

OMAN
عمان
DAILY

Observer

BEATING BAGGAGE BLUES BETWEEN MUSCAT AND SALALAH

By [Name]

WEIGHT

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SUNRISE 05:21 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 03:56 AM

DHUHR 12:09 PM

ASR 03:30 PM

MAGHRIB 06:51 PM

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INBRIEF

HM GREET'S KING OF JORDAN, ARGENTINIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on his country's Independence Anniversary.

His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to King Abdullah and the friendly Jordanian people wishing the brotherly Kingdom of Jordan further progress and prosperity in various fields.

His Majesty also sent a cable of greetings to the President Javier Milei, of the Argentine Republic, on the occasion of his country's National Day.

His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to the president and the friendly Argentinian people, wishing that the common interests of the two countries would see further growth and expansion in various sectors. — ONA

15 PROJECTS TO DRIVE POWER DEMAND



MUSCAT: As many as 15 major private sector-led industrial and commercial projects will be plugged into Oman's national grid over the next couple of years, bolstering electricity demand by an aggregate 2,000 MW and driving a new phase of national economic growth.

According to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the majority state-owned grid operator, the projects are distributed across the industrial, mineral processing, data centre processing, water desalination; and oil and gas segments of the Omani economy.

Topping the list, by power demand size, is the \$1.35 billion polysilicon production plant of United Solar Polysilicon (USP), which is currently in an advanced stage of development at SOHAR Port and Freezone. With maximum power demand estimated at 800 MW, the USP project will be the largest to be connected to the grid via a 400/220kV grid station during 2025, said OETC in its 2024 Annual Report. — **DETAILS ON P13**

Moon sighting for Dhul Hijjah on Tuesday

MAJID AL NADABI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

The Sultanate of Oman will be sighting the crescent moon of Dhul Hijjah 1446 AH on Tuesday. The main committee will hold a meeting to oversee the moon sighting at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

Yousef bin Hamad al Rahbi, Director of the Astronomical Affairs Department at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, said that astronomical calculations

rely on precise criteria and play a significant role in determining the possibility of sighting.

One of the most prominent of these criteria is the time between sunset and moonset which should be 20 minutes at least when using binoculars and no less than 29 minutes for sighting with the naked eye.

He emphasised that astronomical calculations are not definitive unless confirmed by eyewitness accounts of the moon sighting. However, if the calculations indicate the

impossibility of sighting, the final decision is based on calculations without the need for observational testimony.

Regarding the astronomical calculations for the crescent moon of Dhul Hijjah 1446 AH, Al Rahbi explained that on Tuesday, Dhul Qa'ada 29, 1446 AH, corresponding to May 27, the moon will be in the central conjunction phase at 7:02 am Muscat time. Sunset will occur at 6:47 pm while the moon will set at 7:24 pm allowing a 36 minutes window for sighting which is a

suitable duration for observation.

Al Rahbi said that sighting the crescent moon using binoculars is possible while sighting with the naked eye is somewhat difficult, however not impossible, especially if the skies are clear. The crescent moon is expected to be visible all across the Sultanate of Oman provided that there are no clouds or dust covering the skies. Therefore, the beginning of Dhul Hijjah is expected on Wednesday in the Sultanate of Oman and most Arab countries.

Brutal Israeli strikes kill fifteen civilians in Gaza

GAZA'S CIVIL defence agency said Israeli strikes killed at least 15 people on Saturday across the Palestinian territory, where Israel has ramped up its military offensive in recent days. Civil defence agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said that the dead included a couple who were killed with their two young children in a pre-dawn strike on a house in the Amal quarter of the southern city of Khan Yunis. To the west of the city, at least five people were killed by a drone strike on a crowd of people that had gathered to wait for aid trucks, he said.

At Khan Yunis's Nasser Hospital, tearful mourners gathered around white-shrouded bodies outside. "Suddenly, a missile from an F-16 destroyed the entire house and all of them were civilians — my sister, her husband and their children," said Wissam al Madhoun. "We found them lying in the street. What did this child do to (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu?" The Israeli military said it was unable to comment on individual strikes without their "precise geographical coordinates".

In a statement, the military said that over the past day the air force had struck more than 100 targets across the territory. Israel resumed operations in Gaza on March 18, ending a two-month ceasefire. Gaza's health ministry said on Saturday that at least 3,747 people had been killed in the territory since then, taking the war's overall toll to 53,901, mostly civilians.

The Gaza City municipality, meanwhile, warned on Saturday of "a potential large-scale water crisis" due to a lack of supplies needed for urgent repairs. It said damage from the war had "affected the majority of Gaza's water infrastructure, leaving large portions of the population vulnerable



A Palestinian man carries items he salvaged from a house targeted in an Israeli strike at the Nuseirat camp.

to severe water shortages". It added that temperatures were rising and demand was expected to increase.

Aid shipments to the Gaza Strip restarted on Monday for the first time since March 2, amidst mounting condemnation of the Israeli blockade, which has resulted in severe shortages of food and medicine. "I appeal to people of conscience to send us fresh water and food," said Sobhi Ghattas, a displaced Palestinian sheltering at the port in Gaza City. "My daughter has been asking for bread since this morning and we have none to give her."

COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body that oversees civilian affairs in the Palestinian territories, said that 107 humanitarian aid trucks entered Gaza on Thursday. But Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said on Friday that the UN had brought in 500 to 600 per day on average during a six-week ceasefire that broke down in March. "No one should be surprised let alone shocked at scenes of precious aid looted, stolen or 'lost'," he said on X, adding that "the people of Gaza have been starved" for more than 11 weeks. — **AFP**

Cannes hit by power sabotage as film festival draws to a close

CANNES: Suspected vandalism knocked out power to the French Riviera town Cannes on the final day of its film festival on Saturday, but organisers said the show would go on at their glitzy closing ceremony.

A suspected arson attack on a local substation and the sabotage of an electricity pylon along the coast were blamed for the more than five-hour outage.

Festival goers and tourists were left scrambling for paper money during the black-out, which left cash machines out-of-order and restaurants unable to process card payments.

The festival said it had "switched to an alternative electricity power supply, which enables us to maintain the events and screenings planned for today in normal conditions, including the closing ceremony".

Inside its headquarters, journalists dressed up in black tie and headed to the the red carpet for the closing ceremony where French actor Juliette Binoche and her jury will hand out awards, including the Palme d'Or for best film.

The best-reviewed contenders include Iranian director Jafar Panahi's "It Was Just an Accident" and Ukrainian director Sergei



A dog named Thais sits on the desk with a Palme d'Or symbol before a photocall at the 78th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France, on Saturday. — **Reuters**

Loznitsa's study of despotism in "Two Prosecutors", according to analysis from Screen magazine.

But cinema bible Variety predicted a triumph for Norwegian director Joachim Trier's "Sentimental Value", a moving tale about a quietly fractured family starring Elle Fanning.

It received an extraordinary 19-minute standing ovation after its premiere on Thursday.

Rave-themed road trip movie "Sirat" by Franco-Spanish director Oliver Laxe also has many cheerleaders on Cannes famed Croisette sea-front boulevard.

Power was being restored

to Cannes by the middle of the afternoon, with traffic lights blinking back into life after they went blank at around 10:00 am (08:00 GMT).

Local officials said a suspected arson attack on the substation about 12 kilometres (seven miles) northwest of central Cannes had caused a major fire at around 02:00 am. Firefighters in seven different vehicles required five hours to extinguish the flames, the officials said. Along the coast in the opposite direction, a pylon which carries a high-voltage line was discovered with three of its four legs damaged, the local prosecutor's office announced. — **AFP**

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The minister of health discussed with the Director-General of the WHO some proposals to facilitate the organisation’s mission. — ONA

OMAN VOWS TO SUPPORT WHO’S PROGRAMMES

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman vowed to provide support to the World Health Organization (WHO) in implementing its programmes and activities aimed at enhancing the health of individuals and communities in the member states particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

This came during a meeting between a delegation from the Sultanate of Oman, headed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health and Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) on the sidelines of the 78th General Assembly in Geneva.

The minister of health discussed with the Director-General of the WHO some proposals to facilitate the organisation’s mission in the Sultanate of Oman and the region. — ONA

UTAS HOSTS FORUM ON FUTURE-FOCUSED EDUCATION

MUSCAT: The Preparatory Studies Centre (PSC) at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) in Muscat successfully held its 6th PSC Forum on May 15, 2025, under the theme “A Future-Focused Approach: Mediating Between Teaching, Learning and Technology.” The one-day event proved to be a dynamic platform for academic dialogue and innovation.

The forum featured 15 engaging sessions, two presentations by distinguished plenary speakers; and both opening and closing ceremonies. The event brought together educators from across universities and colleges to explore modern pedagogical approaches and the integration of technology in English Language Teaching (ELT), Mathematics and Computing Skills.

The forum successfully met its key objectives: encouraging innovation in teaching and learning, promoting effective and ethical use of technology, supporting personalised learning strategies and strengthening professional collaboration.

Participants appreciated the forum’s emphasis on creativity, critical thinking and inclusive educational practices, making it a valuable professional development opportunity for all involved.

The 6th PSC Forum reaffirmed UTAS commitment to educational excellence and continuous learning in a rapidly evolving academic landscape.

WORK BEGINS ON AL RUSTAQ GATE PROJECT



The project includes the construction of a lounge at Gate No 1 that includes parking lots, cafes and shops

MUSCAT: Work has begun on the Al Rustaq Gate development project, which is part of the governorate’s development projects implemented in the Al Batinah South Governorate. Al Rustaq Gate has two gates connected by arches for a distance of 200 metres.

The project includes the construction of a lounge at Gate No 1 that includes parking lots and rest areas for visitors to rest, cafes and shops to buy collectibles, especially traditional products. The project will include ample slots for car parking.

Oman supports GCC as bloc marks 44th anniversary

THE Sultanate of Oman, alongside the sisterly member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), are marking the 44th anniversary of the founding of the GCC block on May 25, 1981.

The GCC states are celebrating the outset of integration between its six member states at various levels, promoting the interests of their peoples and fulfilling their aspirations for stability, prosperity, development and growth.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik affirmed, in his Royal speech on the day he assumed power on January 11, 2020, his continued support for the GCC, saying: “We will continue, along with our brothers, the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states, to contribute to advancing the path of cooperation among our countries to fulfil the aspirations of our peoples and promote the GCC’s achievements.” The Sultanate of Oman continues its unwavering commitment to the GCC’s principles and objectives, contributing to the formulation of its decisions and initiatives, supporting economic integration mechanisms, coordinating political positions and enhancing cultural and social cooperation. This stems from its belief that the GCC’s cohesion is the cornerstone of the region’s resilience in the face of rapid global transformations.

In this regard, Shaikh Ahmed bin Hashil al Maskari, Head of the GCC and Regional Neighbourhood Department at the Foreign Ministry, said: “The establishment of the GCC back in 1981 marked a historic milestone in joint Arab action and a fundamental building block for an effective and solid regional cooperation system.



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SHAIKH AHMED BIN HASHIL AL MASKARI
Head of the GCC and Regional Neighbourhood Department at the Foreign Ministry

coordination among its member states in various fields based on historical ties and the common interests of its peoples.” Al Maskari added that the GCC’s most notable political achievements include its ability to unify positions in regional and international forums and its role in promoting peace and stability in the region. On the economic front, the Customs Union and the GCC Common Market, in addition to the electricity grid and transportation projects, are all fruits of institutional cooperation.

He stated that despite all these achievements, the GCC faced some challenges including divergent political visions, economic challenges and rapid regional transformations. However, the dialogue and consultation mechanisms established by the GCC helped overcome many obstacles with a spirit of responsibility and wisdom.

The GCC’s founding ambitions were and will always remain great and many of them have been achieved. However, there are still areas requiring greater momentum particularly in the economic, social and legislative fields, Al Maskari said, adding that the GCC remains a vibrant and evolving framework that reflects the political will of its member states towards building and enhancing interconnectedness and integration across various fields.

Regarding the role of the GCC in promoting stability in the Gulf region and the Middle East in general, Al Maskari emphasised that the GCC plays a pivotal role in enhancing collective security, confronting sources of threat and promoting peaceful solutions to regional crises. He stressed the importance of strengthening its strategic partnerships with international powers and regional actors to ensure a balanced approach to protect the security and stability of

the Gulf and the whole region.

The GCC applies a responsible policy based on respect for the principles of international law and non-interference in the internal affairs of states. The GCC also seeks to contribute effectively to conflict resolution through mediation and preventive diplomacy. Examples of this include its constant emphasis on the centrality of the Palestinian cause and its rejection of all forms of escalation and foreign interference in the region.

Regarding the Sultanate of Oman’s role in strengthening Gulf cooperation, particularly on issues of a conciliatory nature, Al Maskari said: “The Sultanate of Oman has always adopted a foreign policy based on dialogue and balance; and has sincerely sought to bring viewpoints closer together and strengthen Gulf unity.” He emphasised that the Sultanate of Oman is committed to supporting the GCC’s work at all stages and encouraging initiatives that contribute to strengthening joint Gulf action particularly on issues that require consensual solutions and well-thought-out understandings.

He explained that the GCC’s future vision requires keeping pace with global transformations by modernising mechanisms, activating integration tools and promoting unified policies on strategic issues such as cybersecurity, climate change and sustainable development in addition to continue working towards an integrated economic union that achieves security and well-being for the peoples of the GCC countries.

Al Maskari affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman believes that the unity and integration of the Gulf community, based on a shared destiny and mutual respect, is the most important pillar for achieving security. — ONA

Tourism-integrated real estate poised for strong growth

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Tourism-integrated real estate projects in Oman are poised for strong growth and will be one of the major contributors to the GDP besides being a job creator, thanks to the country’s strategic focus on sustainable tourism.

In addition, this sector is a promising and enabling sector for implementing investment opportunities, supported by the readiness of the basic infrastructure system of roads, electricity, water, sewage which is all set to grow in leaps and bounds, according to Muriya Tourism Development.

Muriya is a Joint venture between Orascom Development and Omran Group; and is the largest and most diversified private integrated

real estate and tourism developer committed to contributing to the development of the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking to the *Observer* on the sidelines of the recently held Oman Real Estate Exhibition, Wael al Lawati, CEO of Muriya Tourism Development said that tourism-integrated real estate in Oman is poised for strong growth, driven by the rising demand for destinations that combine lifestyle, hospitality and investment.

“The fact is that tourism-integrated real estate projects in Oman are heading towards strong growth and will be one of the major contributors to the GDP besides being a job creator.

This is possible because the country has been paying a very strategic focus on sustainable



Real estate is a promising and enabling sector for implementing investment opportunities.

tourism,” he said.

Through a successful partnership between the internationally acclaimed builder of fully-integrated towns, Orascom Development Holding (ODH) and

Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN), the leading executive government arm for tourism development in the Sultanate of Oman, Muriya has been developing many ITC projects

at an investment of over \$750 million in Oman and they include Hawana Salalah and Jebel Sifah, which include hotels, marinas and recreational facilities.

These successful partnerships have been a major contributor to the tourism sector and have resulted in 1,200 operating hotel rooms in 6 years, 420,000 hotel guest nights in 2019, over 1,000 homeowners, creating thousands of direct and indirect jobs; and supporting local businesses, contributing to Oman’s economic diversification and tourism growth.

“Through Muriya, we strengthen Oman’s international presence as a high-potential tourism and investment hub while supporting job creation and community engagement through sustainable developments,” Al Lawati said.



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SHORTTAKES



ARAB OPEN
UNIVERSITY FETES
NEW GRADUATES

MUSCAT: The Arab Open University celebrated the graduation of the thirteenth batch which comprised 430 graduates of diploma, bachelor and master’s degrees. The celebration was under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation; and with the presence of His Royal Highness Prince Abdulaziz bin Talal al Saud, Chairman of the University’s Board of Trustees, members of the board, several esteemed dignitaries and honoured guests.

The ceremony commenced with a short documentary highlighting the university’s journey, academic mission and its societal contributions in Oman and across the Arab region.

Following that, His Royal Highness Prince Abdulaziz bin Talal Al Saud delivered a speech, highlighting the university’s contributions to Oman’s higher education landscape, in collaboration with other academic institutions. He emphasised the university’s role in enriching Omani society with graduates in various fields of knowledge, education and training.

