

O M A N
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10
AL GHAFRI HITS BRACE AS OMAN OUTCLASS NIGER IN FRIENDLY

INBRIEF

HM GETS MESSAGE FROM COMOROS PRESIDENT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from President Othman Ghazali of the Union of the Comoros. The message deals with relations between the two countries.

It was received by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he received Mbae Mohamed, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Envoy of the President of the Union of the Comoros, at the General Diwan of the Foreign Ministry. During the meeting, the Comorian envoy conveyed greetings and best wishes of President Ghazali to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. On his turn, Sayyid Badr asked the guest to convey His Majesty's greetings and best wishes to President Ghazali and the people of the Comoros. — ONA

FIFTH ROUND OF US-IRAN TALKS IN ROME ON FRIDAY

The Sultanate of Oman has announced that the next round of talks between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America (USA) will be held in Rome on Friday.

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, stated that the fifth round of Iran-US talks will take place in the Italian capital, Rome, on May 23.

The fourth round, which was held in Muscat on May 11, was marked by useful and original ideas reflecting the shared desire of both the Iranian and US sides to reach an honourable agreement.

During his Gulf tour, President Donald Trump had said that the United States was getting very close to securing a nuclear deal with Iran.

RO 243M PACTS TO FINANCE FLOOD PROTECTION DAMS



The Sultanate of Oman signed a number of agreements with the Islamic Development Bank Group (IsDB) worth RO 243 million to finance the construction of flood protection dams, on Wednesday.

The agreements were signed on the sidelines of the 50th Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group, held in Algiers.

The agreements were signed by Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, and Dr Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Jasser, Chairman of the Islamic Development Bank Group. **SEE ALSO P13**

Oman committed to global maritime security

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman has affirmed its decades-long active role in supporting the security and safety of regional and international maritime navigation, recognising the vital importance of these waterways to global trade and energy movement, as well as the legal, security and humanitarian responsibilities they entail.

This came in a speech delivered by Ambassador Omar bin Said al Kathiri, Oman's Permanent Representative to the United



Ambassador Omar bin Said al Kathiri

Nations (UN), during the high-level session of the UN Security Council on “Enhancing Maritime Navigation Security through International Cooperation for Global Stability,” held in New York.

In his address, the ambassador emphasised that Oman has worked to align its national legislation with relevant international legal frameworks, foremost the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS),

which is based on the principle of freedom of navigation, safeguards the responsibilities of coastal and transit states and establishes the legal foundations for resolving maritime disputes.

He noted that Oman recently hosted the eighth Indian Ocean Conference, which focused on enhancing cooperation and integration in maritime security management, reflecting the importance of joint regional action.

TURN TO P2

Digitalisation of curricula to empower teachers

To enrich students' learning experiences

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

THE Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development, and in cooperation with BP Oman, launched the Digitalisation of School Curricula Project for Grades 1–12.

The event was held under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and was attended by Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education.

In his speech, Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, emphasised the unprecedented opportunities brought about by digital technologies to enhance the quality of education.

“Education is no longer confined within the four walls of the classroom. It has become a vast space that transcends geographic boundaries and provides both students and teachers access to rich and diverse learning resources.”

He said that the project directly empowers teachers with modern educational tools to deliver content more effectively and creatively while offering students a flexible and comprehensive learning experience that aligns with their individual needs and abilities.

He added by saying that the project is an integral part of a broader vision for digital transformation in education, laying the foundation for a technology-based, future-oriented learning ecosystem.

Yousuf bin Mohammed al Ojaili, President of BP Oman, expressed the



The project is an integral part of a broader vision for digital transformation in education.
PHOTO BY FAISAL AL BALUSHI

company's pride in partnering with the Ministry of Education, stating that the initiative aims to empower teachers and enrich students' learning experiences through greater interactivity.

He emphasised that the collaboration highlights the vital role of public-private partnerships in driving innovation and leaving a sustainable impact on education in Oman.

The event featured a visit to a model interactive classroom, where a group of teachers and students presented sample

lessons using digital textbooks and interactive screens. A short documentary on the project's development journey was also shown, followed by the official digital book launch and the honouring of BP Oman as the project's main sponsor.

The digitisation process went through several key stages, beginning with the preparatory phase, which involved defining the technical and educational specifications for the digital content. This was followed by content analysis, scenario development, and quality review. **TURN TO P2**

Israeli ‘warning’ fire at diplomats sparks global outcry

JENIN: Israeli troops fired warning shots during a visit by foreign diplomats to the occupied West Bank on Wednesday, the military said, drawing condemnation as pressure mounted on Israel to allow aid into war-battered Gaza.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas urged Israel to hold to account those responsible for the shooting near Jenin.

The Palestinian foreign ministry accused Israel of having “deliberately targeted by live fire an accredited

diplomatic delegation”. A European diplomat said the group had gone to the area “to see the destruction” caused by months of Israeli operations.

The Israeli military said “the delegation deviated from the approved route”, prompting troops to fire “warning shots” to keep them away from “an area where they were not authorised to be”. It said it “regrets the inconvenience caused” by the shooting, which resulted in no injuries.

The incident came as international pressure



Smoke billows following an Israeli strike in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. — **AFP**

intensified over the war in Gaza, where Palestinians were desperate for supplies after a two-month aid blockade was eased.

Rescue teams in the Palestinian territory said overnight Israeli strikes killed at least 19 people, including a week-old baby.

Israel said 93 trucks had entered Gaza on Tuesday but faced accusations the amount fell far short of what was required. The United Nations said the aid had been held up.

SEE ALSO P6

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



OMAN ATTENDS
ARADO REGULAR
MEETING IN CAIRO

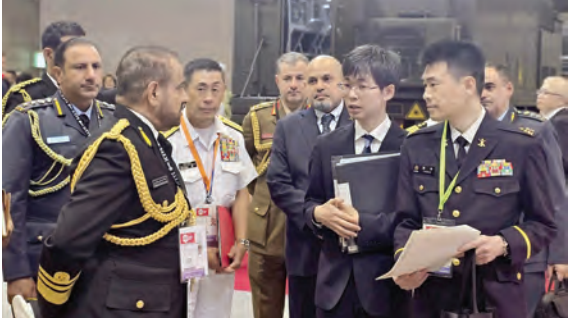
The Sultanate of Oman part in the 119th regular session of the Executive Council of the Arab Administrative Development Organisation (ARADO), held in Cairo.

