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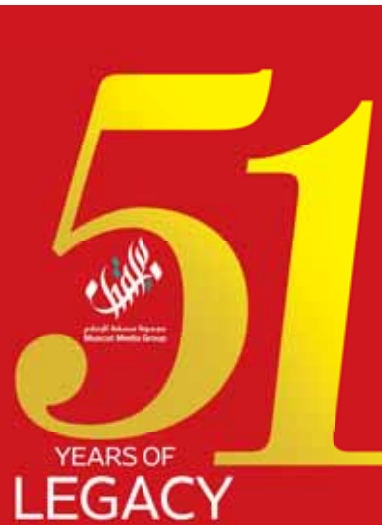


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Oman Airports introduces unified parking rate at Muscat International Airport

MUSCAT: Oman Airports has announced a limited-time unified parking offer at Muscat International Airport, allowing passengers to park in either the P1 or P2 parking areas for a flat rate of OMR3,200 per day. The special offer is valid until August 30, 2026, giving travellers greater flexibility and convenience when choosing airport parking.

In a post on its official social media account, Oman Airports encouraged passengers to take advantage of the unified parking rates and use the dedicated parking facilities to begin their journeys comfortably.



The initiative is expected to benefit passengers travelling during the busy summer holiday period by providing easier access to parking close to the terminal at a fixed daily rate.

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN

Oman airports handle 6.28mn passengers

1 The total number of passengers (arrivals, departures, and transit) travelling through the airports of Oman reached 6,276,117 passengers by the end of June 2026, representing a 9.3% decline compared to the corresponding period in 2025, NCSI data reveals. **>A2**

OMAN

Campaign for Khareef Dhofar launched

2 The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has launched its promotional campaign for Khareef Dhofar. **>A4**

MARKET

Revenues of hotels in Oman top OMR124mn

3 Total hotel revenues in Oman reached OMR124.17mn according to data released by NCSI. **>B1**

CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY

-1.1°C to 50.7°C: 2025, Oman's year of weather extremes

Times News Service



MUSCAT: Oman's weather delivered a year of striking contrasts in 2025, with temperatures soaring to a blistering 50.7°C in Barka and plunging to a freezing -1.1°C in Jabal Shams, highlighting the extraordinary climatic diversity that defines the Sultanate.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) Climate Summary of Weather Events in the Sultanate of Oman 2025, temperature observations throughout the year revealed considerable spatial and seasonal variability, driven by the country's unique mix of coastal plains, vast deserts and towering mountain ranges.

The highest temperature of the year was recorded at the Barka observation station during an intense heatwave that swept across the northern governorates on July 30 and 31. The two-day event was identified as the most severe of 10 notable heat episodes that affected different parts of Oman during the year.

The report shows that heatwaves were not confined to the peak summer months. An unusually warm spell between January 28 and 30 impacted governorates across the country, with temperatures reaching 33°C in Salalah and 32.6°C in Al Jazir—exceptionally high for that time of year.



Successive heat events continued through spring and summer, with temperatures climbing to 39.6°C in Sur in April, 45.5°C in Saham, 48.6°C in Quriyat, 49.1°C in Fahud, and 49.2°C in Bidiya, before culminating in the record-breaking 50.7°C recorded in Barka.

Another nationwide warm spell in early September saw temperatures remain unusually high across all governorates, while October also witnessed widespread heat.

The other side of Oman's weather story was equally dramatic. The Sultanate experienced nine notable cold spells during 2025, although the number was lower than in the previous year. The coldest conditions were recorded in the high-altitude areas, with Jabal Shams in Al Hamra registering -1.1°C, the lowest temperature observed anywhere in the country during the year.

Another significant cold episode occurred between November 24 and December 2, when temperatures at Jabal Shams dropped to -0.3°C, while earlier winter cold spells saw Saiq record lows of 2.6°C and 1.5°C, and Jabal Harim fall to 2.7°C.

The CAA attributed the decline in the number of cold-weather episodes compared with 2024 primarily to the reduced frequency of winter westerly troughs affecting the Sultanate.



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INTERNATIONAL MILESTONE

Four Omani teachers win GLOBE environmental award

MUSCAT: Four teachers from the Sultanate of Oman have achieved a new international milestone by winning the GLOBE International Environmental Competition, held for the first time in conjunction with the FIFA World Cup, in recognition of their outstanding implementation of a project to monitor daily environmental data at football stadiums.

Competition winners

The competition winners are: Fakhriyah Saud Al Balushi from Sowdah Umm Al Mu'minin Basic Education School; Hidayah Sulaiman Al Farsi from Asma bint Umays Basic Education School in A' Dhahirah Governorate; Yusra Humaid Al Dhawi from Sumayya Basic Education School; and Ali Rashid Al Jafili from Abdulrah-

man bin Abi Bakr Basic Education School in North A'Sharqiyah Governorate.

This achievement follows the outstanding performance of the Omani participants at the Near East and North Africa regional level, where they executed a project involving the daily monitoring of environmental data at local football stadiums. The project encompassed measurements of air temperature, land surface temperature, and land cover, with data consistently uploaded through the GLOBE Programme's global platform throughout the competition period.

This accomplishment represents a continuation of the successes achieved by the Ministry of Education in the field of environmental education, reflecting

its commitment to fostering a culture of research and empowering educators and students to actively engage in international scientific programmes. Such initiatives contribute to nurturing a generation that is acutely aware of environmental issues and sustainable development priorities.

Ministry of Education's efforts

These results further underscore the effectiveness of the Ministry of Education's efforts to integrate environmental scientific practices into the educational process, promote inquiry-based learning, and enable teachers to spearhead environmental initiatives within their schools and communities.

It is noteworthy that the GLOBE Programme (Global Learning and

Observations to Benefit the Environment) is an international science and education initiative launched in 1995 with the support of the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and several other international partners. The programme currently involves 127 participating countries worldwide and aims to enhance environmental awareness through hands-on field observations, engaging students and teachers in the collection of scientific data.

The Sultanate of Oman joined the programme in 2009, with the Ministry of Education overseeing its implementation. The programme is regarded as one of the foremost initiatives supporting inquiry-based education and research within Omani schools. — ONA



INTERNATIONAL MUSIC COMPETITION

Royal Air Force of Oman Band secures first place

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Royal Air Force of Oman Band achieved top results in the international music competition currently being held in Scotland, United Kingdom.

The band won first place overall in category 4B in the Dundonald and Bridge of Allan competitions, as well as second place overall in category 4A.

In the Dundonald competitions, the percussion ensemble claimed first place in both categories and



received the award for best overall military appearance. Meanwhile, in the Bridge of Allan competitions, the band achieved second

place in both marching and overall military appearance among participating international bands from outside the United Kingdom. — ONA

IN RUSSIA

Oman to take part in Ostrovsky Fest

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's Al Dan Theatre Troupe for Culture and Art will take part in the 8th edition of Ostrovsky Fest due to held in the city of Kineshma, Russia, from 18 to 23 August 2026.

At the festival, Al Dan will stage a drama titled "A Bite of Bread" au-

thored by Omani dramaturg Mohammed bin Said Al Rawahi.

International communication Mohammed bin Salim Al Nabhani, Head of Al Dan Theatre Troupe for Culture and Art, said, "The troupe's participation in the Rus-

sian festival is the outcome of a long march of planning and international communication. Besides building bridges of cultural dialogue, the troupe's participation aims to spread national artistic experiences via international platforms." — ONA

Oman airports handle 6.28mn passengers by the end of June



In terms of passenger traffic through Muscat International Airport during June 2026, the Indian nationals accounted for the largest share of arriving and departing passengers, with a total of 173,156 passengers, comprising 76,271 arrivals and 96,885 departures, according to latest NCSI data

MUSCAT: The total number of passengers (arrivals, departures, and transit) travelling through the airports of the Sultanate of Oman reached 6,276,117 passengers by the end of June 2026, representing a 9.3% decline compared with the corresponding period in 2025, when the total stood at 6,921,569 passengers, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total number of international flights (arrivals and departures) through Muscat, Salalah, and Sohar airports reached 38,203 flights by the end of June 2026, a decrease of 10.7% compared with 42,778 flights during

the corresponding period in 2025.

