



posed performance to clinch silver in the men's 10m rifle competition.

The women's 10m rifle team of Safaa Al Jabri, Al Anoud Al Khalil and Amina Al Tarshiya contributed another bronze medal to Oman's tally.

Earlier, Oman's fencing team also enjoyed notable success, collecting five medals led by Israa Siyabi, who won gold medals in both the foil and épée categories. Ali Al Busaidi claimed bronze in foil fencing, while Ahmed Kaska and Al Harith Al Harthi secured bronze medals in the épée competitions. **See also »A8**

3 India and the UAE exchanged various pacts and MoUs aimed at expanding cooperation. **>B4**

Foreign insurance companies also posted solid growth, with insurance revenues increasing by 4.19% to approximately OMR974 million, compared to OMR 934 million in the previous year. **>A6**

EXPERTS

'Don't sleep in cars with engine running'

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Sleeping inside parked cars for a long time in a closed space with the engine running can cause sudden death, experts warned on Saturday.

The Royal Oman Police called on everyone to stop the engine while sleeping or remaining inside enclosed spaces due to the risk of suffocation from toxic gases.

Doctors said toxic carbon monoxide (CO) emitted from a vehicle can enter the cabin under such circumstances and prove fatal to passengers sleeping inside.

"Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas and is often called the 'silent killer'. It is dangerous because it is colourless and odourless, making it impossible to detect inside the car," said Dilip Singhvi, Specialist in Internal Medicine and Diabetes at Burjeel Hospital, said. "People may fall asleep after inhaling it. Continued exposure can affect breathing, stop heart function and eventually lead to death," he added.

The warning comes after the South Al Batinah Governorate Police dealt with a report involving four Asian nationals who were found dead inside a vehicle in Al Musannah Governorate after allegedly inhaling carbon monoxide emitted from the vehicle's exhaust while the engine was running.

Mohammed Yaseen Chowdhury, President, Chattogram Association in Oman, said the victims were Bangladeshis. "All four men were aged between 21 and 35 years and belonged to the same family. Efforts are underway to send their bodies to Bangladesh on Tuesday," he added.


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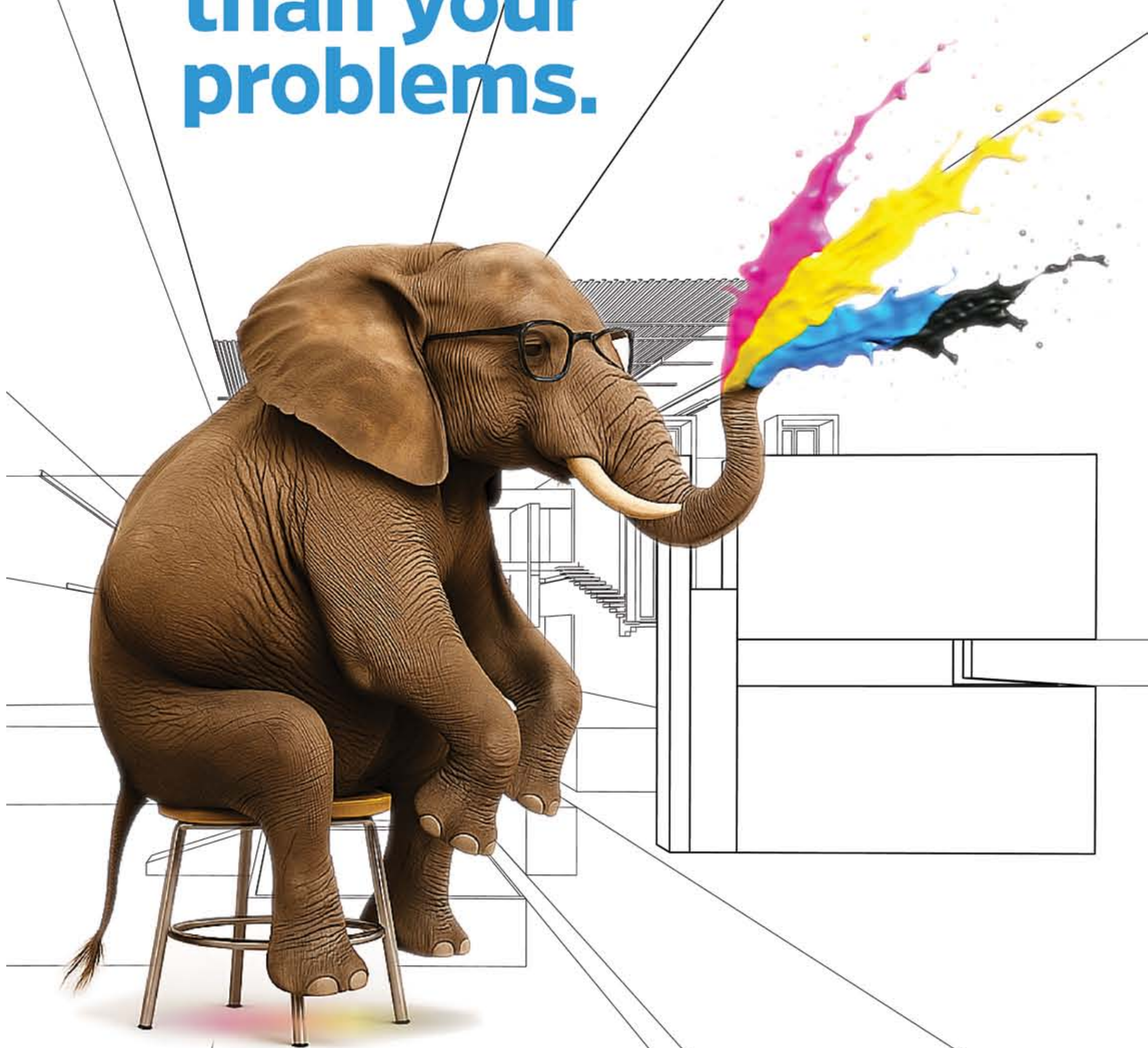
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Protecting the Invisible Majority

What first sparked your passion for environmental work, and what achievement are you most proud of so far?

From a young age, I always enjoyed spending time outdoors, curious about rocks and shells and how nature functions. Biology was my favorite subject and I pursued a degree that would provide me the right mix of adventure and outdoor field work alongside biology and natural sciences.

My first job as a marine researcher allowed me to dive deeper into understanding the significance of coastal and marine habitats and learn more about endangered species, and the threats that they face – and gave me a drive to want to do the best that we can to minimize impacts to endangered species and support healthy ecosystems.

I do not have a single achievement that I am most proud of, but I can say that I'm proud of the fact that I have dedicated 20 years towards commitment to nature conservation.



Suaad Al Harthi **Executive Director, Environmental Society of Oman**

Suaad Al Harthi has spent nearly two decades turning science into stewardship. As Executive Director of the Environment Society of Oman, she leads conservation efforts that protect some of the world's most endangered marine species while building environmental awareness from classrooms to coastlines. From coral reefs to humpback whales, her work blends research, community action, and quiet persistence shaping a future where conservation is practical, inclusive, and deeply rooted in Oman's natural heritage.

TOP WOMEN LEADERS IN OMAN

the significance of marine ecosystems.

A main component of project implementation is to encourage female leadership and participation in field science.

What's one major challenge you've faced in your work, and how did you overcome it?

The ongoing challenge in conservation work is finding the

right balance between the interests for human activities and development and the preservation of endangered habitats and ecosystems.

I do my best to take a pragmatic approach and provide practical information on how we can work together as a collective society towards a more sustainable future keeping in mind that we need all players on board from school students, the youth, private sectors as well as government entities to all work collectively and these positive steps can ensure a more sustainable future.

The other challenge which is always ongoing working for a charity organization such as the Environment Society of Oman

- is fundraising to support our initiatives and programs. We do our best to encourage donations from the public, schools, hotels and the private sector – as no amount is too small to contribute towards making a difference and supporting us at conserving Oman's natural heritage.

How do you see the role of women in environmental leadership growing in Oman and the region?

The role of women in environmental leadership is certainly increasing in Oman and across the region. When I first started work, women were not necessarily encouraged to join the environmental sector particularly because of the outdoor and

sometimes remote field work involved. However, today women are much better supported and I see a growing number of women taking on environmental careers and joining field science.

What advice would you give to young people, especially women, who want to pursue a career in conservation?

For young women, I would advise them to find what they are passionate about and wholeheartedly pursue it. It's important for them to dictate their own narrative and not allow other people's skepticism to drive their ambitions. At the end of the day it's their actions and achievements that will shine through.

Omani Hajj Mission team heads to Medina

Members of the Hajj Companies Supervision delegation will also conduct field visits to inspect the conditions of Omani pilgrims arriving in Medina



MAKKAH AL-MUKAR-RAMAH: A team from the Omani Hajj Mission for the year 1447 AH, headed by Dr. Zahir bin Abdullah Al-Hosni, Deputy Head of the Mission for Hajj Affairs and Hajj Companies, departed on Saturday for Medina to provide services to Omani pilgrims arriving in the holy city.

Dr. Al-Hosni said in a state-

ment to Oman News Agency that around 3,000 pilgrims will travel to Medina to visit the Prophet's Mosque before proceeding to Makkah to perform Hajj rituals. He noted that the mission team will continue operating in Madinah until the fifth of Dhul-Hijjah.

He explained that the team's work in Medina includes deliver-

ing religious preaching and guidance services through the Fatwa and Religious Guidance delegation, healthcare services through the medical delegation, and security and safety services through the delegation of the ROP.

Members of the Hajj Companies Supervision delegation will also conduct field visits to inspect

the conditions of Omani pilgrims arriving in Medina, meet them at their accommodation sites, and ensure they receive services agreed upon under contracts signed with Hajj companies.

The total number of pilgrims from Oman this year reached 14,000, including 13,560 Omani pilgrims and 440 residents.

BRITISH-OMANI SOCIETY

RAM members visit London to exchange views

Times News Service

LONDON: A number of members of the Royal Academy of Management (RAM) visited the British-Omani Society in the British capital, London, as part of a program aimed at enhancing knowledge exchange and learning about leading British institutional and administrative experiences.

The visit provided an opportunity to exchange views on several topics related to developing leadership competencies and strengthening academic and professional partnerships between Omani and British institutions.

The visit also included a dinner hosted by the British-Omani Society for members of the Royal Academy of Management. The event was attended by Badr bin Mohammed Al Mandhari, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Dr. Ali bin Qassim Al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Management., in addition to a number of officials, diplomats, academics and British figures interested in strengthening



Omani-British relations.

During the gathering, participants emphasised the deep-rooted historical ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom, highlighting the importance of continued cooperation in the fields of management, leadership and capacity building.

They also stressed the importance of exchanging expertise and benefiting from international experiences in modern management, governance and institutional innovation. The visit comes as part of the RAM's efforts to expand the international cooperation and strengthen communication with global intellectual and academic institutions.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Omani students bring laurels for country at US competition

Times News Service

WASHINGTON: Student teams from the Sultanate of Oman participating in the International Science and Engineering Fair 2026 achieved outstanding scientific accomplishments, reflecting the capabilities of Omani students and their excellence in research and innovation at the global level, while reinforcing the distinguished presence of the Ministry of Education in international scientific forums.

Students Ward bint Badr Al-Balushi and Rimas bint Qais Al-Balushi from Al-Amal School (10-12), affiliated with the Directorate General of Education in South Al Batinah Governorate, secured fourth place globally in the field of environmental engineering for their invention titled "A passive system based on ophiolites using

plasmonic technology and photocatalytic treatment of water associated with oil production."

The project offers innovative solutions to address environmental challenges related to the oil sector through advanced water treatment technologies.

In another achievement, students Ibrahim bin Mohammed Al-Zarouni and Abdul Rahman bin Khalid Al-Balushi from Saad Bin Abi Waqas School (9-12), affiliated with the Directorate General of Education in North Al Batinah Governorate, received a special award and student membership from the American Psychological Association in the field of social and behavioural sciences.

The recognition came for their invention titled "An artificial intelligence-based system for analysing and supporting student interaction within the classroom."

The exhibition brings together leading innovators and researchers from around the world to compete across 22 scientific disciplines, including engineering, computer science and social sciences, reflecting the latest scientific and technological developments.

Showcasing student research and innovations

The event serves as a global platform for showcasing student research and innovations and promoting a culture of scientific research and creativity. It also provides students with opportunities to exchange scientific expertise and experiences with peers from various countries, broadening horizons for learning and cultural exchange.

These achievements represent an extension of the Minis-

try of Education's efforts to support scientific innovation and enable students to participate in international competitions, strengthening Oman's presence in global scientific forums and reaffirming the ability of Omani students to compete and excel internationally.

The participation also contributes to developing students' skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, while preparing a generation equipped with future-ready tools capable of employing knowledge to devise innovative solutions to contemporary challenges.

The exhibition further enhances students' critical thinking, teamwork, research and analytical skills, in addition to promoting technological awareness and fostering a culture of innovation and creativity.



COMMENTARY

Key Incentives for Investors under Oman’s Special Economic Zones and Free Zones Law

Oman’s Royal Decree 38/2025 issuing the Law of Special Economic Zones and Free Zones offers a strong set of incentives to attract investors. These benefits are clearly laid out to make the Sultanate a competitive destination for business.

In an exclusive interview with Times of Oman, Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim Al Zadjali, Founding Partner of Mohammed Ibrahim Law Firm, explains that “one of the key incentives under the law is the tax exemption. Enterprises operating within a zone are exempt from all taxes imposed under the Income Tax Law for 10 years from the start of their activity. This period of exemption can be renewed twice more for special projects, subject to the conditions specified in the regulations and the approval of the Minister of Finance. However, this exemption does not apply to banks, financial institutions, insurance companies, telecom providers, construction companies, or land and sea transport businesses.”