Oman's delegation at the meeting was headed by Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour.

The meeting discussed the organisation's achievements during 2024, its digital transition strategy and its annual action plan, budget and follow-up of the implementation of its decisions.

The participants expressed keenness to develop administrative performance and enhance integration among Arab countries in respective areas. — ONA

SAF CHIEF OF STAFF
VISITS DSEI JAPAN
2025 EXPO



Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), visited the Defence and Security Equipment International "DSEI Japan 2025" exhibition, held in Tokyo.

The SAF Chief of Staff and his accompanying military delegation toured the exhibition and the various companies participating in the DSEI Japan 2025. He also attended several discussion panels held at the sidelines of the exhibition.

Meanwhile, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces met here with General Yoshihide Yoshida, Japan's Chief of Staff of the Joint Staff. During this meeting, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest. The meeting and the DSEI Japan 2025 opening ceremony were attended by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Japan.

OMAN COMMITTED
TO GLOBAL
MARITIME SECURITY

FROM PAGE 1

He stressed that Oman firmly believes the security of seas and waterways is a fundamental pillar for maintaining regional and international stability, ensuring freedom of navigation, sustaining global trade, safeguarding food and energy security, and promoting sustainable development.

Oman's Permanent Representative to the UN highlighted that escalating transnational threats — such as maritime terrorism, piracy, human and drug trafficking, organised crime, and illicit trade - alongside environmental repercussions from climate change and attacks on maritime infrastructure, necessitate well-considered collective responses that reflect the spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility enshrined in the UN Charter.

He also addressed Oman's pivotal mediation role in reaching the ceasefire agreement announced on May 6, 2025, to ensure freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. This constructive step demonstrates Oman's commitment to easing regional tensions, enhancing maritime stability, and securing the smooth flow of international shipping.

He reiterated Oman's emphasis on strengthening adherence to international law, particularly UNCLOS, as the comprehensive legal framework for all maritime activities, while stressing the full implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions.

— ONA

Oman, Iraq to enhance
judicial and legal ties

SAYYID Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council, received at his office Dr Faiq Zidan, President of the Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq, and his accompanying delegation.

The visit of the Iraqi official aims at strengthening cooperation between the judicial institutions of the two countries.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed ways to develop judicial and legal relations, expand areas of joint cooperation, exchange expertise and activate training and technical programmes — measures that would positively impact the performance of the justice system and enhance its efficiency.

The two sides also reviewed a number of topics of mutual interest, most notably modernising court procedures, developing legal training mechanisms and improving the quality of judicial services while expediting litigation processes.

The Iraqi delegation was briefed on key aspects of Oman's experience in developing its judicial work environment, particularly in areas related to digital transformation and leveraging technology to serve justice — ensuring improved litigant experiences and



Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy receives at his office Dr Faiq Zidan, President of the Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq, and his delegation.

higher institutional efficiency.

Al Busaidy emphasised that this visit represents an important step towards strengthening judicial relations between

Oman and Iraq, noting that the exchange of knowledge and expertise is a fundamental pillar for advancing judicial work and building effective strategic partnerships. — ONA

Review of Draft Civil Society Institutions Law

MUSCAT: The Majlis Ash'shura on Wednesday concluded its review of the draft Civil Society Institutions Law following extensive discussions on several provisions, referring it to the State Council to complete the legislative process.

This came during the 11th regular session of the second annual convening (2024-2025) of the tenth term (2023-2027), chaired by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura .

During the session, The Majlis finalised discussions on the draft law referred by the government, with the project report presented by Mansour bin Zahir al Hajri, Chairman of the Health and Social Committee.

Al Hajri explained that the draft law responds to



developments in civil society work in Oman, noting that the new legislation aims to address social and regulatory challenges facing civil society institutions. It establishes a flexible and progressive legal framework that accommodates ongoing transformations while enhancing these institutions' role in national development.

The draft also introduces specialised provisions for volunteer teams, comprising 83 articles organised into six chapters covering general definitions, civil associations, civil institutions, social associations, volunteer work and final provisions.

He indicated that the committee held multiple meetings with various civil society institutions and relevant entities to consider their perspectives and observations on the draft law's articles. He affirmed that the committee carefully examined all legislative and social dimensions during its review.

During the session, Majlis Ash'shura members provided observations on several provisions and proposed enhancements to strengthen the legal texts and ensure alignment with the practical realities of civil society institutions.

Discussions also addressed aspects related to licensing, classifications, governance of civil work, as well as penalty clauses. — ONA

Digitalisation of curricula to empower teachers

FROM PAGE 1

Each digital book required up to 80 hours of review, totalling more than 4,800 hours for 60 books. A trial phase was then conducted in selected schools to gather feedback and refine the content. The final stage involves publishing the digital books through the ministry's Educational Technologies Portal and later via the Noor platform's digital repository, in line with broader national digital transformation projects. Media campaigns will also accompany the rollout to raise awareness.

Dr Mona al Siyabi, Head of the Technical and Scientific Team for Digitising the English Language, said: "In line with Oman Vision 2040, we have launched the first phase of developing digital interactive books for Omani schools. This phase focuses on transforming traditional textbooks into engaging digital formats for the early grades.

"These new digital books are rich with interactive features, including games, activities and videos, designed to enhance the learning experience for students and support teachers in the classroom. They also serve as a helpful resource for parents at home. We aim to expand this effort to cover grades 5 through 12 in the upcoming stages."

Currently, these interactive books are being piloted in selected schools, and we are collecting feedback from teachers and students to evaluate their experience and



identify areas for improvement.

The ministry aims to develop and transform traditional curricula into interactive digital content within the national educational platform. The project seeks to offer a variety of digital resources for different learning styles, support distance education using information and communication technology, foster self-learning and collaborative learning and equip students with future-ready skills.

Ultimately, it aims to improve the quality of education, enhance student performance and provide accessible and effective digital learning tools.

The project comprises 6 phases... the preparatory phase, the analysis phase, the educational scenario preparation phase, the digital production phase, a pilot phase and the digital book propagation phase (giving access to digital content via the e-learning portal and later via the Noor system).