Statistics showed that Muscat International Airport recorded an 8.3% decline in the total number of flights (international and domestic), reaching 41,022 flights by the end of June 2026, compared with 44,743 flights during the same period in 2025. The total number of passengers also fell by 8.8% to 5,688,276 passengers, compared with 6,233,954 passengers in the corresponding period of the previous year.

In terms of passenger traffic through Muscat International Airport during June 2026, the Indian nationals accounted for the largest share of arriving and departing passengers, with a total

of 173,156 passengers, comprising 76,271 arrivals and 96,885 departures. Omani nationals ranked second with 125,560 passengers, including 54,222 arrivals and 71,338 departures, while Bangladeshi nationals ranked third with 47,822 passengers, comprising 20,092 arrivals and 27,730 departures.

Salalah Airport recorded a 12.8% decline in the total number of flights (international and domestic), reaching 3,945 flights by the end of June 2026, compared with 4,526 flights during the corresponding period in 2025. The total number of passengers also decreased by 14.6% to 561,532 passengers, compared with 657,209 passengers

At Sohar Airport, the total number of flights (international and domestic) declined by 9.5% to 76 flights by the end of June 2026, compared with 84 flights during the corresponding period of the previous year. Passenger traffic also fell by 45.8% to 182 passengers, compared with 336 passengers during the same period last year.

At Duqm Airport, the total number of domestic flights declined by 10.5% to 274 flights by the end of June 2026, compared with 306 flights during the corresponding period in 2025.

— ONA

Congratulations

The **Muscat Media Group** extends its warmest congratulations and sincere best wishes to **DR. SADIQ BIN HASSAN BIN ALI AL-LAWATI** on the occasion of earning his Doctorate in Sociology with Distinction and First-Class Honors. This remarkable academic achievement reflects years of dedication, perseverance, and excellence in scholarly research. As the Muscat Media Group joins Dr. Al-Lawati in celebrating this well-deserved accomplishment, it wishes him continued success and prosperity in his academic and professional journey.

May this milestone be a gateway to even greater scholarly and intellectual contributions that serve the nation, enrich society, and advance knowledge and scientific research.

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COMMENTARY

YOUTH IN MIND

My late grandfather would often repeat a sharp, evocative phrase before sending me off to accomplish a task: “Khallik dheeb”, be a wolf, or in our cultural context, step up and be a man. As a young boy, I didn’t think too much about the hidden meanings behind those words. My primary concern was simply to fulfill his request, complete the errand, and earn his paternal approval. As life unfolded, I realised this simple wisdom was actually an early lesson in self-leadership. It taught me that we must push forward, for we alone are responsible for our own destiny.

Today, we live in an era of constant, unprecedented change, witnessing historical cycles of conflict shifting to peace, economic adversity transforming into prosperity, and digital tools rendering traditional office methods obsolete.

In Oman, as we march deliberately toward the strategic milestones of Oman Vision 2040, this shifting landscape demands a new kind of individual readiness. Faced with rapid change, it is imperative for every citizen, particularly the youth, to navigate these transitions with heightened awareness and personal accountability. We must adapt in a way that does not derail us from our principles, but rather equips us to achieve them.

Self-governance is deeply rooted in our heritage, echoing

the Prophetic tradition: “The wise person is one who calls themselves to account and acts for what comes after death.”

This mandates strict self-accountability and absolute responsibility, rejecting excuses or external blame. From this perspective, my grandfather’s advice truly shines as a call to reject complacency and master self-leadership.

Dr. Charles Manz, a renowned scholar in the field of self leadership, defines it as the ability to direct our own thoughts, behaviors, and motivations to achieve goals without relying on external control. In a literary sense, it means being the captain of your own ship, setting your compass and owning your outcomes. While some believe leadership only applies to directing others, a fundamental question remains: how can anyone expect to lead teams, projects, or communities before they have fully mastered leading themselves?

True self leadership rests upon three distinct dimensions, each intersecting with established global frameworks of organisational and personal excellence:

- Behavior-Focused Strategies: This involves setting clear personal goals, tracking performance, and engaging in continuous self-evaluation. An individual cannot manage their behavior effectively without a clear objective to strive for. This aligns beautifully with Simon Sinek’s famous manage-



ment concept to “Start with Why.” When we understand the true purpose or underlying motive behind our actions, we gain a stronger determination to persist. The clearer the “why,” the easier it becomes to commit to the behaviors required to achieve the goal.

- Natural Reward Strategies: This focuses on seeking out inherent meaning and enjoyment within our duties to build intrinsic motivation. A person is naturally more resilient when their efforts align with their core values. This intersects with Stephen Covey’s second habit of highly effective people: “Begin with the End in Mind.” Clarity of purpose lends greater value to daily efforts, transforming routine work from a mere chore into a meaningful, value-driven mission.

- Constructive Thought Patterns: This relies on fostering positive self-talk, visualising success, and systematically replacing self-defeating thoughts

with beliefs that enhance performance. This pillar converges with John Maxwell’s teachings on the critical importance of “Attitude.” An individual’s outlook on themselves and the challenges around them is very often the deciding factor between surrendering to obstacles or transforming them into opportunities for institutional and regional growth. Self-leadership must be viewed as an ongoing voyage. It is a journey where an individual sails through the turbulence of life, navigating daily conflicts with their own whims, distractions, and desires. Along this voyage, one must pause at three essential waystations to refuel:

- Self-Awareness: This means a profound understanding of one’s own strengths, weaknesses, and internal triggers. A person cannot lead what they do not know. For instance, a university student might realise they achieve their best results when

studying according to a structured plan, whereas their performance plummets when they succumb to digital distractions. This insight empowers them to adopt highly effective habits.

- Self-Regulation: This is the capacity to manage emotions, resist short-term temptations, and stay committed to long-term goals despite hardships. This encapsulates the essence of the famous psychological “Marshmallow Test,” which demonstrated that the ability to delay gratification for a greater future reward is one of the most critical indicators of long-term success and discipline.

- Intrinsic Motivation: This is the ability to generate drive from within, fueled by personal conviction, without waiting for external praise or material rewards. An example of this is a professional who consistently refines their skills through reading and continuous training, driven by a deep belief that lifelong learning is the true pathway to national excellence.

Ultimately, self-leadership is a way of life built upon accountability, discipline, and a relentless pursuit of self-actualisation. By leading themselves effectively, individuals proactively engineer opportunities rather than passively waiting for them. Beyond professional advancement, it fosters deep personal fulfillment, as true satisfaction arises when achievements stem from deliberate, inde-

pendent choices. Consequently, those who master self-leadership exert a greater positive influence, giving back more meaningfully to their families, communities, and workplaces.

This is the profound meaning my late grandfather sought to instill in me. His call to “be a wolf” was not about raw power, but about personal accountability, self-confidence, decisive courage, and the resilience to walk one’s path regardless of the challenges ahead.

In today’s fast-paced, competitive global market, self-leadership is more urgent than ever, especially for Omani youth striving to establish themselves in the workforce. While technical skills are essential, it is self-regulation, discipline, perseverance, and continuous learning that separate those who wait for opportunities from those who create them.

When we lead ourselves with conscious intent, our capacity to contribute expands, leaving a lasting footprint on society. Be accountable, stride toward your goals with confidence, and never expect others to build your future. By dedicating our finest energies to leading ourselves, both our individual lives and our nation will truly flourish. In a nutshell: lead yourself to enrich your life.

**An Omani writer focusing on youth development & cultural issues.*

HyperMax Wins Best Brand in Customer Experience Award in Hypermarket Category



HyperMax, part of Majid Al Futtaim, was felicitated with the ‘Times of Oman Best Brand in Customer Experience (CX) Award in Hypermarket Category’ at the Times of Oman CX Awards 2026. The awards presentation was co-located with Oman CX Forum 2026, held at Hotel Kempinski, Muscat. The premier event was attended by over 325 CX leaders across sectors in Oman.

HyperMax has consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to customer experience by delivering a modern, convenient, and value-driven shopping experience for customers across Oman. Offering a wide selection of fresh food, groceries, household essentials, electronics, fashion, and lifestyle products, the brand combines quality, affordability, and convenience to meet the everyday needs of families and communities.

With a customer-centric approach focused on choice, innovation, and service excellence, HyperMax continues

to enhance every aspect of the shopping journey through well-designed stores, attractive promotions, efficient checkout experiences, and a growing range of digital shopping solutions. Its commitment to understanding customer preferences and delivering exceptional value has helped establish the brand as a trusted destination for everyday shopping.