AUB PRESIDENT
ELECTED TO THE
AMERICAN ACADEMY



DR FADLO
R KHURI

Leadership. This latest milestone recognises Dr Khuri’s exceptional contributions to the advancement of education, as well as his steadfast leadership in the academic sphere during a decade plagued by overlapping crises, placing him among a select group of global leaders. As an honorary society and an independent research centre, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences convenes exceptional global leaders renowned for their excellence that span across disciplines, professions and perspectives. All of its members have impacted the lives of people and societies, leaving their mark in every field of human endeavour.

BEIRUT: The sixteenth president of the American University of Beirut (AUB) in Lebanon and Cyprus, Dr Fadlo R Khuri, has been elected as a new fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in the category of Educational and Academic

STATE,
ASH’SHURA
COUNCILS TO
HOLD JOINT
SESSION TODAY

MUSCAT: The State Council and the Majlis Ash’shura will hold a joint session today (Sunday), under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council in the presence of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura.

During the session, the reports of the joint committees of the State Council and Majlis Ash’shura

will be discussed regarding the disputed articles of the draft law on combating human trafficking, the draft law on regulating communications and information technology, the draft law on real estate regulation, the draft law on collection of state dues and the draft law on the rights of persons with disabilities, all of which were referred by the Council of Ministers.

The members will then vote on the draft laws in accordance with the regulations governing joint sessions between the two councils.

The joint session will be held in accordance with the provisions of Article (49) of the Council of Oman Law. The aforementioned draft laws will be submitted to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik alongside the opinions of both councils.

SMEs, banks unite to
make a stronger future

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

IN a continued effort to strengthen the business environment and promote synergy between the public and private sectors, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) recently organised a dialogue session under the theme ‘Financing Small and Medium Enterprises.’ The session explored ways to enhance banking services for SMEs, discussed regulatory frameworks and addressed the role of partnerships in fostering a more inclusive and dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The session was held in the presence of Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) and Rashid bin Zayed al Ghassani, Deputy CEO of the Supervision and Regulation Sector at the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), alongside representatives from government bodies, financial institutions and SME owners from across Oman.

Key objectives of the session included reinforcing partnerships between SMEs and regulatory entities, improving the appeal of Oman’s business climate and developing SME-centric policies. The Authority also emphasised the importance of innovation in driving economic sectors and encouraged entrepreneurs to bring forward transformative ideas.

Several critical themes were addressed during the dialogue including policies and regulations, for SMEs to access to banking services, with proposals for simplifying licensing and compliance procedures, licensing and fees, access to finance, enablers and Incentives for SMEs.



The session was held in the presence of Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) and Rashid bin Zayed al Ghassani, Deputy CEO of the Supervision and Regulation Sector at the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).



Financing must be part of an integrated framework that includes regulation, skills development and advisory services

HALIMA BINT
RASHID AL
ZARIYAH
SMEDA
Chairperson

In her address, Halima reiterated that financial access is not merely a capital issue but a strategic enabler of growth. “Financing must be part of an integrated framework that includes regulation, skills development and advisory services,” she said.

During the session, Al Ghassani reaffirmed the Central Bank of Oman’s support for SME financing, noting the importance of regulatory flexibility and digital innovation in banking. He also emphasised the central bank’s strategic role in promoting financial inclusion through accessible banking products tailored to the needs of small businesses.

The session concluded with several recommendations for stakeholders that include streamlining banking-related licenses and reducing associated fees, promoting alternative finance models, including venture capital and crowdfunding, expanding incubators and accelerators in partnership with academic and private sector institutions,

developing a credit scoring system tailored for SMEs and organising financial literacy programmes for entrepreneurs.

Participants agreed that the coming phase requires tangible partnerships between SMEs and financial institutions, alongside targeted incentives for priority economic sectors. According to updated statistics shared by SMEDA, the number of registered SMEs in Oman reached 276,111 by March 2025. Among these, 149,219 hold the official “Entrepreneurship Card.” The highest concentration of SMEs is in the Al Dakhiliyah governorate (53,450), followed by Al Batinah North Governorate (21,872) and Al Sharqiyah North Governorate (18,119). Meanwhile, Muscat Governorate recorded over 10,000 enterprises.

The breakdown by size category shows a dominance of micro-enterprises (129,706), followed by small (37,107) and medium-sized businesses (18,437), highlighting the sector’s significant presence in the national economy.

Eco-friendly practices at OCEC boost visitor experience: Research

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 24

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) is recognised for its sustainable operations and world-class facilities as research findings provide evidence that the centre’s sustainable event management practices create a positive link to increased visitor satisfaction.

Sustainability is gaining popularity in the tourism, hospitality and event management sectors due to socioeconomic and environmental concerns.

Convention and exposition facilities like the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre play a crucial role in generating income and satisfying visitors. By implementing sustainable practices such as waste management, energy efficiency and eco-friendly design, they help address environmental issues; and attract customers and tourists with their eco-friendly operations.

Research investigating the impact of sustainability integration at convention and exhibition centres on visitor satisfaction and strategic decision-making has shown that the use of sustainable materials



Survey results indicate that 76 per cent of participants are aware of the sustainable practices at the facility, with factors like sustainability influencing event attendance and recommendations from respondents.

improves sustainability prospects by contributing to the design of green buildings.

The Oman Centre has also actively engaged with communities by forming relationships with local organisations, promoting recycling programmes and installing over 8,000 solar panels for energy efficiency, which significantly impacts guest satisfaction.

Survey results indicate that 76 per cent of participants are aware of the sustainable practices at the facility, with factors like sustainability influencing event attendance and recommendations from

respondents.

Strategic landscape techniques and a 4.6-megawatt rooftop solar power system have contributed to water conservation, while energy-saving measures have had the most significant impact on visitor experience.

While some tourists suggest a no-plastic zone, the installation of electric vehicle charging stations and other energy-saving measures have made a significant impact. Overall, the Centre’s sustainable practices have enhanced guest experiences and made Oman a more appealing destination.



BEATING BAGGAGE BLUES BETWEEN MUSCAT AND SALALAH

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

WEIGHT LOSS is one of the most trending topics on the internet, as is travelling light on flights following policy changes by airlines. These changes aim to prevent flights from overloading and to generate more revenue from passengers who are unable to avoid travelling light despite their best efforts.

With new baggage rules imposed by domestic flight operators between Muscat and Salalah, travellers are now faced with the choice of travelling light or paying extra fees. Some savvy travellers are choosing to travel light by booking a 'light' fare for the flight and sending the rest of their baggage through bus service. This allows them to carry the luggage they desire while saving a significant amount on fares.

Some savvy travellers are choosing to travel light by booking a 'light' fare for the flight and sending the rest of their baggage through bus service. This allows them to carry the luggage they desire while saving a significant amount on fares.

Abdullah, a frequent traveller on the Salalah-Muscat-Salalah route, mentioned that although it is somewhat inconvenient to go to the bus station in Ruwi or Rusail, the cost savings make it worthwhile.

Managing in the Wilayat of Salalah is easier due to the short distance, with most bus operators located within a three-kilometre radius.

Both Oman Air and Salam Air, operating on this route, have adjusted their baggage policies to attract passengers travelling light and to increase revenue from those who must travel with heavier luggage. A travel agent confirmed the recent changes in Oman Air's baggage policy, noting that the base fare for 'light' passengers is now lower than that for 'heavy' passengers, offering a cost-effective option for frequent travellers.

Oman Air's 'Super Saver' baggage policy for Economy Class allows passengers to carry only one piece of cabin baggage weighing up to seven kilogrammes, with no check-in baggage permitted. This option is more affordable than others, such as the 'Comfort' and 'Flex' categories, which allow for larger checked baggage allowances.

Fare differences between these categories can vary from RO 61 to RO 87 or more, depending on demand and booking timing. Booking earlier typically results in lower fares, as prices tend to increase as the travel date approaches.

Previously, all Economy Class passengers were allowed one piece of cabin baggage weighing up to seven kilograms and checked baggage up to 30 kilogrammes.

Despite mixed reactions to the policy changes, they have sparked innovative travel habits among passengers.

UNCONDITIONAL TRUCE



Demonstrators gather, at the Martyrs' Square in Libya's capital Tripoli. — AFP

AFRICAN UNION URGES PERMANENT CEASEFIRE IN LIBYA

ADDIS ABABA: The African Union called for a permanent ceasefire in Libya on Saturday after deadly clashes in the capital earlier this month and demonstrations demanding the prime minister's resignation. The latest fighting in the conflict-torn North African country pitted an armed group aligned with the Tripoli-based government against factions it has sought to dismantle, resulting in at least eight dead, according to the United Nations.

Despite a lack of a formal ceasefire, the clashes mostly ended last week, with the Libya Defence Ministry saying this week that efforts towards a truce were "ongoing". On Saturday, the AU's Peace and Security Council condemned the recent violence, calling for an "unconditional and permanent ceasefire". In a statement on X, the council urged "inclusive, Libyan-led reconciliation", adding that it "appeals for no external interference".

Libya is split between the UN-recognised government in Tripoli, led by Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, and a rival administration in the east. The country has remained deeply divided since the 2011 Nato-backed revolt.

The clashes were sparked by the killing of an armed faction leader by a group aligned with Dbeibah's government — the 444 Brigade, which later fought a third group, the Radaa force that controls parts of eastern Tripoli and the city's airport. It came after Dbeibah announced a string of executive orders seeking to dismantle Radaa and dissolve other Tripoli-based armed groups but excluding the 444 Brigade. — AFP

BANGLADESH INTERIM GOVERNMENT CALLS FOR UNITY

DHAKA: Bangladesh's interim government, which took over after a mass uprising last year, warned on Saturday that unity was needed to "prevent the return of authoritarianism".

The South Asian nation of around 170 million people has been in political turmoil since ex-prime minister Sheikh Hasina was ousted by student-led protests in August 2024, ending her iron-fisted rule of 15 years.

However, after a week of escalation during which rival parties protested on the streets of the capital Dhaka, the government led by Muhammad Yunus said political power struggles risked jeopardising gains that have been made and pleaded for people to give it their full support. "Broader unity is essential to maintain national stability, organise free and fair elections, justice, and reform, and permanently prevent the return of

authoritarianism in the country," it said in a statement.

Yunus says he has a duty to implement democratic reforms before elections that are due by June 2026 at the latest. However, the government warned that it had faced "unreasonable demands, deliberately provocative and jurisdictionally overreaching statements", which it said had been "continuously obstructing" its work. — AFP

Gazans descend toward famine amid aid shortage

ISRAEL

has been bombarding and besieging Gaza since the territory's ruling group Hamas launched a surprise attack against Israeli border communities on October 7, 2023. The Hamas attack killed 1,200 people, according to Israel, while Gaza authorities say the ensuing Israeli offensive has killed more than 53,000 people. Israeli authorities have repeatedly said there is enough food in Gaza to feed the population and accuse Hamas of stealing aid in order to feed its fighters and to maintain control over the territory, an accusation the group denies.

This week Israel started allowing some food to enter the territory for the first time since March 2, including flour and baby food but it says a new US-sponsored system run by private contractors will begin operating soon. The plan will involve distribution centres in areas controlled by Israeli troops, a plan the U.N. and aid agencies have attacked, saying it will lead to further displacement of the population and that aid should flow through existing networks.

Mervat Hijazi said her family had seen no sign yet of the new

Getting the supplies to people sheltering in tents and other makeshift accommodation has been fitful and UN officials say at least 500 to 600 trucks of aid are needed every day. So far, an umbrella network of Palestinian aid groups said, 119 aid trucks have got past the Kerem Shalom crossing point



Palestinians gather to receive a hot meal at a food distribution point in the Nuseirat camp. — AFP

aid and she is consumed by worry for her baby, Lama, who was 5 kg when weighed last week. That's about half the average for a healthy one-year-old girl according to World Health Organization charts. This week the family have had, at most, a single meal a day to share, the mother added. UN aid chief Tom Fletcher said this week that the amount of aid Israel was proposing to allow into Gaza was "a drop in the ocean" of what was needed.

The tent shared by Hijazi and her children is large and rectangular

with a portrait of their dead husband and father Mohammed hanging on one side above a thin mattress and some mostly empty jars and stacked plastic bowls. The family is from the Sabra district of Gaza City, in the north of the enclave, where Israel's first assault was concentrated. They decided to flee the district on the day Mohammed was killed - November 17, 2023. They went south to the central Gazan area of Deir al Balah, first staying with family and then moving to an encampment for the displaced. — Reuters



UAE HITS RECORD MAY TEMPERATURE

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates breached its May temperature record for the second day in a row, hitting 51.6 degrees Celsius on Saturday, according to the National Center of Meteorology. "The highest temperature recorded over the country today is 51.6C in Sweihan (Al Ain) at 13:45 UAE local time," the office said in a post on X, 1.2C hotter than the temperature recorded on Friday in the Abu Dhabi area. — AFP

THREE KILLED IN THAI POLICE HELICOPTER CRASH

BANGKOK: Three people died when a police helicopter crashed and burst into flames in south central Thailand on Saturday, according to officials. The Bell 212 aircraft belonging to the Kanchanaburi Police Aviation Unit came down near a village in Prachuap Khiri Khan province. Two pilots and a mechanic on board died, according to a statement by the Royal Thai Police.

Rescue workers said that firefighters had extinguished the fire, but the cause of the crash is unknown. In the statement, the police expressed condolences and said police chief Kitrat Panphet had ordered an immediate investigation and compensation to the families.

Employee Departure Announcement

 **Penicillin General Integrated Industrial Company (FZC) LLC** wishes to inform all concerned parties that **Mr. SATHISH RAJAN KALIYAPERUMAL Indian National, holding Indian Passport Number (Z5182765)** has concluded his tenure with the company in his capacity as Chief Operating Officer (COO), effective 30th April 2025.

His departure was reached through mutual agreement and on amicable terms. All matters relating to Mr. Kaliyaperumal's employment have been duly finalized, and as such, the company will not be responsible for any commitments or representations made by him on behalf of the company following his final working day.



THE ROYAL GUARD OF OMAN

Tenders Advertisement

The Royal Guard of Oman, invites tenders for the following:-

Tender Reference	Subject	Grade	Tender Document Fee (Non-refundable)	Submission Date
03/2025	Cleaning and Pest Control Services from (01/01/2026) to (31/12/2028)	I & above	SME R.O. 30/- L.O R.O. 150/-	15 th July 2025
04/2025	Supply of Vehicles for the year 2025	I & above	R.O. 50/-	30 th June 2025

Specialized companies registered in the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with the above-mentioned Grade and the Procurement and Contracts Directorate of the General Directorate of Finance, Royal Guard of Oman, can collect the tender document from the Tender Committee Secretariat, Royal Guard of Oman, Seeb during working hours from **Sunday 25th May to Thursday 29th May 2025.**

Wax-sealed Tenders addressed to the Chairman - Tender Committee should be submitted to RGO before 1200 hours on the submission date along with a Tender Bond the name of the Royal Guard of Oman equivalent to 1% (One Percent) of the value of the Tender from any registered Bank in the Sultanate of Oman,. The tenderer shall not reveal his identity other than the tender title and the address mentioned below.

No Tender will be accepted after the submission date. The Royal Guard of Oman reserves the right to accept or reject any Tender without giving reasons.

Tender Committee
P.O Box 381, C.P.O
Postal Code 111



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Announcement of an Internal Tenders

Tender No.	73/2025/MHT/HQ-15	Tender Name	Supply and Apply Paint to Existing Steel and Concrete Structures for Oman Botanic Garden Project.
	75/2025/MHT/HQ-16		Provision of Consultancy Services for the Design and Supervision of the Construction of the Visitor Center in Al Jabal Al Akhdar.
	76/2025/MHT/HQ-17		Provision of Consultancy Services for the Design of General Camping Site.
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	73/2025/MHT/HQ-15	25 R.O	
	75/2025/MHT/HQ-16	25 R.O	
	76/2025/MHT/HQ-17	25 R.O	
Tender Document Sales End Date	10/6/2025		
Last Date for Bid Submission	2/7/2025		
Grade	73/2025/MHT/HQ-15	Third & Fourth	
	75/2025/MHT/HQ-16	First	
	76/2025/MHT/HQ-17	First	
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		
Support and inquiries	Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om , against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents.		
	The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid.		
For further information	The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids		
	The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).		
Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		
	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@gstb.gov.om or 24402200		
For further information	Email : solic@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085		

WORLD

NOBLEWORDS



Pope Leo XIV gets on the papemobile, at St Peter's Square in The Vatican. — AFP

POPE TAKES MESSAGE OF DIALOGUE, UNITY TO THE CURIA

VATICAN CITY: Pope Leo XIV took his message of building bridges and promoting dialogue to the Roman Curia on Saturday, in his first audience with members of the Catholic Church's governing body. The late Pope Francis had sometimes difficult relations with the Curia and Vatican officials, accusing them early in his papacy of “spiritual Alzheimer’s” and a lust for power.