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SHORT TAKES



Volunteer Media Passport programme

The Omani Volunteer Network “Taawon” concluded the closing ceremony of the “Volunteer Media Passport” programme for the year 2025, under the auspices of Dr Aisha al Ghabshi, Member of the State Council. The programme was aimed at training and empowering Omani youth in the fields of digital and volunteer media; and was attended by a distinguished group of media professionals and volunteers.

The ceremony included the honouring of participants who successfully completed the programme, which offered both practical and theoretical training in volunteer digital media skills, content creation, photography and media production. This contributed to enhancing their capabilities and strengthening their role in serving the community through media platforms.

A representative highlighted the importance of volunteer media in conveying positive messages and spreading community awareness.

First private cancer institute in Oman

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The first cancer institute in the private sector will be opened under the auspices of Dr Muhanna al Muselhi, Director General of Private Health Establishments, Dr Sulthana al Harthy, Director of Treatment Abroad, Ministry of Health, at the Hotel Muscat Grand Millennium.

Named Burjeel Cancer Institute, the initiative aims to cater to the need of research and development centres in the region and is a pivotal advancement in oncology care that promises to elevate cancer treatment standards in the region.

Led by a multidisciplinary oncology team under the guidance of Prof Humaid al Shamsi, Consultant Medical Oncologist and Chief Executive Officer of BCI, specialists are dedicated to offering a comprehensive range of oncology services from diagnostics and treatment.

Hotels see 2.3% growth in guests by March-end

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

OMAN'S hospitality sector continues its upward momentum, as the total number of guests in 3 and 5-star hotels across the country reached 610,176 by the end of March 2025 — a 2.3 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2024, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) through its official social media channels.

The statistics also revealed a hotel occupancy rate of 59.5 per cent, while total revenues for the sector stood at RO 79.43 million, reflecting a notable 10.6 per cent growth compared to March of last year.

These figures point to a steady recovery in Oman's tourism industry, fuelled by the government's continuous efforts to promote tourism, diversify the national economy and attract investments in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

The modest yet steady increase in guest numbers and the more robust rise in revenues indicate a positive trend for the tourism sector, which is regaining momentum following the global disruptions caused by the pandemic and regional economic challenges.

The higher revenues, in particular, suggest an increase in guest spending and possibly longer stays — both of which are crucial indicators of a healthier tourism economy.

Oman has steadily positioned itself as a sought-after travel destination thanks to its diverse tourism offerings — from pristine beaches and rugged mountains to rich cultural heritage sites and eco-tourism experiences. Flexible visa policies, enhanced infrastructure and active global promotion campaigns by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism have played a central role in boosting Oman's visibility on the international tourism map.

Domestic tourism continues to form the backbone of the industry's resilience, especially during weekends and national holidays. Popular destinations such as the mountains of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, beaches in Dhofar; and the forts and heritage villages of



The statistics revealed a hotel occupancy rate of 59.5 per cent.

the interior regions continue to attract large numbers of local tourists.

Efforts to improve road access, hospitality services and visitor facilities have made internal travel more convenient and enjoyable.

Under Oman Vision 2040, the tourism sector is designated as one of the key drivers of economic diversification. Government initiatives have focused on expanding investment in eco-tourism, heritage resorts and adventure tourism — particularly in governorates with untapped potential.

The ministry is also leveraging digital transformation, with new platforms and campaigns aimed at enhancing the visibility of Omani destinations and offering interactive experiences that appeal to modern travellers.

Despite positive indicators, several challenges remain. These include increasing hotel room capacity, training and retaining skilled workforce in the hospitality sector; and improving air connectivity with key international markets.

The region's competitive tourism landscape further emphasises the need for

innovative marketing approaches and the continuous enhancement of the overall visitor experience. Looking ahead, the sector is expected to maintain its growth trajectory throughout 2025. With the onset of summer travel season and high-profile events such as the Khareef Dhofar Season and winter tourism initiatives in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, further increases in occupancy rates and revenues are anticipated.

Moreover, the opening of new hotels, combined with targeted investments in rural and cultural tourism, will help diversify the market and distribute tourism activity across various regions.

The latest statistics published by the NCSI underscore the gradual but steady rebound of Oman's tourism sector. The increase in guest numbers and revenues by March 2025 is a testament to the effective policies and long-term vision guiding the industry.

As Oman continues to balance growth with sustainability, the goal remains to position the country as a leading tourism destination — one that celebrates its authenticity while meeting the expectations of global travellers.

Innovation for industrial water purification using squid ink

AL SUWAIQ: The innovative project “Water Filter Using Squid Ink” by Omani inventor Yusra bint Yousef al Ghadaniyah offers an effective and sustainable solution to one of the most pressing challenges in the oil and gas sector: produced water. This byproduct of oil extraction is generated daily in massive quantities and is difficult to treat due to its high concentration of toxic chemicals.

Yusra explained to Oman News Agency that she developed a novel filtering material based on squid ink as a cost-effective and efficient alternative to activated carbon, which is commonly used in industrial wastewater treatment. The innovative material absorbs heavy metals and dissolved hydrocarbons while also reducing water salinity, providing comprehensive treatment for contaminated industrial water at minimal cost.

She noted that the project began in 2023 during her participation in



YUSRA
AL GHADANI

focused on utilising resources to design local Omani beneficial products. This sparked her journey to develop the innovation.

The filter primarily relies on a specially processed powdered form of squid ink, engineered to possess the necessary adsorption properties. This powder can be directly integrated into existing filtration systems, particularly compact filters, without requiring major structural modifications — making it practical and adaptable



Water filter using squid ink

for industrial applications. As for the environmental benefits, Yusra emphasised that the innovation is more sustainable than traditional filters, particularly activated carbon. The production process for squid ink-based material does not involve complex manufacturing or high energy consumption, reducing its

carbon footprint. Additionally, it is eco-friendly in both sourcing and production, as it can be locally manufactured in Oman using readily available natural resources, unlike activated carbon, which is often imported and requires advanced industrial processing. This dual advantage supports both environmental protection and the local economy, she added.

She explained that initial tests on simulated produced water samples showed high efficiency in absorbing heavy metals and reducing salinity. Comparative studies with activated carbon demonstrated near-equivalent performance, confirming the filter's capability to deliver similar results. Yusra is now conducting tests on real produced water samples in industrial-like environments, with preliminary results being promising. Further refinements are underway to ensure scalability and long-term

effectiveness.