By continuously investing in retail innovation, product quality, operational excellence, and customer engagement, HyperMax continues

to set benchmarks in customer experience within the hypermarket sector. Its dedication to creating enjoyable shopping experiences and delivering outstanding value reinforces its position as one of Oman’s preferred retail destinations.

The Best Brand in Customer Experience (CX) Awards are instituted by Times of Oman, in collaboration with Muscat Media Group, Gulf Leaders Circle and TEvents. They are presented to the leading brands that are ahead of the curve in

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COUNTERFEIT

OMAN OIL PRICE FALLS
The price of Oman crude oil has decreased, with prices for delivery by October 2026 reaching \$78.26. The price of Oman crude oil fell by \$0.54 from the price.

MARKET
BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER
The MSX index closed at 7,349.07 points, up by 0.73% from previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.11% at 580.86 points. Al Anwar Investment, up 10.00%, was the top gainer while, Muscat Gases, down 9.87%, was the top loser.

Oman records growth in farm and fisheries sector during first quarter

The Ministry of Economy stated that the sector witnessed notable growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices by 6.1 percent, reaching approximately OMR337.8 million, compared to OMR318.3 million during the same period in 2025

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The agriculture, forestry, and fishing activity in the Sultanate of Oman recorded a positive performance during the first quarter of 2026, according to the quarterly bulletin issued by the Ministry of Economy. The ministry stated that the sector witnessed notable growth in

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices by 6.1 percent, reaching approximately OMR337.8 million, compared to OMR318.3 million during the same period in 2025. It indicated that this growth reflects an improvement in the performance of activities related to agricultural and fisheries production, driven by the expansion of investments and the enhancement of pro-

duction and supply chain efficiency. At the sub-activity level, agricultural activity achieved strong growth of 12 percent, while fishing activity recorded a growth of 0.9 percent. This indicates a stable performance in the marine sector alongside a continued pace of development in the agricultural sector. The ministry pointed out the increasing relative importance of the agriculture and fishing sector within the national economy, as its contribution reached 3.4 percent of the total GDP during the first quarter of 2026, compared to 2.9 percent during the same period of the previous year. Furthermore, the ministry reported that this performance comes in light of continuous efforts to develop productive sectors. This contributes to achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 by boosting investments, raising production efficiency, and expanding the economic base reliant on local resources. -ONA



BRIEFS

Oil drops nearly 5% as Donald Trump announces fresh talks with Iran



SINGAPORE: Oil prices plunged nearly 5% in early Asian trade yesterday after US President Donald Trump said fresh negotiations with Iran would seek to end the conflict in the Middle East and reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Brent crude futures fell 4.69% to \$83.81 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude dropped 4.67% to \$80.72 a barrel. -ONA

Dollar steady as yen climbs to three-month peak



SINGAPORE: The dollar was little changed yesterday, while the Japanese yen surged to a three-month high as investors anticipated the possibility of further intervention by Tokyo following last week's joint action with Washington to support the currency. The yen climbed as much as 1% in Asian trading to 155.20 per dollar, its strongest level in about three months, before trimming some of its gains. It was last up 0.7% at 156.46 per dollar. The Japanese currency also strengthened against other major currencies, including the euro and sterling, reinforcing market expectations that Japanese authorities could intervene again in the foreign exchange market if needed. The yen's advance weighed on the US dollar, lifting the euro to a six-week high of \$1.1559 in early Asian trade, while sterling hovered near a two-week peak of \$1.3470. The US Dollar Index was little changed at 99.70, after falling more than 1.5% last week. Elsewhere in the currency market, the Australian dollar climbed to a more than one-month high of \$0.7069, while the New Zealand dollar rose to a two-month high of \$0.59075. -ONA

European stocks rise as oil prices fall on Iran-US talks



BRUSSELS: European stocks rose at the start of trading yesterday, supported by a decline in oil prices following the announcement of a new round of negotiations between Iran and the United States aimed at easing tensions in the Middle East. Among the major European markets, France's CAC 40 index in Paris gained 0.87%, while Germany's DAX index in Frankfurt advanced 0.91%. Italy's FTSE MIB index rose 0.80%, while Britain's FTSE 100 index in London climbed 0.42%. -ONA

STATISTICS

Revenues of hotels in Oman exceed OMR124mn by end of June 2026

MUSCAT: The number of guests staying at three- to five-star hotels in the Sultanate of Oman reached 992,009 by the end of June 2026, marking a 13% decline compared to the same period in 2025, when the number stood at 1,140,086, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSD). The data also showed that total hotel revenues fell by 12.3% to OMR124.177 million, down from OMR141.520 million during the corresponding period in 2025. Hotel occupancy declined to 46.3%, compared to 54.6% in the same period last year, representing a 15.3% relative decrease. Meanwhile, the number of Omani guests increased to 395,659 guests, up from 383,783 during the corresponding period in 2025. According to the data, European visitors remained the largest group of non-Omani hotel guests during the first half of 2026, totaling 246,603 guests. They were followed by Asian guests with



162,978, and visitors from the GCC countries with 69,289 guests. The number of guests from other Arab countries reached 41,090, while American guests totaled 30,546. Visitors from Oceania numbered 9,644, and African guests reached 6,969 guests during the same period. -ONA

ENHANCES CAPITAL BASE

Sohar International completes OMR149.3mn rights issue, reinforcing investor confidence

MUSCAT: Sohar International Bank (the "Bank") announced the successful completion of its rights issue of 1,058,759,403 ordinary shares, attracting total subscriptions of OMR 182,408,592.29, covering the issuance size of OMR 149,285,075.82 by 1.22 times. The rights issue was fully subscribed, reflecting the strong confidence of the bank's shareholders in its strategic direction, financial strength, and long-term growth ambitions. With a take-up rate of 95.5% among eligible shareholders, the residual pool of unsubscribed shares was oversubscribed by 9 times, demonstrating robust investor demand and reaffirming market confidence in the Bank's strategy and future outlook. Commenting on the successful completion of the rights issue, Abdulwahid Mohamed Al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, said: "The successful completion of this rights issue represents another important milestone in Sohar International's growth journey and reflects the strong confidence our shareholders continue to place in the Bank's strategy, leadership, and long-term vision. Their support reinforces our ability to execute our strategic priorities while creating sustainable value for all stakeholders." He further added, "This enhanced capital base further strengthens our financial position,



providing greater flexibility to pursue growth opportunities, deepen our market presence, invest in innovation, and continue delivering differentiated financial solutions that meet the evolving needs of our customers across Oman and our international markets." The successful capital raise further enhances Sohar International's capital position, reinforcing the Bank's resilience and providing additional capacity to support sustainable business growth. It also strengthens the Bank's ability to accelerate strategic initiatives, expand its product and service of-

ferings, and capture new opportunities across its priority markets while continuing to deliver long-term value for customers, shareholders, and the wider economy. Following the completion of the rights issue, the Bank's paid-up capital has increased to OMR 849,675,744, divided into 7,676,005,673 ordinary shares. The rights issue was offered at an issue price of 141 baisa per share, comprising 139 baisa as the share price and 2 baisa towards issue expenses. Sohar International extends its sincere appreciation to its shareholders and investors for

their continued trust and support throughout this important milestone. The Bank remains focused on executing its long-term growth strategy, strengthening its leadership position in the market, and delivering innovative financial solutions that create lasting value for customers, shareholders, and the communities it serves. It also extends its sincere appreciation to the Financial Services Authority, the Central Bank of Oman, and Muscat Clearing & Depository Company for their valuable guidance and support throughout the Rights Issue process.

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Spain’s economy is at risk of being choked by clouds of ash

Devastating wildfires are ravaging Spain’s tourism, economy and nature

MADRID: Charred tree stumps, melted asphalt, burned-out cars and destroyed buildings: The wildfires in southern Europe are leaving a trail of devastation and causing billions of euros in damage.

Spain’s economy in particular is at risk of being choked by clouds of ash. According to the EU’s Copernicus Earth observation system, around 206,000 hectares of forest in Spain have already gone up in flames this year.