The new pontiff, the first from the United States, said on Saturday that his inaugural meeting was an opportunity to say thanks for all their work. “Popes come and go, the Curia remains,” Leo told the audience of officials, staff and their families in the Vatican’s vast Paul VI hall. He repeated his first words from St Peter’s Basilica when he became pope on May 8, where he urged people to “build bridges” and to welcome “with open arms, everyone who needs our charity, our presence, dialogue and love”.

“If we must all cooperate in the great cause of unity and love, let us try to do so first of all with our behaviour in everyday situations, starting from the work environment,” the pope said. “Everyone can be a builder of unity with their attitudes towards colleagues, overcoming inevitable misunderstandings with patience and humility, putting themselves in the shoes of others, avoiding prejudices, and also with a good dose of humour, as Pope Francis taught us.”

From decentralising power and increasing transparency to providing greater roles for lay people and women, Francis implemented several reforms of the Roman Curia. But his criticism left a lasting impression among many officials, and he also drew accusations of being too authoritarian in his governance, regularly bypassing the administrative bodies of the Holy See.

In 2024, the Vatican also saw an unprecedented strike by around 50 employees of the Vatican Museums over their working conditions. The pope spent two decades working in Peru but for the past two years was head of the Vatican department responsible for appointing bishops. — AFP

PILOT AND PASSENGERS KILLED IN SAN DIEGO PLANE CRASH

SAN DIEGO: The six people onboard a small plane that crash-landed in a California neighbourhood amid dense fog were all killed, according to investigating authorities. The Cessna 550 Citation, which federal records show belonged to music agent Dave Shapiro, plummeted into a residential area of San Diego at 3:47 am (1047 GMT) on Thursday, according to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB).

It was not immediately clear

what caused the Cessna to come plunging into the Murphy Canyon neighbourhood, about 3.2 kilometres from the Montgomery-Gibbs Executive Airport where the aircraft was headed. In an audio recording posted to air traffic website liveatc.net, the pilot can be heard asking about weather conditions prior to descent, while indicating that visibility was down to a minimum. “Doesn’t sound great, but we’ll give it a go,” the pilot said. As the plane came

down, it clipped a power line and the impact of the crash set several nearby houses and vehicles alight, jolting families awake before dawn. “The pilot and passengers were fatally injured,” NTSB investigator Dan Baker told a press conference on Friday. He added that no one on the ground had been seriously hurt. While Baker did not specify the number of fatalities, the US Federal Aviation Administration previously said the private plane had six people onboard. — AFP

Russia strikes Ukraine as more POWs exchanged

A massive Russian drone and missile attack on Kyiv on Saturday wounded at least 15 people, even as Russia and Ukraine continued the biggest prisoner swap since the start of Moscow’s attack. Ukraine’s air force said Russia launched 14 ballistic missiles and 250 attack drones overnight, adding that it downed six missiles and 245 drones.

Kyiv was “the main target of the enemy attack”, the air force said in a statement. “With each such attack, the world becomes more certain that the cause of prolonging the war lies in Moscow,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on X. “Only additional sanctions targeting key sectors of the Russian economy will force Moscow to cease fire,” he said.

Kyiv city officials reported fires and fallen debris in several parts of the Ukrainian capital after journalists heard explosions overnight. Officials said 15 people were injured in Kyiv itself and five civilians were killed by Russian strikes in the Kharkiv and Donetsk regions.

The Russian military meanwhile said Ukraine had targeted it with 788 drones and missiles since Tuesday. Dozens of drones targeting Moscow have been shot down over the past week. The attack on Kyiv came hours after Russia and Ukraine completed the first stage of a prisoner exchange agreed at talks last week in Istanbul and just before the second stage on Saturday.

Russia’s defence ministry said each side exchanged 307 prisoners of war on Saturday via Belarus, a Kremlin ally. It said the Russian POWs would receive psychological



A local resident looks out of the window of his flat in a multistorey residential building, in Kyiv. — AFP

Kyiv city officials reported fires and fallen debris in several parts of the Ukrainian capital after journalists heard explosions overnight. Officials said 15 people were injured in Kyiv itself

and medical help in Belarus before travelling on to Russia. Both sides received 390 people in the first stage on Friday and are expected to exchange 1,000 each in total. “We expect the exchange to continue tomorrow,” Zelensky said. Russia has signalled it will send Ukraine its terms for a peace settlement after the swap, which is set to continue over the weekend – without saying what those terms would be.

The two countries have held regular prisoner swaps since Russia launched its 2022 offensive -- but none have been on this scale. A reporter saw some of the formerly captive Ukrainian soldiers arrive at a hospital in the northern Chernigiv

region, emaciated but smiling and waving to crowds waiting outside. After they stepped off the bus, tearful relatives rushed to embrace the soldiers while others held pictures of their loved ones, hoping to find out if they had been seen in captivity.

Many of the soldiers were draped in bright yellow and blue Ukrainian flags. “It’s simply crazy. Crazy feelings,” 31-year-old Konstantin Steblev, a soldier, said after he was released following three years in captivity. Russia said it had received 270 Russian troops and 120 civilians, including some from parts of its Kursk region captured and held by Kyiv for months. — AFP

جامعة الشرقية
A' SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Tender Committee at A'Sharqiyah University is pleased to invite companies with experience in providing laboratory equipment to participate in this tender.

Tender details:

Tender No.	Description	Document Collection Deadline	Bids Submission Deadline	Document Fees
ASU/36/24/25	Providing Lab Equipment for College of Applied and Health Sciences at A'Sharqiyah University	29/05/2025	12/06/2025	100 OMR

- Specialized companies interested in this assignment can obtain the tender document from the Procurement and Contracts Department at A'Sharqiyah University in Ibra during working days from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM.
- Bids must be submitted in closed, sealed envelopes with red wax, addressed to the Tender Committee at A'Sharqiyah University, Ibra. The envelopes should clearly indicate the tender subject and reference number but must not display the bidders' names.
- The main submission envelope should contain the following:
 - A separate sealed envelope with the technical proposal (1 original copy, 1 copy, and 1 soft copy on a USB flash drive).
 - A separate sealed envelope with the commercial proposal (1 original copy, 1 copy, and 1 soft copy on a USB flash drive).
 - A separate sealed envelope containing the tender bond.
- ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids. http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf
- A'Sharqiyah University is not obligated to accept the lowest bid.
- For further details, feel free to contact us via phone at 25401115/25401116, or by email at ajza.rashid@asu.edu.om/yousuf.alsaadi@asu.edu.om



POWER PYLON VANDALISED IN FRANCE 'S CANNES

NICE: A power substation and an electricity pylon were vandalised overnight in the region around France’s Cannes, which has been hit by a major blackout on the final day of its film festival, officials said. A substation in the village of Tanneron which supplies Cannes was targeted by a suspected arson attack, while the legs of a pylon carrying a high-voltage line were cut in Villeneuve-Loubet, prosecutors and local officials said.

A fire broke out at the Tanneron substation, about 12 kilometres northwest of central Cannes, at around 2:00 am (0000 GMT), local authorities said. Seven fire engines were called to the scene and the blaze was extinguished at 07:00 am, it said. Cannes Mayor David Lisnard said that it had been “targeted in a criminal act.” The pylon in Villeneuve-Loubet, 15 kilometres to the northeast towards the city of Nice, was also sabotaged, with three of its legs found to have been cut. — AFP

The New York Times

Record number of Americans apply for British citizenship



LIZZIE DEARDEN

The writer is an international journalist and author

A record number of Americans applied for British citizenship in the first three months of this year, and for the right to live and work in Britain indefinitely, according to official data. In the year to March, 6,618 Americans applied for British citizenship, the highest annual figure since records began in 2004, according to statistics released by Britain's Home Office on Thursday. More than 1,900 of those applications were made between January and March — the highest number for any quarter on record. Immigration lawyers said they had received an increased number of inquiries from people in the United States about possibly relocating to Britain in the wake of President Donald Trump's reelection in November. Muhunthan Paramesvaran, a senior immigration lawyer at Wilsons Solicitors in London, said that inquiries from Americans looking to settle in Britain had risen "in the immediate aftermath of the election and the various pronouncements that were made." "There's definitely been an uptick in inquiries from US. nationals," he said. "People who were already here may have been thinking, 'I want the option of dual citizenship in the event that I don't want to go back to the US.'" The rise in British citizenship

applications from Americans took place against a backdrop of similar increases from across the world, but the global rate — 9.5% year-on-year — was far outpaced by the 30% jump from the United States. Zeena Luchowa, a partner at Laura Devine Immigration, a law firm that specialises in American migration to Britain, said she expected further increases in the coming months because of the "political landscape" in America. "We've seen increases in inquiries and applications not just for US nationals, but for US residents of other nationalities who are currently in the US but looking at plans to settle in the UK," she added. "The queries we're seeing are not necessarily about British citizenship; it's more about seeking to relocate." Separate data published by the Home Office this week showed that a record number of Americans were given the right to settle in Britain in 2024, allowing them to live and work indefinitely in the country as a necessary precursor to citizenship. Of the 5,521 settlement applications granted for US citizens last year, most were for people who are eligible because of their spouses, parents and other family links, while a substantial

The rise in British citizenship applications from Americans took place against a backdrop of similar increases from across the world, but the global rate — 9.5% year-on-year — was far outpaced by the 30% jump from the United States.

portion were for people who had originally arrived in Britain on temporary visas for "skilled workers" and want to remain. That figure was up 20% compared with 2023 and marked a record high for Americans granted permission to remain in Britain indefinitely. However, the jump was less than the overall increase in settlement grants for all nationalities, which rose by 37% in the same period. Paramesvaran believes that the rate of settlement applications will accelerate further in the coming months after the British government recently announced that most people would have to live in the country for 10 years, rather than the current five, before they can apply for permanent settlement. "People are worried about what may be on the horizon in terms of potential changes to qualification periods," he said. "It's a case of people wanting to take advantage of the rules and guidance as they exist today." Yvette Cooper, the home secretary, said in Parliament that some people might qualify "more swiftly" for permanent settlement in Britain depending on the "contribution" they made, but that the exact details would not be finalised until later this year.

HISTORIC SHIPWRECKS COME TO LIGHT IN THE GREAT LAKES



ALEXANDER NAZARYAN

The author writes on politics, books and culture

Last week, the Lake Guardian left the port of Oswego, New York, preparing to sail into the nation's past. The research vessel, which belongs to the Environmental Protection Agency, is exploring the Lake Ontario National Marine Sanctuary, a 1,722-square-mile expanse that stretches from the shoreline of New York state to the

(watery) border with Canada. There, 63 ships rest beneath hundreds of feet of cold, clear water. Many had sailed in the service of nation-building some time during the 19th century, only to succumb to bad weather, rough seas, the vagaries of fate. Now, the maritime archaeologists aboard the Lake Guardian — experts with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Ocean Exploration Cooperative Institute, students from the University of Rhode Island — aim to create detailed 3D models of the wrecks. They will do so with the help of Rhody, a remotely operated vehicle, or ROV, outfitted with a high-definition camera that has provided astonishing images on which those models will be based. "There's lifetimes worth of research potential here," Benjamin Ioset, a NOAA maritime archaeologist, said as the expedition commenced. A native of central New York, he began diving in these waters when he was 14. "I've always been in love with this region," Ioset said. Now, he is a conduit to that region's prosperous, industrial past. In fact, the Great Lakes make for a world-class shipwreck museum, albeit one that can be reached only by competent scuba divers or ROVs like Rhody, depending on the wreck's depth. Just three days into the trip, the Lake Guardian's sonar system discovered a new shipwreck, the marine sanctuary's 64th: probably a commercial vessel from the early 19th century, though Ioset said it would take a little bit of detective work to nail down the craft's identity. For the most part, the goal of the trip is not to find new ships but to use Rhody's powerful cameras to capture clear images of ones already known: the Farmer's Daughter, possibly the oldest ship in the sanctuary; the steam-powered tugboat Philip Becker; the Roberval, a steamer whose steel hull proved no match for an enormous wave that sank it in 1916. The project is the culmination of an effort by local officials to gain recognition for their stretch of the Great Lakes. A year ago, the Biden administration designated a large stretch of eastern Lake Ontario a national marine sanctuary, which confers certain protections — and a measure of clout. Local and state officials hope that the mostly commercial ships now submerged in hundreds of feet of freshwater spur interest from history buffs and recreational divers.

Judges keep calling Trump's actions illegal

PRESIDENT Donald Trump has suffered a string of court losses in recent days as federal judges ruled that his administration broke the law on a number of matters, including firing officials, shutting down organizations and deporting migrants. But if the decisions all point in the same direction — Trump and his team have acted lawlessly in egregious ways, judges emphatically said — the real-world consequences may vary. That is because even assuming all those rulings were to be upheld on appeal, some of Trump's actions would be easier to undo than others. And the slow pace of litigation means the judiciary is often many steps behind and in some cases unable to catch up.

Still, courts serve as a rare check on Trump, who has steamrolled constraints inside the executive branch, enjoys broad immunity for his official acts because of a 2024 Supreme Court ruling and, as a matter of political reality, has little reason to fear impeachment or even serious oversight inquiries by the Republican-controlled Congress. The Trump administration has responded, as it often does to court losses, by lobbing insults — calling one such ruling a "rogue judge's attempt to impede on the separation of powers" and another the act of "an unelected judge with a political ax to grind." In an interview with New York Times columnist Ross Douthat, Vice President JD Vance declared, "I know this is inflammatory, but I think you are seeing an effort by the courts to quite literally overturn the will of the American people." The denunciations make clear that appeals are inevitable, so the story is not yet over. But among the actions struck down by district court judges this week, the simplest to undo is likely Trump's dismissal, without cause, of three Democratic-selected members of an independent watchdog agency that scrutinises counter-terrorism policies and actions, the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board. On Wednesday, Judge Reggie B. Walton of the US District Court in Washington ruled that Trump had broken the law in doing so and ordered the reinstatement of two members who had sued.



President Donald Trump signs executive orders in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington.



CHARLIE SAVAGE

The author writes about national security and legal policy

That is because even assuming all those rulings were to be upheld on appeal, some of Trump's actions would be easier to undo than others. And the slow pace of litigation means the judiciary is often many steps behind and in some cases unable to catch up

Trump's move left the board with only one member, largely paralysing the agency because a quorum of three is necessary for it to act. When its employees wrote up an examination of face scanners in airports this month, they released it as an informal staff report rather than as a statutorily authorised board report that is accompanied by member recommendations and submitted to Congress. They cannot start new investigations. The administration has not said whether it will appeal, but it has made clear it wants the Supreme Court to expand a president's authority to fire the leaders of independent agencies. On Thursday, the court permitted Trump, for now, to remove leaders of two other such agencies. Still, Walton's reasoning suggested that even if the Supreme Court bolsters Trump's power to control some of these agencies, the independent structure of the privacy board might survive since it is an investigative body that does not exercise much, if any, "executive power," like making and enforcing rules. And if the two oversight board members who sued, Travis LeBlanc and Edward Felten, can return to

their offices, collect back pay and finish their terms, there will have been relatively little long-term damage done. A middle ground, in terms of what it would take to undo the administration's handiwork, is presented by two rulings against Trump this week concerning his efforts to unilaterally shut down parts of the government, or its activities, that were established and funded by Congress. On Monday, Judge Beryl A. Howell of US District Court in Washington ruled that the administration's takeover of the US Institute of Peace, a non-profit think tank that Congress established to seek diplomatic solutions to global conflicts, was unlawful and a "gross usurpation of power." She ordered the reinstatement of top officials ousted by the White House and nullified the transfer of the institute's building to the General Services Administration, which manages the federal real estate portfolio. A separate lawsuit remains pending on behalf of the institute's workforce. The administration terminated most of the institute's hundreds of workers in the United States and abroad.

OPINION

Can ChatGPT save your marriage?