On challenges faced during development, Yusra highlighted difficulties in conducting scientific experiments and proving the material's efficacy after her graduation, as she no longer had direct access to university labs. She overcame this by assembling a multidisciplinary research team. Another hurdle was securing institutional support — after initially failing to qualify for incubation under ‘Manafi,’ she eventually joined OQX, an accelerator under OQ, which provided the necessary backing.

Looking ahead, Yusra aims to implement a pilot project in an oil and gas field to validate the product's real-world performance. She also plans to establish a startup, InkClear, to professionally develop and market the innovation globally, aspiring to position the Omani-made solution as a sustainable standard for industrial water treatment. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

A SUMMER DESTINATION

BALQEES
AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

AS TEMPERATURES SOAR across much of the world during the summer, seasoned travellers are rethinking their go-to destinations. What if the next unforgettable escape was a place where cool monsoon breezes blanket misty mountains, where age-old souqs meet serene coastlines and where adventure lives around every corner? That place is the Sultanate of Oman. Nestled on the southeastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, Oman remains one of the region's best-kept secrets — an oasis of natural beauty, cultural authenticity and warm hospitality. Whether you're chasing waterfalls in the south or diving in turquoise waters in the north, this is the summer you should spend in Oman. Oman's growing popularity is backed by numbers. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, the country welcomed more than 2.3 million tourists by the end of June 2024 — a 2.4 per cent increase compared to the same period the previous year. Notably, European visitors rose by nearly 20 per cent, signalling the country's expanding appeal beyond the region.

Hotel revenues also reflect the boom, rising by 10.2 per cent to over RO 108.3 million (\$281.5 million) in the first half of 2024. These figures are not just economic indicators — they're proof that Oman is increasingly being recognised as a go-to travel destination. "We were looking for something different — less commercial, more real," says Emma Thompson, a visitor from the UK. "Oman delivered. From the people to the mountains, everything felt authentic." Forget the desert stereotypes. In Oman's southern city of Salalah, the summer ushers in khareef — a seasonal monsoon that transforms the arid Dhofar Governorate into a lush, green paradise. Temperatures drop, clouds drift over the hills and waterfalls cascade through mountain passes. "I thought I was in Southeast Asia," says Raj Patel from India, who travelled to Salalah in July. "The mist, the greenery — it was unlike anything I expected from the Middle East." The annual Khareef Dhofar Season, held from late June to early September, brings together culture, cuisine and nature in a celebration that captivates locals and foreigners alike. The capital, Muscat, offers a unique blend of tradition and modernity. Here, the Sultan Qaboos Grand



Mosque stands as a marvel of Islamic architecture, while the Royal Opera House Muscat hosts world-class performances in a distinctly Omani setting. Stroll through the atmospheric Muttrah Souq, then unwind at one of the capital's scenic beachfront cafes. "It's the Middle East's most laid-back capital," notes a recent

Times travel article. "There are no skyscraper skylines — just mountains, mosques and an irresistible sense of calm."

Oman is a haven for the outdoorsy traveller. Head north to explore the Al Hajar Mountains, home to Jabal Shams, the country's highest peak and a hiker's dream. Venture into the Rimal Al Sharqiya for a true desert experience — complete with sandboarding, camel treks and Bedouin hospitality. If water is more your element, the Daymaniyat Islands and the Musandam Peninsula offer world-class diving and snorkeling. Here, coral reefs teem with life and dolphins often dance alongside boats.

"Oman's coastline is spectacular," says Lena Krause, a diver from Germany. "It felt like discovering a whole new underwater world — uncrowded and untouched."

Oman's appeal lies not only in its landscapes but also in its values. The government's Oman Vision 2040 initiative places sustainable tourism at the heart of its development strategy. From eco-resorts in the mountains to protected marine zones, Oman is committed to growing its tourism sector without compromising its natural heritage.

"Travelling here doesn't feel intrusive — it feels welcomed," says Carlos Mendes, a sustainable travel blogger from Portugal. "The people care about their land and you can see that in how tourism is managed."

The world is rediscovering the beauty of meaningful travel — and Oman fits the bill. It offers soulful landscapes, untold stories and unmatched warmth. In a time when many destinations feel overcrowded or overexposed, Oman remains refreshingly real. "This country surprised me in the best way," says Emma Thompson. "I came for a new experience — and I left with memories I'll never forget."

So this summer, skip the ordinary. Follow the monsoon mists, climb the sunlit cliffs, wander through ancient forts and float in Oman's hidden wadis. Whether you're an adventurer, a cultural explorer, or a traveller seeking serenity, Oman is not just a destination — it's an experience.

SHORT TAKES



be'ah holds awareness visits to schools

The Community Awareness and Engagement Team from the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company be'ah carried out a series of awareness visits to six schools in the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, targeting more than 5,219 students and educational staff.

This initiative aligns with the company's commitment to spreading environmental awareness and promoting sustainable practices among younger generations. The visits included interactive educational sessions focusing on sustainable consumption, smart shopping and proper waste disposal methods.

The team aimed to deliver simplified and engaging content tailored to the students' age groups, fostering a culture of environmental conservation from an early age. The visits highlighted the company's efforts in managing engineered landfills.

MACE alumni body marks 25 years



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The MACE Alumni Association, the Omani chapter of the alumni network of Mar Athanasius College of Engineering, Kothamangalam, celebrated its silver jubilee at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Madinat Al Irfan.

Dr Boss Mathew Jose, Principal of MA College, inaugurated the event which was attended by a large number of guests. The line of speakers included Riyaz Mohammed, Chandralal, Jeena Subin and John Emmanuel, representing the Association of MACE Alumni Chapters. Shabin Kunju Muhammed, Benny Joseph and the President of the MACE Alumni Association Oman delivered the welcome address, while Silver Jubilee Chairman Joseph P J proposed the vote of thanks.

The celebration featured various cultural and literary programmes with the participation of the families of alumni members.

13 NATIONS ATTEND EMPOWERING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS PROGRAMME

SUHAR: The First Foundation Programme Conference on Empowering University Students in the 21st Century commenced at Sohar University in Al Batinah North Governorate.

