notes while mixing opera and techno.

His Eurovision song, about the experience of unrequited love, blends lyricism and balladry, before ending with a techno flourish.

His performance, broadcast in black and white in 4:3 ratio, captivated viewers around Europe.

“What a fantastic success! My warmest congratulations on your victory,” said Austria’s Chancellor Christian Stocker, adding: “JJ is making Austrian music history.”

The Philippine Consulate General in Frankfurt also issued a message of congratulations to JJ on Facebook.

“What an incredible moment — Filipino pride on the European stage!,” it said.

— CELINE DION NO-SHOW —

The 69th Eurovision Song Contest was held at Basel’s St Jakobshalle, packed with 6,500 excited ticket-holders dressed to the nines while 36,000 others watched a live transmission in a nearby stadium.

An estimated 160 million people across Europe and beyond were

expected to tune in for the annual TV spectacle, where kitsch, glam and spectacular staging go hand in hand.

Twenty-six countries were in contention, with 11 having been eliminated in the semi-finals during the week.

Basel had been abuzz all week with rumours that Celine Dion might make an emotion-laden appearance as she battles Stiff Person Syndrome.

The Canadian superstar, now 57, launched her international career by winning Eurovision 1988, while

a showcase of Europe’s different musical scenes.

They included a Portuguese guitar ballad, a Maltese diva, Lithuanian alternative rock, an Italian singalong, a Greek power ballad, ethereal Latvian choral folk and German booming beats.

Estonia’s wobbly-legged Tommy Cash finished a close third with his cod-Italian “Espresso Macchiato” song.

Finland’s Erika Vikman — who gained momentum during



competing for Switzerland.

But in the end, she did not appear.

“We have been in contact with her through various channels and regret that ultimately it was not possible to include her in the show,” Eurovision organisers said.

“We send her all our best wishes and, above all, good health.”

Sweden had long been the bookmakers’ hot favourite to win in Basel with the comedy trio KAJ’s sauna song “Bara Bada Bastu”.

But they finished fourth ahead of Italy, Greece and France as JJ scooped up the microphone-shaped trophy.

Albania, Ukraine and Switzerland rounded out the top 10.

The songs in contention were

Eurovision week with the orgasmic “Ich Komme” — was hoisted in the air on a spark-emitting golden microphone.

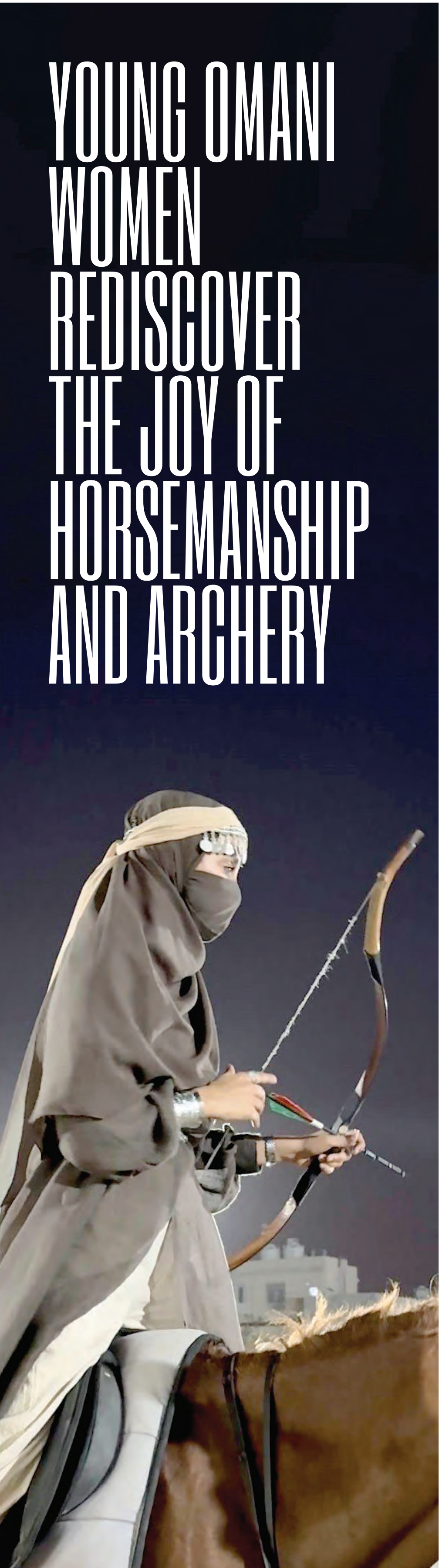
Poland’s Justyna Steczkowska, 52, set a new record between Eurovision appearances, returning 30 years after her first performance.