“Machinery, tools, raw materials, equipment, and other supplies required for the construction, preparation, or operation of the enterprise are not subject to customs tax when brought into the zone, whether from inside or outside Oman. Products manufactured in the zone and exported outside Oman are also not subject to customs tax. This reduces costs for both importing and exporting,” he said.

He further stated that “non-Omanis may fully own an enterprise, operator, or real estate developer without the requirement of a local partner. Land is allocated through lease or usufruct rights in accordance with the rules and procedures of the Authority and the Board, without application of the general land



allocation framework.”

“It is not permitted to nationalise an enterprise, impose receivership over it, seize, freeze, impound, or confiscate its property except pursuant to a judicial ruling, subject to the enforcement of State tax debts. It is also not permitted to cancel or suspend licences issued to the enterprise unless it is warned of the violations attributed to it, heard, and granted an appropriate grace period to rectify them,” he said.

“Investors may freely transfer profits and investment proceeds abroad without restriction. Taken together, these incentives make Oman’s free zones an attractive investment destination, supported by tax benefits, legal safeguards, and a range of additional incentives offered across the various free zones established in the Sultanate of Oman,” he concluded.

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

Oman and India review their maritime history



The National Museum of the Sultanate of Oman also participated with a video clip showcasing Omani-Indian relations across the ages and civilisations, reflecting the rich cultural, historical and civilisational heritage that Oman and India possess

Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, explained that the journey of the ship ‘Kaundinya’ brings to mind the long-standing and strong relationship that unites the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India, which has flourished in the heart of the Indian Ocean for centuries.

He noted that the visit of the ship ‘Kaundinya’ to the Sultanate of Oman is a living testament to the strong ties that bind the two friendly countries.

He reviewed the legacy of the maritime partnership between the Sultanate of Oman and India, which sought to build bridges of communication between civilisations, and the role played by ports such as Muscat, Sur, and Mumbai as vital gateways for trade and cultural exchange around the world.

He added that the spirit of co-operation that has always characterised relations between the Sultanate of Oman and India inspires the adoption of cooperative approaches in managing marine resources and preserving biodiversity, and has shown leadership in promoting responsible fishing practices, combating marine pollution, and supporting scientific research, through the exchange of experiences and the promotion of dialogue, which contributes to achieving a global vision of sustainable and productive oceans that are accessible to all in a way that serves the interests of future generations.

The event included interventions from the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, who explained that the journey of the Indian ship ‘Kaundinya’ confirms the long-standing maritime relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and India and brings to mind the ancient maritime traditions of trade and cultural exchange between India and the countries of the region in the Arabian Gulf and the role it played in consolidating the established relations between India and the countries of the region.

The National Museum of the Sultanate of Oman also participated with a video clip showcasing Omani-Indian relations across the ages and civilisations, reflecting the rich cultural, historical and civilisational heritage that Oman and India possessed throughout the ages and its impact on the depth of historical relations whose effects are still present today.

Ambassador Dr Adnan bin Rashid al Azri, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman for the Continental Shelf and Maritime Affairs, spoke about the joint projects between the two countries in the fields of marine science, the aquatic environment and water management.

The event also witnessed interaction from the participating delegations from the countries bordering the Indian Ocean and Europe.

A delegation from the Indian Navy and the crew of the ship ‘Kaundinya’ reviewed the efforts made by the Indian Navy to rebuild the ship and the training phases it went through in preparation for this voyage, expressing their appreciation for the warm welcome they received upon their arrival in the Sultanate of Oman.

The event was attended by a number of representatives of member states to the UN, officials of UN and staff of diplomatic missions in New York. -ONA



KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

OIA to announce financial results of 2025 on Monday

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Oman Investment Authority will unveil its 2025 financial results and key performance indicators during its annual media meeting on Monday, alongside updates on its subsidiaries and major achievements made in line with its strategic and investment objectives.

During the meeting, the Authority will launch its 2025 annual report and review its financial and institutional indicators, developments in its investment portfolios, and progress achieved under plans aimed at asset development, maximising returns, and strengthening financial sustainability, in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. The meeting will also highlight the Authority’s efforts in implementing the objectives of the national agenda and its role in supporting the national economy through attracting investments,



enhancing local content, and improving the efficiency of affiliated companies, in addition to reviewing the latest developments related to its exit strategy.

The event will further spotlight a number of transformation and success stories achieved by companies under the Authority toward profitability and financial sustainability as part of ongoing efforts to enhance operational efficiency and strengthen the financial performance of its subsidiaries.

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These efforts support natural habitats for marine organisms, especially economically valuable species like grouper



MUSCAT: The Environment Authority continues to strengthen efforts to protect marine ecosystems and biodiversity through ongoing coral reef cultivation projects aimed at rehabilitating damaged reefs, building new coral communities and implementing community initiatives and scientific surveys in response to environmental challenges, particularly climate change and rising temperatures.

These efforts contribute to supporting natural habitats for marine organisms, especially economically valuable species such as grouper fish.

Oman's marine environment is characterised by unique coral diversity extending from Musandam Governorate to Dhofar Governorate, with distinctive coral communities of scientific importance that demonstrate resilience and adaptability to climate changes, including high temperatures, salinity and seasonal fluctuations.

Environmental studies and periodic surveys conducted by the Authority provide data on living coral cover, growth rates and the impact of coral bleaching, helping authorities make proactive protection decisions based on scientific evidence.

Eng. Ahmed bin Said Al Shukaili, Director of the Marine Environment Conservation Department at the Environment Authority, said challenges facing coral reefs include harmful human activities such as abandoned fishing nets and the use of anchors in coral reef locations, in addition to natural factors including tropical storms and the spread of crown-of-thorns starfish that feed on coral reefs.

He explained that among Oman's most prominent coral reef destinations are the Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve, known for their dense biodiversity, and Musandam Governorate, particularly Khor Najd and Telegraph Island, which feature unique rock forma-



tions and branching coral reefs.

He added that coral reefs in the Al Hallaniyat Islands are distinguished by rare species and massive coral communities, while Bandar Al Khiran is considered an ideal destination for diving and snorkeling enthusiasts due to

its accessibility and rich marine environment.

Al-Shukaili noted that the Authority is implementing an ambitious national project to restore Oman's "blue forests" through direct coral reef cultivation in the Daymaniyat Islands Nature Reserve as a proactive intervention to protect marine ecosystems, strengthen resilience against climate challenges and preserve Oman's

unique biodiversity.

The project aims to rehabilitate damaged sites within the reserve, accelerate natural recovery using direct aquaculture techniques, enhance biodiversity, ensure sustainable fisheries and establish a scientific database through marine surveys to monitor coral growth and assess the impacts of climate change.

Al-Shukaili explained that the project relies on direct cultivation techniques where coral fragments are attached directly to hard rocky seabeds. Survey operations are conducted according to the International Maritime Organization survey strategy through 30-meter cross-sections distributed at five-meter intervals.

Sites are selected on the northern side of the islands, particularly Lagoon and Al-Ghurfa areas, at

depths ranging between 5 and 12 metres to ensure sufficient light for photosynthesis and stable water currents.

For her part, Hanaa bint Saeed Al-Rawahi, marine life management specialist at the Environment Authority, said Oman has an advanced record in coral reef conservation projects.

She highlighted key initiatives including the "Coral Nursery" project at Jumeirah Muscat Bay, which has achieved high success rates in coral growth, the coral cultivation project in Musandam implemented in cooperation with local communities, and the artificial reef project in Al-Suwaig, considered the largest of its kind in the region.

She also referred to initiatives by Petroleum Development Oman in cooperation with the Environment Authority to deploy artificial reef units along several coastal areas.

Al-Rawahi affirmed that the Authority continues efforts to enhance marine biodiversity, provide natural habitats for marine organisms, raise environmental awareness on the importance of coral reefs and support pioneering environmental projects through effective public-private partnerships.

She added that the coral cultivation project in the Daymaniyat Islands is being implemented in partnership with Sultan Qaboos University as the academic partner, with support from Oman LNG and participation of the Sea of Oman Diving Team.

The project aims to cultivate between 600 and 1,000 coral fragments using direct fixation techniques while relying on an integrated scientific methodology that studies environmental factors such as temperature, oxygen levels and acidity, alongside marine survey analyses to ensure high success rates and establish methodologies applicable to future initiatives.

Mobile subscriptions in Oman grow to 8.24mn

Active postpaid mobile phone subscriptions rose by 4 percent to 1.29 million while prepaid subscriptions fell by 2 percent to 5.27 million



MUSCAT: The total number of mobile service subscriptions in the Sultanate of Oman reached 8.24 million by the end of March 2026, a slight increase of one percent compared to the same period in 2025, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Active postpaid mobile phone subscriptions rose by 4 percent to 1.29 million while prepaid sub-

scriptions fell by 2 percent to 5.27 million.

Internet of Things
Internet of Things (IoT) service subscriptions also grew by 9 percent, reaching 1.68 million subscriptions by the end of March 2026.

Internet services also witnessed remarkable development, as the total number of active mobile

broadband Internet subscriptions rose to 5.47 million and the total number of active fixed broadband Internet subscriptions rose by 2 percent to reach 599,305.

Fibre optic subscriptions grew by 8 percent to reach 361,819 by the end of March 2026, while fixed 5G subscriptions rose slightly by 1 percent to reach 218,279, and satellite subscriptions jumped by 250 percent to reach 1,344.

In contrast, fixed 4G subscriptions declined by 63 percent to 7,653, and Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) subscriptions decreased by 28 percent to 9,478, while the remaining subscriptions (which include internet via power lines, Ethernet, and leased lines) declined by 8 percent to 732 by the end of March 2026 compared to the same period in 2025.

- ONA

NCSI DATA

Oman issues over 40,000 building permits

MUSCAT: The total number of building permits issued in the Sultanate of Oman during 2025 reached approximately 40,340 permits, compared to 36,517 permits in 2024.

Data issued by the 2026 Statistical Yearbook of the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the South Al Batinah Governorate ranked first in terms of total permits for the year 2025 with 8,194 permits. It was followed by North Al Batinah Governorate with 7,179 permits, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate with 5,993 permits and Muscat Governorate with 5,854 permits, while



the Al Wusta Governorate recorded 345 permits.

Regarding the type of use, the residential sector topped the list

with 32,446 permits, followed by the agricultural sector with 2,191 permits. It was followed by residential/commercial sector with

2,091 permits, the government sector with 1,868 permits, the industrial sector with 874 permits, the commercial sector with 534 permits, and the tourism sector with 105 permits. The education and places of worship sectors recorded 10 and 15 permits respectively, while other uses amounted to 206 permits.

In another indicator reflecting the shift from the approval stage to the actual completion of projects, the total number of building completion certificates during 2025 reached approximately 24,470 certificates, compared to 23,743 certificates in 2024. - ONA



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FINANCIAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

Assets of insurance sector top OMR1.31bn

< FROM A1 The results underscore the continued strength and attractiveness of the Omani insurance market, supported by a diverse range of insurance products and growing awareness among individuals and businesses of the importance of insurance coverage.

The sector also recorded a 6.9% increase in total assets, reaching OMR1.31 billion in 2025. At the same time, investment income increased by 42.6% to OMR49 million, compared to OMR34.3 million in 2024, reflecting improved efficiency in the management of insurers' investment portfolios and their enhanced ability to generate stronger returns.

In addition, the total net profit of insurance companies increased by 36% to approximately OMR34.3 million, compared to OMR25.2 million in 2024, supported by higher investment returns and improved operational performance among several companies.

Insurance service results also reached approximately OMR11.7 million during 2025, despite variations in underwriting performance among companies depending on the composition of insurance portfolios, claims levels and operating costs. Higher investment returns and stronger risk management practices also supported the sector's overall fi-

nancial performance and helped maintain stable profitability levels.

Gross written premiums (GWPs) also recorded growth of 8.9%, reaching approximately OMR551.8 million compared to OMR506.6 million in 2024. This growth was driven by significant expansion in life and savings insurance business, which grew by 42%, in addition to a 6% increase in health insurance business.

Meanwhile, total claims incurred declined from OMR279.4 million in 2024 to OMR267.8 million in 2025, representing a decrease of 4.1%. Loss ratios for both national and foreign insurers also improved compared to 2024, reflecting enhanced risk management practices and improved underwriting efficiency during 2025.

The sector also witnessed wider adoption of digital channels, with premiums generated through digital platforms increasing by 35.5%, while premiums generated through bancassurance channels rose by 38.1%. This highlights the accelerating pace of digital transformation and growing customer preference for digital insurance services, contributing to broader access to insurance services in the Sultanate of Oman.

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PRESS CONFERENCE



India can play ‘greater role’ in West Asia peace: Iran FM Araghchi

NEW DELHI: Highlighting New Delhi’s growing influence as a global peacemaker, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Friday asserted that India can play a “greater role” in de-escalating the volatile situation in West Asia.

Addressing a press conference in the national capital following a meeting of the BRICS Foreign Ministers, Araghchi made it clear that Tehran sees no future in armed conflict.

He stated that there is no military solution to the current crisis and that a “negotiated settlement” remains the only viable path forward.

Underscoring Tehran’s openness to Indian mediation, he remarked, “We will welcome any constructive role by India.”

This outreach comes as West Asia remains locked in a cold, precarious stalemate following the eruption of hostilities on February 28, which pitted the combined forces of the United States and Israel against Iran.

Although a fragile ceasefire currently holds, the region is defined by a high-stakes maritime tug-of-war within the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

This vital artery of global commerce has become the primary battleground of a shifting energy war.

In a bid to cripple Tehran’s economic lifeline, the US has enforced a stringent naval blockade designed to choke off Iranian petroleum exports.

In a retaliatory display of brinkmanship, Iran has imposed its own severe restrictions, partially shuttering the shipping lane to global traffic.