The conference features speakers and academics from 13 countries alongside higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. Dr Hamdan Sulaiman al Fazari, Vice Chancellor of Sohar University, emphasised that the conference aligns with global trends in empowering university students within foundation programmes, addressing developments in higher education and modern disciplines



in line with labour market demands and student aspirations.

He added that higher education institutions undertake a pivotal role in empowering students and fostering their transformation in the 21st century by investing in human capital, offering programmes,

policies and platforms that prepare students for careers.

These initiatives provide programmes and specialisations that meet labour market needs, align with technological advancements and keep pace with artificial intelligence and digital transformation.

The conference brings together 80 speakers from universities and educational institutions in Oman, alongside academics and experts from 11 countries, which are France, Spain, Morocco, the UAE, Malaysia, Canada, Saudi Arabia, the People's Republic of China, Iran, Nigeria, and Algeria. — ONA

Al Buraimi Oasis project 72 per cent complete

Al Buraimi Governorate organised its 2025 media briefing as part of its efforts to enhance communication with the media, highlight key developmental achievements made in 2024 and outline future plans for the coming period.

The event aimed to strengthen communication channels between the governorate and the community while updating media professionals on ongoing developmental projects and initiatives. This aligns with the principle of transparency and reinforces the media's role in supporting development efforts.

Held at the Al Salam Grand Resort in Al Buraimi, the event was attended by several officials and media representatives. It featured a visual presentation about the governorate, followed by a speech by Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi, who highlighted key indicators for 2024 and the governorate's initiatives.

These included the "Plant Your Home" initiative, the "Community Partnership" initiative to monitor progress in developmental projects and the collaboration between the Governor's Office and the University of Al Buraimi to organise the "Job Opportunities Forum" for employment.

The event also addressed major achievements and projects, such as the economic zone in Al Rawdah and the Hafeet Rail Network project. Additionally, future plans were discussed, including Al Buraimi Oasis — Downtown Hub project, which is 72 per cent complete. The project features shaded seating areas, pedestrian walkways, green spaces and a reflective pool in front of Al Hila Fort, serving as an iconic aesthetic element. Another project highlighted was



Al Buraimi Governorate organised its 2025 media briefing as part of its efforts to enhance communication with the media.

the artificial lake, which includes six chalets, a children's play island and a café, with 57 per cent of its construction completed.

Eng Moosa Said al Abri, Director General of Al Buraimi Municipality, provided a detailed presentation on key ongoing projects, reviewing progress rates for several infrastructure developments. These include the design and construction of 100 km of internal roads (Phase 2) across the governorate's wilayats and the maintenance of roads affected by recent weather conditions, with remaining work under way.

He noted that asphalt road maintenance has been assigned to a company for five years. Other projects discussed were urban beautification initiatives and the automated shading system in the Central Market, which is 100 per cent complete. This project supports small and medium enterprise vendors by providing a comfortable work environment that protects them from weather conditions and enhances their commercial activity.

On her turn, Ruqaya bint Rashid al Yahyaeyah, Director of Planning and

Investment at the Governor's Office, highlighted Al Buraimi's key advantages and achievements across various sectors. These include the logistics sector, where the dualisation of Al Buraimi-Mahadha road is under way, with the final concept and design approved and tendering expected soon. She also discussed major investment opportunities in food security, valued at approximately RO 34 million and urban planning.

She added that 30 developmental and investment opportunities were presented through the "Tatweer" platform, targeting 83 beneficiaries in 2025. Additionally, an agreement was signed to develop the Integrated Residential Neighbourhood (Hayy Al Salam) project, a modern housing option that will be provided in accordance with approved regulations to meet growing housing demand and enhance quality of life.

The meeting included a dialogue session where media inquiries were addressed and various topics related to developmental and service-related affairs in the governorate were discussed. — ONA

A novel design of microbial desalination

MUSCAT: Winning in the Environmental and Biological Resources field in the Young Researcher's category, 'Desalination and acid-base recovery in a novel design of microbial desalination and chemical recovery cell' by Eng Azhar bint Juma Hamdan al Hinaiyah, Head of Waste Management Section in Environment Authority, was among the winning innovative research projects in the 11th National Research Award, organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

Discussing the reasons behind the study, Eng Azhar al Hinai mentioned that microbial desalination cell (MDC) is deemed as an environmentally friendly technology for water treatment using organic matters present in wastewater for the desalination process. Microbial desalination



A winners of innovative research project in the 11th National Research Award.

and chemical recovery cell (MDCC) is a modified version of MDC that desalinates saline water using wastewater as fuel, generates electricity and concurrently produces value-added products. However, several factors have limited the MDCC performance and its development, eg, pH imbalance, ions accumulation and high internal resistance.

Eng Azhar elaborated that MDCCs, so far,

are fabricated through modifying the dual-chamber microbial fuel cell (MFC) by placing the desalination and recovery chambers between the anodic and cathodic chambers, which not only increases the distance between two electrodes, but also brings different types of membranes between them leading to high internal resistance.

Therefore, this research, for the first time, demonstrated a novel

design of MDCC, which is a modified version of a single chamber membrane-less MFC, named SMDCC; with the focus of removing barriers between the anode and cathode while upholding desalination and chemical recovery features of MDCC. The study focused on assessment of SMDCC performance in terms of electrolyte pH, acid and base recovery and desalination rate at different salt concentrations and in absence and presence of applied power supply.

For the main findings, Eng Azhar stated that this study proposed a new configuration for the microbial desalination and chemical recovery cell. The performance of the system in terms of electrolyte pH, acid and base recoveries and desalination rate were assessed comprehensively.

Recall



Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
OTANI TYRES - 205/55ZR16 94Y XL KC2000	2024	389

Recall consequence

Due to tread thickness over spec at shoulder it cause of overheat during high speed specially Y speed category.

Recall Action

Tyre replacement by other category or other brand.



To verify the serial number of the goods those affected please visit the results website and scan using the response code

OMAN AL SAHOU AL IHTIKATH S.A.C

Contact number 94335556/94292748

Consumer Protection Authority

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Security personnel stand guard at the site of a school bus bombing in Khuzdar district of Balochistan. — AFP

SCHOOL BUS BOMBING KILLS SIX IN SW PAKISTAN

QUETTA: A suspected suicide bomber targeted a school bus in southwestern Pakistan killing at least four children and two adults on Wednesday. The bus driver and his assistant were among those killed in the attack in Khuzdar district of Balochistan province, on the way to a school that caters to the children of army personnel and civilians living in the area.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif accused arch-rival India of backing the militants that carried out the attack, coming almost two weeks after the two sides settled a ceasefire to end their most serious conflict in decades. “Terrorists operating under Indian patronage attacking innocent children on a school bus is clear evidence of their hostility,” his statement added.