“According to the European Commission, the economic impact of wildfires in Spain in 2022 amounted to approximately €7.1 billion (\$8.1 billion), representing around 4.5% of the country’s GDP. This figure reflects not only the direct costs of firefighting but also the long-term economic consequences of recovering the affected areas,” Emilio Vizuete Luciano, an economist at the University of Barcelona, told DW.

The fires often devastate the local economy and disrupt trade in the affected regions, Luciano says. “Tourism is also severely affected. Given Spain’s strong dependence on tourism, the disappearance of this activity in fire-affected regions has particularly significant economic repercussions.”

Wildfires slow economic growth

Climate economist Sarah Meier of Swiss public research university ETH Zurich has taken a closer look at the economic losses caused by wildfires in southern Europe. Her findings show that in regions affected by at least one wildfire, the growth rate fell by between 0.11% and 0.18%.

According to a 2023 study she co-authored, the decline in growth was even greater when several wildfires occurred simultaneously, rising to as much as 4.5% depending on the extent of the fires. “Our calculations are an average for the period from 2011 to 2018,” she explains.



And she issues a stark warning: “The costs become particularly high when wildfires reach larger cities, something that has so far been very rare in southern Europe.”

The European Environment Agency (EEA) has also calculated the economic losses caused by wildfires in previous years. In 2017, when nearly 990,000 hectares burned across southern Europe, the losses amounted to almost €10 billion.

Europe is burning

According to the European Commission, the EU loses around 500,000 hectares of land to wildfires every year. Spain, Greece and France are among the countries where wildfires are most widespread.

The economic damage goes far beyond losses to tourism. It also includes the loss of biodiversity, declining forestry revenues, soil erosion, destroyed infrastructure and property, as well as the costs of fighting the fires.

A heated debate has erupted in Spain over the cost of fighting wildfires. Since 2009, investment in prevention has actually been declining – even though the number and scale of wildfires have reached alarming levels over the past decade.

According to official figures, spending on wildfire prevention in Spain fell from €364 million in 2009 to €144 million in 2024. Over the same period, annual spending on actually fighting and extinguishing fires remained stable at

around €417 million.

For economist Luciano, there is “a certain irony” to this because prevention has been proven to be the best long-term investment. “It is far cheaper than fighting wildfires once they have already broken out.”

Spain’s high cost of firefighting

The Spanish forestry services company Forescat has estimated that fighting and extinguishing wildfires costs around €19,000 per hectare. Nearly 400,000 hectares of forest went up in flames in Spain in 2025, amounting to costs of around €7.6 billion.

It’s still too early to say how much fighting this year’s fires will cost Spain; however, Maria Inmaculada Marmol Tardaguila of MATS, a social organization representing public-sector healthcare workers, says things cannot continue this way.

“Continuing to rely on the heroic efforts of firefighting crews to keep our forests safe is both

ecological recklessness and fiscal irresponsibility,” she notes on the organization’s platform, which has also warned of an increase in respiratory illnesses caused by wildfire smoke.

“The solution is not to keep buying more and more firefighting aircraft, but, for example, to remove combustible material such as deadwood from forests before the first spark catches,” she points out. Unless public officials understand this, she warns, Spain will continue to “burn through its budget at the same rate as its forests burn.”

Fire reek brigade helicopters collide as wildfires spread

Two fire brigade helicopters collided mid-air in Greece on Sunday, as firefighters continued to battle fierce wildfires around the Gulf of Corinth.

The fire service said the two aircraft collided in the Psatha area, just to the west of the capital, Athens, adding that search and rescue teams were “immediately mobi-

lised to locate and assist the crews.”

Television footage showed one of the helicopters explode and plunge to the ground in flames after an apparent rotor collision.

Greek public broadcaster ERT reported that the crew of one of the helicopters had been found and were safe. The fate of the crew of the second helicopter initially remained unclear.

Greece wildfires: ‘Extremely difficult’ days ahead, says PM

The accident came as Greek firefighters continued to battle wildfires on multiple fronts. Three firefighters died in recent days in the line of duty, two in Crete and one in the Peloponnese.

Greek firefighters struggle to save coastal resort

The fires are being exacerbated and spread by winds of up to 100 kilometres (60 miles) per hour, with Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis warning of “extremely difficult” days ahead.

“When the winds blow with such force, even the dozens of aircraft we have at our disposal cannot operate safely,” he wrote on social media.

“There are moments when nature and the intensity of weather phenomena surpass any human planning and any operational capability.”

Just to the north of Psatha in the neighboring town of Porto Germenio, nearly 500 firefighters were attempting to keep a blaze from approaching the western outskirts of Athens.

Footage released by Greek police showed officers going door to door on motorcycles in the nearby hilltop village of Agios Nektarios, sounding sirens and shouting “Is anyone there?” as they urged residents to evacuate.

On Friday, firefighters evacuated 254 people by sea – often the last escape route for isolated coastal communities – followed by another 12 on Saturday.

“We could not believe what we were seeing,” Nikos Georgopoulos from the laboratory of forest management at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, told state TV channel ERT. “The fire spread extremely rapidly.”

Greece: man arrested on suspicion of arson

Further west and on the opposite side of the Gulf of Corinth, some 100 firefighters were fighting another blaze in Aigialia in the northern Peloponnese region. -aw

POWER CUTS

Cuba suffers yet another nationwide blackout

HAVANA: Cuba’s state-owned grid operator said the island’s power system collapsed late on Sunday, the latest in a series of rolling power cuts caused by aging infrastructure and a US energy embargo.

The outage comes on the heels of three nationwide power outages last month.

What do we know about Cuba’s latest blackout?

The state-run utility UNE said there was a “total disconnection” of the national electricity system, which means the entire country of 10 million people, including the capital, Havana, has been plunged into darkness.

The Ministry of Energy said that protocols to reactivate the grid were underway.

The series of outages afflicting the island in recent times have also affected water supplies and cooling systems, making normal life extremely difficult.

Cuba, which relies largely on aging oil-fired power plants, lost access to fuel from its previous primary supplier, Venezuela, after US President Donald Trump imposed an oil blockade following Washington’s ouster and capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on January 3.

Stepped-up US campaign against Cuba

Cuba is also facing other pressure from the US, including ramped-up sanctions against Cuban state-owned businesses imposed by the Trump administration.

These have led to a number of foreign companies suspending their operations in the island.

Washington has also indicted former President Raul Castro over the downing of two civilian planes 30 years ago, in which three US citizens and a US resident died.

The US redesignated the communist island as a “state sponsor of terrorism” for a third time in 2025, shortly after former President Joe Biden moved to have it deleted from the list.

Trump has even made scarcely veiled threats to take over the island.

Imports from Mexico, which subsequently became Cuba’s key supplier of oil, have also ceased under US pressure. -aw

MOORNING

Nirmal Purja planned to build a house at his birthplace in Nepal

MYAGDI : Kamala KC has not been able to hold back her tears for the past four days. Ever since she saw the reports on social media platforms that 10 members of a mountaineering team, including her younger brother Nirmal Purja gone missing in Pakistan’s Broad Peak, she initially didn’t believe it.

Since Thursday, she has been visiting the ruins of Purja’s home, which takes her back to the childhood days when she played with him in the same vicinity.

“I had the hope that I would meet him someday. For the past two three days, I have been hearing news about him. I am not able to check the phone, he’s all over it. I can hear him speaking but cannot converse with him,” Kamala KC, cousin sister of Nirmal Purja said.

The Titar village in Annapurna Rural Municipality- 3, Dana of Myagdi is mourning his loss. All of Nirmal’s relatives, childhood friends and neighbours have fallen silent.

“He was stubborn by nature; he would accomplish whatever he wanted or desired, whatever he thought of doing, no one could have changed his mind he would accomplish it by any means. If I would ask him not to go down or up the slope, then he would go there and get across or climb-up. He used to hunt the crabs and hit on the nest of the bees and similar insects with fist and bear the stings of insects and say I should endure the pain,” Kamala recalls her childhood with Nirmal.

A banner reading “Mountaineer Nirmal Purja (Nims) Felicitation Ceremony” hangs on the balcony (veranda) of Kamala’s house. It was on March 6, 2025 that Purja was publicly honoured in Beni for



setting world records in mountaineering. Kamala didn’t let go the banner and hung it in the balcony.