Describing the current maritime status as “very complicat-

ed”, Araghchi stated that Iran is prepared to assist the passage of vessels, provided they are not at war with Tehran and coordinate directly with the Iranian navy.

The consequences of this dual stranglehold have rippled across the planet, triggering massive spikes in international fuel prices.

This has left the global energy market in a state of sustained, volatile disruption as the stand-off continues to reshape regional and global trade.

Against this backdrop, Araghchi noted that any potential dialogue with the United States is currently “suffering from trust”.

Expressing a blunt assessment of the deadlock, he said, “Iran has every reason not to trust the US, while Americans have every reason to trust us,” adding that “contradictory messages” from Washington have fuelled Iranian scepticism.

While Araghchi confirmed that Iran is attempting to maintain the truce to “give diplomacy a chance”, he warned that the Islamic Republic is equally “prepared to go back to fighting” should negotiations collapse.

While acknowledging that existing mediation efforts through other regional players are in “difficulty”, the Foreign Minister’s focus remained firmly on India’s potential to bridge the gap.

He further reiterated that Tehran “never wanted nuclear weapons”, despite rising pressure from Washington.

Araghchi’s comments follow recent statements from US President Donald Trump, who indicated that his “patience with Iran was running out” and demanded the immediate reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. — **ANI**

US won’t travel ‘9500 miles’ to fight Taiwan’s war for independence, says Trump

Trump explicitly cautioned Taiwan against pursuing formal independence, framing the island’s defence as a staggering logistical and military challenge for the United States



BEIJING: US President Donald Trump has signalled a potential shift in Washington’s approach towards Taiwan following his two-day “high-stakes” visit to China, stating that the United States is not looking to “travel 9,500 miles to fight a war” over Taiwan’s independence, raising questions about the future of America’s long-standing policy of strategic ambiguity.

Speaking during an interview with Fox News following his visit, Trump explicitly cautioned Taiwan against pursuing formal independence, framing the island’s defence as a staggering logistical and military challenge for the United States.

“I’m not looking to have somebody go independent and we’re supposed to travel 9,500 miles to fight a war. I’m not looking for that. I want them to cool down. I want China to cool down”, Trump said.

Referring to Chinese President Xi Jinping’s longstanding position on Taiwan, Trump said the issue has always been Beijing’s “most important thing” and indicated that he believed China would prefer maintaining the current arrangement rather than facing a declaration of independence from Taiwan.

“It has always been his most important thing from the day I knew him years ago. It’s always been the biggest thing for him, Taiwan,” the US President said.

“If you kept it the way it is, I think China is going to be okay with that. We are not looking to have somebody say let’s go independent because the United States is backing us,” he added.

The US President further claimed that Taiwan’s current leadership was moving towards in-

dependence under the assumption that Washington would support it militarily.

“They are going independent because they want to get into a war, and they figure they have the United States behind them. I would like to see it stay the way it is,” Trump stated.

His comments come amid longstanding US strategic ambiguity on Taiwan. Under the Taiwan Relations Act, the United States maintains unofficial relations with Taiwan and provides defensive support while officially adhering to the “One China” policy, recognising the People’s Republic of China diplomatically.

According to US Congressional records, the Trump Administration’s 2025 National Security Strategy stated that “detrerring a conflict over Taiwan” remains a priority while reaffirming that the United States “does not support any unilateral change to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.”

During his talks with Trump, the Chinese President stated that the Taiwan question remains the “most important issue” in China-US relations and warned that mishandling it could lead to clashes and conflict between the two countries.

According to a statement issued by the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, Xi stressed during discussions with Trump that the future stability of bilateral ties depends heavily on how the Taiwan issue is managed.

“President Xi stressed to President Trump that the Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-US relations. If it is handled properly, the bilateral relationship will enjoy overall stability.

Otherwise, the two countries will have clashes and even conflicts, putting the entire relationship in great jeopardy,” the statement said.

Xi also reiterated Beijing’s strong opposition to Taiwan independence, describing it as incompatible with peace across the Taiwan Strait.

“Taiwan independence’ and cross-Strait peace are as irreconcilable as fire and water. Safeguarding peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is the biggest common denominator between China and the U.S.,” the statement added.

Xi agreed that “Iran can’t have nuclear weapons”, Strait of Hormuz must be opened: Trump after China visit

United States and China have agreed that “Iran can’t have nuclear weapons,” and that the Strait of Hormuz must be opened, according to US President Donald Trump. President Trump met with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping during his three-day state visit to China, where he discussed the ongoing West Asia conflict, and other regional issues.

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One following his departure from China, President Trump asserted that the US controls the Strait of Hormuz, while emphasising Iran has been hit with 500 million dollars of loss per day in the past two and half weeks due to US’ naval blockade in the region.

“I have a lot of respect for him. On Iran, he feels strongly that they can’t have a nuclear weapon--said that very strongly, they can’t have a nuclear weapon--and he wants them to open up the strait. But as

he said, they close it and you close them. And it’s true, we (US) control the strait, and they (Iran) have done no business in the last two and a half weeks, which is approximately 500 million dollars a day,” said President Trump.

President Trump further stated Chinese President Xi Jinping does not want to see a “fight for independence” in Taiwan because that would be a very strong confrontation.

“We had a great stay; it was an amazing period of time. President Xi is an incredible guy. President Xi and I talked a lot about Taiwan. He thinks they cannot have anything to do with what they’re doing. He’s very much against what they’re doing. We talked about Taiwan and we talked about Iran a lot, and I think we have a very good understanding on both. On Taiwan, he does not want to see a fight for independence because that would be a very strong confrontation. I heard him out. I didn’t make a comment on it, but I heard him out. I have a lot of respect for him,” Trump added.

Trump said that even though he did not say anything about it, Xi had brought it up.

He said, “I think 1982 is a long way away. It was a big, far distance. I didn’t say anything about it, but he brought that up. He talked about that being an issue, obviously. So, what am I going to do--say I don’t want to talk to you about it because I have an agreement that was signed in 1982? No, we discussed arms sales too. We discussed Taiwan in great detail, actually. And I’ll be making a decision. The last thing we need right now is a war that’s 9,500 miles away. We’re doing very well.” — **ANI**

LANDMARK PROJECT

Yas Island to be home of Sphere Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI: The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) and Sphere Entertainment on Saturday announced that Yas Island has been selected as the location for Sphere Abu Dhabi, a landmark project with a construction phase cost of \$1.7 billion. Poised to become a global icon, the venue will attract tourists from around the world, boost economic diversification, and strengthen Abu Dhabi’s sense of place for residents and visitors alike.

Sphere Abu Dhabi, which will be the first Sphere venue outside the United States, will be built on a plot of land between Yas Mall and SeaWorld Abu Dhabi, with lush green surroundings and proximity to other Yas Island theme parks and attractions. Construction on the venue is expected to be completed by the end of 2029.

HE Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, Chairman of DCT Abu Dhabi, said: “Abu Dhabi has always built for the long term, and Sphere Abu Dhabi is a powerful demonstration of that commitment. In a region where the appetite for world-class experiences continues to grow, our \$1.7 billion investment in its construction phase sends a clear signal: Abu Dhabi is open, ambitious, and unwavering in its direction.

“This project reflects the strength of Abu Dhabi’s international partnerships, built on shared ambition and mutual confidence in what this emirate represents as a global destination. Together, we



are creating a venue that will draw our community, visitors, creators and investors to Yas Island and Abu Dhabi for decades to come. And at its heart, Sphere Abu Dhabi will be a platform for Emirati culture, Emirati talent and Emirati storytelling, shared with the world on the grandest stage ever built.”

James L. Dolan, Executive Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Sphere Entertainment, said: “Sphere Abu Dhabi is the first step in realising our vision for a global network of venues. Abu Dhabi is a premier international capital city, and its ambition, infrastructure, and position as a cultural crossroads make it a natural home for Sphere.

“Sphere Abu Dhabi will establish Yas Island as a destination in the region for immersive experiences, and we look forward to working with DCT Abu Dhabi to see this venue come to life.”

Sphere Abu Dhabi will host three main categories of events, all powered by Sphere’s advanced experiential technologies: Sphere Experiences, proprietary immersive productions that feature multi-sensory storytelling; concert residencies; and marquee and brand events supported by flexible configurations to host everything from combat sports to conferences to product launches.

The entertainment offerings at Sphere Abu Dhabi will reflect Abu Dhabi’s status as a cultural crossroads.

While still in development, plans include featuring fully immersive experiences that are the signature of Sphere in Las Vegas, in addition to the creation of Sphere Experiences that convey Emirati culture and heritage, and displaying Emirati artists’ work on the Exosphere, the spherical LED screen that forms the venue’s exterior. Concerts will feature local and other Arabic artists, as well as global stars.

Located a short drive from Zayed International Airport, Sphere Abu Dhabi will be a welcoming gateway to the emirate’s culture and entertainment offerings. With its proximity to Yas Island’s other hospitality and entertainment infrastructure, Sphere Abu Dhabi will reinforce Yas Island as a global events destination, not only for events at Sphere, but also by providing an exceptional backdrop, broadcast worldwide during the annual Formula 1 Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix.

The world’s first Sphere venue opened in Las Vegas in September 2023. Like the venue in Las Vegas, Sphere Abu Dhabi will be an experiential medium powered by advanced technologies that will transform the traditional venue model. The venue will also echo the scale of Sphere in Las Vegas, with a capacity of up to 20,000, depending on the configuration for a given event. Once open, Sphere Abu Dhabi’s ongoing operations will create thousands of jobs locally.

Another milestone in Abu Dhabi’s integrated destination development, Sphere Abu Dhabi will function as a global tourism magnet alongside other globally renowned projects such as Saadiyat Cultural District and the upcoming Disney theme park resort on Yas Island.

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HUMANITARIAN APPROACH

UAE to restore Umayyad Mosque in Damascus

ABU DHABI: With the support of Sheikhha Fatima bint Mubarak (Mother of the Nation), Chairwoman of the General Women’s Union, President of the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood, and Supreme Chairwoman of the Family Development Foundation, the UAE has announced the restoration of the historic Umayyad Mosque in Damascus.

Sheikha Fatima affirmed the humanitarian approach of the Founding Father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, and his commitment to the values of giving and development.

Arab heritage

This is a hallmark of the UAE community and is carried forward by President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, whose inspiring vision for development, prosperity, and the preservation of heritage drives the country’s aid ecosystem. An integral part of that vision is the preservation of Arab heritage and Islamic culture.

The UAE announcement of the restoration of the Umayyad Mosque came during a visit by Noura bint Mohammed Al Kaabi, Minister of State, to the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Syria.

Al Kaabi stated, “Syria occu-

pies a unique place at the heart of Arab and Islamic civilisation, and the Umayyad Mosque is one of its most prominent historical landmarks and enduring cultural symbols. The UAE’s announcement of the restoration of this mosque, with the generous support of H.H. Sheikhha Fatima bint Mubarak, the ‘Mother of the Nation’, reflects the importance of our shared heritage and culture and the UAE’s unwavering support for the Syrian people.”

She emphasised the UAE’s commitment to preserving history and heritage, which is evident in the launch of cultural initiatives aimed at safeguarding Arab and Islamic heritage on the one hand and rehabilitating cultural heritage in the Arab region on the other.

This is part of the UAE’s leading global role and its distinguished record in cultural diplomacy and humanitarian work.

She explained that the initiative to restore the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus will include the structural and architectural rehabilitation of the mosque, as well as the broader revitalisation of the surrounding historical area, in a manner that aligns with the Syrian identity and the economic, cultural, and social fabric of the country. — **ANI/WAM**

SPORTS

Golden baton glory: Oman surge to 20 medals at GCC Games

Another rich haul of medals at the ongoing Doha GCC Games came across track and shooting events on Friday

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The roar from the track inside Doha's packed athletics arena said everything about Oman's growing presence at the fourth GCC Games on Friday.

The men's 4x100m relay quartet stormed to gold in emphatic fashion on a dramatic fourth day of competition, leading another wave of medals that pushed the Sultanate's overall tally to 20 and strengthened hopes of an even bigger finish in the Qatari capital.

Powered by the blistering speed of Ali Al Balushi, Mulham Al Balushi, Rashid Al Asmi and Mohammed Al Saadi, Oman's relay team delivered one of the standout moments of the Games, surging to victory against fierce regional competition.



The gold capped another hugely successful day for Oman, whose athletes collected six medals overall — one gold, two silver and three bronze — across athletics and shooting competitions on Friday.

With the latest haul, Oman climbed to fourth place in the overall standings with seven gold, three silver and 10 bronze medals.

The athletics team once again proved to be the heartbeat of Oman's campaign in Doha.

Alongside the relay triumph, the women's 4x100m relay team clinched silver through the quartet of Azza Al Ya'rubi, Mazoon Al Alawi, Hanaa Al Qasmi and Alia Al Mughairi.

Hanaa added another medal to Oman's growing collection by taking bronze in the women's 400m race, while Ahmed Al Abdul Salam earned bronze in the men's 400m event after an intense contest that showcased the depth of talent.

The latest success built on an already exceptional start to the Games for Oman's track and field stars.

Earlier in the competition, Mazoon captured gold in the long jump, Fatik Beit Jaaboub soared to high jump gold, while sprint sensation Ali Al Balushi powered to victory in the men's 100m.

Fellow sprinter Mulham completed an Omani one-two by taking silver in the same race.

National athletics coach Hamoud Al Dalhami hailed the performances as evidence of the progress being made by Omani sport and praised the commitment shown by the athletes throughout the competition.

"The results achieved by our team are honourable and reflect the advanced level reached by the players," Al Dalhami said.

He added: "The first day was very positive with three gold medals and



one silver, and the team continued strongly on the second day by winning four more medals. These achievements give the athletes great motivation to continue excelling in the remaining events."