Sarfraz Bugti, the chief minister of Balochistan province said four children, the bus driver and his assistant were killed. “A bus carrying children of the APS (Army Public School) was targeted with a bomb, the nature of which is still being determined,” Yasir Iqbal Dashti, a senior local government official in Khuzdar district, said.

— AFP

SINGAPORE UNVEILS NEW CABINET AFTER ELECTION



Singapore's PM Lawrence Wong arrives at an assembly area for People's Action Party supporters, in Singapore. — Reuters file photo

SINGAPORE: Singapore's newly elected Prime Minister Lawrence Wong unveiled his cabinet on Wednesday, retaining his post as finance minister and appointing an ex-army general as defence chief. Wong became only the second non-member of the influential Lee family to lead Singapore in nearly 60 years when he brought the People's Action Party (PAP) to a landslide victory on May 3.

The new cabinet, which saw several ministers take on new duties while keeping their old posts, comes as the trade-oriented nation faces uncertainty over US President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs. “With your strong support, I have done my utmost to assemble the strongest team I could for Singapore,” Wong told local media.

Wong, a Singapore- and US-trained economist, kept his position as finance minister, a key post in the wealthy global financial hub. Eugene Tan, an associate professor of law at the Singapore Management University, said the new cabinet “has its accent on continuity rather than change”. — AFP

UNFORTUNATE REMARKS

Japan farm minister resigns over rice gaffe



Japan's farm minister resigned after a gaffe about rice drew public fury in a country experiencing soaring prices of the cherished staple. Taku Eto told a gathering that he had “never bought rice myself because my supporters donate so much to me that I can practically sell it”. This hit a nerve in Japan where shortages have sent the price of rice soaring. Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba chastised the minister, calling the remarks “extremely unfortunate”. — AFP

KENYA ADMITS ROLE IN KIDNAPPING OF UGANDA OPPN LEADER

NAIROBI: Kenya has admitted it assisted in the kidnapping of a Ugandan opposition leader on its soil last year as he appeared in court for the latest hearing of his treason trial on Wednesday. Kizza Besigye, 68, was abducted by armed men in the heart of the Kenyan capital Nairobi in November and re-emerged a few days later at a military court in Uganda. Besigye is a former doctor to President Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled Uganda for nearly 40 years,

but turned against him and ran for the presidency on multiple occasions. Kenya's government had previously denied any involvement in his abduction.

But in a TV interview late on Tuesday, Foreign Secretary Musalia Mudavadi admitted: “Kenya cooperated with the Ugandan authorities.” “(Uganda) is a friendly nation. He (Kizza Besigye) was not seeking asylum. He had not come to say that he was seeking asylum. Had

he said that, maybe the treatment would have been different,” Mudavadi told Citizen TV. “We have to partner with our East African states and sometimes we have to manage those relations very carefully for the broader national interest,” he added. Rights groups say Besigye's abduction and trial for treason, which carries a potential death penalty, are linked to the upcoming election in January, when Museveni, 80, will once again seek re-election. — AFP

Gaza still waiting for aid as pressure mounts on Israel

PALESTINIANS

in Gaza were left waiting for the promised

arrival of food on Wednesday despite mounting international and domestic pressure on the Israeli government to allow more aid to reach a population on the brink of famine after an 11-week blockade. Fewer than 100 aid trucks have entered Gaza, according to Israeli military figures, since Monday, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government agreed to lift the blockade that has forced Gazans into a desperate struggle to survive. With air strikes and tank fire continuing to pound the enclave, killing dozens of people on Wednesday, local bakers and transport operators said they had yet to see fresh supplies of flour and other essentials.

Abdelnasser Al Ajramy, the head of the bakery owners' society, said at least 25 bakeries that were told they would receive flour from the World Food Programme had seen nothing and there was no relief from the hunger for people waiting for food. “There is no flour, no food, no water,” said Sabah Warsh Agha, a 67-year-old woman from the northern Gaza town of Beit Lahiya sheltering in a cluster of tents near the beach in Gaza City. “We used to get water from the pump, now the pump has stopped working. There is no diesel or gas.”

The resumption of the assault on Gaza since March, following a two-month ceasefire, has drawn condemnation from countries that have long been cautious about expressing open criticism of Israel. Even the United States, the country's most important ally, has shown signs of losing patience with Netanyahu. Britain has suspended talks with Israel on a free trade deal, and the European Union said it will review a pact on political and economic ties over the “catastrophic situation” in Gaza. Britain, France and



Palestinians line up to receive a hot meal at a food distribution point in the Al Rimal neighbourhood. — AFP

Canada have threatened “concrete actions” if Israel continues its offensive.

Within Israel, left-wing opposition leader Yair Golan drew a furious response from the government and its supporters this week when he declared that “A sane country doesn't kill babies as a hobby” and said Israel risked becoming a “pariah state among the nations.”

Golan, a former deputy commander of the Israeli military who went single-handedly to rescue victims of the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct 7, 2023, leads a party with little electoral clout. But his words, and similar comments by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in an interview with the BBC, underscored the deepening unease in Israel at the continuation of the war while 58 hostages remain in Gaza. Netanyahu dismissed the criticism. Opinion polls show widespread support for a ceasefire that would include the return of all the hostages,

with a survey from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem this week showing 70% in favour of a deal. But hardliners in the cabinet, some of whom argue for the complete expulsion of all Palestinians from Gaza, have insisted on continuing the war until “final victory”, which would include disarming Hamas as well as the return of the hostages.

Air strikes and tank fire killed at least 34 people across the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, Palestinian health authorities said. The Israeli military said air strikes hit 115 targets, which it said included rocket launchers, tunnels and unspecified military infrastructure.