DR HAMED
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

THOSE who support the use of artificial intelligence as a marital counsellor believe that it offers a neutral, judgement-free space for couples to discuss their concerns and seek advice.

My friend, who has been married for over twenty years, was recently going through serious marital difficulties that made him consider divorcing his wife. However, when he attended marital therapy, he was not impressed by the advice given by the counsellors.

He then decided to explore ChatGPT for free advice. He informed ChatGPT about all the points that were bothering him about his wife's attitude towards him and asked for an opinion. In a few seconds, the application produced a detailed analysis of the wife's behaviours followed by a few suggestions on how to address them. My friend was so impressed with this outcome that he decided to appoint ChatGPT as his marital therapist.

All over the world, people of different age groups are using ChatGPT and other AI applications regularly, with some using it for marriage counselling. But can artificial

intelligence truly help couples navigate the complexities of a relationship?

Those who support the use of artificial intelligence as a marital counsellor believe that it offers a neutral, judgement-free space for couples to discuss their concerns and seek advice. It's free and available 24/7, making it convenient for those who might not have access or cannot afford to pay a human therapist.

Moreover, AI can provide communication exercises, conflict resolution strategies, and even suggest ways to improve emotional intimacy that can help couples overcome their difficulties. Sometimes, couples feel uncomfortable discussing personal issues with a human, so an AI application can feel like a safe alternative.

On the other hand, those of us who are against the use of AI as a marital counsellor believe that it lacks the genuine empathy and emotional intelligence that a human therapist can provide. Human relationships are complex, and one would need to observe a person's body language, tone of voice, and cultural context to provide therapy, while an AI programme might miss all of these.

Additionally, the lack of professional

While ChatGPT can offer supplemental support and practical tips, it is not yet equipped to provide marital therapy

credentials and the inability to handle deep-rooted issues or crises mean that AI should not replace a trained professional.

Another important fact is that marital norms, communication styles, and conflict resolution strategies vary widely across cultures, while AI programmes collect information from a vast pool of Internet-based databases that may not fully capture or respect these cultural norms. What works as advice in one cultural context might be inappropriate or ineffective in another.

When one relies on generalised data generated by AI, the advice provided is unlikely to align with a couple's specific cultural or social context. Also, having access to advice 24/7 is likely to make people dependent on AI to solve their problems instead of working on them.

In my opinion, while ChatGPT can offer supplemental support and practical tips, it is not yet equipped to provide marital therapy. The best approach likely involves a combination of human expertise and technological tools that are tailored to the specific needs of each couple, with careful consideration of cultural and social differences.

SYRIA HAILS US LIFTING OF ASSAD-ERA SANCTIONS

DAMASCUS: Syria on Saturday hailed the Trump administration's lifting of US sanctions, as Washington looks to open a new chapter in its relations with Damascus.

US President Donald Trump surprised many with his announcement of the new policy on a Gulf tour earlier this month, during which he shook hands with Syria's militant-turned-interim President Ahmed al Sharaa.

Trump said he wanted to give the war-torn country's new rulers "a chance at greatness" after their overthrow of longtime ruler Bashar al Assad in December.

"The Syrian Arab Republic welcomes the decision from the American government to lift the sanctions imposed on Syria and its people for long years," a foreign ministry statement said.

It described the move as "a positive step in the right direction to reduce humanitarian and economic struggles in the country".

US sanctions were first imposed on Syria in 1979 under the rule of Bashar al Assad's father Hafez. They were sharply expanded after the bloody repression of anti-government protests in 2011, which triggered the country's civil war.

Washington imposed sweeping sanctions on financial transactions with Syria and made clear it would use sanctions to punish anyone involved in reconstruction as long as Assad remained in power.

Since Assad's ouster, the new administration has been looking to build relations with the West and roll back sanctions, but some governments have expressed reluctance, pointing to the Islamist past of leading figures.

Sharaa himself was once considered a "terrorist" by Washington, with a \$10 million bounty on his head.

On Friday, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said his country was "implementing authorisations to encourage new investment into Syria". The sanctions relief extends to Syria's new government with conditions that the country not provide a safe haven for terrorist organisations and ensure security for religious and ethnic minorities, the US Treasury Department said.

Concurrently, the US State Department issued a 180-day waiver for the Caesar Act to make sure sanctions do not obstruct foreign investment into Syria.

The 2020 legislation severely sanctioned any entity or company cooperating with the ousted government. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the waiver would "facilitate the provision of electricity, energy, water and sanitation, and enable a more effective humanitarian response across Syria". — AFP

A 'Made in America' iPhone? 'Absurd.'

PRESIDENT Donald Trump went on the offensive against Apple on Friday, demanding that the company begin making iPhones in the United States or pay tariffs of at least 25 per cent on iPhones made abroad.

The ultimatum is the latest in a decade-long push to get the technology giant to move its supply chain. When he first ran for president in 2016, Trump promised voters that he would "get Apple to start building their damn computers and things in this country instead of other countries." But instead of bringing its manufacturing home, Apple has shifted production from China to other countries across Asia, including India, Vietnam and Thailand. Almost nothing is made in America, and an estimated 80% of iPhones are still made in China.

Could Apple make iPhones in the United States? Yes. Apple could make iPhones in the United States. But doing so would be expensive, difficult and force the company to more than double iPhone prices to \$2,000 or more, said Wayne Lam, an analyst with TechInsights, a market research firm. Apple would have to buy new machines and rely on more automation than it uses in China because the US population is so much smaller, Lam said.

"It is absurd," Lam said. "In the short term, it's not economically feasible." There would be some benefits to moving the supply chain, including reducing the environmental costs of shipping products from abroad, said Matthew Moore, who spent nine years as a manufacturing design manager at Apple. But the upsides would be trivial compared to the challenges that would have to be overcome.

So why hasn't Apple started production in the United States? Supply chain experts say that shifting iPhone production to the



The Apple store on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. — The New York Times



TRIPP
MICKLE

The writer is a technology reporter for The New York Times covering Apple

United States in 2025 would be foolish. The iPhone is nearly 20 years old. Apple's top executives have said that people may not need an iPhone in 10 years because it could be replaced by a new device built for artificial intelligence. As a result, Apple would invest a lot of money that it wouldn't be able to recoup, Lam said.

"I would be surprised if there's an iPhone 29," Lam said, noting that Apple is trying to disrupt the iPhone by making augmented reality products like the Vision Pro.

Apple also had a bad experience when it first began assembling Mac desktop computers in the United States in 2013. The company had to temporarily stop production when employees walked off the assembly line at the end of their shift but before their replacements arrived. And it struggled to find a supplier who could make enough of the tiny, custom screws it needed.

In 2019, Apple CEO Tim Cook gave Trump a tour of the Texas plant. But recent labels on the computer say that the Mac Pro assembled there is a product of Thailand.

What does China offer that the

United States doesn't? Small hands, a massive, seasonal workforce and millions of engineers. Young Chinese women have small fingers and that has made them a valuable contributor to iPhone production because they are more nimble at installing screws and other miniature parts in the small device, supply chain experts said. In a recent analysis the company did to explore the feasibility of moving production to the United States, the company determined that it couldn't find people with those skills in the United States, said two people familiar with the analysis who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

China has millions of people who migrate around the country to work in factories as Apple revs up production around a new iPhone. They often work from the summer until Chinese New Year, when production slows down, so Apple's suppliers don't have to pay them for a full year of work.

They live in dormitories connected to factories with assembly lines longer than a football field, clustered near component suppliers. — The New York Times

The English language: It’s only words



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

LEARNING English is compulsory in Oman and I believe rightly so. It is the unrivaled global language in the world of business, commerce and finance; and has become the most effective because it is widely used as the 'lingua franca,' the chosen language of business, travel and international politics and mediation.

Of course, more people speak Mandarin, or one of its many close variations, than any other language, with 1.3 billion speakers of the native language of China. But it is not a language that has spread widely, as it is complex, being a 'tonal' language.

This means that the tone of the user may identify the same 'word' differently. For example, 'ma' may mean, among other words, 'horse' or 'mother' among its five tonal iterations. You wouldn't want to get that wrong, would you? Especially where Mothers-in-Law are concerned. Surprisingly, nearly half a billion people worldwide speak different versions of Spanish, not just in its home country, but in large parts of Central and South America, Africa and Europe. It too has several linguistic iterations, with Andalusian, Catalan, Castilian, Canarian, Mexican, Caribbean and Colombian among those, all identifying their regional origins.

However, while the Spanish did exert global dominance during the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, they were severe invaders, with their 'foot very much on the throat,' so

engendered significant social and linguistic antagonism.

By comparison, English has around 400 million native speakers in its global catchment today. Apart from the spelling differences engendered across the English/American divide, these are genuinely identified only by regional accents.

These are evident even in the United Kingdom, where each of the four kingdoms has their own distinctive versions based on their original, now rarely used native languages, but uniquely accented. Compared to the Spanish, the English did seek to win hearts and minds, to develop societies and relationships through their Empire building and that is probably why their language rose to the top. The so-called 'Queen's English' provides the model for all current teaching and learning across the globe. It is relatively new as a linguistic categorisation and takes its inspiration from the English nobility and royalty, who saw themselves as the standard bearers for what was further known as 'Received Pronunciation,' or RP, which was an indication of the privilege that commoners should have felt in being able to use the same accent and style in speech as their so-called 'betters.'

The first identified use of 'posh speech' historically was during the late 19th century in the boarding schools of the upper crust of society, with a handbook for teachers in such establishments advising that, "It is the business of educated people to speak so that no one may be able to tell in what county

By comparison, English has around 400 million native speakers in its global catchment today. Apart from the spelling differences engendered across the English/American divide, these are genuinely identified only by regional accents

their childhood was passed (Burrell, 1891)." It is defined by the Oxford Dictionary hierarchy as "the standard accent of English as spoken in the South of England" and was identified by Tom McArthur in 2002 as "the accent of those with power, money and influence," noting that while it may be perceived negatively, being undeserved, or accidental, it signposted the British Empire as a bastion of privilege and class; and symbolic of the southern region's London-based political power in Britain.

English is acknowledged as Saxon but was hugely influenced by the Viking raiders who pillaged mercilessly during the 8th to the 11th centuries. The Irish have their own historic Irish Gaelic, which is remarkably categorised as an Indo-European language with significant Indian continent and specifically Iranian regional influences. Who knew? Scotland has its Scots Gaelic, phonologically enhanced by Dutch, French and Latin influences prior to the 14th century. The Welsh language, Celtic, has British and European, specifically German, Roman and even Polish, historical footnotes.

Further differences in accent are noted across the UK, with the 'Geordies' of Newcastle, the 'Scousers' of Liverpool, the 'Brummies' of Birmingham, the 'Cockneys' of East London and the delightfully comedic drawl of the West Country's 'Worzel Gummidge.' Not gobbledegook, claptrap, mumbo-jumbo, codswallop, yackety-yak, tittle-tattle, or blah-blah-blah, but as unique as an Australian accent, right?

STABBING SUSPECT HAS ‘PSYCHOLOGICAL ILLNESS’: POLICE

BERLIN: A German woman accused of a mass stabbing attack that wounded 18 people at a train station in Hamburg suffers from mental illness, police said on Saturday.

The suspect, a 39-year-old woman, is accused of going on a stabbing spree on Friday at the main station in Hamburg, stunning the northern city in the middle of the evening rush hour.

The woman has “very clear indications of a psychological illness”, police said in a statement, without giving further details on her condition.

They added there were no signs she was under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of the attack, which left four victims seriously wounded.

The woman was subdued by two passersby and law enforcement officers, then taken into custody at the scene without resisting arrest, police said.

She was due to appear before a judge later on Saturday.

Police say they have ruled out a “political motive” for the attack and believe the suspect acted alone. The victims range in age from 19 to 85.

The four in serious condition were a 24-year-old man and three women, aged 24, 52 and 85, police said.

Emergency officials initially said their wounds were life-threatening, but police say all the victims now appear to be out of immediate danger.

The attack took place just after 6:00 pm (16:00 GMT) on Friday on one of the platforms in front of a standing train, German media reported.

The suspect was thought to have turned “against passengers” at the station, a spokeswoman for the Hanover federal police directorate, which also covers Hamburg, said.

Some of the victims were treated onboard waiting trains in the station, German daily Bild reported.

Images of the scene showed access to the platforms at one end of the station blocked off by police and people being loaded into waiting ambulances.

Forensic police could also be seen walking up and down the platforms where the attack took place. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz expressed his shock in a call with the mayor of Hamburg.

“My thoughts are with the victims and their families,” Merz said, according to a readout from a spokesman.

Germany has been rocked in recent months by a series of violent attacks with often far-right extremist motivations that have put security at the top of the agenda. The most recent, on Sunday, saw four people injured in a stabbing at a bar in the city of Bielefeld.

The investigation into that attack has been handed over to federal prosecutors after the Syrian suspect told the police officers who arrested him that he had extremist beliefs. — AFP

Syrians rush to preserve memories of the revolution

AS Syria emerges from a painful chapter in its recent history, some in the country are fervently trying to preserve the remnants of an anti-government uprising that morphed into a civil war and lasted almost 14 years. The hope is that these will serve not only as reminders of what opponents did to fight a brutal regime and the price they paid, but as a cautionary tale.

Others are rushing to salvage troves of documents, hard drives and computers from the ousted government, items they hope will aid in bringing a measure of justice and accountability.

“You might say we need to forget these scenes. But I don’t want to forget,” said Mutassim Abdulsatir, a 45-year-old who was detained at Syria’s most notorious prison, Saydnaya. “These must become a remembrance for days to come so they are not repeated, not in Syria and not in any country in the world.”

On a recent day outside Saydnaya prison, where untold numbers of inmates were summarily executed, Abdulsatir was collecting nooses from ropes intertwined like clumps of hair. He then dragged them inside the prison, with its sprawling wings and dank dungeons, for safekeeping, imagining them displayed in a glass case.

“I want to preserve these,” he said of the nooses. “This is priceless,” he added, before rattling off the names of detainees who probably met their end in the prison. “They were all executed here with this.” Abdulsatir, who now works as a researcher for the Association of Detainees and Missing Persons of Saydnaya, described how prisoners were received there, with beatings as they were blindfolded, bound and herded like cattle.

Abdulsatir said he wants to save everything that remains of Saydnaya, from the names of prisoners and messages they scratched into cell walls, to the clothes and shoes still piled throughout the prison and even the



Preserving posters and banners from the uprising against Bashar al Assad in the northwestern town of Kafranbel, Syria. — The New York Times

small tubs in which they were given sparse food.

The urge to enshrine objects connected to decades of oppression has not extended to the thousands of pictures, billboards and statues of the ousted dictator Bashar al Assad and his father and predecessor. After rebels overthrew Assad in early December, Syrians rushed to tear down and destroy images of him and his family.

For many Syrians, the urge to safeguard their recent history is particularly acute because of past experience.

In 1982, security forces answering to Hafez al Assad, Assad’s father, massacred thousands of civilians and razed the central city of Hama to crush an anti-government uprising led by the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist group.

Syrians risked arrest or worse for decades if they spoke openly about the uprising and massacre, which the Assad family characterised as a battle against terrorists.

“As Syrians under the Assad dynasty, we were forbidden from remembering anything,” said Sana Yazji, 55, a graphic designer from the capital, Damascus.

She said she fled to neighbouring Lebanon in 2013 with her family for fear that they were wanted by the Assad government. She

founded an organisation known as Creative Memory to document posters, songs and illustrations from Syria’s uprising, which began in 2011, spurred by other Arab Spring revolutions across the Middle East and North Africa.

Some of the reminders of the uprising have already been erased, such as graffiti and street art that Syrians risked their lives to spray-paint, only to have it covered up by pro-regime forces. These have particular resonance given that the 2011 uprising began with a single line of graffiti.

In early 2011, as Arab leaders were being toppled by grassroots protests, a group of teenage boys in the southern Syrian city of Daraa spray-painted a school wall with a taunt to Bashar al Assad, a former ophthalmologist: “It’s your turn, doctor.” The teenagers were arrested and tortured, setting off demonstrations across Syria.

But a good deal of graffiti can still be seen across Syria, whether it is messages of farewell from people as they were being displaced or of defiance written on rubble left by government air strikes.