Al Dalhami stressed that the GCC Games represented the national team's first international participation of the season, making the medal haul even more significant. "These achievements reflect the hard work carried out by the technical staff, administrative teams and players during the preparation period," he said.

The coach also pointed to the quality of competition in Doha, particularly in the high jump where Oman's Fatih Beit Jaaboub shared gold with Qatar's Olympic champion Mutaz Barshim.

"The high jump competition witnessed the participation of elite Gulf athletes led by Mutaz Barshim, which added tremendous



strength to the event," he said.

"Fatih's performance confirms the ability of Omani athletes to compete strongly at Gulf and international level."

Away from the track, Oman's shooting team also made an immediate impact by securing silver and bronze medals on the opening day of the shooting events.

Salem Al Naabi produced a composed display to win silver in the men's 10m rifle competition.

The women's 10m rifle team — comprising Safaa Al Jabri, Al Anoud Al Khalili and Amina Al Tarshiya — added bronze to Oman's tally with another disciplined performance.

Lieutenant Colonel Muslim bin Abdullah Al-Subhi, director of the national shooting team, described the medals as an encouraging start.

"Winning two medals on the first day is a good achievement that reflects the efforts made during the

preparation period," Al Subhi said.

Oman's success in Doha has not been limited to athletics and shooting.

Earlier, the fencing team produced five medals, led by star athlete Israa Al Siyabi, who captured two gold medals in the foil and épée disciplines.

Ali Al Busaidi claimed bronze in foil, while Ahmed Kaskas and Al Harith Al Harthi added bronze medals in the épée events.

The taekwondo squad also impressed with five medals, highlighted by gold for Fidaa Al Barwani in the women's 49kg category. Bronze medals came through Nebras Al Touqi, Omaira Al Hina'i, Mohammed Al Hajri and Shabib Al Sinani.

Hosts Qatar remain top of the standings with 82 medals, including 30 gold, while Saudi Arabia sit second with 51 medals and Bahrain third with 41.

SECOND TEST VS PAKISTAN

Litton's 126 rescues Bangladesh after Pakistan's early dominance

SYLHET: Bangladesh recovered from a disastrous top-order collapse to post 278 on the opening day of the second Test against Pakistan in Sylhet, thanks to a superb century from Litton Das on Friday. Pakistan then safely negotiated six overs at stumps to reach 21/0, still trailing by 257 runs.

After winning the toss, Pakistan captain Shan Masood elected to bowl first and his seamers immediately justified the decision. Mohammad Abbas struck with only the second ball of the day, removing Mahmudul Hasan Joy after Salman Agha held a sharp catch in the slips.

Debutant Tanzid Hasan and Mominul Haque responded posi-

tively, adding quick runs in a lively second-wicket partnership that carried Bangladesh close to 50 inside the opening 10 overs. Abbas, however, broke through again when Tanzid top-edged an attempted on-side stroke back to the bowler.

Pakistan tightened their grip as Khurram Shahzad replaced Shaheen Shah Afridi and found immediate movement. He dismissed Mominul Haque to leave Bangladesh struggling at 63/3.

Captain Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mushfiqur Rahim attempted to rebuild, but Pakistan dominated the post-lunch session. Abbas trapped Shanto after inducing an edge that wicketkeeper Moham-

mad Rizwan collected diving to his left. Shahzad then produced a fine spell, trapping Mushfiqur lbw before bouncing out Mehidy Hasan Miraz, whose miscued hook was caught at fine leg by Hasan Ali.

At 116/6, Bangladesh looked set for a modest total before Litton launched a remarkable rescue act. Initially cautious while batting with the tail, Litton gradually counterattacked as Pakistan's discipline slipped.

A crucial 64-run ninth-wicket stand with Shoriful Islam shifted the momentum completely. Litton played a series of authoritative strokes, including a memorable six over midwicket, before reach-

ing his third Test century against Pakistan with a stylish cover drive.

He eventually fell for a magnificent 126, lifting Bangladesh to 278 after the hosts had appeared in danger of being bowled out for far less. Shahzad finished with 4/81, while Abbas claimed 3/45.

Pakistan's inexperienced opening pair of Azan Awaish and Abdullah Fazal then survived the final six overs calmly to guide the visitors to 21/0 at stumps, ending a fascinating opening day that swung dramatically between both sides.

Brief scores: Pakistan 21/0 (Awaish 13*, Fazal 8*) trail Bangladesh 278 (Litton 126, Shanto 29; Shahzad 4-81, Abbas 3-45).



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HIGHER-QUALITY SERVICE
China is ramping up efforts to expand and upgrade its service sector, aiming to better underpin economic growth, industrial upgrading, people's livelihoods and high-standard opening up, officials and experts said on the latest episode of China Economic Roundtable.

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



INDIA'S TRADE DEFICIT
With the West Asia conflict persisting and global oil prices likely to average around \$100/bbl, India's current account deficit could rise meaningfully this year, ICICI Bank Global Markets warns.

MSX listed firms report OMR406 million net profit in 1st quarter

Preliminary financial results analysed by the Oman News Agency indicated that the first quarter of 2026 saw an increase in the number of companies that made profits, reaching 70 companies compared to 64 companies that recorded profits in the first quarter of last year



MUSCAT: Public shareholding companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) recorded net profits of OMR406.6 million in the first quarter of this year, compared to profits of OMR355.1 million in the same period last year, achieving a growth of 14.5 percent. Preliminary financial results analysed by the Oman News Agency indicated that the first quarter of 2026 saw an increase in the number of companies that made profits, reaching 70 companies

compared to 64 companies that recorded profits in the first quarter of last year. These financial results reflected the improvement in the national economy, driven by increased government spending, accelerated implementation of numerous economic projects, and an improved investment environment. OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP) topped the list of companies with the highest profits, recording net profits of OMR71.8 million. Bank Muscat came in second with net profits of OMR63.9

million and Omantel came in third after recording net profits of OMR30.4 million. Bank Sohar International came in fourth with net profits of OMR26.1 million, while the National Bank of Oman (NBO) came in fifth with net profits of OMR19.4 million. The first quarter of this year witnessed a robust performance for banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, which achieved net profits of OMR144.3 million, accounting for 35.4 percent of total profits. The first quarter of this year also witnessed strong performance in

other sectors. OQ Group companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange recorded net profits of OMR106.7 million, compared to OMR105.1 million in the same period last year. Oil marketing companies achieved growth in their net profits of 132 percent, rising from about OMR3.1 million to more than OMR7.2 million. The net profits of finance companies increased from OMR6.5 million to OMR6.7 million. Preliminary financial results showed good performance for financial brokerage companies list-

ed on the Muscat Stock Exchange, with the Financial Centre and Financial Services companies moving from losses to profits, and International Financial Investments achieving net profits of OMR6.2 million compared to OMR2.5 million in the first quarter of last year. Conversely, the financial data indicated that losses recorded in the first quarter of this year rose to OMR67.4 million, compared to OMR21.7 million in the same period last year, affected by losses recorded by energy companies, most notably Al-Suwadi Power and Al-

Batinah Power, which recorded losses of OMR26.8 million and OMR26 million respectively. The energy companies attributed the losses to a number of factors, including routine maintenance operations in preparation for the summer season, expecting to compensate for these losses during the coming months. Al Suwadi Power Company and Al Batinah Power Company said that the financial results were affected by an impairment assessment resulting from the signing of a new power purchase agreement in accordance with the agreed commercial terms. This resulted in recording an impairment of assets of OMR29.7 million for Al Suwadi Company and OMR29.1 million for Al Batinah Company, which was partially offset by a deferred tax credit of OMR4.4 million based on adjusted cash flows that came in lower than the book value of the assets. The two companies said that, excluding the impact of the impairment, the financial results show an overall improvement in performance. The first quarter of this year saw a decrease in the number of companies that recorded losses to 21 companies, compared to 25 companies that recorded losses in the first quarter of last year. Preliminary financial results showed that 8 companies turned from losses to profits, most notably Galfar Engineering and Contracting, Raysut Cement, National Real Estate Development and Financial Services Company. In contrast, three companies turned from profits to losses: Salalah Port Services, Oman Chlorine and Arab Falcon Insurance Company. **-OMA**

CHIEF ECONOMIST

‘Rupee likely to remain under pressure amid weak capital inflows, higher import bill’

NEW DELHI: The Indian rupee is likely to remain under pressure due to weakening capital inflows, rising import dependence, elevated crude oil prices and a widening current account deficit, Devendra Pant, Chief Economist at India Ratings and Research, told ANI on Friday. “I will not say capital inflows have dried up, they have reduced significantly. There is an outflow from your portfolio investments. Now in this situation, whatever increase in your current account, that is not able to be funded by the capital inflows, and that is creating pressure on your currency,” Pant told ANI. Pant said India remains heavily dependent on imports of crude oil, edible oil, pulses and electronic goods, which continues to strain the country's external balances. “India has a lot of import dependence. Import dependence on crude oil, import dependence on edible oil, import dependence on pulses, import dependence on electronic goods because we do not have that kind of manufacturing setup here where we manufacture chips and other components,” he said. According to Pant, India earns a substantial surplus through software exports, services exports and remittances, but the inflows are still insufficient to fully offset the merchandise trade deficit, resulting in a current account deficit. “Because of all these factors put together, we are seeing a situation the currency is continuously under pressure,” Pant said. He further noted that foreign portfolio investors tend to shift money across markets in search of better returns, resulting in outflows from India during periods of global uncertainty. “What is happening in the stock market and other markets, where their rupees are giving more returns, portfolio investors



will always start jumping from one country to another country where they get more return,” Pant said. The economist said the Indian rupee depreciated by around 5 per cent on average during the last fiscal year because of these pressures. Pant also highlighted the impact of rising crude oil prices on India's macroeconomic stability, saying every USD 10 per barrel increase in crude oil prices raises India's current account deficit by nearly USD 16.7 billion. He said India imported crude oil and crude products worth nearly USD 100 billion in the last fiscal year, while gold imports stood at around USD 72 billion. “Gold does not have any economic value. It is more as an asset class. Most of it is lying in bank lockers,” Pant said, explaining the rationale behind higher import duties and tighter gold import rules. On fuel prices, Pant said the government had earlier reduced excise duty on petrol and diesel by around Rs 10 per litre, taking a hit of nearly Rs 1.7 lakh crore on its balance sheet to shield consumers. He said oil marketing companies had also absorbed losses for some time, but rising global crude prices eventually led to a Rs 3 per litre increase in petrol and diesel prices and a Rs 2 per kg increase in CNG prices. “Further rise cannot be ruled out if oil remains elevated,” Pant said. **-ANI**

LOWEST LEVEL IN TWO MONTHS

Muscat Stock Exchange index falls below 8,000 points in weekly trading

MUSCAT: The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) fell below the 8,000 point level at the end of trading during the week and closed at 7,959 points at the end of trading on Thursday, recording its lowest level in two months, thus giving up the gains it had begun to record since March 25, when it rose for the first time in 18 years to the 8,000 point level. The main index of the Muscat Stock Exchange fell 390 points during the week, pressured by a number of local and external factors, amid geopolitical tensions in the region and fluctuating oil prices that affected investor sentiment and led to a decline in most Gulf stock exchanges. The Muscat Stock Exchange witnessed a wave of declines that included most leading stocks, as investors awaited the public offering of 25 percent of the shares of the Oman India Fertilizer Company. During the week, 65 securities recorded a decline, compared to 13 securities whose prices rose and 15 securities that remained unchanged at their previous levels. The declines included many leading stocks. In the banking sector, shares of Bank Muscat, Bank Sohar International, Bank Nizwa and Ahli Bank declined. In the services sector, shares of OQ Gas Networks, OQ Exploration and Production, Omantel, Ooredoo, Renaissance Services and many energy companies declined. In the industrial sector, shares of Al Jazeera Steel Products, Al Safa Foods, Oman Flour Mills, Oman Chrome, Al Anwar Ceramic Tiles and many other stocks declined. These declines prompted the sectoral indices of the Muscat Stock Exchange to record collective declines, led by the financial sector index, which fell by more than 500 points and closed at 12,764 points. The industrial sector index fell by 278 points, the services sector index recorded a decline of 91 points, and the Sharia index closed at 639 points, recording a weekly decline of about 23 points. These declines put pressure on the market capitalisation of the



Muscat Stock Exchange, which recorded losses of OMR961.5 million, ending Thursday's trading at OMR37.37 billion. Trading data released by the Muscat Stock Exchange showed a decline in liquidity during the past week, with the number of securities traded falling from 971.9 million to 738.1 million securities. Trading value during the week recorded a decline of 31.3 percent to OMR249.4 million compared to OMR363.6 million in the week before, and the number of transactions executed decreased by 12.8 percent from more than 30,000 to 26,432 transactions. Bank Muscat topped the list of most traded companies in terms of

trading value of OMR50.8 million, representing 20.3 percent of the total trading value. Bank Sohar International came in second place with trading value of OMR47.5 million, OQ Basic Industries came in third place with trading value of OMR41.7 million, while Omantel came in fourth place with trading value of OMR34.1 million, and OQ Gas Networks came in fifth place with trades of OMR25.8 million, representing 10.3 percent of the total trading value. Bank Muscat's stock recorded the highest losses, declining by 9.6 percent and closing at 414 baisa. Bank Sohar International's stock declined by 9.4 percent and closed

at 210 baisa. Dhofar Insurance's stock fell to 338 baisa, recording a decline of 8.8 percent. Bank Nizwa's stock declined by 8.6 percent and closed at 137 baisa. Oman Chromite's stock fell by 8.5 percent and closed at 3 rials and 111 baisa. In contrast, Sohar Power shares recorded the highest gains, rising by 20.2 percent and closing at 226 baisa. Fincorps Financial Center shares rose by 10.4 percent and closed at 116 baisa. Raysut Cement shares climbed to 207 baisa, recording an increase of 8.9 percent. Oman Refreshments shares rose to 1400 rials, recording an increase of 6.8 percent. National Bank of Oman shares climbed to 437 baisa, rising by 4.5 percent. **-OMA**

MARKET

Rising oil prices and gold imports to widen India's trade deficit

While resilient services exports should offer some cushion, the brokerage expects the current account deficit (CAD) to settle between 1.5-2 per cent of GDP, provided non-essential imports are contained and capital inflows improve once global risk sentiment stabilises

NEW DELHI: With the West Asia conflict persisting and global oil prices likely to average around \$100/bbl, India's current account deficit could rise meaningfully this year, ICICI Bank Global Markets warns.