As some trucks left Kerem Shalom, the sprawling customs and logistics hub at the south-eastern corner of the Gaza Strip, a small group of Israeli protesters angry that any supplies were being let into Gaza while hostages were still held there tried to block them. — Reuters

KEY BANGLADESH PARTY PROTESTS

DHAKA: Bangladesh's key political party held large-scale protests against the interim government for the first time on Wednesday, as political rows spill onto the streets including demands for an election date. Thousands of supporters of the powerful Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) rallied in Dhaka, shutting down central streets, demanding their candidate be installed as the capital's mayor.

The protests are significant in that they pitted the BNP, seen as the frontrunners in highly anticipated elections, against the caretaker government. BNP supporters have padlocked the gates of the mayoral office for the past week suspending civic services, demanding Hossain take up the post — pointing out that this has already happened in the country's second city Chittagong. — AFP



OVER FALSE ANNOUNCEMENT

Tanzania blocks X after police account hacked



Tanzanian blocked social media platform X after a police account was hacked and used to falsely announce the president's death, Internet watchdog NetBlocks said. Tanzanians were unable to access X unless using a Virtual Private Network (VPN). “Live metrics show X has become unreachable on major Internet providers in #Tanzania; the incident comes as a compromised police account posts claim the President has died.” — AFP

PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Iran approves strategic pact with Russia



Iran's parliament approved a 20-year strategic partnership on Wednesday between Moscow and Tehran. The agreement represents a deepening of bilateral ties including closer defence cooperation. Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian signed the strategic partnership document on January 17. The Russian legislative branch approved the pact in April. — AFP

TARGETING OFFICIALS



Police officers work near shooting in front of the school in Pozuelo de Alarcon, Madrid. — AFP

FORMER UKRAINE MP SHOT DEAD NEAR MADRID

MADRID: A US-sanctioned Ukrainian ex-MP and senior aide to the country’s former pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych was shot dead near Madrid on Wednesday, a Spanish police source said. Officers rushed to the upmarket town of Pozuelo de Alarcon where several people shot a man in the back and head as he prepared to climb into a vehicle, the source said, identifying the victim as Andriy Portnov.

The shooters then fled from the scene towards a wooded area, the source added, saying the attack struck outside an American private school at around 9:15 am. Madrid emergency services found a dead man sprawled on the pavement near the school with at least three gunshot wounds, spokeswoman Encarna Fernandez told reporters at the scene.

Spanish media reported the victim had just dropped off his children at the school before he was killed. Armed police had cordoned off the area and a forensics team was collecting fingerprints from a black Mercedes. Portnov was a lawmaker in the 2000s and became deputy head of the presidential administration under Yanukovych, an ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, before fleeing to Russia in 2014 after cracking down on pro-EU protests in Ukraine.

Portnov lived in Russia and Austria before returning to his home country following the election of President Volodymyr Zelensky. The United States imposed sanctions on him in 2021 for alleged corruption, saying he had used his influence in the judiciary and law enforcement to buy access in Ukrainian courts and undermine reform efforts. He was also known in Ukraine for insulting and threatening journalists, as well as filing numerous lawsuits against media professionals.

Ukrainian authorities had not commented on the incident, but a military intelligence official told AFP on condition of anonymity that Portnov had been shot dead. Ukraine has claimed or been linked with several assassinations in Russia and Moscow-occupied parts of Ukraine since the start of the attack in 2022, targeting political or military officials or ideological supporters of the war.

El Pais daily reported that Spanish intelligence sources had “no doubt that the long arm of the Kremlin was behind this unprecedented crime”. Spain hosts more than 300,000 Ukrainians, most of them beneficiaries of temporary protection granted after they fled the Russian attack, according to government data. — AFP

GERMANY ARRESTS TEENAGERS OVER ASYLUM SEEKER ATTACKS

BERLIN: German police on Wednesday arrested five teenagers accused of forming a far-right militant group called the “Last Wave of Defence” that targeted asylum seekers and plotted to undermine the government. The suspects, reportedly aged 14 to 18, were members or supporters of the “right-wing extremist terrorist organisation” founded in April last year, federal prosecutors said. Their goal was “to bring about the collapse of the democratic system

in the Federal Republic of Germany through acts of violence”, the prosecutors’ office said in a statement. The juveniles saw themselves as defenders of the “German nation” and had allegedly planned “arson and bomb attacks on asylum seekers’ homes and institutions on the political left”. Justice Minister Stefanie Hubig said it was “particularly shocking” that the suspects arrested were all “minors when the terrorist group was founded”. “This is a warning sign

and shows that right-wing extremist terrorism knows no age,” Hubig said. Police launched raids on 13 properties nationwide and arrested four alleged group members and one supporter. All had been minors over the age of criminal responsibility at the time of most of the crimes, prosecutors said. Two of the suspects, identified as Jerome M and Lenny M, were also accused of attempted murder and arson, prosecutors said. — AFP

232 drones force Moscow airports to halt flights

RUSSIA said on Wednesday that its air defences had shot down at least 232 Ukrainian drones over various Russian regions, including some approaching Moscow where the capital’s airports were briefly shut down to ensure the safety of flights. While Russia, Ukraine, the United States and European powers consider the sequencing of a possible end to the more than three-year conflict in Ukraine, the drone war continues and fighting is intensifying in some areas of the front.

Russia’s Defence Ministry said it had destroyed at least 232 Ukrainian drones, mostly over Russia’s western regions bordering Ukraine, but also some approaching Moscow, a city which along with the surrounding area has a population of 21 million people.



Foreign service members of the National Guard of Ukraine attend an exercise, in Kharkiv region. — Reuters

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said three drones had been downed en route to the capital where three major airports briefly stopped flights before resuming operations. There were no reports of casualties, but Ukraine’s military said that its drones had hit the Bolkhovsky Semiconductor Devices Plant, a semiconductor devices plant in the Oryol region that it said supplied Russian fighter jet and missile producers.

The war in Ukraine, which has left hundreds of thousands of people dead, has become a crucible of drone innovation with both sides fielding swarms of drones far behind the front lines in an attempt to disrupt production facilities. Moscow and Kyiv have both sought to buy and develop new drones, deploy them in innovative ways, and seek new ways to destroy them - from farmers’ shotguns to electronic jamming. Soldiers have reported a visceral fear of drones and both sides have used macabre footage of fatal strikes in their propaganda,

Russia’s Defence Ministry said it had destroyed at least 232 Ukrainian drones, mostly over Russia’s western regions bordering Ukraine, but also some approaching Moscow, a city which along with the surrounding area has a population of 21 million people

with soldiers shown being blown apart in toilets or running from burning vehicles.