Last month in Damascus, community organisers exhibited dozens of photos showing posters, graffiti and caricatures from the revolution. — The New York Times



RAJA ABDULRAHIM

The writer is a correspondent for The New York Times reporting on the Middle East

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



The training venue was shifted from the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex to Seeb Stadium as per the coaching staff’s decision

RED WARRIORS BACK TO TRAINING FOR WC PREPARATIONS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

Oman team back to action on Friday night at Seeb Stadium marking the next phase of preparations for their upcoming World Cup qualifying fixtures after two days rest provided by the coaching staff following the friendly match against Niger which ended for Oman by 4-1. The training venue was shifted from the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex to Seeb Stadium as per the coaching staff’s decision. The Red Warriors will continue their final warm-up sessions at Seeb until the official pre-match training for the Jordan clash, which will be held back at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Essam al Subhi (Al Quwa Al Jawiya, Iraq) and Al Mundher al Alawi (Al Zawra Club) joined the training sessions on Saturday night while Salah al Yahyaie (Al Khalidiya SC, Bahrain) is expected to join the squad by May 29. Meanwhile, Friday’s session saw the participation of goalkeepers Ahmed al Rawahi and Motasim al Wahaibi, both of whom were recently called up by head coach Rasheed Jaber to replace the injured Ibrahim al Mukhaini, who is undergoing a four-week treatment period after sustaining a finger injury to his left hand. Mohsin al Ghassani (Bangkok United SC), who has completed his season in the Thai League, is already training with the squad, alongside promising newcomer Tariq al Saadi (UE Sant Andreu SC, Spain). Both players found the net in the recent friendly win over Niger, underlining their form and readiness.

As part of their buildup, Oman will face Lebanon in a closed-door friendly on Tuesday at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex and the match will start at 8:00 pm. This fixture will serve as the final test for the national side before the two decisive matches in the third round of the FIFA World Cup 2026 Asian Qualifiers—against Jordan at home on June 5, followed by an away game against Palestine on June 10 in Jordan. With the qualifiers fast approaching, the team is set to enter an intensive training program under the leadership of Coach Rasheed Jaber. Upcoming sessions will focus on attacking transitions, reinforcing defensive organization, and improving tactical cohesion across all lines of play.

Riding the momentum from back-to-back strong performances in March, the Red Warriors are determined to carry their form into the final qualifiers. The home clash against Jordan on June 5 is viewed as a pivotal encounter that could reignite Oman’s qualification hopes and set the stage for a dramatic final showdown against Palestine on June 10.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

Two Omani coaches, Mohammed bin Mubarak al Awaisi from Al Amerat Club and Majid bin Omar al Balushi from Salalah Club, participated in the International Coaches Course held over two days at the Umm Al Hassam Basketball Hall in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The course was led by veteran Serbian coach Saša Obradović and coach Jelena, and featured a distinguished group of coaches from across the Gulf and Arab countries.

The participation of the Omani coaches was supported by the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) through a training grant

provided by the Technical Development Committee. This initiative comes as part of the association’s ongoing efforts to enhance the quality of national coaching talent and to provide them with opportunities to explore the latest coaching concepts and methods at regional and international levels. The Technical Development Committee emphasised that this participation falls under its strategic plan to support and qualify Omani coaches through specialised programmes that strengthen their presence in the sports field. In a statement, coach Mohammed al Awaisi expressed his gratitude for this exceptional training opportunity, saying: “The



The participation of the Omani coaches was supported by the OBA through a training grant provided by the Technical Development Committee

course was an enriching experience in every sense. We had the rare chance to engage with highly experienced coaches and explore advanced

concepts in both offensive and defensive strategies. What stood out to me the most was the strong focus on the details of decision-making during



Mujibur Ali picked up two key wickets

qualify directly for the 10-team ICC World Cup Qualifier, with the remaining four having to compete in the Cricket World Cup Qualifier playoff. Brief scores: Canada 212 all out in 48.4 overs (Navneet Dhaliwal 73, Mansab

Gill 59; Shakeel Ahmed 2/21, Mujibur Ali 2/35, Mohammad Nadeem 2/9 lost to Oman 108/3 in 23.1 overs -D/L target: 91 runs from 23.1 overs (Hammad Mirza 31, Jatinder Singh 27, Mujibur Ali 23*). Oman won by 18 runs (DLS method)

Omani coaches attend international basketball course

SHORT TAKES



Indiana Pacers forward Pascal Siakam (43) shoots against New York Knicks forward Mikal Bridges (25) in the second quarter during game two of the eastern conference finals for the 2025 NBA Playoffs at Madison Square Garden. — Reuters

SIAKAM SHINES AS PACERS TAKE 2-0 LEAD OVER KNICKS

NEW YORK: The irrepressible Indiana Pacers opened up a 2-0 lead over the New York Knicks in the Eastern Conference finals with a 114-109 win at Madison Square Garden on Friday.

The series now moves to Indianapolis with the Pacers in control after Pascal Siakam led them with a playoff career-high 39 points.

Cameroonian Siakam was well-supported though with all the Indiana starters making double figures.

Myles Turner put up 16 points while Tyrese Haliburton had 14 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds. Aaron Nesmith and Andrew Nembhard had 12 points each and T.J. McConnell added 10 from the bench.

It was a different game to the high-scoring Game One where Indiana looked dead and buried before an astonishing comeback from 14 points down late in the game, forcing overtime before triumphing.

The Knicks showed some resilience fighting back in the fourth quarter from ten points down to make it a one point game before the Pacers closed out the contest.

The Pacers have now won six straight playoff road games since their defeat at Milwaukee in the first round. The score was tied at 81 entering the fourth quarter before the Pacers surged ahead with a 29-19 run, leading 110-100.

The Knicks countered with a 9-0 burst, closing to within one point with 15 seconds left.

Aaron Nesmith made two free throws after being fouled on the inbound, and Jalen Brunson missed a game-tying three.

Myles Turner secured the rebound and sank two free throws to seal the victory. Turner was crucial down the stretch with 13 points on 4-of-6 shooting in the fourth. Siakam had been relatively subdued with 17 points in Game One but he was on fire from the outset.

"I just came out aggressive at the end of the day, we're a team, you know, it doesn't matter who scores, that's what I love so much about this team," said Siakam.

"I got to go in early, the guys did a good job finding me, and again, another night is going to be somebody else, you know, that's what makes us special," he said.

Pacers coach Rick Carlisle hailed Siakam's performance.

"It was a quiet 39 points. It really was. He's a veteran who's been in these situations multiple times. He understands the importance of patience and being disciplined and understanding the NBA playoffs are a process," he said. — AFP



Hamburg European Open winner Italy's Flavio Cobolli (Right) and runner up Russia's Andrey Rublev pose with their trophies. — Reuters

Cobolli upsets Rublev to win Hamburg Open

ITALY'S FLAVIO COBOLLI won the biggest title of his career when he upset third seed Andrey Rublev 6-2 6-4 to win the Hamburg Open on Saturday. Ranked number 35 in the world, Cobolli had only one ATP 250 title to his name, having won the Romanian Open last month, but the 23-year-old now has two claycourt titles after beating Rublev in the final of the ATP 500 event. He is just the third player to win multiple titles on the ATP Tour this year after Carlos Alcaraz (three) and Felix Auger-Aliassime (also two), while the victory will see him rise to a

career-high 26th in the rankings.

"I think it is the best moment and match of my life for sure. I have to say sorry to Andrey because today I played unbelievable. I am so happy and proud of myself," Cobolli said.

"I can see my family, friends, brother and girlfriend here and it is a surprise. I am really happy. I passed many battles this year and this kind of day is good for your mind. I am so happy, I just want to (lift) the trophy."

After Cobolli convincingly took the opening set, Rublev went 3-2 up in the second but the momentum shifted after a 31-shot rally where the Russian tried to make Cobolli run for most points.

Cobolli turned the tables when he fired a scorching forehand winner to get the point and as the Italian put his hand to his ear to get the crowd roaring, a spent Rublev bent over in exhaustion.

Rublev never recovered and although he had seven break points in the contest, Cobolli saved six of them. The Italian converted all four of his own break points to wrap up the match in an hour and 28 minutes. He will have no time to rest, however, as he looks ahead to a match against former Grand Slam champion Marin Cilic in the first round of the French Open, which begins on Sunday. — Reuters

Omani rally drivers all set for the new challenge in Jordan

THE OMANI rally drivers Abdullah al Rawahi, Zakariya al Amri and Abdullah al Zubair, are all set and prepared to take part in upcoming challenge in Jordan International Rally, the fourth round of the Middle East Rally Championship, which will gear up on Friday and Saturday with wide participation from different countries and competitors, including championship's leader, Qatari Nasser Al Attiyah, and the Saudi Rakan Al Rashid who is second overall and the third in the championship Abdullah al Rawahi.

The Dead Sea stages and Jordan valley host the rally this year as usual, which consists of 12 stages over two days in Baptism, Panorama, Suwyma, Karamah, Tal Hilal and Wadi Nar, covering a distance of approximately

200 km as Special Stages.

The Jordan International Rally, which is considered one of the toughest rallies in the region and also one of the most enjoyable at the same time, will of course witness strong competition between the most prominent names, Nasser Al Attiyah and Rakan Al Rashed, the Omani Abdullah al Rawahi, and the Qatari Abdulaziz Al Kuwari, in addition to a group of Jordanian drivers.

In Merc 2 group the competition will be strong between Omanis Abdullah al Zubair and Zakariya al Amri for the lead in the Merc 2 (N category), as Al Amri still leads the category by 15 points over Al Zubair.

A quick review of this rally shows that competition will not be easy between Al Attiyah and Al Rawahi,



Abdullah al Rawahi

as both have long experience in the Jordan International Rally, Al Attiyah is the most successful driver there, meanwhile Al Rawahi is building his ambitions to win the rally, given that he started his rally carrier in Jordan

rallies and has won numerous titles there, both in the Jordan National Rallies and the International Rallies including the MERC championship in 2023.

Al Rawahi, who will be accompanied by Jordanian Atta Al Hamoud in the navigation seat, and on board a Skoda Fabia, explained that he will do his best in terms of effort and work inside the car to win this time and remove the bad luck that has plagued him in the past three rallies this year, despite many differences in the participating teams in terms of capabilities, technical teams and support.

He said, "First, I would like to thank the supporters and sponsors , the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), the Oman Automobile

Association, OQ Group, National Finance, Al Manar, WMS, Strike, Size, and Zamakan for standing behind us in this championship". He added that as everyone knows, the Jordan Rally is difficult especially in the Dead Sea and Jordan valley, in the hot weather and varied terrain, the other competitors' cars are better and newer than mine, but will not stop me from working on the stages and focusing on the race and we will leave the results until the end." As for the competitor Zakariya al Amri and his navigator Mohammed al Mazroui, on board a Subaru Impreza (N14), he has classified the rally as one of the most rugged rallies in some places, but we are now focused on maintaining the lead in the category and we are working on that in this rally.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Nitish Kumar Reddy celebrates with Abhishek Sharma after taking the wicket of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Mayank Agarwal caught out by Sunrisers Hyderabad's Ishan Kishan. — Reuters

KISHAN SHINES AS HYDERABAD DEFEAT BENGALURU

LUCKNOW: Ishan Kishan top-scored with 94 not out as Sunrisers Hyderabad scripted a 42-run consolation win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Indian Premier League on Friday.

Kishan hit seven fours and five sixes in his sparkling 48-ball knock to help Hyderabad post a formidable 231-6 off 20 overs in Lucknow.

Bengaluru, who have already qualified for the playoffs, were bowled out for 189 off 19.5 overs in reply. The win helped restore some pride for Hyderabad who have been eliminated from the playoffs.

“It was probably one of the best wickets to bat on throughout the tournament,” said Hyderabad’s Jaydev Unadkat.

“The message was to try and make things happen. Our bowlers were spot on.” Bengaluru started their chase positively with openers Phil Salt and Virat Kohli laying a strong foundation.

Kohli looked in supreme touch, hitting paceman Harshal Patel over deep extra cover for four and then following it up with another boundary over mid-off on the next ball.

His 43-run innings was cut short when he holed out to Abhishek Sharma off left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey. He hit seven fours and a six in his 25-ball knock. After a cautious start, Salt (62) opened up to play some delectable shots and delight the crowds at the Ekana stadium.

After Salt’s departure, Bengaluru lost wickets in quick succession, including three in the space of five balls.

Pat Cummins (3-28) and Eshan Malinga (2-37) impressed the most among Hyderabad bowlers.

“They played very well. I didn’t have any answers for their attack,” said Bengaluru skipper Jitesh Sharma.

“We were rusty. The intensity was not there initially.” Earlier, Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head gave Hyderabad a flying start, going after the bowlers with disdain after Bengaluru won the toss and put Hyderabad in to bat. But Bengaluru fought back, with Lungi Ngidi having Abhishek caught at backward square leg by Salt for 34.

— AFP



Napoli's Giovanni Di Lorenzo lifts the trophy as he celebrates winning Serie A with teammates. — Reuters

Napoli crowned Serie A champions; Inter miss out

■ McTominay and Lukaku secure title for Napoli ■ Napoli celebrate fourth Serie A crown ■ Manager Conte wins Scudetto with third different team

NAPOLI secured the Serie A title in style with a dominant 2-0 home win over Cagliari on Friday thanks to goals from Scott McTominay and Romelu Lukaku.

Napoli celebrated their second Italian crown in three years - and fourth overall - after a thrilling battle with Inter whose 2-0 win at Como thanks to goals from Stefan de Vrij and Joaquin Correa left them one point adrift of their rivals.

McTominay opened the scoring for Napoli three minutes before the break with a stunning bicycle kick from Matteo Politano’s cross, sending the home crowd into a frenzy.

Lukaku doubled the lead six minutes after the restart by latching on to a long ball, shrugging off a defender and calmly finishing past Cagliari keeper Alen Sherri.

The rest of the match turned into a celebration at the Diego Armando Maradona Stadium as flares and smoke filled the pitch

“All the credit goes to the boys. Winning in Naples is difficult, these boys are doing it for the second time in two years. They are serious boys, you don’t leave in a team that always plays to win

ANTONIO CONTE
Napoli manager

before the final whistle blew and fireworks lit up the Naples sky. For manager Antonio Conte, the victory represented another milestone in his career, securing the Serie A title with a third different club, having previously achieved the feat with Juventus and Inter.

“It happened again, and it’s something wonderful. When we got to the stadium, it was honestly difficult to get in, as I don’t know how many people were there. I had a slight thought, if we let these people down, it’d be something we carried with us for a long time,” he told reporters. Conte was absent from the touchline for the final match due to suspension, but Napoli completed their task.

“All the credit goes to the boys. Winning in Naples is difficult, these boys are doing it for the second time in two years,” he said. “They are serious boys, you don’t leave in a team that always plays to win.”

In front of a buzzing crowd brimming with nerves, Napoli flew out of the blocks as Giacomo

Raspadori pounced on a rebound from a corner and drilled a low shot inches wide. Two minutes later, a teasing cross floated just too high for Andre Frank Zambo Anguissa to meet cleanly with a free header much to the chagrin of the home crowd. The chances kept coming as a blistering Napoli counter sent Raspadori through, only for Sherri to deny him smartly before Politano blasted the rebound over.

The Albanian keeper played the party spoiler in most of the first half, pulling off a string of stunning saves that left Napoli’s players frustrated. The mood dipped around the 20th minute as word spread that Inter had taken the lead in Como, sapping the energy from the stands and halting Napoli’s momentum along with the match’s intensity. Once McTominay had worked his magic, however, Napoli never looked back. “It is the well-deserved victory of an extraordinary team and a city that never stops dreaming, fighting and loving,” Naples mayor Gaetano Manfredi wrote on X. — Reuters

Norris beats Leclerc to put McLaren on pole in Monaco

MONACO: Lando Norris put Formula One champions McLaren on pole position for the Monaco Grand Prix in track-record time on Saturday, with Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc alongside on the front row for his home race.

Norris’s championship-leading team mate and rival Oscar Piastri qualified third for a showcase — but often processional — fixture that has been won only 10 times since 1950 by a driver starting lower than third.

Ferrari’s Lewis Hamilton was fourth fastest after crashing in final practice, but the seven-times world champion faces a stewards’ enquiry for allegedly impeding Red Bull’s Max Verstappen, who was fifth.