While resilient services exports should offer some cushion, the brokerage expects the current account deficit (CAD) to settle between 1.5-2 per cent of GDP, provided non-essential imports are contained and capital inflows improve once global risk sentiment stabilises.

India's goods exports had a strong start to FY27, rising 14 per cent YoY to USD 43.6 billion in April, driven by a sharp 35 per cent YoY jump in oil exports and a 9 per cent YoY rebound in non-oil exports. Oil exports touched USD



9.6 billion, the strongest growth in about two years, aided by elevated global prices and a sequential surge of 85 per cent from March. Non-oil exports stood at USD 34 billion, flat on a month-on-month basis but up 9 per cent annually.

Sectorally, electronics exports hit an all-time high of USD 5.2 billion, growing 40 per cent YoY, while engineering goods (8.8 per cent YoY) and chemicals (7.2 per cent YoY) also posted gains. Marine products, ores and minerals, and plastic and rubber articles recorded positive growth. However, exports of ceramics and glassware fell 41 per cent YoY, with gems and jewellery, textiles, and agri products also contracting.

Regionally, exports to the US improved mildly by 1.1 per cent YoY to USD 8.5 billion, reflecting gradual tariff normalisation. Exports to non-US countries grew sharply by 17 per cent YoY to USD 35 billion, led by China, Hong Kong, Singa-

pore, the UK, and Germany. The outlier was West Asia, where exports contracted 28 per cent YoY due to the ongoing blockage of the Strait of Hormuz.

On the import side, goods imports rose 10 per cent YoY to USD 71.9 billion, led by an 82 per cent YoY surge in gold imports to USD 5.6 billion and a 15 per cent YoY rise in non-oil non-gold imports to USD 47.7 billion. Oil imports, however, fell 10 per cent YoY on a high base but jumped 53 per cent MoM to USD 18.6 billion, the highest in 12 months, as global crude prices climbed to ~USD 105/bbl. Electronics and machinery imports also hit record highs, contributing nearly 27 per cent of the goods import basket.

The widening gap pushed India's goods trade deficit to USD 28.4 billion in April, up from USD 20.7 billion in March. Both the oil deficit (USD 9.0 billion) and non-oil non-gold deficit (USD 13.7 billion) expanded sequentially. In-

cluding services, the overall goods and services deficit widened to USD 7.8 billion from a mild surplus of USD 0.3 billion in March.

Services trade provided some relief, with net services exports growing 29 per cent YoY to USD 20.6 billion in April, above the FY26 average of USD 18.1 billion. Gross services exports rose 13 per cent YoY to USD 37.2 billion.

Capital flows remain a concern. "FPI outflows are quite high at USD 10 billion in FY27 so far," ICI- CI Securities notes, adding that inflows should return once tech and commodity-driven global themes fade. In the interim, easing compliance and regulations could help attract inflows.

With both oil and gold imports remaining elevated and global uncertainty persisting, the report underscores the need for policy measures to restrict non-essential imports to protect the external balance. -ANI

AI Security Forum to highlight role of AI in shaping national security frameworks

ABU DHABI: The inaugural edition of the AI Security Forum is set to debut as part of the International Exhibition for National Security and Resilience (ISNR 2026), taking place at ADNEC Centre Abu Dhabi from 19 to 21 May.

Organised by ADNEC Group, a Modon company, in collaboration with the UAE Ministry of Interior (MOI) and in strategic partnership with Abu Dhabi Police, the three-day forum provides a strategic platform to explore the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in reshaping national security frameworks and enhancing their readiness to address evolving security threats.

With the global surge in integrating AI into security systems, not just as a technological tool but as a strategic enabler redefining national security and risk mitigation, this event brings together key decision-makers, senior executives from international security agencies, AI experts, and technology innovators to explore the growing impact of AI on national security, cybersecurity, defence, law enforcement, and critical infrastructure protection.

The forum aims to advance the global understanding of AI-powered national security solutions, as well as highlight their practical applications across critical sectors, including energy, smart cities, transportation, and infrastructure, and how they can enhance nations' ability to predict and efficiently respond to risks.

The forum will host a series of high-level discussion sessions, fireside chats, and keynotes, led by decision-makers, industry experts, and leading service providers, to explore the critical themes shaping today's increasingly complex security landscape.

Key topics will include how governments can design integrated national security ecosystems by breaking down silos and adopting coordinated operating models, enabling large-scale data

sharing and fostering more effective responses to emerging threats.

The discussions will also delve into the integration of AI tools across critical domains, leveraging interoperability and real-time data to effectively predict and counter emerging threats.

Additionally, the sessions will examine the cultural and organisational transformations required to embed AI into decision-making processes.

The role of sovereign cloud, secure AI, and robust data governance in reshaping critical national infrastructure will also be a key area of focus, particularly amidst growing concerns over digital trust and geopolitical risks.

The discussions will also highlight how generative AI copilots are transforming command centre operations by accelerating decision-making, automating incident responses, and redefining human-AI collaboration.

The programme will further spotlight the real-world impact of AI on cybersecurity resilience, threat detection, and data protection, offering attendees practical insights into how AI is shaping the future of digital national security.

Major General Dr Ahmed Nasser Al Raisi, Inspector General at the Ministry of Interior and Chairman of the Supreme Organising Committee for ISNR 2026, said, "The AI Security Forum represents a strategic addition to ISNR 2026, providing a dynamic platform to explore the safe and responsible use of advanced technologies in supporting national security objectives. As reliance on AI and its applications continues to grow across various sectors, the importance of developing comprehensive frameworks that balance innovation and governance becomes more pronounced. This ensures enhanced national security systems, risk mitigation, and the protection of communities and nations amid evolving challenges." -WAM

DATA

Austria's economic confidence indicators continue to decline

VIENNA: Austria's latest banking data showed economic confidence indicators continued to decline amid the impact of tensions in the Middle East on European markets and ongoing pressure from slowing growth, inflation and high energy costs.

Economic indicator

Austria's UniCredit Bank said its economic indicator fell by 0.5 points in April from the previous month to -1.8 points, marking its lowest level in six months.

Bank economists attributed the decline mainly to weaker sentiment in the services and construction sectors and a sharp drop in consumer confidence.

Weaker sentiment

Stefan Bruckbauer, Chief Economist at UniCredit Bank, said the impact of the Middle East conflict on Austria's economy was expected to continue through the winter. He said weaker sentiment at the start of the second quarter reflected subdued growth prospects in the coming months amid persistent uncertainty weighing on economic activity and market confidence.

The bank said geopolitical uncertainty and accelerating inflation driven by higher fuel and energy prices had pushed consumer confidence to its lowest level in two and a half years.

Economist Walter Pudschedl forecast Austria's gross domestic product would grow 0.8 percent in 2026, with average annual inflation expected at 3 percent. -WAM

ECONOMIC ROUNDTABLE

China promotes higher-quality service sector development for growth, livelihoods

BEIJING: China is ramping up efforts to expand and upgrade its service sector, aiming to better underpin economic growth, industrial upgrading, people's livelihoods and high-standard opening up, officials and experts said on the latest episode of China Economic Roundtable, an all-media talk show hosted by Xinhua News Agency.

Advancing high-quality, efficient development of the service sector aligns with economic trends, industrial needs and public expectations, noted Li Chunfang, an official with the National Development and Reform Commission.

China's service sector has played an increasingly robust role in driving growth in recent years. During the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-2025), its added value successively surpassed the 60-trillion-yuan (about \$8.77 trillion), 70-trillion-yuan and 80-trillion-yuan marks. In the first quarter of 2026, the service sector's added value accounted for 61.7 percent of China's gross domestic product, up 0.4 percentage points from a year earlier.

The country has intensified policy efforts to boost service sector development. The outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) and this year's government work report both made specific arrangements for this sector, while a national conference on service sector development was held in April, and the State Council issued a guideline on advancing the expansion and quality upgrading of the sector.

High-quality service development

China's service sector has achieved notable progress, yet gaps remain when measured against the requirements of high-quality development, said Liu Tao, deputy head of the Institute of Market Economy under the Development Research Center of the State Council.



Amid profound shifts in the global landscape and rapid breakthroughs in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), many of which have seen initial application in service fields, China's service sector faces valuable opportunities alongside notable challenges, Liu said.

The service sector still faces institutional obstacles in areas including market access, factor mobility, regulatory models, integrated development and open cooperation. To tackle these constraints, the guideline issued by the State Council on April 21 has set out measures to ease market access, expand application scenarios, refine regulatory approaches, deepen pilot programs and broaden opening up.

Wider adoption of AI, big data and the industrial internet has spawned new business formats such as smart logistics and digital cultural tourism, helping traditional services upgrade and emerging services grow faster while cutting costs and boosting efficiency, said Li.

Elderly care stands out as a key service area where new technologies can play a bigger role. Zhang Chengcheng, chairperson of Roffar Elderly Service Co., Ltd, said the sector will fully leverage the Internet of Things, big data and intelligent monitoring to improve safety, lower operating costs and provide more convenient and efficient modern services for the elderly.

With all foreign investment access restrictions in the manufacturing sector lifted, the service sector has become a key area for China's high-standard opening up. In 2025, the sector attracted 545.12 billion yuan of actual foreign investment, accounting for more than 70 percent of the national total, while service trade exceeded 8 trillion yuan, an increase of 7.4 percent year on year.

Liu said China has continued to widen its service sector opening by easing foreign investment access, expanding opening-up platforms and further opening key fields, with comprehensive pilot programs for service sector opening

up now covering 20 areas across the country.

Fostering China services brands

According to the guideline, China aims to make marked progress in high-quality service sector development by 2030, with the total scale of the sector exceeding 100 trillion yuan by then, while more competitive and influential "China services" brands will be cultivated.

Li said the service sector is expected to generate about 20 trillion yuan in additional growth space during the 15th Five-Year Plan period, and the guideline has identified 26 sub-sectors in 10 key fields for expansion and upgrading, giving enterprises clearer direction for development.

Translating this growth potential into stronger brands will require more high-quality service providers. Major service enterprises account for less than 1 percent of service sector market entities in China, while Chinese companies make up less than 6 percent of the

global top 500 service enterprises, according to Li.

Li said efforts should be made to deepen reform, improve the business environment, scale up fiscal and financial support, and help service enterprises build stronger brands.

For producer service providers such as inspection, testing and certification agencies, building stronger "China services" hinges on enhancing institutional credibility, industrial support capacity and global influence, said Liu Gang, general manager of China Quality Certification Centre Co., Ltd.

Liu noted that the sector should benchmark against leading international standards, better cater to domestic economic and social development needs, and promote international mutual recognition of inspection, testing and certification results, so as to help Chinese standards and Chinese manufacturing become more competitive globally.

In building elderly-care service brands, operators should focus on both quality and warmth by placing greater emphasis on family-style companionship, emotional care and cultural enrichment, while promoting intergenerational interaction and neighborhood mutual assistance, said Zhang.

China's wider opening up has also helped Chinese services in fields like logistics, cross-border e-commerce and cultural tourism gain a stronger global presence. In the first quarter of 2026, the country's service exports rose 11.2 percent year on year to 704.52 billion yuan.

As China enters its 15th Five-Year Plan period, it is poised to further expand and upgrade its service sector, shore up services that drive industrial upgrading, deliver more high-quality, accessible services for households, and nurture more competitive "China services" brands. -Xinhua



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India-UAE sign major agreements to enhance strategic partnership

The agreements which were signed in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan were mainly related to the defence sector



ABU DHABI: India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) exchanged various agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) aimed at expanding horizons of cooperation and strengthening the strategic partnership between the two countries.

In an 'X' post, the UAE's Ministry of Defence said on Friday that the agreements which were signed in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan were mainly related to the defence sector.

The event was also attended by Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Deputy PM and Dubai Crown Prince Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum and Ruler's Representative in the Al Dhafra Region, Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

"His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the State, "may God protect him," and His Excellency Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, today ex-

changed a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding aimed at expanding the horizons of cooperation between the two countries and strengthening the strategic partnership that unites them, as part of the official visit being undertaken by the Prime Minister of India to the State, in the presence of His Highness Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi; His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence; and His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Ruler's Representative in the Al Dhafra Region," said the 'X' post.

Meanwhile, both countries also signed agreements which reflect their commitment to enhancing defence cooperation and developing the strategic partnership in the military and defence fields.

"The signed agreements includ-

ed an agreement on the framework of the strategic defence partnership between the Ministry of Defence in the United Arab Emirates and the Ministry of Defence in the Republic of India, whereby the agreement was exchanged between His Excellency Lieutenant General Ibrahim Nasser Al Alawi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Defence, and His Excellency Vikram Misri, Foreign Secretary of India, reflecting the two countries' commitment to enhancing defence cooperation and developing the strategic partnership in military and defence fields," the 'X' post added.

PM Modi also met with UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan earlier on Friday and reaffirmed India's strong support for the country. The Prime Minister stressed that New Delhi stands "shoulder-to-shoulder" with Abu Dhabi amid growing regional instability in West Asia.

Addressing the UAE leadership during the meeting, PM Modi described the UAE as his "second

home" and thanked the Emirati side for the warm reception extended to him.