Kamala, a former teacher who had come to the district headquarters, Beni, to attend the same event, brought the banner prepared by Annapurna Rural Municipality back home and hung it there. Although the letters on the banner have faded, the photograph on it can still be clearly seen from the Beni-Jomsom road.

The house where Nirmal was born has collapsed, leaving only the remains of its walls. Kamala has planted maize and vegetables on the site where the house once stood.

Kamala recalled that during that visit, Nirmal had asked her to look after the land where their old two-storey house once stood and had shared plans for the siblings to build a traditional-style house together.

“I would build the house, it is where I was born Didi (sister), he

had told me. His brothers also had said okay to the proposal and also had asked me to clear the debris so that it can be constructed and I also cleared the site,” Kamala said.

It was on March 26, 2023, Nirmal had returned to his birthplace, Dana. While accompanying Qatari Princess Asma Al Thani on an expedition to climb Annapurna, Nirmal spent two nights in Dana, where he spoke with elected representatives, relatives, village elders and neighbors.

Nirmal’s father, Nand Bahadur, was an Indian Gorkha soldier. Nand Bahadur died three years ago, while his mother, Purna Kumari, passed away several years earlier. Although Nirmal’s family migrated to Chitwan, they have not sold their ancestral land and property.

Nirmal was the youngest son of Nand Bahadur and Purna Kumari. His eldest brother Jang Bahadur’s family lives in Chitwan, while the family of his second-

eldest brother Kamal Bahadur Purja, a former British Gurkha soldier, lives in the UK.

Jit Bahadur, another elder brother and a former teacher at Gyan Prakash Secondary School in Dana, has also been living in Chitwan for the past decade. Their only sister, Anita and her family also live in Chitwan.

On November 9, 2023, Nirmal obtained Non-Resident Nepali citizenship from the District Administration Office, Myagdi. Nirmal’s wife, Suchi, and their daughter, both of whom are connected to his life as a former British Gurkha soldier, also live in the UK.

Busy with mountaineering expeditions, Nirmal would sometimes travel to Dana by helicopter while travelling to and from Dhulagiri and Annapurna. Ramesh Purja, ward chair of Annapurna Rural Municipality- 3 and one of Nirmal’s friends, said that Nirmal continued to visit Dana along with his other brothers.

“We are observing a day of mourning and the rural municipality also has announced a holiday for today in mourning. Also, the chairman of the rural municipality also has announced to set up a statue of Nirmal Dai (Purja),” Ramesh Purja, Ward Chair of Nirmal Purja’s birthplace in Dana of Myagdi told ANI.

Rural Municipality Chair Bharat Kumar Pun issued a condolence statement, paying tribute to Nirmal and the other deceased mountaineers and expressing sympathy to their bereaved families.

Chair Pun also announced that a statue of Nirmal would be built in his honour in recognition of his contribution and courage in bringing Nepal’s mountaineering sec-

tor to international prominence. Although it may not be possible to bring Nirmal’s body back to his birthplace for cremation, residents of Dana have suggested that his ashes should be brought back and that a statue should be built at the appropriate location in his birthplace.

Three years ago, Nirmal announced an endowment fund of NRs. 4 million. The interest generated from the fund has been used to provide awards to the top-performing students in Grades 8, 10 and 12 at Gyan Prakash Namuna Secondary School and to provide educational materials to students at four other basic schools in Dana, the official said.

“During his visit, he (Nirmal Purja) came up with the proposal to set up an endowment fund of four million Nepali rupees and its interest to be awarded to the students of Gyan Prakash Namuna Secondary School, who stands first in the class with cash of Nrs. 50,000 in Grade 8, NRs. 80,000 to the student who ranks first in the Secondary Education Examination (SEE), and NRs. 100,000 to the student who ranks first in Grade 12.

Three students will get these cash prize for standing top in the class,” Principal of the school, Santa Bahadur Nepali told ANI.

Other schools in the local body where the famed British-Nepali mountaineer was born are being provided with educational materials worth NRs. 500 per student at the four other basic schools.

Nirmal joined the British Gurkha Regiment in 2003 at the age of 18. In 2009, he joined the British Special Boat Service (SBS), an elite special forces unit.

During his 16 years of service in the British military, his interest in mountaineering continued to grow. In 2018, Purja was awarded an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) by Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom.

In 2012, Nirmal reached Everest Base Camp. To learn mountaineering, he climbed 6,119-metre Lobuche East, which became his first mountain ascent.

In 2019, Purja launched an expedition called “Project Possible”, through which he climbed all 14 of the world’s mountains above 8,000 metres in six months and six days. At the time, the previous record had stood at around eight years.

His record was later broken in 2023 by Norwegian mountaineer Kristin Harila, who climbed all 14 peaks in three months and one day.

Nirmal’s “Project Possible” journey, which began with Annapurna in his birthplace, was documented in the film “14 Peaks: Nothing Is Impossible,” which received worldwide attention.

To finance his expedition to climb all 14 peaks, he raised funds by mortgaging his own house again. After “Project Possible,” he became internationally renowned. He subsequently established his own mountaineering company and an outdoor clothing brand.

Rescuers on Sunday retrieved the body of famed British-Nepalese climber Nirmal Purja alongside three other climbers to Camp-1 of the Broad Peak, officials announced.

The ground rescue team had reached Purja’s body at an altitude of about 5700 metres along with three other climbers, which have been brought to Camp I, the Alpine Club Pakistan announced. -ani



LIFESTYLE

HOW CRYPTO MINERS ARE STEALING POWER IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Across Southeast Asia, illegal cryptocurrency miners are stealing vast amounts of electricity, straining national grids, and exposing links to organized crime

A raid in Malaysia last week exposed how cryptocurrency mining is becoming entangled with electricity theft and organized crime across South-east Asia.

In Malaysia's southern state of Johor, 71 cryptocurrency-mining machines had been running around the clock across four rented premises for about a month before police moved in.

During the raids on July 22 and 23, officers arrested three suspects and seized computers, routers and vehicles alongside equipment used to illegally mine Bitcoin.

Johor police chief Ab Rahaman Arsad said the syndicate bypassed electricity meters, leading to an estimated €14,500 (\$16,600) in losses in about a month, according to local media reports. The machines were thought to be generating between €17,200 and €21,500 in monthly revenue.

The case was relatively small by Malaysian standards. Between 2020 and 2025, national utility Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) identified almost 14,000 premises linked to electricity theft for cryptocurrency mining. Its cumulative losses reached around €1.1 billion.

Recorded cases of such theft increased from 610 in 2018 to 2,397 in 2024, according to Malaysia's Energy Ministry, which has described illegal mining as a serious threat to public safety, economic stability, and the national electricity system.

"In Malaysia, thousands of incidents have triggered investigations into illegal mining for cryptocurrency purposes," said Sonny Zulhuda, associate professor at the International Islamic University Malaysia.

"This poses a huge problem for the security of electricity resources, economic sustainability, competition, and revenue loss," Zulhuda told DW. "Enforcement has been lagging behind, due to a lack of legislative preparedness and limited agency capability in enforcement and investigation. This is unfortunate because Malaysia is fast developing its digital infrastructure."

Where crypto mining meets organised crime

Cryptocurrency mining is not inherently criminal, but authorities are increasingly finding links between illegal crypto mining, online gambling, money laundering, and Southeast Asia's industrial-scale cyber scam networks.

Last October, the United States and the UK sanctioned the Cambodia-based Prince Group and associated companies, alleging that the network operated forced-labor scam compounds and laundered proceeds through cryptocurrencies and other assets.

US authorities also seized Bitcoin worth around \$15 billion at the time from wallets whose private keys were held by Prince Group chairman Chen Zhi, describing the cryptocurrency as proceeds and instruments of fraud and money laundering.

Thailand's Department of Special Investigation has made the clearest connection between stolen electricity and transnational crime.

In 2025, investigators dismantled three major illegal crypto mining networks, seized more than 6,390 machines and estimated losses to the Provincial Electricity Authority at more than €24.9 million.

In one operation, authorities found around 1,900 mining machines at warehouse sites. The electricity authority estimated that the network was consuming power worth around €575,000 each month while paying only a fraction of the amount due.

Indonesia battles crypto mining crimes as well

Indonesia has seen similar cases. In December 2023, police in the province of North Sumatra raided ten sites and seized more than 1,100 Bitcoin-mining machines. State utility PLN estimated losses over six months at around €700,000.