The Netherlands’ competitor Claude broke into tears after performing his song “C’est La Vie”.

French singer Louane, who lost both her parents as a teenager, performed her song “Maman”, with falling pieces of cork representing the sands of time.

And Malta’s Miriana Conte finished her diva big number “Serving” by bouncing up and down on an exercise ball. — AFP

FEATURES



YOUNG OMANI
WOMEN
REDISCOVER
THE JOY OF
HORSEMANSHIP
AND ARCHERY

BY ZUWAINA AL SULIEMANI

IN A QUIET, rural part of Oman, the energy in the open field is clear to see. The sun is shining, a gentle breeze stirs the air and a group of young girls buzz with excitement as they try something new — something deeply traditional, yet refreshingly modern. They’re learning to ride horses and shoot arrows, combining skills that have been part of the region’s history for thousands of years. It’s an unusual sight — a modern training ground for ancient sports, full of hope and curiosity.

Oman has a long history of horsemanship and archery. It’s a place where riders once fought in battles and where the bow was a symbol of precision, patience and honour. These skills were passed down through generations, from tribal warriors to royal knights. Over time, they became part of cultural festivals, celebrations and traditional storytelling. Today, these ancient traditions are finding new life among young people who want to connect with their roots whilst building confidence and strength.

In recent years, the picture has started to change. Instead of being exclusive to men or only seen during special events, horsemanship and archery are now being seen as skills anyone can learn — especially for girls. More and more young women are eager to pick up these skills, seeing them as a way to challenge stereotypes and gain new opportunities.

In Nizwa, a popular city in the centre of Oman, a local riding school called Al Bayan organised a special workshop. It was held in a spacious outdoor arena, surrounded by mountains and lush farmland. The girls arrived eager and excited, knowing this was a chance to try something different. As they mounted their horses, the atmosphere was alive with anticipation. They clutched bows, aiming carefully at targets set up at various distances, all whilst riding steadily on the horses’ backs.

One of the girls taking part was Duha Ambuali. She admits she’s passionate about riding and she was eager to try archery on horseback. “It was a very demanding experience,” she says, smiling. “Balancing on a moving horse whilst aiming an arrow takes full focus and control. It really pushes you to be in tune with your body and your mind.”

Her sister, Farha Ambuali, shared her thoughts too. “It was amazing,” she says. “Controlling the horse and shooting accurately on the move made me feel really powerful. I was nervous at first, but once I tried it, I realised how much I could do when I put my mind to it.” Both girls said that trying something so different gave them a new sense of confidence they hadn’t felt before.

Other young girls, like Areen and Rudaina al Salmi, tried mounted archery for the first time. They described their experience as “awesome” and “artistic.” Though they felt a little nervous at first, they finished the session proud of themselves. “Most people don’t get to try this,” Areen says simply. “It’s a new skill and something most girls don’t usually do.”

What the girls shared most was how much the experience boosted their confidence. Hitting a target whilst riding a horse isn’t easy — it requires patience, balance, focus and determination. Farha said, “When I hit the target, I felt like I’d achieved something big. It gave me a feeling I’ve never had before, like I can do anything now.”

This kind of activity doesn’t just teach physical skills. It’s also about breaking barriers. Traditionally, horsemanship and archery have been seen as “men’s sports,” sports of strength and endurance. But these young girls are proving that these skills belong to everyone. Participating in them helps challenge stereotypes and shows that girls can be just as brave, skilled and confident as boys.

The organisers of the workshop hope to run more sessions like this. Many of the girls already said they want to keep learning and even try future competitions. For some, this experience has opened a whole new door — one they want to walk through.

The success of this workshop also hints at a bigger picture. As these old skills become popular again, they could be featured more in movies, TV shows, or even fashion, bringing them into the mainstream. Showing young people the excitement of horsemanship and archery can inspire more to take an interest, blending history with today’s culture.

Learning to ride and shoot requires more than just physical ability. It teaches patience, persistence and resilience — qualities that are helpful in everyday life too. These skills remind us that traditional arts are still relevant and powerful tools for growth and empowerment.

Stories like these show how ancient skills can be refreshed and shared with a new generation. They also serve as a reminder that cultural traditions are not fixed in time — they evolve and adapt, shaping the way young people see themselves and their opportunities. Through activities like this, girls in Oman and across the Middle East are rewriting their futures — confident, capable and proud of their heritage.