"I express my heartfelt gratitude for this warm welcome. And as you said, I have come to my second home," PM Modi said, adding that the escort provided by UAE Air Force aircraft during his arrival was "a matter of pride for the people of India."

The Prime Minister also thanked the UAE leadership for expressing condolences over the recent natural disaster in Uttar Pradesh and said he had been personally eager to meet the UAE president. "We strongly condemn the attacks on the UAE. The way the UAE has been targeted is unacceptable in any way," PM Modi stated during the talks.

Praising the UAE leadership's handling of the situation, PM Modi said, "In these difficult circumstances, the restraint, courage, and wisdom you have shown are highly commendable."

He also welcomed efforts under the UAE leadership to maintain

UAE to store up to 30mn barrels in India's Petroleum Reserve

ABU DHABI: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri shared key details on agreements between India and the UAE, stating that the UAE will store up to 30 million barrels of crude oil in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserve following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit.

He said the move is aimed at strengthening energy cooperation and enhancing India's energy security.

"We will be issuing a more detailed press release later today, but let me give you a snapshot of everything that happened during the course of this brief two-and-a-half-hour visit. On the bilateral front, the two sides have concluded several important initiatives to further deepen our comprehensive strategic partnership. Energy has always been a very important part of this relationship. In the energy cooperation field, we've seen several agreements being initialled between Indian energy sector companies and UAE entities, primarily the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company. These include agreements on enhancing UAE participation in Indian strategic petroleum reserves to a level of 30 million barrels, the establishment of strategic gas reserves



in India, and long-term LPG offtake supply agreements," he said.

Misri said that new investment commitments were signed, totalling \$5 billion.

"In the field of investment, the UAE has traditionally been a significant investor in India, cumulatively the seventh largest investor over the course of the last 25 years. Today, new investment commitments were signed totalling \$5 billion. These include investments by Emirates NBD Bank in RBL Bank in India, by the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority in the National Infrastructure Investment Fund, and by the International Holding Company in Saman Capital of India," he said.

Misri further said that the two sides built on the initial steps that were taken during the visit of the UAE President to India.

"national unity, security, and regional integrity."

PM Modi expressed appreciation to the UAE government and

the royal family for supporting the Indian community living in the Gulf nation during difficult times.

— ANI

US STATE DEPARTMENT



Israel and Lebanon agree on 45-day ceasefire extension

WASHINGTON DC: The US State Department informed that Israel and Lebanon have agreed to extend their ceasefire for the next 45 days amidst the ongoing Israeli attacks on Lebanon, according to media report.

US State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott described the peace talks, which concluded in Washington on Friday, as "highly productive" and stressed that the political negotiations would continue on June 2 and 3. Meanwhile, a "security track" would begin at Pentagon on May 29, which will involve the presence of both officials from Israel and Lebanon.

Lasting peace

"We hope these discussions will advance lasting peace between the two countries, full recognition of each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and establishing genuine security along their shared border," Pigott said as per Al Jazeera.

This comes after Israel killed seven people in South Lebanon on Friday in fresh attacks, Al Jazeera reported, quoting Lebanese state media. As per the country's health ministry, a total of 2,951 people have been killed in Israeli attacks since March 2.

However, amidst the ongoing peace talks, Hezbollah on Wednesday (local time) carried out 17 operations targeting Israe-

li military positions, forces and vehicles in southern Lebanon, according to Iranian state media Press TV.

Press TV reported that the operations included eight drone strikes, five missile or rocket attacks, one artillery strike, and one guided missile launch.

According to the news agency, Hezbollah targeted two "Nimr" military vehicles, two "Merkava" tanks, one armoured personnel carrier and two military bulldozers during the attacks.

The group also claimed that its fighters "ambushed" Israeli troops near the outskirts of the town of Haddatha, using pre-planted explosives along with 'light and heavy weapons and artillery fire'.

Meanwhile, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on Thursday, through its official Telegram channel, said that "a short while ago, an interceptor was launched toward a suspicious aerial target identified in the area in which IDF soldiers are operating in southern Lebanon."

The military added that no sirens were activated "in accordance with protocol." The IDF further said that in several incidents over recent hours, Hezbollah launched an anti-tank missile and several mortar shells that landed adjacent to areas where Israeli troops were operating in southern Lebanon. — ANI

SUPREME COURT

Nepal's SC restrains govt from collecting customs on goods above NRS100 from India

KATHMANDU: Nepal's Supreme Court (SC) on Saturday issued an interim order restraining the country's government from collecting customs on goods above NRS100 brought across the border from India.

A joint bench of Justices Hari Prasad Phuyal and Tek Prasad Dhungana directed the Office of the Prime Minister of Nepal and Council of Ministers of Nepal, the Ministry of Finance of Nepal, and concerned authorities not to enforce the disputed provision until further notice.

The order was issued in response to a writ petition filed by advocates Amitesh Pandit, Akash Mahato, Suyogee Singh, and Prashant Bikram Shah, challenging the Finance Ministry's decision.

Petitioners argued that the policy of imposing customs duty on goods exceeding NRS100 is inconsistent with provisions of the Customs Act, 2081, particularly those relating to exemptions.

Earlier, the Ministry of Finance of the newly elected government under Prime Minister Balendra "Balen" Shah had made customs duty mandatory on goods above NRS100, a move that led to stricter checks at Nepal-India border points in the Terai-Madhesh region and triggered public criticism.



With the interim order, the government is barred from collecting such duties until the final verdict on the petition is delivered.

Following the imposition of the mandatory provision for collecting customs, the Armed Police Force (APF) had started urging people to mandatorily pay customs duty on goods worth more than NRS100 brought from India.

Targeting ordinary citizens who previously enjoyed informal customs exemptions for small purchases and household items, the government began strictly en-

forcing a rule requiring mandatory customs duties on any goods valued over NRS100.

Secondary customs points had been witnessing widespread crackdowns in the name of controlling customs evasion.

Following orders from the centre, joint monitoring teams comprising the Department of Customs, the Department of Revenue Investigation, District Administration Offices, Nepal Police, and the Armed Police Force had increased their activity, leading to stricter controls on all goods en-

tering the country.

This unilateral and strict policy created significant problems in the border districts of Madhesh, affecting the daily lives of residents.

The situation at border points from east to west was thrown into disarray, making it tense and abnormal. The checks conducted by the Armed Police Force on Nepalis returning from weekly markets forced people to stand in long queues, with their bags and packages opened and inspected thoroughly. — ANI

GERMANY

Merz wouldn't advise his kids to go to US



BERLIN: German Chancellor Friedrich Merz says he wouldn't advise his own children or other young Germans to move to the US for study or work.

Speaking at the German Catholic Convention in Würzburg, he referred to "the social climate that has suddenly developed" in the United States and said that "even the best educated in America have great difficulty in finding a job."

"I am a great admirer of America, but right now my admira-

tion is not increasing," he said, to laughter from the 1,600-strong audience — many of them young people. "I wouldn't recommend to my children today that they go to the US, get an education there, and work there."

Merz famously spent much of his career in business traveling to and from the US as part of his work with the Blackrock investment management company.

This was Merz's first appearance at the Catholic Conven-

tion since he took office in 2025. Seated alongside the 70-year-old Chancellor were 19-year-old student Amy Kirchhoff from Saxony and 29-year-old Lisa Quarch from the Federation of German Catholic Youth.

For just over an hour, the discussion touched on many domestic German issues: anxieties about the future, educational opportunities, and youth centers that have been hollowed out by budget cuts.

— DW

SCIENTISTS UNLOCK COMPUTATIONAL METHOD TO SPEED UP SEARCH FOR MATERIALS CAPABLE OF TURNING SUNLIGHT INTO FUEL

By analysing how 53 different metal ions influence the structure and electronic behaviour of these materials, researchers created a framework that predicts which combinations will perform best

Scientists have developed a powerful new computational method that could accelerate the search for next-generation materials capable of turning sunlight into useful chemical energy. The work focuses on polyheptazine imides, a promising class of carbon nitride materials that absorb visible light and can drive reactions such as hydrogen production, carbon dioxide conversion, and hydrogen peroxide synthesis. By analysing how 53 different metal ions influence the structure and electronic behaviour of these materials, researchers created a framework that predicts which combinations will perform best. Photocatalysis offers a promising way to convert the vast supply of sunlight into useful chemical energy. Among the materials attracting growing attention are polyheptazine imides, which have structural and functional features that make them particularly effective for photocatalytic reactions. Until recently, scientists had only limited insight into how changes in their structure influence their electronic and optical behaviour across the many possible materials in this family. Researchers led by a team at the Center for Advanced Systems Understanding (CASUS) at Helmholtz-Zentrum Dresden-Rossendorf (HZDR) have now introduced a dependable and reproducible theoretical approach to tackle this problem. Their predictions were validated through measurements on real material samples. The team believes this advance could significantly accelerate research on polyheptazine imides and spark rapid growth in the field.

Carbon nitride materials and visible light absorption

Polyheptazine imides belong to the broader class of carbon nitrides. These materials consist of layered structures that resemble graphene but are built from nitrogen-rich ring-shaped molecular units. While graphene is known for exceptional electrical conductivity, it does not function well as a photocatalyst. Polyheptazine imides differ in a crucial way. Their electronic band gaps allow them to absorb visible light, which makes them suitable for sunlight-driven chemical reactions. Carbon nitride materials also offer several practical advantages. They are relatively inexpensive to produce, non-toxic, and thermally stable. However, early versions of these materials did not perform well as photocatalysts because their internal properties limited effective charge separation. When a photon strikes a material, it can excite an electron and move it away from its original position, leaving behind a positively charged hole. If the electron quickly recombines with the hole, the energy is released only as heat or light instead of driving chemical reactions. “Polyheptazine imides containing positively charged metal ions exhibit markedly improved charge separation. This feature



LIFESTYLE

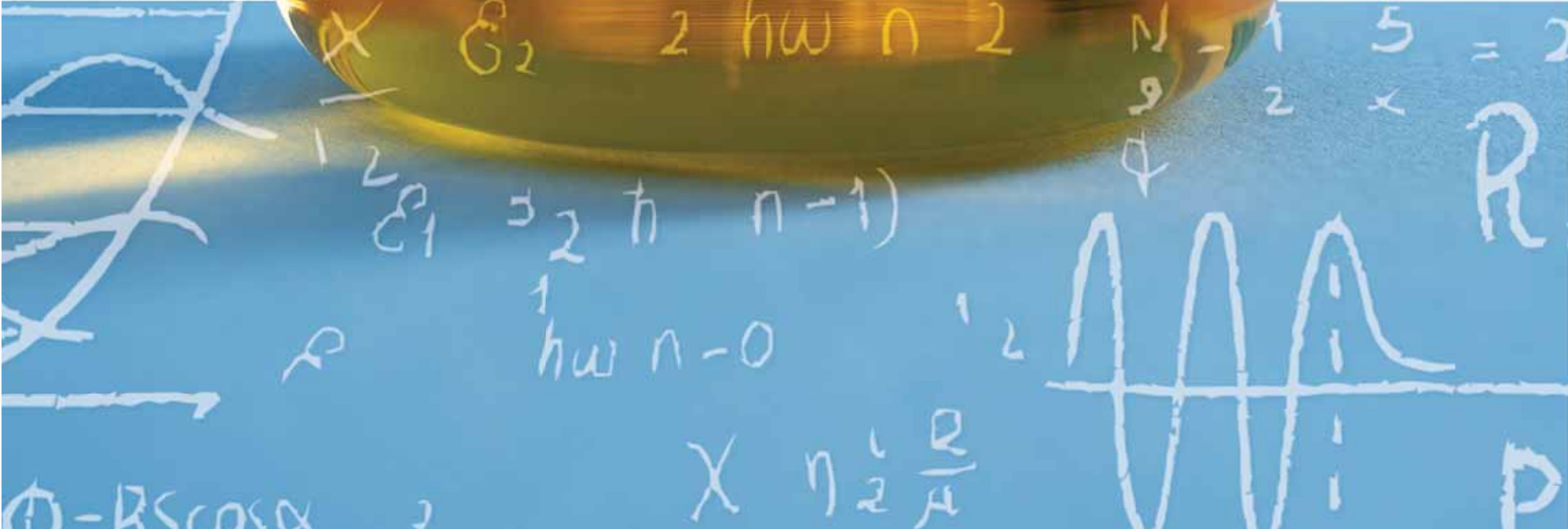
renders them highly suitable for practical applications,” says first author Dr. Zahra Hajiahmadi. Improved materials are needed to unlock the economic potential of several photocatalytic processes. These include water splitting (to produce hydrogen as a fuel), carbon dioxide reduction (to produce basic carbohydrates as fuels or industrial chemicals), and hydrogen peroxide production (as a basic industrial chemical). Designing a polyheptazine imide catalyst that performs well for a specific reaction requires careful control over many aspects of its structure. Creating and testing every possible material candidate in the laboratory would be unrealistic. Computational methods therefore, play an essential role in narrowing down the possibilities. “The design space is enormous,” explains Prof. Thomas D. Kuhne, Director of CASUS, head of the CASUS research team “Theory of Complex Systems” and senior author of the study. “One can for example add functional groups on the surface or substitute specific nitrogen or carbon atoms with oxygen or phosphorus atoms.” Kuhne’s research group is developing advanced numerical techniques designed to be both efficient and capable of accurately reproducing the chemical and physical behaviour of complex materials.