Governments have responded with raids, tougher penalties and cooperation between police, utilities, regulators and anti-corruption agencies. Malaysia has created a multi-agency committee and deployed smart meters at substations to identify abnormal consumption.

But enforcement remains difficult. Equipment can be moved quickly, premises can be rented through intermediaries and meter tampering may involve organized networks or insider assistance.

Saaidal Razalli Azzuhri, a telecommunications expert at the University of Malaya, told DW that raids should be supported by transformer-level monitoring, mandatory licensing, disclosure of companies' beneficial owners, and investigations tracing bank transfers and cryptocurrency wallets.

"The objective should not be to prohibit blockchain technology, but to ensure that miners pay the full economic cost of their electricity and do not transfer their costs and infrastructure risks to the public," he said.

Zulhuda said that Southeast Asian governments need to deal with this issue properly so they don't send the wrong message to companies that want to invest in the region's growing digital sectors.

Malaysia has several laws to curb illegal cyber activities, including the Cyber Security Act 2024 to protect its National Critical Information Infrastructure and the recently enacted Cybercrimes Act 2026 to address digital system misuse and abuse, he added.

Laos pulls the plug

Laos shows that even legal, state-backed cryptocurrency mining can struggle to deliver the promised benefits.

In mid-2021, the government authorized six companies to mine and trade cryptocurrencies. The plan appeared suited to a country that had invested heavily in hydropower and sometimes produced more electricity than its economy could absorb. Mining offered a way to monetize surplus energy.

At its peak in 2021 and 2022, the industry consumed around 500 megawatts. But the surplus proved unreliable.

Some miners accumulated unpaid bills. More importantly, officials concluded that the industry created few jobs and little demand for domestic suppliers compared with manufacturing or other commercial activities.

Deputy Energy Minister Chanthaboun Soukaloun said last October that the government intended to end electricity supplies to miners.

Laos wants to redirect the power towards metals processing, electric-vehicle manufacturing and artificial intelligence data centers, while increasing electricity exports to neighboring countries.

The experiment offered a broader warning. Cheap electricity can attract crypto miners, but it does not guarantee lasting investment or wider development. When operators steal power, or consume subsidized electricity without creating much value, the public is left carrying the cost. -nw

SPORTS

UEFA warns FIFA of legal action over failed World Cup sell-off plan



FIFA president Gianni Infantino's plan to sell a stake in future World Cup profits was dropped after a global backlash

NYON: European football body UEFA has threatened FIFA with legal action over president's Gianni Infantino's failed plan to sell a stake in future World Cup profits to private investors, and said any potential evidence should not be destroyed. Infantino's secretive proposal to raise \$4.2 billion from investors including the New York invest-

English FA set to withdraw support

LONDON: The English Football Association is set to write to FIFA president Gianni Infantino withdrawing its support amid the fallout from his scrapped plans to sell off stakes in FIFA competitions to private investors, according to a BBC Sport report on Monday. As the pressure grows on Infantino, Qatar, Lebanon, Kuwait and Sri Lanka have pledged their support for his FIFA leadership to continue. If he holds out until March, he could stand for re-election for a fourth and final term as president and would need 106 votes from FIFA's 211 members to win. UEFA has 55 votes, Africa 54, Asia 46, Concacaf 35, Oceania 11 and Conmebol 10. The Asian Football Federation (AFC) has said it stands in "solidarity" with UEFA and Concacaf, while Africa, Conmebol and Oceania have not criticised Infantino's plan. However, the FIFA Council could try to force Infantino to resign through an emergency meeting. That would be triggered if 19 of the 37 FIFA Council members call for one and the meeting must take place within two weeks. UEFA has nine members, AFC has seven, Concacaf five, Africa has six, Conmebol five and Oceania three. It is completed by Infantino and secretary general Mattias Grafstrom. - Agencies

ment firm of Joshua Kushner was dropped early Saturday, days after the revelation in media reports provoked a global furore.

UEFA led the backlash and on Thursday its 55 member federations met to agree boycotting all FIFA events and competitions

while the proposal was active. Now lawyers for UEFA have informed FIFA that the European body is "actively considering legal

British PM: Infantino not the right man to lead FIFA

LONDON: British Prime Minister Andy Burnham said on Sunday that FIFA President Gianni Infantino was not the right man to lead world football's governing body in the latest fallout from the now abandoned plan to sell stakes in the World Cup to private investors. "I do not believe that he is the right man to lead football forward on the world stage," Burnham said. "The plan that was put forward was offensive to many people, football people, around the world, and it can't be the case that we just move on and forget that, it wasn't acceptable." While Infantino has received pockets of public support from associations including 2022 World Cup host Qatar, Burnham's words were further evidence of the anger generated by his plans. - Agencies



GOALKEEPER

World Cup star Vozinha finally lands in Chile to join Colo Colo



SANTIAGO: Vozinha, the 40-year-old goalkeeper who made history with Cape Verde at the recently concluded World Cup, arrived in Chile on Sunday to join Colo Colo after a series of twists and turns that put his move in doubt. "I'm very happy to be here. And I want to thank the fans for the patience they've shown while waiting for me," the Cape Verde star told reporters in Chile. "See you at the Monumental Stadium." That is Colo Colo's home ground in Santiago. Colo Colo, Chile's most successful football club, announced the signing of Josimar Évora Dias, better known as Vozinha, on July 24. However, a series of setbacks — including documentation issues and personal matters — delayed his arrival on three separate occasions, causing concern both within and outside the club. At last, he arrived at Santiago's airport at 8:35 p.m. local time and was welcomed by a huge crowd of supporters who gathered at the terminal with flags, banners, drums, and chants. Vozinha became the oldest player to appear in a national team's debut game at the World Cup and was widely celebrated for keeping eventual champion Spain scoreless. Colo Colo supporters share one dream: that Vozinha will help the runaway leaders of the Chilean league win the championship and enhance its continental ambitions for next season. The World Cup's breakout goalkeeper is scheduled to undergo medical examinations before of-

ficially signing his contract with Colo Colo. The initial deal will run for six months, with an option to extend it for another 12. Colo Colo said Vozinha is expected to join training on Tuesday. The club also plans to officially present its marquee signing for the remainder of the season that same day. The veteran goalkeeper will be allowed to wear the nickname that brought him worldwide fame on his jersey after the Chilean Football Federation unanimously decided on Friday to amend its regulations and allow him to be identified as Vozinha — "grandma" in Portuguese. The change was necessary because, under Chilean league rules, players are required to use only their surnames on the back of their jerseys. Vozinha arrives in Chile after ending his spell with Chaves in Portugal's second division. He became one of the standout figures of the World Cup thanks to a string of spectacular saves against powerhouses Spain, Uruguay, and Lionel Messi's Argentina, which ultimately eliminated Cape Verde in the Round of 32. His performances brought him meteoric fame not only on the field. Before the World Cup, he had fewer than 50,000 followers on Instagram; he now has more than 29.5 million. "The Colo Colo family and all of Chile are eagerly waiting," fan Sebastián Paredes said. "Now he has to earn his place at Colo Colo through talent, dedication, hard work, commitment, and by winning over the fans. Hopefully, he'll be a great signing and help put Chile on the map." - Agencies

PRE-SEASON FRIENDLY



Calvert-Lewin brace condemns Liverpool to defeat against Leeds



CHICAGO: Dominic Calvert-Lewin scored two of Leeds' four second-half goals as the side rallied for a 4-2 friendly win over Liverpool on Sunday at Soldier Field in Chicago. The stunning comeback saw Liverpool handed their first defeat under new coach Andoni Iraola, who arrived this summer from Bournemouth to replace the sacked Arne Slot. Liverpool had notched a 4-2 win over Sunderland and a 1-0 victory against Wrexham at Yankee Stadium in the first two matches of its US tour. The Merseyside club looked in control on Sunday with a pair of first-half goals before Leeds stormed back against its English Premier League rivals. US midfielder Brenden Aaronson launched the fightback in the 60th minute, and Calvert-Lewin pulled Leeds level in the 71st, firing in at the back post after Joe Rodon flicked on a long Ethan

Ampadu throw. Sean Longstaff's scuffling finish in the 73rd gave Leeds a 3-2 lead, and Calvert-Lewin made it 4-2 with a near-replica of his first goal in the 85th, when Ampadu's throw was sent on by Sebastian Bornauw and he headed in. The victory was Leeds' second on its US tour, who opened with a 3-2 loss to Wrexham in Tampa, Florida, before a 1-0 victory over Sunderland in New Jersey. Liverpool had opened the scoring in the seventh minute when Dominik Szoboszlai's corner was flicked on by Milos Kerkez and slammed home by Luke Chambers from six yards out. Florian Wirtz doubled the tally in the 40th minute, tucking in a cross from Jeremie Frimpong. Germany's Wirtz was one of three of World Cup players who returned to action for Liverpool on Sunday, along with Ryan Gravenberch of the Netherlands and Alexander Isak of Sweden.