Norris was quickest with his first flying lap in the final phase but he then

- NORRIS PIPS LECLERC FOR POLE
- CHAMPIONSHIP LEADER PIASTRI WILL START THIRD
- DISMAL AFTERNOON FOR MERCEDES
- HAMILTON FACES STEWARDS’ ENQUIRY



McLaren's Lando Norris celebrates after qualifying in pole position. — Reuters

had to go even faster to deny Leclerc — who went top at the chequered flag but ended up 0.109 slower — a fourth Monaco pole in five years.

The Briton did it with a stunning effort of one minute 09.954 seconds around the treacherous and twisty metal-fenced streets, a big moment for his title hopes.

“It’s been a long time coming. I feel good. I don’t think you realise how good this feels after quite a few struggles in the last few months,” said Norris, whose qualifying pace has been a weak point.

“Monaco is a beautiful place. The hardest track to do it and up against the hometown hero.”

The pole was Norris’s career 11th, second of the season and first since the opener in Australia, a race he won.

SECOND PITSTOP

Norris is 13 points behind Piastri after seven races but overtaking is very difficult in Monaco, although a second pitstop is mandatory this year, and pole position in the principality is a huge advantage. Leclerc, quickest in all three practice sessions, had been fastest through the first phase but Norris was quicker in the second.

“We know that we don’t quite have the car to go for wins this year but this weekend the car felt good and starting second here, it’s going to be tricky to take that first place,” said the Monegasque.

French rookie Isack Hadjar was sixth for Racing Bulls with Aston Martin’s Fernando Alonso seventh and Esteban Ocon eighth for Haas. — Reuters

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OMAN IMPOSES ANTI-DUMPING DUTIES ON TILE IMPORTS FROM CHINA, INDIA

MUSCAT: Starting May 29, Oman will begin applying anti-dumping duties on ceramic and porcelain tile imports from China and India at all customs ports.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion announced the move as part of the GCC Unified Law on Anti-Dumping, Countervailing and Safeguard Measures.

Nosrah bint Sultan al Habsiyah, Director-General of Commerce and GCC committee member, said the decision follows complaints from Gulf tile manufacturers about unfairly priced imports flooding local markets.

A year-long investigation, led by the GCC's technical office, reviewed the claims and concluded that dumping practices were harming local industry. Based on its findings, the committee approved the duties for a period of five years.

Ahmed bin Salim al Rasbi, Director-General of the Competition and Anti-Monopoly Center, described the measure as a strategic move to protect the competitiveness of national industries. He noted that dumping distorts prices and undermines local manufacturers, while the new duties will promote fair trade, enhance product quality, expand local production, and generate jobs.

"This step ensures price stability and protects consumers in the long run by encouraging local investments and guarding against monopolistic practices," he added.

Khalid bin Issa al Ameri, head of Consumer Services and Market Control at the Consumer Protection Authority, said the Authority is actively monitoring the implementation of the duties. Inspections of tile retailers are being intensified to ensure price compliance and detect any irregularities.

He warned that legal action would be taken against violators and urged suppliers to follow the law. Consumers are encouraged to report any misconduct related to tile pricing or sales. — **ONA**



An investigation reviewed the claims and concluded dumping practices were harming local industry.

15 major projects to drive power demand growth

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 24

AS many as 15 major private sector-led industrial and commercial projects will be plugged into Oman's national grid over the next couple of years, bolstering electricity demand by an aggregate of 2,000 MW and driving a new phase of national economic growth.

According to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the majority state-owned grid operator, the projects are distributed across the industrial, mineral processing, data centre processing, water desalination, and oil and gas segments of the Omani economy.

Topping the list, by power demand size, is the \$1.35 billion polysilicon production plant of United Solar Polysilicon (USP), which is currently in an advanced stage of development at Sohar Freezone.

With maximum power demand estimated at 800 MW, the USP project will be the largest to be connected to the grid via a 400/220kV grid station during 2025, said OETC in its 2024 Annual Report.

Also notable are two major data hubs, each with a power demand of 200 MW, which will be connected to the grid this year. Salalah-based Green Data City, which operates the country's first licence for sustainable crypto-mining, will be connected to the 132kV Ashoor grid station with an



The polysilicon plant of UPS is set to be the largest project by power demand size to be connected to the grid this year.

installed capacity of 200 MW in 2025.

In the second phase, the hub will be expanded to reach 400MW hyperscale data centre capacity, along with associated downstream activities including renewable energy, hydrogen, sea-water A/C (SWAC), desalination, food industries and cosmetics, according to the promoters.

Exahertz, a blockchain based data centre also operating in Salalah, is also slated to be connected to 132kV Salalah Free Zone grid station in 2026 with an installed capacity of 200MW.

In 2027, the oilfield operations of Occidental of Oman (Oxy) will be connected to the grid, starting with planned hookups to the 132kV Wadi Latham grid station

with an installed capacity of 120 MW, followed by another connection to the 132kV Safah grid station with an installed capacity of 65 MW.

Sohar Freezone, a major hub for heavy industry, will witness a number of linkages to the national grid during the course of this year. JA Solar, which is establishing a major solar PV module plant with an investment of RO 217.3 million, will be connected to the SFZ grid station in 2025 with an installed capacity of 88 MW, according to OETC.

Sanvera Carbon's prebaked anode production facility, a key ingredient in the aluminium smelting and mining sectors, will also be connected to the 132kV SFZ grid station in 2025 with generation capacity of 24 MW this year.

This will be followed by the linkage of the smelter of Star Ferro Alloys to the same grid in Sohar Freezone next year, with an installed capacity of 18 MW.

Also slated for grid connection are the Duqm Cement plant (installed capacity of 29.95 MW) in 2026; Oman Cement to the 132kV Misfah grid station in 2027 with a total installed capacity of 80 MW; and the Ghubrah III Independent Water Project to the 132kV Ghubrah grid station in 2027 with installed capacity of 50.8 MW.

Rounding off the list is the Shaleem Industrial Minerals Project of Minerals Development Oman (MDO), which will be connected to the 132kV Shuwaymiyah grid station in 2029 with an installed capacity of 65.8 MW.

Ras Markaz terminal exports 17 million tonnes of petroleum products

DUQM: Oman Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO) has exported around 17 million metric tonnes of petroleum products and handled 491 vessels through its Ras Markaz Terminal in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZD) since its operations began in 2023 up to the end of April 2025.

More than 950 million barrels of crude oil have been imported through the terminal, underscoring its growing strategic importance in global energy logistics.

Eng Salim bin Marhoon al Hashmi, CEO of OTTCO, highlighted the Sultanate of Oman's ambition to become a global energy hub, stating that the company's operational success is built on rigorous safety standards and operational excellence. "Our location provides a direct link to major shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean, opening access to markets across Asia, Africa and Europe," he said.



ENG SALIM BIN
MARHOON AL
HASHMI
CEO, OTTCO

A key milestone in this direction is a strategic partnership with the Dutch firm Vopak, one of the world's leading storage companies. The agreement aims to transform Duqm into a global storage hub and supports the OQ Group's broader strategy of launching a dedicated company for storing and handling particulates.

Al Hashmi added that the partnership with Vopak is also helping OTTCO adopt international best practices,

The terminal's storage services currently meet local demand, but OTTCO is now focusing on expanding its global storage operations.



More than 950 million barrels of crude oil have been imported through the terminal.

develop Omani talent in the energy logistics sector and reinforce its sustainability goals.

Among the company's clean energy initiatives are projects supporting the storage and handling of green ammonia and hydrogen — in line with growing global demand for low-carbon energy solutions.

"Preliminary studies have already been completed to lay the groundwork for advanced infrastructure to store, handle and export green ammonia," he noted.

OTTCO is also working on shared smart infrastructure for storage services and establishing international partnerships to exchange expertise and accelerate

development, in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The Ras Markaz terminal plays a vital role in supplying the Duqm Refinery through an 80-kilometre pipeline that transports crude oil from the terminal.

The facility boasts eight large storage tanks, floating platforms for oil imports and exports, a 7-kilometre subsea pipeline, and a pumping station.

Control rooms, administrative offices, and safety installations are also housed within the terminal. One of Ras Markaz's defining advantages is its ability to blend different types of crude oil and efficiently handle vessel loading and unloading.

Positioned outside the Strait of Hormuz, the terminal offers international companies the flexibility to store crude oil in large volumes for any duration. Spanning 40 square kilometres, it has a projected storage capacity of up to 200 million barrels. — **ONA**

ADVERTORIALS

E-COLLECTIONPROJECT



The e-collection project aligns with the digital transformation policy aimed at enhancing government performance and delivering high-quality, efficient services to beneficiaries.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR HONOURS BANK MUSCAT FOR EXCELLENCE

MUSCAT: In recognition of its significant contributions to advancing digital transformation within the government services sector, the Ministry of Labour has honoured Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman.

This accolade acknowledges the Bank’s outstanding efforts in facilitating the ministry’s electronic collection operations, which have streamlined and expedited banking transactions. The e-collection project, implemented by the government, aligns with the digital transformation policy aimed at enhancing government performance and delivering high-quality, efficient services to beneficiaries.

On this occasion, Mohsen bin Saif al Maamari, Director-General of Financial and Administrative Affairs at the Ministry of Labour, expressed gratitude for Bank Muscat’s pivotal role in executing the electronic payment collection project. He highlighted the success of this collaboration in saving time and effort, in line with contemporary digital trends. Al Maamari also praised the longstanding partnership between Bank Muscat and the Ministry of Labour, emphasising their joint efforts to facilitate financial operations and improve service quality.

Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager of Personal Banking at Bank Muscat, extended his appreciation to the Ministry of Labour for this recognition. He emphasised the Bank’s commitment to investing in digital technology and modern information systems to deliver optimal banking services and solutions to customers. Al Raisi reaffirmed the Bank’s dedication to enhancing the readiness of its electronic channels and banking devices, enabling customers to conduct transactions swiftly and efficiently.

He expressed pride in the honour bestowed by the Ministry of Labour and valued the ongoing collaboration with various government and private entities. He also thanked individual and corporate customers for their trust in Bank Muscat and its services.

In today’s environment, digital channels have become essential for providing banking services and ensuring their accessibility to customers. Bank Muscat allocates an annual budget to leverage modern technological systems, applications and electronic solutions to enhance operational efficiency and ensure a secure environment for customers.

Among its recent initiatives, the Bank has established a dedicated unit for technological innovation, focused on continuously improving digital services and utilising advanced systems for cyber threat detection, thereby significantly enhancing security measures.

In the first quarter of this year, Bank Muscat witnessed a remarkable 37% increase in transactions completed through Points of Sales, along with a 14% rise in electronic transactions compared to the same period last year. These figures reflect the Bank’s commitment to harnessing modern technologies to facilitate banking transactions for its customers.

BANKING CREDIT REACHES RO 33.4 BILLION BY MARCH 2025

MUSCAT: Credit extended by Oman’s banking sector surged by 8.5% year-on-year, reaching RO 33.4 billion by the end of March 2025, according to the latest data from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Private sector credit accounted for the lion’s share, growing by 6.9% to stand at RO 27.7 billion. Within this segment, non-financial corporations held the largest portion at 46.5%, followed by individuals at 44%.



Private sector credit accounted for the lion’s share, growing by 6.9% to stand at RO 27.7 billion.

Financial corporations and other sectors comprised 5.8% and 3.7% respectively.

Meanwhile, total deposits in the banking sector grew by 6.7% to RO 32.3 billion. Private sector deposits rose by 5.9% to RO 21.3 billion.

Of these, individuals made up the majority at 50.7%, with non-financial and financial corporations contributing 30.5% and 16.5% respectively.

Other sectors accounted for 2.3%. — ONA

Asyad Shipping acquires two mega crude tankers

ASYAD Shipping, part of Oman’s Asyad Group, has expanded its fleet with the acquisition of two ultra-large crude oil tankers, each capable of carrying up to two million barrels of oil.

The strategic move is aimed at enhancing the company’s footprint in the global energy transport market and aligns with its broader growth agenda.

Emad bin Said al Khadhouri, Chief Commercial Officer of Asyad Shipping, said the investment is part of a comprehensive strategy to strengthen the company’s fleet and deepen partnerships with leading global oil transport firms.



The move is aimed at enhancing footprint in the global energy transport market.

operating models, combining short- and long-term charters with spot market contracts to respond effectively to market needs.

As part of its long-term growth plan, Asyad Shipping is investing between \$2.3 billion and \$2.7 billion.

Over \$1 billion has already been committed, including for new vessels scheduled for delivery in 2026 and 2027.

These include two liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers, four crude oil carriers and two

carriers for refined petroleum products.

The company’s operational strength was further bolstered in 2024 with the launch of its commercial office in Singapore, which now oversees the management of 38 tankers. This move has enhanced Asyad’s global operational efficiency and commercial reach.

Al Khadhouri also noted that Asyad Shipping’s in-house vessel management and marine crew services are predominantly staffed by Omanis. The

Omanisation rate across the company has reached 90 per cent, reflecting its dedication to developing national talent and maximising in-country value.

Despite steady revenue levels in 2024 compared to 2023, the company’s revised contracting approach resulted in a 30.4% increase in net profits.

Al Khadhouri added that the company’s planned initial public offering (IPO) is a testament to its robust investment management capabilities and expanding international presence. — ONA

RIA ANNOUNCES THE WINNER OF EV6 GRAND RAFFLE

MUSCAT: Recently, Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the official distributor of Kia in Oman, announced the winner of the EV6 grand raffle. The raffle winner announcement concludes Kia’s Ramadhan campaign.

Ghassan bin Saleh al Busaidy is the the lucky winner.

Set inside the Kia Showroom, the raffle draw winner was selected from various customer entries across Oman. “Kia offers modern, intelligent and premium vehicles that meet the diverse needs of today’s customers,” an official from RIA commented.

“The Kia EV6 is one of Kia’s first all-electric utility vehicles. Based on Kia’s advanced Electric-Global Modular Platform, the EV6 offers ultra-fast charging capabilities that make long trips and everyday use easier than ever,” he shared.

“This was unexpected. I purchased a Kia vehicle during the Ramadhan campaign and



The raffle draw winner was selected from various customer entries across Oman

participated in the lucky draw,” the winner exclaimed.

“This is the beginning of a new journey for us as a family. Electric vehicles are just gaining momentum in the market, and I’m beyond excited to be a part of such a revolution. The support received from the Kia team has been overwhelming,” he shared.

Kia offers manufacturer’s warranty of 5 years/100,000 km on the EV’s conventional parts and an 8-year or 160,000 km (whichever is earlier) on the EV Battery.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman, provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers.

Ranked as No1 by Kia in 2024 for sales in customer satisfaction in the Middle East and Africa, RIA offers excellent products and unmatched facilities to ensure customers’ absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way.

National Finance’s corporate fixed deposits deliver stability and growth

MUSCAT: Dedicated to delivering reliable, growth-focused solutions to its corporate clientele – the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company – National Finance’s Corporate Fixed Deposits continue to offer a secure and structured investment instrument designed to meet the strategic financial requirements of corporate entities.

This offering provides businesses with a valuable avenue for capital growth while maintaining financial

agility.

National Finance’s Corporate Fixed Deposits provide an ideal solution for both short-term cash flow management and long-term financial strategies.

With flexible tenure options ranging from 3 to 60 months, this high-yield investment is expertly tailored to meet the diverse needs of a broad spectrum of corporate entities, including SAOGs, LLCs, partnerships, trusts, pension funds



The Corporate Fixed Deposits are both accessible and highly adaptable.

and government institutions.

Commenting on the offering, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, stated, “In today’s dynamic financial landscape, the demand for stable, structured investment products has never been more critical.

“National Finance’s Corporate Fixed Deposits provide corporates with a trusted platform to safeguard their capital while ensuring

consistent returns.

“As the leading finance company in the nation, our scale, reputation and commitment to service excellence uniquely position us to meet the evolving needs of our corporate customers. This offering further underscores our dedication to empowering businesses with the financial tools necessary to make informed decisions that promote long-term sustainability and resilience.”

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The new vehicle is tailored to meet the evolving demands of the markets.

KARWA MOTORS LAUNCHES NEW MULTI-PURPOSE TRANSPORT VEHICLE

DUQM: Karwa Motors has unveiled a new multi-purpose vehicle designed for logistics, military, and public transport applications, further advancing Oman's ambitions to become a regional hub for automotive manufacturing. The launch took place at the company's state-of-the-art facility in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD). Developed through a strategic partnership with Impel and technical collaboration with MAN, the new vehicle is tailored to meet the evolving demands of local, regional, and international markets. It showcases Karwa Motors' commitment to innovation, industrial excellence, and the localisation of vehicle manufacturing in the Sultanate of Oman.