Systematically testing 53 metal ions

A defining feature of polyheptazine imides is the presence of negatively charged pores within the material. These pores can host positively charged metal ions, which can significantly enhance catalytic performance. Hajiahmadi’s work represents the first comprehensive investigation of how different metal ions influence the optoelectronic properties of these materials. The study examined 53 metal ions in total, categorising them according to where they sit within the structure (in plane or between layers) and how they alter the geometry of the material (resulting in a distortion or not). “We used a reliable and reproducible computational framework that goes beyond conventional modelling approaches,” says Hajiahmadi. “Standard computational studies of photocatalysts typically focus on ground-state properties and neglect excited-state effects, despite the fact that photocatalysis is inherently driven by photoexcited charge carriers. Specifically, we employ many-body perturbation theory methods,” added Hajiahmadi. These methods begin with a simplified model system that does not include particle interactions. Interactions are then added as small corrections, allowing researchers to approximate how large numbers of particles affect each other. Although such calculations require substantial computing power and are rarely applied in this field, the new study demonstrates their value. The framework provides an accurate description of how these materials absorb light and how their electronic structure behaves under illumination.

Experiments confirm theoretical predictions

Using their computational approach, the researchers explored how different metal ions alter the structure of the polyheptazine imide network. Their analysis revealed that introducing ions can cause measurable structural changes, including shifts in the spacing between layers and modifications to local bonding environments. These structural variations directly influence the electronic band structure and optical properties of the materials, affecting how efficiently they capture light. To test their predictions, the team synthesised eight polyheptazine imide materials, each incorporating a different metal ion. The materials were then evaluated for their ability to catalyse hydrogen peroxide production. “The results clearly showed a high degree of agreement to our predictions and outperformed competing calculation methods,” Hajiahmadi concludes. “If there was some doubt about polyheptazine imides being one of the most promising platforms for next-generation photocatalytic technologies, I believe this work put them to rest. The path toward the targeted design of efficient polyheptazine imide photocatalysts for sustainable reactions is clearer now. I firmly believe that it will be taken often and successfully,” adds Kuhne - ANI



SPORTS

PREMIER LEAGUE

Guardiola insists he has ‘one more year’ on Man City deal

LONDON: Manager Pep Guardiola insists he has “one more year” remaining on his contract at Manchester City as speculation continues over his future.

The 55-year-old takes City to Wembley Stadium for the 24th time in a domestic cup semi-final or final on Saturday.

Guardiola’s side face Chelsea in the FA Cup final aiming for a double, having claimed the Carabao

Cup with victory over Arsenal in March. There continues to be talk that the Spaniard will step down from his position in the summer after a decade at the helm, with BBC Sport hearing similar soundings.

Asked in the pre-match news conference whether Saturday could be his final trip to Wembley, Guardiola said “no way”.

He then playfully suggested, while smiling, that he has “one

more year [on his] contract” - before making a swift exit from the room. Guardiola was scheduled to leave anyway as it was the last question. As things stand, there has been no confirmation from Guardiola or the club over his immediate future, but it is understood former Chelsea head coach Enzo Maresca is among the leading candidates to replace him.

City’s preference is for Guar-

diola to stay for as long as possible, but sources have told BBC Sport there is tangible uncertainty over whether he will see out the final year of his contract.

Guardiola, who continues to publicly insist he loves working at the club, has lifted 19 trophies during his time at City, including six Premier League titles, the Champions League and two FA Cups. His side remain in the hunt for a

seventh top-flight title of his spell, but lie two points behind leaders Arsenal with two games remaining.

Asked if his reign is the definition of greatness, Guardiola replied by flexing his bicep and saying: “Yeah, of course, 19 titles in 10 years is not bad. “They know they don’t need to wait until I’m leaving, they know I have been fun. So 19 titles - fight for 20 in 10 years - it’s not bad, honestly.” - Agencies



Watkins shines as Aston Villa seal Champions League spot



The win moved Villa into fourth place with 62 points from their 37 games, leapfrogging their opponents, who have 59 points from the same number of matches



BIRMINGHAM: Ollie Watkins scored two goals and had another disallowed as Aston Villa set themselves up nicely for next week’s Europa League final with a 4-2 win at home against Liverpool in their Premier League game on Friday.

The win also guaranteed Villa a place in next year’s Champions League. The win just five days before Villa faces Freiburg in the Europa League decider means Unai Emery’s side ensured a top-five finish in the Premier League.

“It’s a great performance and a great way to end the season at Villa Park,” captain John McGinn told broadcaster Sky Sports.

“We’ve just made this club a Champions League club again, and this allows us to be excited and enjoy the game on Wednesday.

Liverpool were three points behind in fifth and still sweating whether they will make it into next year’s Champions League. Liverpool had the better of the opening exchanges with Cody Gakpo see-

ing a goal ruled out for offside and Emiliano Martinez pushing away a swerving long-range effort from Dominik Szoboszlai.

However, Villa found their composure as the half went on and took the lead three minutes before halftime. Morgan Rogers placed a perfect right-foot shot beyond the reach of Giorgi Mamardashvili after a well-worked corner kick.

Virgil van Dijk’s header eight minutes into the second half brought Liverpool level but Villa

started to dominate as the game opened up. Watkins had a goal chalked off for offside but made up for it just a few minutes later when he took advantage of a slip by Szoboszlai that set Villa free on the counterattack.

He added a third in the 73rd when he side-footed home from point-blank range after Mamardashvili made two excellent stops.

It was Watkins’ sixth goal in his last seven league games and he was a constant threat to a Liverpool

rearguard that looked shaky every time Villa stormed forward.

“We’ve conceded far too many games, but we also haven’t scored enough goals,” said Liverpool coach Arne Slot, who admitted his team lacked backbone after going behind in the second half.

“(After) the 2-1 we crumbled, we struggled. In the end made it 4-2, so they did not give up, but we struggled to control their pace, intensity and quality.”

“It’s not about me, it’s about us

being disappointed with the result,” Slot told the BBC. “I spoke yesterday on it (his future) and that’s enough.

“The culmination of the fan support and a good performance will lead us to what we want to achieve and that is qualifying for the Champions League.”

The win moved Villa into fourth place with 62 points from their 37 games, leapfrogging their opponents, who have 59 points from the same number of matches. - Agencies

ManU reach deal to appoint Michael Carrick as manager

LONDON: Manchester United on Saturday reached an agreement with Michael Carrick to become the club’s permanent head coach.

The formal process of exchanging contracts is now under way, with an announcement expected inside the next 48 hours, according to a BBC Sport report.

As things stand there is some doubt over whether the formalities can be completed before Sunday’s match against Nottingham Forest, but there is a will to have it done in time for the club’s final home game of the season. Carrick will sign an initial two-year deal with the option of an additional 12 months. Carrick has overseen a vast improvement at Old Trafford since replacing Ruben Amorim, who was sacked in January, successfully leading the club to Champions League qualification.

His impressive body of work since his interim appointment has put the 44-year-old in pole position



to become the club’s next permanent boss.

United’s executive leadership team, that includes chief executive officer Omar Berrada and director of football Jason Wilcox, has recommended to club owners Ineos that Carrick be handed the reins on a full-time basis - which has been passed by the hierarchy. Carrick has won 10 of his 15 Premier League games since taking charge in January.

SPANISH LA LIGA

Arbeloa ‘happy’ if Mourinho returns to Real next season

MADRID: Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa said on Saturday he will be pleased if Jose Mourinho replaces him and leads the club next season.

The Portuguese veteran who led Madrid between 2010 and 2013, clashing in that era with Pep Guardiola’s Barcelona side, has been heavily linked with a return to the Santiago Bernabeu bench.

Currently coaching Benfica, selecting the divisive Mourinho would be a gamble on the part of president Florentino Perez after Los Blancos finished without a major trophy for a second consecutive season.

“For me, as a former (Madrid) player and as a Madridista, Jose Mourinho is number one. He’s one of ours,” Arbeloa told reporters.

“If he comes back next year, I’ll be very happy to see him back home.” Arbeloa replaced Xabi Alonso in January but was unable to help Madrid salvage anything from a troubled campaign.

Star striker Kylian Mbappe criticised Arbeloa after being benched in midweek for Madrid’s win over Real Oviedo. Mbappe returned from a thigh injury that had kept



him out of the El Clasico last weekend, where Barca beat Madrid to seal its La Liga triumph.

“I’ve just bumped into him; I told him to stay calm. I understand that these kinds of things make headlines, but it’s something much more normal than you think,” Arbeloa said.

“I used to be a player; I know

what they can feel in these situations - playing every day, then playing less or not at all,” continued the coach.

“I totally understand that Kylian wasn’t happy about not playing on Thursday, and I like that.

“I wouldn’t understand it if he didn’t want to play. My relationship with him remains the same.”

SQUAD ANNOUNCED

Son to lead S Korea’s World Cup campaign

SEOUL: Veteran star Son Heung-min will lead South Korea’s World Cup campaign as coach Hong Myung-bo named his 26-man squad on Saturday.

The tournament, hosted by the United States, Mexico and Canada, will be the fourth World Cup for Son, who left Tottenham last summer after 10 years in the Premier League to join Los Angeles FC in Major League Soccer. It is also South Korea’s 11th successive appearance, a streak that stretches back to 1986. Lee Kang-in of Paris Saint-Germain and Bayern Munich defender Kim Min-jae also made the list for the 48-team tournament.

Coach Hong called up influential midfielder Hwang In-beom although the Feyenoord star is struggling with an ankle injury.

“Our primary goal is to reach the round of 32,” Hong said in Seoul. “We do not know what will happen after that. We could go even further than we could have imagined. Our World Cup goal is not the round of 32; our primary goal is the round of 32.”

Korea reached the last 16 in 2022, defeating Portugal in the final group game, and then lost to five-time champion Brazil.

Hong was the captain of the team that made the semi-finals of the 2002 World Cup and was also in charge at the 2014 tournament when the Taeguk Warriors collected just one point in Brazil. Korea will play all three Group A games in Mexico, starting June 11 against the Czech Republic before taking on Mexico a week later and then playing South Africa on June 24. - Agencies



STRIKER’S FOURTH CAMPAIGN

Injury-hit Lukaku included in Belgium’s World Cup squad



BRUSSELS: Romelu Lukaku’s efforts to recover from injuries seem to have paid off after the Napoli striker was included in Belgium’s World Cup squad on Friday.

Lukaku, midfield great Kevin de Bruyne and Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois are set to play their fourth World Cup campaigns.

Lukaku has 124 games for Belgium, de Bruyne 117 and Courtois 107, making them some of the most experienced players on any team at the World Cup. They all trail 37-year-old defensive midfielder Axel Witsel, also heading into a fourth tournament. He has played for Belgium 136 times.

Lukaku hasn’t played for Bel-

gium in almost a year since scoring against Wales in World Cup qualifying in June. Injuries have limited the 33-year-old striker to just five Serie A games for Napoli this season.

He was selected for Belgium’s most recent friendlies in March and April but withdrew from the squad over more fitness concerns.

Courtois’ last game for the national team was in October and he was left out of Belgium’s most recent squad over injury issues, but he’s been a key player for Real Madrid this season. Arsenal forward Leandro Trossard and Manchester City winger Jérémy Doku bring Premier League experience

up front. Coach Rudi Garcia hasn’t selected 17-year-old midfielder Nathan de Cat, who would have been one of the youngest players at the World Cup.

De Cat made his Belgium debut in a 5-2 win over the United States in March. Forward Lois Openda also misses out after spending much of the last few months on the Juventus bench.

Belgium start their World Cup campaign in Group G against Egypt on June 15 before facing Iran six days later and New Zealand on June 27. Belgium placed third at the 2018 World Cup but are looking to improve on a group-stage exit in 2022. - Agencies

NO IMPACT ON CRICKETING ACTIVITIES

ICC suspends funding to Cricket Canada over governance-related issues

DUBAI: The International Cricket Council (ICC) has suspended funding to Cricket Canada over governance-related issues. Cricket Canada was informed earlier this week by the global governing body and faces a freeze in the funding it receives for the next six months.

The funding suspension, however, will not impact any cricket activities, including high performance programmes. But it will be a significant blow to Cricket Canada, who, as an Associate Member, rely heavily on ICC distributions. Its financial statement for the year-ending 2024 showed that income from the ICC made up 63% of the

board's total income (CAD\$3.6 million out of a total revenue of CAD\$5.7 million).

The details around the governance failures are not yet known, though the fifth estate in Canada, an investigative documentary programme, has reported "breaches of ICC policies, including concerns over Cricket Canada's governance and lack of financial oversight."

Cricket Canada has gone through a period of turmoil on and off the field recently. Canada's match against New Zealand at the recent T20 World Cup is the subject of a probe by the ICC's anti-corruption and integrity unit.



Another ACU investigation is underway, stemming from a recording of a telephone call involving then Canada coach Khurram Chohan, in which he claimed that senior (now former) Cricket Canada board members put pressure on him to select certain players to the national side. The audio was leaked last year and also contains claims of attempts to corrupt matches.

Cricket Canada has also faced administrative challenges over the last year, most notably in the appointment and subsequent removal of former CEO Salman Khan. His appointment had attracted ICC attention, for failing to dis-

close prior criminal charges and he has been charged with theft and fraud by Calgary Police. Salman has denied the claims. In April, Arvinder Khosa was made the interim board president, replacing Amjad Bajwa.

The ICC's funding decision came immediately after Cricket Canada's annual general meeting last weekend (May 9-10), in which the board announced reforms it said were part of its "ongoing governance transformation initiative". It also elected a new nine-person board of directors, with Khosa elected president, after his interim stint. - Agencies

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP 2026

McNealy and Smalley share lead at Aronimink

NEWTOWN SQUARE: Americans Maverick McNealy and Alex Smalley shared the lead after Friday's chaotic second round of the PGA Championship as cold, windy conditions contributed to carnage at Aronimink.

Six others were only one adrift after 36 holes with seven more, including top-ranked defending champion Scottie Scheffler, just two strokes off the lead entering the weekend.

McNealy, never in the top 25 after 36 holes in 14 prior major starts, fired a three-under par 67 to match Smalley on four-under 136 at the midway mark.

"This is unfamiliar territory to me," McNealy said. "I was surprised to be that high on the leaderboard."