Oman Cricket’s winning mindset

A five-day specialised programme, specifically for the senior national team, was recently held at the Oman Cricket headquarters under renowned mental conditioning and peak performance coach Dr Swaroop Savanur from India

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket (OC) has made a significant investment in the mental side of the game ahead of a crucial international season.

Renowned Indian mental conditioning and peak performance coach Dr Swaroop Savanur recently completed an intensive five-day high-performance programme designed to help the Sultanate’s cricketers cope with pressure, build resilience and unlock their full potential.

The programme, held at the Oman Cricket headquarters in Al Amerat conducted specifically for the senior men’s team comes as Oman prepare for the ACC Premier Cup and the remaining ICC Cricket World Cup League 2 series, with qualification for next year’s Asia Cup and the ICC Cricket World Cup Qualifier firmly in their sights. He also conducted a group workshop with the women’s national teams as well as the U-19 boys’ and girls’ squads.

For Dr Swaroop, the assignment addressed what he described as the team’s “missing link.”

“The mental part of the game has been the missing link,” he said. “When I first spoke to head coach Sulakshan Kulkarni and the management, the agenda was very clear—to help the players perform better and go to the next level. We devised a structured plan to make mental conditioning an integral part of their preparation.”

Widely regarded as one of India’s leading mental conditioning and peak performance coaches, Dr Swaroop has worked with the BCCI ecosystem, domestic champions Vidarbha, Punjab Kings IPL team, Indian national football team, IPL players and several elite athletes across sports, helping teams build the mindset needed to excel under pressure.

He believes one of the biggest misconceptions in modern sport is that mental conditioning is merely psychology.



“Unfortunately, many people think the mental aspect is psychology. For me, it is training. You train your mind just as you train your batting, bowling or fielding.

“Players need the right tools and routines to switch on when it matters most. One of the biggest achievements over these five days was removing the myths around mental training and reducing the resistance towards working on this aspect of the game. The players opened their minds and embraced the process.”

The workshop centred on three key areas—changing players’ approach towards mindset training, developing customised mental preparation plans ahead of major tours, and helping individuals deal effectively with pressure, expectations and setbacks through practical exercises and match simulations.

“There is nothing wrong with pressure, expectations or even failure,” Dr Savanur said.

“The important thing is how you deal with them. We spent time working individually with players, discussing different match situations and creating practical responses. I am happy with what we have achieved in just five days because the players have understood how mental conditioning can be-

come part of their daily routine.” What impressed him most, however, was the potential within the Oman camp.

“I saw a deep desire throughout the team to improve and go beyond where they are today. The players have the skills to beat the best and compete at the highest level. What they perhaps lack is consistent exposure against stronger opposition. Our objective is to add peak-performance strategies and mental tools that will help bridge that gap.”

‘Set sights much higher’

Dr Savanur believes Oman should set their sights much higher. “There is absolutely no reason why Oman cannot be among the top four Associate Nations. There is nothing called ‘tough’ if every one of the 15 players performs their role. The players and coaching staff are aligned, they enjoy taking on difficult challenges and they are genuinely excited about what lies ahead.”

He identified three areas that could define Oman’s progress over the coming years—belief, pushing beyond comfort zones and responding positively under pressure.

“The biggest challenge is believing, as a unit, that they are capable of achieving what may seem impossible. That belief comes



through consistent actions, disciplined preparation and the willingness to keep improving even after setbacks.

“Players also need to move beyond their comfort zones because limited bench strength can sometimes lead to complacency. Finally, they must learn how to respond—not simply react—to difficult match situations. That is where games are won and lost.”

According to Dr Swaroop, the programme is only the beginning of a longer process.

“My role is to help players integrate mental training into their everyday preparation while working closely with the head coach. I observe players, understand team

dynamics and develop practical mental templates that coaches can continue implementing long after I leave.”

Reflecting on the week, he praised the attitude shown by the players.

“The positivity was outstanding. They were eager to learn, willing to experiment and very honest about their challenges. That openness made a huge difference. I also saw excellent bonding despite different backgrounds, and coach Sulakshan deserves immense credit for creating that culture. When a team grows together, extraordinary things become possible.”

Oman Cricket Chief Development Officer Duleep Mendis said

the initiative would strengthen an area that has often made the difference in close contests. “Dr Swaroop is a veteran who has worked with many successful teams and we believe our players will benefit immensely from his experience. In the past, our team has suffered in pressure situations. This programme will strengthen the mental side of the game and, in the long run, help our players perform with greater confidence and consistency.”

Mindset a priority: Kulkarni Head coach Sulakshan Kulkarni, who initiated the programme, said addressing the team’s mindset had become a priority as Oman prepare for a demanding international calendar.

“Dr Swaroop is a well-known figure in Indian cricket. He has worked with the BCCI and the champion Vidarbha Ranji team as a mental conditioning expert. We specifically invited him to address mindset and handling match pressure. His week-long programme was outstanding, and our senior men’s team benefited immensely from his knowledge.”

Kulkarni said the players have already begun incorporating the drills introduced during the workshop into their preparations. “He has given them practical exercises that they can continue applying. This was a much-needed learning experience not only for the players but also for the support staff. I sincerely thank Oman Cricket for making this possible.”

With preparatory matches against Goa, Mumbai and Kerala lined up before the ACC Premier Cup and the remaining League 2 fixtures, Oman are focusing on strengthening every aspect of their game — technical, tactical and mental — as they pursue their ambition of establishing themselves among Asia’s leading emerging cricket nations.

ICC ANTI-CORRUPTION CODE



USA cricketer Reddy banned for eight years

DUBAI: USA off-spinner B Akhilesh Reddy has been banned from all cricket for eight years after being found guilty of breaching three counts of the ICC’s anti-corruption code.

The charges relate to the 2025-26 Abu Dhabi T10 tournament, where Reddy played two matches for Aspin Stallions.

In November, Reddy was provisionally suspended and charged under the following sections of the anti-corruption code:

Article 2.1.1 - Attempting to fix, contrive, or improperly influence, or being party to an agreement or effort to improperly influence, the result, progress, conduct, or any other aspect of matches in the ADT10 2025.

Article 2.1.4 - Soliciting, inducing, enticing, instructing, persuad-

ing, encouraging, or intentionally facilitating (or attempting to do so) another Participant to breach Article 2.1.1 during one or more matches in the ADT10 2025.

Article 2.4.7 - Obstructing the investigation by deleting data and messages from a mobile device that may have been relevant to the inquiry.

The Emirates Cricket Board (ECB) had appointed the ICC as the designated anti-corruption official (DACO), and the ICC’s anti-corruption tribunal has now found Reddy guilty on all three counts. The ban imposed on Reddy is backdated to November 21, 2025, when his suspension began.