Equipped with advanced safety features and high efficiency standards, the vehicle is suitable for long-distance travel and remote area transportation, offering a robust solution for both government and private sector needs.

The launch also included a showcase of Karwa's diverse vehicle portfolio, underlining the company's growing role in supporting Oman's transportation infrastructure.

Karwa Motors further announced the continuation of its partnership with the Armored Group to develop and customise vehicles for specialised and security-related uses. This collaboration is set to expand the company's specialised product range, addressing the needs of vital sectors across the region.

Dr Ibrahim bin Ali al Balushi, CEO of Karwa Motors, said the new vehicle underscores the company's broader mission to contribute to Oman's industrial growth, meet local demand, and export high-quality products abroad.

"This new launch enhances the global visibility of Omani-made vehicles and supports the national strategy for economic diversification. It also represents a milestone in our journey towards industrial and technological advancement, positioning the Sultanate of Oman as a key centre for specialised vehicle manufacturing," Dr Al Balushi said. — ONA

RO 25.3 BILLION IN DEPOSITS AT COMMERCIAL BANKS

MUSCAT: Conventional commercial banks in Oman saw a 7.3% increase in total credit by the end of March 2025, while credit to the private sector rose by 4.9% to RO 21.3 billion. On the investment front, total holdings in securities rose slightly by 0.8% to RO 6 billion. Investments in government development bonds jumped 11% to RO 2 billion, while foreign securities dropped 8.8%, also totalling RO 2 billion. Total deposits at conventional banks climbed 3.6% to RO 25.3 billion. Government deposits rose 4.9% to RO 5.4 billion, while deposits from public sector institutions dipped 5.9% to RO 2.4 billion. Private sector deposits, which form 65.8% of total deposits, grew by 3.8% to RO 16.7 billion. — ONA

TWIN SLAP

Trump threatens new tariffs on EU, Apple



US President Donald Trump threatened on Friday to ratchet up his trade war again, pushing for a 50% tariff on European Union goods starting on June 1 and warning Apple he may slap a 25% levy on all imported iPhones bought by US consumers. The twin threats, delivered via social media, roiled global markets after weeks of de-escalation had provided some reprieve in the tariff battle. — Reuters

WORKSHOP TO BOOST HERITAGE AND TOURISM GOVERNANCE

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in partnership with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and several public and private stakeholders, will host a national workshop starting on Monday, May 26, in Muscat. The event, titled "Addressing the Challenges of Governance of Heritage and Tourism Development Management with Governorates", will run for four days. The workshop aims to strengthen



institutional coordination between the ministry and governorates, support decentralisation in the heritage and tourism sectors, and propose sustainable solutions for

facility development and financing. It is also aligned with efforts to enhance public-private partnerships and improve overall institutional performance. The event will revolve around four core themes: governance and integration, investment and tourism development, public service and tourism facilities, and enabling frameworks covering employment, localisation, legislation, performance metrics, statistics, marketing and media outreach.

Airborne Wind Energy set to make Oman debut

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 24

A Polish-based clean energy company specialising in harnessing wind energy through the deployment of kite sails, has been tapped to introduce this technology in Musandam Governorate for the first time in Oman.

The renewable energy technology, formally known as Airborne Wind Energy (AWE), will be deployed by Njord Energy Inc, headquartered in the Polish city of Wroclaw, under a partnership agreement signed with Musandam Global Investment Co SAOC, a community-owned, publicly-listed closed joint stock company.

"This initiative is a bold step forward in aligning with Oman Vision 2040, promoting energy diversification, environmental stewardship, and technological localisation.

By supporting the local development and future manufacturing of AWE components, we aim to stimulate regional innovation, create high-value jobs, and open export opportunities for homegrown



Dignitaries attending the signing of a partnership agreement between Musandam Global Investment Company and Njord Energy Inc.

solutions," said Musandam Global Investment Co in a post. The partnership will pave the way for the development of a pilot project that "leverages high-altitude wind and AI-powered systems to deliver clean, sustainable energy to Musandam's remote and mountainous areas," it added.

Njord Energy says its Airborne Wind Energy system utilises kite sails to capture wind energy efficiently at altitudes up to 1,000 metres. "This plug-and-play system operates autonomously, generating power from 10 kW to over 500 kW with minimal environmental impact and at

a significantly lower cost than traditional turbines," it noted on its website. Given the Musandam's remote and rugged mountainous settings, Airborne Wind Energy (AWE) technology – a term also associated with Kite Wind Power or Tethered Wind Energy Systems – is seen as cost-competitive in supplying clean electricity to small, isolated communities distributed across the governorate. These systems typically harness wind energy at higher altitudes (between 200 and 1,000 metres) using tethered flying devices such as kites, drones, or gliders. They can access stronger and more consistent wind currents than conventional wind turbines, which are typically limited to around 100-150 metres in height. The commercialisation of Airborne Wind Energy in Musandam can potentially drive the deployment of this technology in supporting the sustainable energy requirements of remote communities located elsewhere along coastal or mountainous parts of the country.

OMAN'S INFLATION RISES 0.9 PER CENT IN APRIL

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman recorded a 0.9-per cent increase in its general inflation rate in April 2025 compared to the same month in 2024, based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) with 2018 as the base year, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Leading the price increases was the personal goods and miscellaneous services category, which jumped by 7.0 per cent. This was followed by health services, up 3.2 per cent, and transportation, which rose 3.1 per cent.

Other sectors also saw modest increases: restaurants and hotels (1.5%), clothing and footwear (0.6%), culture and entertainment (0.3%), and education (0.1%).

Meanwhile, some categories experienced declines. Food and



Leading the price increases was the personal goods and miscellaneous services category.

non-alcoholic beverages fell by 0.3 per cent, while furniture, household equipment and maintenance dropped by 0.1 per cent. Prices remained stable in housing, utilities, communication and tobacco. Within the food and

beverages group, the largest price hikes were noted in food products not classified elsewhere (3.5%), followed by milk, cheese and eggs (3.1%), sugar and sweets, and oils and fats (1.1%). Fruits edged up 0.7 per cent, and meat rose slightly

by 0.1 per cent. In contrast, vegetables saw the sharpest decline at 6.1 per cent, followed by fish and seafood (3.0%), bread and cereals (0.7%), and non-alcoholic beverages (0.1%). Al Dakhiliyah Governorate recorded the highest inflation rate among Oman's governorates, up by 1.8 per cent year-on-year. It was followed by Musandam (1.5%), Al Dhahirah and Al Sharqiyah South (1.3% each). Muscat, Al Buraimi and Al Wusta each registered a 0.9-per cent rise. Dhofar saw a 0.6-per cent increase, Al Batinah North (0.5%) and Al Sharqiyah North (0.4%). Notably, Al Batinah South was the only governorate to register a decline in inflation, down 0.1 per cent. — ONA

REVISED DOWN

Lower prices boost new US home sales



Sales of new US single-family homes surged to more than a three-year high in April as builders lowered prices to attract buyers, but rising mortgage rates and economic uncertainty remained headwinds for the housing market. Data for February and March was revised down, taking some of the shine from the unexpected increase in sales last month reported by the Commerce Department on Friday. — Reuters

NEW EXPANSION

Saudi Aramco asset sales to free up funds



Saudi state oil giant Aramco is exploring potential asset sales to free up funds, two people with knowledge of the matter said, as it pursues an international expansion and weathers lower crude prices. Aramco is the world's largest oil-producing company and the main source of Saudi state revenue. The firm will slash dividend payouts by nearly a third this year. — Reuters

The real disruption: EVs are rewriting the insurance rulebook



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The writer is the head of business and politics section at Oman Observer

Electric vehicles are not just disrupting the car market – they are quietly rewriting the logic of insurance. Last week's move by Oman's Financial Services Authority (FSA), mandating full insurance coverage for electric vehicles (EVs) through Decision No. 14/2025, has been reported as a compliance correction.

But beneath the regulatory language lies something far more consequential: a structural stress test for a sector that has long operated on traditional assumptions. This is not merely about enforcing Article (2) (b) of Royal Decree No. 34/94.

It is about confronting a truth that many insurers have yet to internalise – that the 20th-century insurance model, built on combustion engines, predictable depreciation, and linear claims data, is increasingly out of sync with the energy and mobility systems of the 21st century.

Electric vehicles are changing the nature of automotive risk. Their parts are fewer, but more expensive.

Their failures are less mechanical, more digital. Damage to a battery pack can render an entire vehicle a write-off. And the real differentiator? Software. Insurers are no longer just covering machines – they're covering code.

In this new reality, old underwriting models no longer apply. Risk is shifting from engine blocks to electronics. Repair costs depend less on metal and more on firmware. And the claims process now requires collaboration with EV platforms, not just body shops.

What the FSA has done, then, is more than demand inclusion. It has cracked open the door for reinvention. By forcing insurers to cover EVs – even when technical infrastructure is still developing – the Authority is saying, in effect: evolve now, or risk being irrelevant tomorrow.

This evolution won't be easy. Insurers must design pricing models that factor in non-linear depreciation, battery health, and real-time diagnostics.

They must account for servicing ecosystems that are still emerging. And most crucially, they must do so while maintaining profitability and public trust.

Yet therein lies the opportunity. Oman's insurers can become pioneers in designing EV-native insurance products – not retrofits of petrol-era policies. Imagine usage-based premiums tied to battery efficiency.

Coverage tiers linked to over-the-air software upgrades. Partnerships with EV importers to create bundled policies at point of sale. These are not hypotheticals – they are already emerging in leading global markets.

But beneath the regulatory language lies something far more consequential: a structural stress test for a sector that has long operated on traditional assumptions. This is not merely about enforcing Article (2) (b) of Royal Decree No 34/94.

But this transformation requires more than actuarial tables. It demands vision. Oman's insurers must see themselves not just as risk absorbers but as enablers of national policy – partners in the country's energy transition under Vision 2040.

The FSA's decision to allow cash compensation where spare parts or garages are unavailable was a practical interim step. But it must not become a crutch. It is the market's responsibility – and the regulator's expectation – that infrastructure for EV servicing and repairs scale quickly. The longer insurers delay adapting, the more they will expose themselves to mispricing, disputes, and brand erosion.

More broadly, this moment could serve as a blueprint for regulatory innovation in other markets. Oman has quietly taken the lead in embedding electric mobility into insurance law – ahead of many jurisdictions still treating EVs as fringe anomalies.

For the policyholder, the impact is direct: access, protection, and peace of mind. For the sector, the implications are existential. This is no longer about adjusting to electric vehicles. It's about surviving the algorithmic economy they usher in.

The EV is not just a new type of vehicle. It is a new language of risk. Oman's insurance companies must now learn to speak it – fluently, urgently, and strategically.

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF SAND BATTERIES FOR THE GULF



NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The writer is a Media and Communication Master's graduate

IN THE global quest for sustainable energy, the spotlight often shines on solar panels, wind turbines, and lithium-ion batteries.

But in the quiet town of Kankaanpää, Finland, a modest silo packed with sand is rewriting the rules of energy storage; offering a promising solution to one of renewable energy's most stubborn challenges: what to do when the sun

isn't shining and the wind isn't blowing.

The world's first commercial sand battery became operational in July 2022, the result of a collaboration between Finnish startup Polar Night Energy and local utility Vatajankoski (Polar Night Energy, 2022).

The installation, a 7-meter-high steel container filled with around 100 tons of coarse sand, uses excess renewable electricity to heat air, which is then circulated through the sand, raising its temperature to about 600°C.

The stored thermal energy is later used to supply the town's district heating network, warming homes and even a municipal swimming pool (BBC Future, 2022). Unlike conventional batteries, which store electricity, sand batteries store heat - a key advantage in cold climates where heating demand exceeds electrical use.

The Kankaanpää system delivers 100 kW of heating power with a thermal storage capacity of 8 MWh, allowing energy to be held for days or weeks with minimal loss (Polar Night Energy, 2022).

A second installation in Pornainen, southern Finland, is currently under development.

Slated for commissioning in 2025, this larger unit will store up to 100 MWh using 2,000 tons of crushed soapstone, a byproduct of fireplace manufacturing. The system is expected to cut the town's oil-based heating use by over 60% (PV Magazine, 2024).

The simplicity and sustainability of sand battery technology make it especially appealing. Sand is abundant, affordable, and thermally stable. Unlike lithium-ion systems, sand batteries involve no toxic materials or rare earth elements and operate without moving parts—minimizing long-term maintenance and degradation (NREL, 2024).

Although the concept remains new, it is attracting global attention. The US National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) has confirmed sand's potential for long-duration thermal storage, capable of maintaining high temperatures with minimal heat loss over time (NREL, 2024).

The nexus of ICV, human capital development



OMAN Vision 2040 strives to dynamically shift the limb of Oman's economic structure towards a diverse knowledge-based economy alongside social development

Another goal is to fulfil the objectives of Vision 2040 which has, in turn, resulted in Oman setting new bounds for productivity and innovation.

A central element, for now, is mobilised towards a strategic policy called ICV (In-Country Value) which aims to cultivate the local economy by restricting the outflow of economic value from Oman, enabled through sustainable job creation and localised employment.

Alongside this is the Human Capital Development which strives to build an innovative Omani workforce capable of sustaining the nation's long term growth.

This powerful synergy between ICV and Human Capital Initiatives serves to yield immense value for Oman through nurturing the local talent to eradicate over dependency on foreign labour.

Not having to spend externally on essential profits that come through employment results in an economically self sustaining country.

This serves, alongside capturing the cores of capital depletion, to cultivate the intellect Oman needs to stay relevant competitively in the future.

This text analyses the intricate relationships of ICV and Human Capital Development in Oman, and examines how policies, strategies for specific sectors, and education systems are integrating to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth.

By addressing the gaps, highlighting the success stories, and offering strategic insights, we aspire to demonstrate how Oman can optimally utilise ICV to emerge as a leading regional human-centred economic development hub.

The pillars of ICV include: Employment and training of Omanis; Retention of expenditure within Oman; Retention of local service providers and suppliers; and Omani goods and services.



This powerful synergy between ICV and Human Capital Initiatives serves to yield immense value for Oman through nurturing the local talent.



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

A specialist in local content/ In-country value, the writer is the Acting Director-General of Local Content, previously assigned to the General Secretariat of the Tender Board.

All of these pillars support Oman Vision 2040 which states that there is a need for a highly productive and empowered workforce to sustain a diversified and sustainable economy.

There exists a legal framework to regulate and monitor the ICV delivery of a company's ICV initiatives through tendering processes.

In the oil and gas spheres, there is a new legislation that requires companies to budget for mandatory spending on training Omanis, supporting local SMEs and funding community development projects.

This has resulted in the establishment of training and certification centres, and even working with local schools to develop programmes valued by the workforce.

This is how ICV has transformed from a policy instrument into a tool that strategically drives socio-economic development by ensuring that Oman's natural resources and industrial projects result in sustainable national value.

DEVELOPING HUMAN CAPITAL (HCD) IN OMAN

The term 'Human Capital Development' describes the enhancement of skills, knowledge and competence of an individual so that productivity and contribution to the economy improves.

In regard to Oman, human capital development is crucial for achieving the objectives put forth in Vision 2040 where innovation, inclusivity and human empowerment form the basis of human society.

During the past two decades, Oman has significantly improved its education, vocational training and general workforce development.

There has been a remarkable improvement in the access to primary and secondary education and an increase in the number of higher education and technical colleges. Sultan Qaboos University and the University of Technology and Applied Sciences along with several private colleges have played a significant role in providing a workforce of skilled graduates.

The Omanisation policy is one of the main elements of Oman's human capital strategy. The Omanisation policy is meant to reduce the reliance on foreign labour by putting up minimum hiring quotas for Omanis in all sectors and industries.

Employment opportunities for Omanis are guaranteed while at the same time boosting citizens' participation in economic activities.

There is still a gap between qualifications and actual jobs because the available education does not match opportunity, which businesses regard as having sufficient soft skills, technical skills and work experience. Hence, there appears to be greater focus on real-world applications through curriculum reforms, strengthening STEM fields and initiatives supporting education.