McNealy, a back-nine starter whose best major finish was 18th at last month's Masters, holed out a 54-foot bunker shot for eagle at the par-five 16th, then made birdie putts from 12 and 18 feet on the first two holes.

The world No.33 squandered the solo lead, however, with three-putt bogeys at the sixth and par-three eighth holes.

Smalley fell out of the solo lead with three bogeys in a row but a closing birdie put him on 69.

"It was difficult, it was chilly this morning, the wind was up," Smalley said. "Some of the hole locations are very difficult. They're right on the top of a crown."

Sharing third on 137 were Japan's Hideki Matsuyama, the 2021 Masters champion, plus Americans Chris Gotterup and Max Greyserman, South African

Aldrich Potgieter, Australian Min Woo Lee and German Stephan Jaeger, who made 18 pars.

A bogey-bogey finish doomed 21-year-old Potgieter's bid to become the youngest 36-hole major leader since Tiger Woods at the 1997 Masters.

Joining Scheffler in ninth on 138 were fellow Americans Cameron Young, Justin Thomas and Harris English plus Spain's David Puig, Sweden's Ludvig Aberg and South Korean Kim Si-woo.

Scheffler tumbled from a share of the lead with three bogeys in his first four holes but closed with a birdie at nine to shoot 71.

The four-time major winner missed seven fairways after hitting 13 of 14 on Thursday but complained most about hole positions.

"Most of the pins today were, I mean, kind of absurd," Scheffler said. "You've just got to try to continue to hit good shots."

Six-time major winner Rory McIlroy, the reigning Masters champion, fired a bogey-free three-under par 67 to stand on 141 with Jordan Spieth, Brooks Koepka and Xander Schauffele among others.

"Some of these hole locations have been brutal," McIlroy said. "It's a really bunched leaderboard because guys are finding it tough to make putts."

Germany's Martin Kaymer made bogeys on five of the first seven holes and shot 75 to stand on 142. England's Justin Rose chipped in for eagle from 76 feet on his final hole to shoot 73 and made the cut with a total of 143 despite two double bogeys and four bogeys. - Agencies



Al Rawahi flies Oman flag high with second place at Jordan Rally



The Omani rally driver secured an impressive podium finish despite punishing Dead Sea conditions, as Qatar's Nasser Al Attiyah sealed a record-extending 18th win in the FIA MERC event on Saturday

difficult conditions, high temperatures and slippery terrain, while also overcoming an early tyre strategy setback and a puncture on Saturday's Rawda stage.

"Jordan is always a tough rally, especially because we are at the lowest point on earth," said Al Rawahi. "It's always hot. It's not easy with long stages and a lot of corners when it is very slippery. We tried to push but I gained a lot of experience from this rally so we can come back and do better next time."

The runner-up finish was another major boost for Oman in the MERC standings and highlighted the growing consistency of the Oman Rally Team on the regional circuit.

At the front, Al Attiyah and Spanish co-driver Candido Carreira were unstoppable. The Autotek Motorsport Škoda Fabia RS crew repeated the rare feat of winning every stage of the rally, a clean sweep the Qatari last achieved in Jordan in 2016. "Absolutely, it was a good weekend," said Al Attiyah. "We did the same stages as

last year and we were even faster. It means our set-up is really good. We worked very hard this weekend to get the maximum points. It's nice to win all 12 stages."

Saudi Arabia's Hamza Bakhshab completed the podium in a Toyota GR Yaris Rally2 despite suffering double punctures during stage nine.

Oman's Al Amri excels

There was more success for Oman as the pairing of Zakariya Al Amri and Mohammed Al Mazroui claimed maximum MERC2 points after bringing their Subaru Impreza N14 home in 10th overall.

Al Rawahi and Al Hmoud also dominated the Jordan National Rally Championship category held alongside the regional event, finishing comfortably ahead of local rivals Sheikh Bader Al-Fayez and Bakhshab.

The FIA Middle East Rally Championship resumes in Lebanon from September 11-13, with Al Rawahi expected to continue his push for top honours after another strong showing in Jordan.

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman's Abdullah Al Rawahi delivered another impressive performance on the FIA Middle East Rally Championship stage by securing second place at the Jordan Rally, as Qatar's Nasser Al Attiyah powered to a record-extending 18th victory in the event on Saturday.

Driving the Oman Rally Team Škoda Fabia RS alongside Jordanian co-driver Ata Al Hmoud, Al Rawahi produced a composed and

consistent drive across the punishing Dead Sea and Jordan Valley stages to collect crucial championship points and underline his status as one of the region's leading contenders.

While Al Attiyah dominated the rally by winning all 12 special stages and finishing in 2hr 14min 26.1sec, Al Rawahi stayed firmly in control of second place throughout the event to finish 3min 53.7sec behind the multiple Dakar champion.

The Omani driver battled dif-

SEVEN-WICKET WIN

Marsh blitz steers LSG to crushing victory over CSK



LUCKNOW: Mitchell Marsh produced a stunning power-hitting display while Akash Singh starred with the ball as Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) scored a commanding seven-wicket victory over Chennai Super Kings (CSK) in the IPL match at Lucknow on Friday.

Marsh smashed a breathtaking 90 off just 38 balls as LSG chased down 188 with ease, reaching 188 for 3 in only 16.4 overs.

The emphatic win, however, was not enough to lift LSG from the bottom of the points table, while the defeat dealt a major blow to CSK's playoff hopes as they slipped from fifth to sixth place.

Earlier, left-arm pacer Akash Singh returned superb figures of 3 for 26 in four overs against his former franchise to help restrict CSK to 187 for 5 after they were sent in on a lively red-soil pitch at the Ekana Stadium.

Akash struck early by removing skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad and Sanju Samson inside the power-play with disciplined hard-length bowling. CSK struggled to 37 for 2 in six overs before young batter Kartik Sharma revived the innings with a fluent 71 off 42 balls.



Kartik counterattacked brilliantly, especially against Shahbaz Ahmed, taking 30 runs off just 15 deliveries from the spinner. The youngster reached his maiden IPL fifty off 35 balls and looked set for a bigger score before holing out in the 16th over.

Dewald Brevis chipped in with 25 off 16 balls, while Shivam Dube provided a late flourish with an unbeaten 32 off only 16 deliveries. Dube exploded at the death, striking two sixes and two fours in his final four balls. Prashant Veer remained unbeaten on 13 off 10 balls as CSK added valuable late runs, including 23 from the final over bowled by Prince Yadav af-

ter LSG were penalised for a slow over rate.

Defending 188, CSK were blown away by Marsh's extraordinary assault at the top. The Australian all-rounder tore into the pace attack from the outset, hammering 56 runs by himself during the power-play as LSG raced to 86 for no loss in six overs.

Mukesh Choudhary conceded 15 in his opening over before Marsh unleashed carnage against Anshul Kamboj, smashing him for four sixes and a boundary in one over. Marsh also dominated CSK debutant Spencer Johnson, taking him for three fours and a six.

Josh Inglis played the support-

ing role perfectly with 36 off 32 balls as the pair added 135 for the opening wicket in just 11.5 overs, effectively killing the contest.

CSK finally broke through when Mukesh deceived Inglis with a slower off-cutter. Marsh then fell agonisingly short of a century when a drive from Nicholas Pooran deflected off Mukesh's hand onto the stumps at the non-striker's end, running him out for 90.

Abdul Samad briefly departed for seven, bowled by Spencer Johnson, but Pooran finished the chase in explosive fashion. The West Indian bludgeoned four successive sixes off Kamboj to seal victory with 20 balls to spare.

Pooran remained unbeaten on 32 off 17 balls as Kamboj endured a nightmare spell, finishing with figures of 0 for 63 in 2.4 overs — the most expensive return by a CSK bowler this season.

Brief scores: Lucknow Super Giants 188/3 in 16.4 overs (Mitchell Marsh 90, Josh Inglis 36, Nicholas Pooran 32*) beat Chennai Super Kings 187/5 in 20 overs (Kartik Sharma 71, Shivam Dube 32*, Akash Singh 3-26) by seven wickets. — Agencies

ROUND-UP

Bank Muscat tailors corporate banking to evolving business needs



Bank Muscat's focus has been on delivering seamless, secure, and scalable digital experiences, enabling customers to manage payments, trade transactions and liquidity positions through integrated channels

MUSCAT: As one of Oman's leading financial institutions, Bank Muscat continues to strengthen its position as a strategic banking partner for large corporates by delivering tailored financial solutions aligned with evolving business needs.

In this exclusive interview, Afaf Ali Moosa, Assistant General Manager, Large Corporate, Bank Muscat, highlights the bank's relationship-driven approach, sector expertise and comprehensive suite of corporate banking products designed to support growth, liquidity management and long-term expansion across key industries in the Sultanate.

Bank Muscat has long positioned itself as a trusted partner for large corporates in Oman. How does the Bank tailor its banking solutions and advisory services to meet the evolving needs of large corporate customers across different sectors?

At Bank Muscat, our approach to large corporates is anchored in deep relationships, sector expertise and a clear understanding of our customers' strategic priorities. We recognise that each corporate operates within a distinct ecosystem, and therefore requires solutions that are both flexible to fit their needs and forward-looking to keep up with the trends.

We work closely with our customers through dedicated teams to co-create bespoke financial solutions that align with their operational cycles, capital structures, and growth ambitions. In recent years, Bank Muscat has held the highest individual subscription capacity among local banks and has established robust connections with regional companies. The Bank provides an extensive range of corporate banking products and services, encompassing



project financing and debt financing through both direct loans and participation in joint transactions. Additionally, it offers working capital support through funded and non-funded facilities. The funded working capital product suite comprises Overdraft, Line of Credit for Short Term Loans, Inventory Financing & Receivable Financing solutions that can be customized to suit specific business and financial needs of a customer. The Bank further extends an array of non-funded products such as Letters of Credit for procuring both inventories and capital equipment, as well as diverse range of guarantees tailored for various business needs of a Corporate.

Beyond traditional banking, we place strong emphasis on advisory-led engagement, supporting customers with insights on market dynamics, funding strategies, and cross-border opportunities.

This allows us to act not just as a financial institution, but as a trusted strategic partner, accompany-

ing our customers as they evolve and scale.

What steps has Bank Muscat taken to enhance its digital platforms and transaction banking services for large corporates?

Digital transformation remains a core pillar of our corporate banking strategy. At Bank Muscat, we have made significant investments in modernizing our digital platforms and strengthening our transaction banking ecosystem to meet the increasing expectations of large corporates.

As a dependable Banking partner in the Sultanate, the Bank is dedicated to supporting diverse institutions, whether governmental or private, and fostering a thriving business environment.

Our focus has been on delivering seamless, secure, and scalable digital experiences, enabling customers to manage payments, trade transactions and liquidity positions through integrated



while total transactions recorded a robust growth of 24% over the same period.

Bank Muscat underscores its determination to persist in this approach, staying attuned to evolving developments and continuously offering technology-based services and facilities to Bank's esteemed customers.

How Bank Muscat's latest innovations helping customers streamline payments, improve liquidity management and strengthen financial controls?

Innovation at Bank Muscat is centered on enabling our corporate customers to optimize treasury operations and strengthen financial governance.

We have introduced solutions that streamline payment processes, allowing customers to execute transactions with greater speed, accuracy and visibility, both locally and internationally. At the same time, our liquidity management offerings are designed to help corporates unlock working capital efficiencies, allowing automation in funds movement between accounts as per pre-defined rules.

Similarly, we continue to enhance our capabilities in risk mitigation and financial control, offering structured instruments and transaction frameworks that support transparency and discipline across complex operations. These solutions are particularly valuable for large-scale projects and supply chains, where effective oversight is critical.

Through these initiatives, we are helping our customers build more efficient, resilient, and well-governed financial ecosystems.

As Oman continues to focus on economic diversification and

growth, what role does Bank Muscat see itself playing in supporting large corporates through financing, advisory services and strategic partnerships?

As Oman advances its economic diversification goals, Bank Muscat plays a central and proactive role in enabling sustainable growth across key sectors.

We have a long-standing track record in supporting landmark projects through project finance, structured lending, and capital mobilization, often acting as a lead arranger and strategic partner. Our ability to bring together financing, advisory, and execution capabilities allows us to support corporates at every stage of their growth journey.

Additionally, our role in fostering strategic partnerships is equally important, working alongside government entities, investors, and corporates to facilitate investment needs and deliver impactful projects aligned with national priorities.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to empowering large corporates with innovative financial solutions, strategic insights, and strong partnership support, reinforcing our position as a key enabler of Oman's long-term economic transformation and 2040 vision.

Our commitment to excellence has been recognized through several prestigious accolades. Bank Muscat was honored with the Excellence in Corporate Banking Services Oman 2025 award by International Business Magazine, the Best Corporate Banking Services Oman award at the World Business Outlook Awards 2025, and Top Performing Company in the Large Cap Category by United Media Services.

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UNI-S 4WD
Royal

1.5L Turbo Engine, 185 hp,
7-Speed DCT, 4WD



EMI
OMR140*
for 6 years



UNI-V 2.0T

2.0L Turbo Engine, 232 hp,
8-Speed AT

EMI
OMR142*
for 6 years



Terms and conditions apply. *Easy Monthly Installment is calculated based on 20% down payment for 6 years loan tenure, Subject to credit approvals from Banks only. Applicable on vehicles purchased for personal use. Images shown are for illustrative purpose only. Specification may vary as per the model variant. To generate an inquiry, customers are required to visit the CHANGAN showroom to test drive their preferred model and to obtain full details regarding vehicle pricing and applicable offers.

**Arabian Gulf Automobiles
and Equipment LLC**

Showrooms:
Qurum 94641010, Mawaleh 97888180, Nizwa 96628940
Sohar 95351200, Salalah 96629050, Ibri 96628930,
Barka 96629010, Sur 96628920

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