The 26-year-old Reddy made his international debut in April 2025. He has played four T20 games, all of them T20Is for USA. - Agencies

MEMPHIS OPEN

Russian teen Liutova wins WTA title

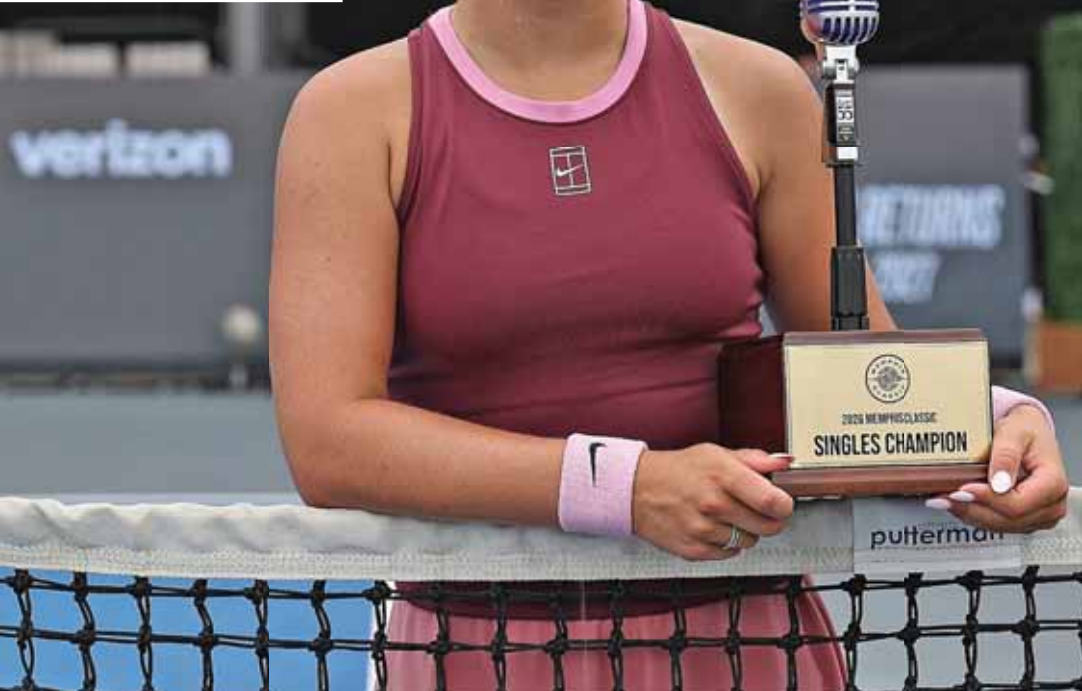
WASHINGTON: Russian 16-year-old Kristina Liutova won the WTA Memphis Open title on Sunday, beating Darja Vidmanova 1-6, 6-1, 6-3 to capture the crown in her first main-draw appearance. Liutova became the youngest player to win a WTA title since 15-year-old Coco Gauff triumphed in Linz in 2019.

When she fired a stinging forehand to the corner to seal the win on her fourth match point, Liutova dropped to her knees, then ran to the stands to share a tearful embrace with her mother.

Having shaken off early nerves to storm through the second set, she led 4-0 in the third before Vidmanova held serve for 4-1, then broke for 4-2. Liutova broke back immediately, but was unable to convert a trio of match points on her own serve before finally sealing the win with a last break of the Czech.

Liutova’s run to the title in the 250-level event included wins over top-seeded Ekaterina Alexandrova and sixth-seeded Caty McNally.

Ranked 229th in the world, Liutova had come through qualifying to book her spot in the draw. Having started the year ranked 714th in the world, Liutova is now projected to rise to 126th. Vidmanova, 23 and ranked 114th, remains in search of her first WTA title. - Agencies



ROUND-UP

Future Banker Day: A full day of knowledge and inspiration for employees' children at Bank Muscat

The day's programme opened with an ice-breaking session and interactive activities, followed by a welcome address delivered by Khalfan Bot, alongside a comprehensive presentation covering the bank's founding journey, its leadership in the Omani banking sector, its digital transformation path and its initiatives in employee engagement and community responsibility

MUSCAT: As part of ongoing commitment to opening the doors of the banking world to future generations, offering them a behind-the-scenes look at how a modern bank operates and the many exciting career paths it offers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, organised Future Banker Day event at its Head Office, with the participation of a group of employees' children aged between 15 and 17. The event brought together an enjoyable, educational and exploratory experience.

The event adopted an interactive approach that blended entertainment with hands-on experience. The day's programme opened with an ice-breaking session and interactive activities, followed by a welcome address delivered by Khalfan Bot, alongside a comprehensive presentation covering the bank's founding journey, its leadership in the Omani banking sector, its digi-



tal transformation path and its initiatives in employee engagement and community responsibility.

The programme also featured a series of introductory presentations, including cybersecurity and fraud awareness, that gave participants the opportunity to learn about operations within key departments, in addition to a group challenge session that encouraged the children to em-

brace creativity and teamwork.

The event also included a field discovery tour that took participants to the Branch, Jadara Academy, AI Lab, the Command Centre and the Cards Team, allowing them to gain firsthand insight into the diversity of specializations and future study and career opportunities available within the Bank.

A number of participants ex-

pressed their happiness with the experience. Mais Fahad Al Amri, 15 years old, said: "I really enjoyed the departmental discovery tour, especially visiting the AI Lab, where I learned about a side of technology used within the Bank. Today's experiences and activities opened up new horizons for my professional future."

Hamoud Younis Al Hasani, 17

years old, said: "What I enjoyed most was visiting the Command Center, where I got to see just how much work happens behind the scenes. We also had the chance to ask questions openly and came away with practical advice and valuable insights."

This initiative reflects Bank Muscat's belief in the importance of introducing young people early to the diverse career opportunities

within the banking sector and instilling the concept of career planning among employees' children; opening their eyes to future career paths in technology, finance, risk management, marketing and leadership. From a community perspective, the event carries meaningful educational value by fostering professional awareness and a sense of institutional belonging among the target age group.

This event also builds on Bank Muscat's ongoing efforts to introduce a culture of innovation and an entrepreneurial spirit among younger generations. The Bank previously organized its Educational Camp for children, aimed at promoting concepts of entrepreneurship and innovation through a series of interactive educational activities designed to build participants' capabilities and encourage them to develop and professionally present innovative business ideas.

Accordingly, Bank Muscat will continue to play a leading role in supporting initiatives that contribute to building an informed generation, aware of the opportunities within the banking sector and capable of contributing meaningfully to the future of the national economy.

MID-SIZE LUXURY CROSSOVER

Lexus NX: Defining modern luxury and sport performance

MUSCAT: The Lexus NX continues to capture the attention of discerning motorists across the Sultanate, securing its position as a standout favourite in the mid-size luxury crossover segment.

Engineered for drivers who demand an engaging behind-the-wheel experience without compromising on premium refinement, this striking vehicle effortlessly blends a bold visual presence with highly responsive, driver-centric engineering that handles Oman's varied driving conditions with absolute poise.

Dynamic sport performance and command on the road

Built to deliver an exhilarating drive, the Lexus NX features a highly responsive powertrain engineered to manage both tight urban routes and long-distance highway cruises. Under the hood, the performance variants boast a potent 2.4-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engine producing an impressive 275 hp and 430 Nm of torque, mated to a smooth-shifting 8-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission. Power is distributed seamlessly to all four wheels via an electronically controlled full-time All-Wheel Drive (AWD) system, working in unison with an advanced Adaptive Variable Suspension (AVS) to ensure a perfectly composed, vibration-free ride on any terrain.

The exterior design of the Lexus NX makes an immediate visual statement, utilizing sharp lines



and a diamond-like silhouette to exude a commanding road presence. The front fascia is anchored by the signature Lexus spindle grille, framed by sleek 3-eye LED headlamps featuring the Adaptive High-beam System (AHS), while large 20-inch alloy wheels emphasize its athletic stance.

Inside, the cabin introduces the

Tazuna cockpit concept, a human-centric layout designed to connect the driver intuitively with the vehicle. The interior serves as a quiet tech sanctuary, centered around an expansive 14-inch multimedia touchscreen navigation hub with seamless smartphone integration. Audiophiles will appreciate the rich, crystal-clear acoustics of the

10-speaker premium surround sound system.

Everyday convenience is woven into the vehicle's premium fabric, highlighted by an innovative inside E-Latch electronic door handle system and a hands-free power backdoor equipped with a convenient kick-open sensor. Overhead, a panoramic moonroof featuring ad-

vanced UV and IR cut glass keeps the entire cabin bright and airy while blocking out harsh sunlight.

Occupant protection remains a cornerstone of the Lexus brand. The NX comes standard with the comprehensive Lexus Safety System+, an advanced driver assistance suite that operates with split-second accuracy. Key fea-

tures include a Pre-Collision System (PCS), Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC), and Lane Tracing Assist (LTA). For effortless tight-space maneuvering, a high-definition Panoramic View Monitor is paired with Safe Exit Assist (SEA), which utilizes the electronic E-Latch and Blind Spot Monitor to prevent door-opening accidents.



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