Consequently, a number of new government initiatives have been implemented, including: The National Training Fund (NTF), which finances training activities within specific industries for employers; Educational scholarships which, accompanied by internships, enhance career prospects through tangible, real-life engagements; and Creative self-employment innovation and entrepreneurship hubs for schools designated to advance innovation and guide students in setting up their businesses.

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ART/LIFE



T R A V E L

WRAPPING UP YOUR OMAN ADVENTURE: THE BEST SOUVENIRS TO TAKE HOME

> 20

FILM

Norway film starring Elle Fanning gets 19-minute Cannes ovation



DIRECTOR JOACHIM Trier was moved to tears behind the camera while filming his latest heartfelt work, “Sentimental Value”. The film, which tells the story of a quietly fractured family, received an extraordinary 19-minute standing ovation at its Cannes premiere on Thursday. Trier admitted, “It sounds cheesy, but I wept a lot making this film because I was so touched by the actors.” The cast portrays artistic family members in Oslo who struggle to communicate, despite their sophistication.

The actors are Trier’s friends, and he explained they were partly inhabiting their characters and partly being themselves, grappling with personal issues. This sentiment echoes Trier’s previous success, “The Worst Person in the World”, which earned Norway two Oscar nominations and won Renate Reinsve Best Actress at Cannes in 2021. Critics acclaimed that film, suggesting it too deserved the Palme d’Or.

Trier likened himself to a family member, sharing that he rehearsed his script in the same house in Oslo where the film was shot — a character in its own right. Central to the story are the absent father, a retired arthouse film-maker played by Stellan Skarsgard, and his stage actress daughter, Reinsve. Trier reflected, “Many families carry wounds and grief, and talk often doesn’t help — it can lead to arguments, keeping us stuck in our assigned roles.”

The dynamics shift dramatically with the arrival of Hollywood star Elle Fanning, who plays a character close to her own persona — a fan of the father, eager to fund a stalled script. Fanning described her experience as a fan-turned-actor, flying to Oslo between projects. “Joachim sent me the script, and I cried through the entire thing,” she said. “It’s an intensely personal piece for Joachim; you can feel that raw honesty.”

Trier, acknowledged the film’s meta aspect — it’s a family story created by a film-making family, with a Hollywood star in tow. Despite this, he reassured that his own family has seen and supported the film. His father, he said, is inspired by renowned auteurs like Bergman, Kieslowski and Cassavetes.

Fanning praised Trier’s collaborative style, calling him a “mensch” — a genuinely kind and talented director. Trier’s process involves patience and a light approach to profound themes, often allowing quiet moments to unfold naturally, much like therapy. Critics at Cannes lauded “Sentimental Value” as “exquisite” and “gorgeous”, with some calling its ending one of the most satisfying in recent cinema. — AFP

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



HERITAGE

Hugo Gautraud, 15, a campanology passionate, checks one of the two bells of the Visitation Chapel in Stuckange, north-eastern France. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

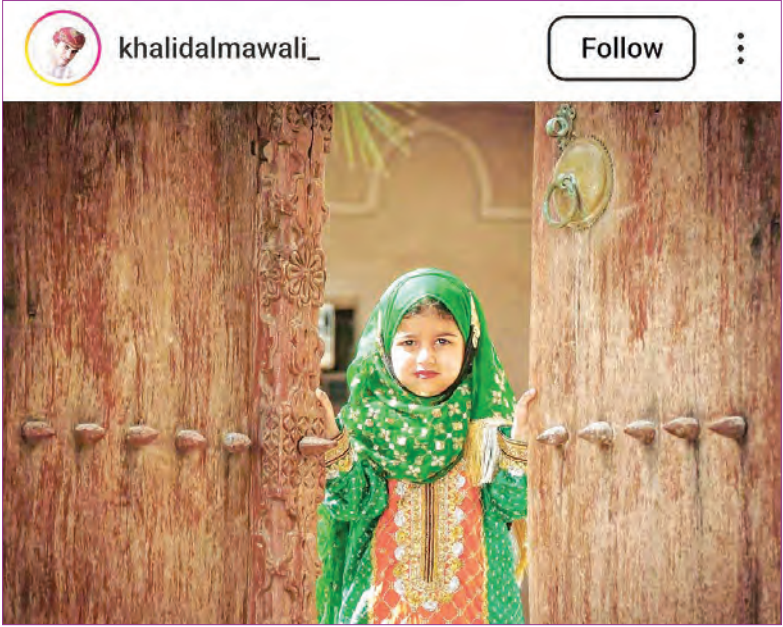
Iranian actress and director Erika Abdolrazzaghi, gestures as she speaks at Tehran’s Shahr Theatre where she is presenting William Shakespeare’s “King Lear”. — AFP



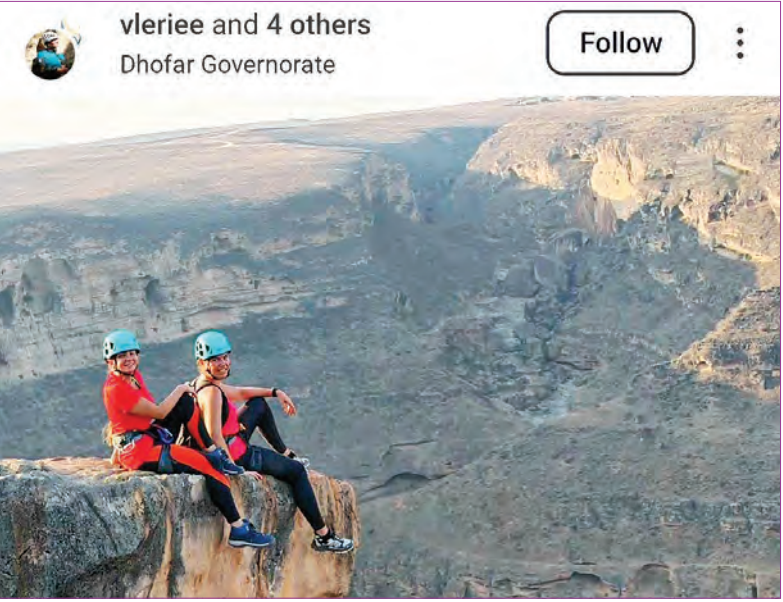
LIFESTYLE

British production designer Sarah Greenwood (L) and British set decorator Katie Spencer (R) pose during the Academy Museum media viewing for “Barbie to Anna Karenina: The Cinematic Worlds of Sarah Greenwood and Katie Spencer” in Los Angeles. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



A Warm Welcome



Beauty of Remote Places

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Teeth hurt? It could be because of a 500-million-year-old fish



SCIENTISTS have long debated the origins of teeth, but a recent study suggests they initially served a different purpose than today’s chewing function. About 500 million years ago, the earliest precursors called odontodes appeared on the outside of primitive fish, not in their mouths. Today, species like sharks and stingrays still have microscopic teeth on their skin, giving it a rough texture. Theories about their initial purpose include protection from predators, aiding movement, or mineral storage. However, new research published in Nature indicates that these structures originally functioned as sensory organs, transmitting sensations to nerves.

Yara Haridy, a researcher from the University of Chicago, started her investigation to find the earliest vertebrate fossil. She analysed tiny fossils and focused on dentine, the inner layer of teeth that sends sensory information. One fossil,

Anatolepis, appeared to contain structures that might have held dentine. But closer examination revealed these features resembled sensilla — sensory organs used by arthropods like insects and crustaceans to detect temperature, vibrations and smells. This led to the realisation that Anatolepis was an invertebrate, and that early odontodes may have evolved from sensory structures independently in different animal groups. Haridy confirmed that nerves are present in modern fish teeth, supporting the idea that early odontodes were sensitive. These findings highlight how sensory functions in teeth are an ancient adaptation that helped early fish survive in predator-rich environments. Over time, these structures became part of the feeding mechanism, but their original role as sensory tools is a fascinating evolutionary legacy. — AFP



Century-old Tokyo geisha festival revives dying art

THE GEISHAS glide with measured steps across a wooden stage, offering a glimpse of a long-misunderstood tradition that is becoming a rare sight in Japan. Dancing with paper fans and dressed in kimonos, the entertainers were rehearsing without the striking white make-up and sculpted hairstyles they are famous for. But for seven days from Wednesday the women will perform in full splendour at the 100-year-old Azuma Odori festival at a theatre in the heart of the Japanese capital. In the popular imagination geishas are often confused with courtesans, but in fact their work — as trained masters of refined old artforms — does not involve intimate acts. “Japanese people themselves often don’t understand or have the wrong idea about what geishas do,” Hisafumi Iwashita, a writer specialised in geisha culture, said. In Japanese, the word geisha means “person of the arts” — a woman or man trained in traditional Japanese performing arts. But the core role of geishas goes far beyond “just dancing and singing,” Iwashita said. Geishas in different parts of Japan are also known for different skills. In Kyoto, where they are called geikos, “dance is seen as the most important artform,” Iwashita said. Tokyo geishas meanwhile are known for their singing and talents on the shamisen, which resembles a slim three-stringed guitar. This year for the first time ever, geishas from 19 Japanese regions are participating in the annual Azuma Odori, as well as those from Tokyo’s Shinbashi district who usually perform. Around 180 geishas will take part overall, taking to the stage in small groups for two shows each day. Koiku, a Shinbashi geisha, said her job first and foremost involves “welcoming and entertaining visitors at traditional restaurants called ryotei”. Entry to these expensive, exclusive establishments, found in



historic geisha districts known as hanamachi, is by invitation only.

- 10 YEAR’S TRAINING -

Today, around 40 geishas work in Shinbashi — many fewer than in times gone by — and all of them will appear at the Azuma Odori. “Not so long ago, there were 100 of us, then 60... and the number keeps going down,” Koiku said. Life as a geisha is tough, with a strict practice schedule even for established performers. “In general, it takes 10 years to be seen as competent,” said Koiku, who

was enticed by her love of music and dance. The geishas’ choreography, watched by their instructors and accompanied by live musicians at the rehearsal, includes playful touches such as miming the movements of a fox. It is not polite to ask a geisha’s age, but some taking part in the show have been performing for five or six decades. Koiku said she is worried that if nothing changes, it will be “too late” for the waning geisha tradition. Azuma Odori’s roots date back to Japan’s 1868-1912 Meiji era, when dance began to take a more central role in geisha performances. Geishas, who would entertain government officials at banquets, played “a key role” in shaping modern Japanese culture, according to the expert Iwashita. He thinks the main reason for the falling number of geishas in Japan is simply that they have fewer clients. While geishas once made a living from Japan’s wealthy elite, in 1993 then-prime minister Morihiro Hosokawa called for an end to government banquets in ryotei restaurants. That was a “tough blow for the industry”, Iwashita said. Koiku agrees that the “world has changed” — including the type of socialising where business deals are sought. “Nowadays, companies are increasingly organising receptions in their offices or other venues,” she said. Shinbashi Enbujo Theatre, where Azuma Odori will take place, was inaugurated in 1925 with the festival’s first edition. It was rebuilt in 1948 after being destroyed in World War II, and its lavish post-war performances influenced Japanese Kabuki theatre before being simplified to audience tastes. With the future of the geisha profession uncertain, for Iwashita, “the fact that such a theatre still exists, and that it is the 100th anniversary (of Azuma Odori) is nothing short of a miracle”. — AFP

FEATURES



WRAPPING UP YOUR OMAN ADVENTURE: THE BEST SOUVENIRS TO TAKE HOME

BY YERU EBUEN
PHOTOS BY DUSIT D2 JABAL AKDHAR

AFTER exploring the stunning mountains, wandering colourful souqs, and soaking in the rich culture of Oman, it's only natural to want a little something to remind you of your trip. Luckily, Oman is home to dozens of traditional souqs — bustling markets packed with unique treasures that make perfect gifts or mementos. Whether you're shopping in the historic Nizwa Souq, the lively Muttrah Souq in Muscat, or even grabbing something at the airport before you leave, there are plenty of authentic items that encapsulate Oman's rich heritage.

While some souvenirs are special and artisans' crafts, you'll also find easy-to-find items that will make memorable gifts without the hassle of haggling or searching the entire country. Here are five of the easiest, most meaningful souvenirs you can pick up during your trip to Oman.

OMANI PERFUME AND FRANKINCENSE INCENSE

Oman's fragrant market is legendary, and frankincense is perhaps the most iconic aroma linked with the country. Known for producing some of the world's highest-quality frankincense, Oman's frankincense makes a lovely gift. You'll find frankincense merchants in almost every souq, especially at Muttrah and Nizwa. Looks-wise, the whitest, clearest lumps are regarded as the highest quality. If you don't want to carry resin home, opt for frankincense-infused products like perfumes, essential oils, or scented candles, which are widely available and easy to pack.

A small incensed burner from Dhofar or a box of frankincense water (mercifully compact) makes for a simple yet fragrant souvenir. These aromatic remnants of Oman's ancient trade routes serve as a subtle reminder of the country's historic importance in the spice and incense trade.



OMANI DATE VARIETIES

Dates are more than just a snack; they're a cultural staple. Oman produces over 250 varieties of dates — each with its own unique sweetness and texture. A visit to the date souq at Nizwa or Muttrah is your best chance to sample different types and pick out your favourite. The Khalas date, in particular, is highly prized and considered one of the most decadent.

Dates come packaged in beautifully decorated boxes or as simple wooden or woven containers, making them perfect gifts. On the go, a bag of locally grown Omani dates (readily available at the souq for around RO 1 per kilogramme) makes a sweet and practical souvenir. They're also ideal for sharing with friends and family — a tasty touch of Oman across miles.

OMANI SILVER AND TRADITIONAL JEWELLERY

Perhaps the most iconic Omani souvenir is the Khanjar, the silver dagger worn by men — but frankly, it's hardly practical as a gift for everyone. Instead, explore Omani silverware — finely crafted jewellery, tables, and decorative items created by skilled artisans in the country.

A particularly popular item is the silver date container or small decorative plates, which make excellent souvenirs and home accessories. These pieces are crafted with intricate designs reflecting Oman's rich culture and add a touch of elegance to any home. You can find finely made silverware at souqs or in speciality craft shops. Just remember, bargaining is part of the experience here — so don't be shy to negotiate for a good price.

TRADITIONAL OMANI CLOTHING AND TEXTILES

Oman's traditional dress is both distinctive and beautiful. Men wear the dishdasha (a long white robe), and women often wear colourful embroidered dresses. However, for souvenirs, keep an eye out for kuma — embroidered caps worn by Omanis, often with intricate geometric designs. These are affordable, portable, and instantly recognisable as a symbol of Omani identity.

Additionally, indigenous textiles like beautifully woven rugs from Ghul or woven scarves are fantastic keepsakes. A small woven bag or a patterned fabric makes for a unique tribal-inspired memento of your trip that's easy to carry home.

LOCAL ARTISANAL POTTERY AND HANDICRAFTS

Oman is home to traditional pottery, particularly from Bahla — a Unesco World Heritage site famed for its clay craftsmanship. If you have the time, visiting the pottery workshops in Bahla can be rewarding; otherwise, you can find a selection of decorated pots, bowls and lamps at major souqs. These are fantastic as decorative items or functional pieces for your own home.

Oman's pottery and handicrafts are a testament to the country's rich artisanal tradition. While Bahla is renowned for its handcrafted ceramics, you can also find smaller pieces in many souqs and craft markets across the country. These items often feature traditional geometric or floral patterns, reflecting Oman's historical artistry. An intricately decorated bowl or a uniquely shaped vase can serve as both a beautiful home decor piece and a tangible memory of your journey through Oman's ancient villages and bustling markets. When shopping, look for authentic items made from local clay — they're usually more durable and carry a genuine touch of Omani heritage.



FINAL TIPS FOR SOUVENIR SHOPPING IN OMAN

When shopping for souvenirs in Oman, remember that haggling is customary in most traditional markets — don't be shy to negotiate to get a good deal. Always inspect items carefully, particularly silverware and textiles, to ensure quality. While it's tempting to buy numerous items, consider what will be easy to carry. And most importantly, try to support local artisans; many of the best souvenirs are handcrafted by skilled Omanis, helping preserve their timeless crafts.

If you're pressed for time, the airport shops and dedicated souvenir stores often have a selection of these essential items. Whether it's a bag of fragrant frankincense, a box of delectable dates, or an embroidered kuma, these treasures reflect Oman's rich cultural tapestry and will serve as treasured mementos long after your journey ends.