Russia’s Defence Ministry said its forces were advancing at key points along the front and pro-Russian war bloggers said Russia had pierced the Ukrainian lines between Pokrovsk and Kostiantynivka in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday visited the western Kursk region for the first time since Russian forces ejected Ukrainian troops from the area last month. Putin sent tens of thousands of soldiers into Ukraine in February 2022 and Russia now controls just under one fifth of the country.

Meanwhile, Britain and allies including the United States issued an advisory on Wednesday warning of a Russian state-sponsored cyber campaign targeting the delivery of support to Ukraine and Western

logistics entities and technology companies.

“This malicious campaign by Russia’s military intelligence service presents a serious risk to targeted organisations, including those involved in the delivery of assistance to Ukraine,” Paul Chichester, Director of Operations at Britain’s National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), said.

The campaign has also targeted defence, IT services, maritime, airports, ports and air traffic management systems sectors in multiple North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members, the NCSC statement said.

Wednesday’s advisory was issued in conjunction with the United States, France, Germany and other allies, warning organisations of the elevated threat and urging immediate action to protect themselves. — Reuters

Trump unveils plans for ‘Golden Dome’ missile shield for US

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has announced new details and initial funding for his “Golden Dome” missile shield system, with geopolitical rival China accusing Washington on Wednesday of undermining global stability. Trump on Tuesday announced \$25 billion earmarked for the project, which he said could eventually cost a total of around \$175 billion and would be operational in about three years.

“In the campaign I promised the American people I would build a cutting-edge missile defense shield,” Trump said at the White House. “Today I am pleased to announce we have officially selected architecture for this state-of-the-art system.”

“Once fully constructed, the Golden Dome will be capable of intercepting missiles even if they are launched from other sides of the world, and

even if they are launched from space,” Trump said.

“This is very important for the success and even survival of our country.” He said US Space Force General Michael Guetlein will lead the effort, and that Canada has expressed interest in being part of it as “they want to have protection also.”

While Trump put the total price at about \$175 billion, the Congressional Budget Office has estimated the cost of space-based interceptors to defeat a limited number of intercontinental ballistic missiles at between \$161 billion and \$542 billion over 20 years. Golden Dome has more expansive goals, with Trump saying it “will deploy next-generation technologies across the land, sea and space, including space-based sensors and interceptors.”



US President Donald Trump speaks during an announcement about the Golden Dome, in the Oval Office. — AFP

Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth, speaking alongside Trump, said the system is aimed at protecting “the homeland from cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles, drones, whether they’re conventional or nuclear.”

The plan’s Golden Dome name stems from Israel’s Iron Dome air defense system that has intercepted thousands of short-range rockets and other projectiles since it went into operation in 2011.

The United States faces various missile threats from adversaries, but they differ significantly from the short-range weapons that Israel’s Iron Dome is designed to counter. The 2022 Missile Defense Review pointed to growing threats from China and Russia.

Beijing on Wednesday expressed “serious concern” over the plan,

saying it undercuts “global strategic balance and stability.”

“The United States puts its own interests first and is obsessed with seeking its own absolute security, which violates the principle that no country’s security should come at the expense of others,” foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular briefing. “(The plan) heightens the risk of space becoming a battlefield, fuels an arms race, and undermines international security,” Mao added.

China this month had already joined Russia in slamming the concept as “deeply destabilizing”. It “explicitly provides for a significant strengthening of the arsenal for conducting combat operations in space,” said a statement published by the Kremlin after talks between the two sides. — AFP

OPINION

Carbon credits in a thirsty land



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

It was sunset in Muttrah and the sky over the corniche was brushed with hues of apricot and rose. The scent of frankincense drifted through the air as I sat at Bait Al Luban with a visiting friend, a carbon markets expert who had spent the week navigating Oman Sustainability Week. Between sips of coffee and luban-infused water; and bites of golden sambusa, our conversation turned, as it often does in my circles, to climate.

“Everyone here wants to do mangroves because they live in harsh weather,” he said. It was a passing remark, but one that stayed with me. Mangroves have become an environmental emblem in the Gulf: tough, rooted, enduring. But increasingly, I wonder if we are asking them to do more than they were meant to.

Oman is moving fast on climate ambition. We have committed to net-zero by 2050. A national carbon credit system, complete with a registry, verification protocols and crediting frameworks, is being designed. Projects are taking shape. And nature-based solutions, especially mangrove restoration, are at the centre of it all. But in this moment

of momentum, we need to pause and ask: are we clear about what success looks like?

Take mangroves. In Oman, they are vital. They protect our coastlines, provide nurseries for fisheries, support biodiversity and hold deep cultural value. Their restoration has tangible benefits for local communities and resilience. But scientifically, they are limited in what they can deliver as carbon sinks. Avicennia marina, the dominant species here, is highly salt-tolerant but slow-growing. Research in Muscat’s Al Qurum Reserve shows that annual sequestration rates rarely exceed 0.5 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare. Compare that with tropical mangroves in Indonesia or Malaysia, which can exceed six tonnes per hectare annually.

This does not make our mangroves any less worthy. It simply means they should not be asked to deliver what they cannot. The carbon market is not built on symbolism. It is built on measurable, verifiable impact. If we expect high-return credits from low-sequestration ecosystems, we set ourselves up for disappointment and diminished credibility.

Mangroves in Oman protect our coastlines, provide nurseries for fisheries, support biodiversity and hold deep cultural value. Their restoration has tangible benefits for local communities and resilience. But scientifically, they are limited in what they can deliver as carbon sinks

This is where Oman’s climate leadership will be tested. The systems are being built. The opportunities are real. But the real challenge lies with policymakers, project developers and private investors alike: to ensure every project is designed to deliver what it promises. If mangroves are planted, let it be for resilience. If carbon credits are pursued, let them come from ecosystems or technologies that can meet the metrics. We have other options too, including inland native tree planting, salt marsh rehabilitation, seagrass restoration and industrial abatement. Nature is not a single solution. It is a portfolio. And markets will reward those who treat it as such.

That evening, as the call to prayer echoed through Muttrah’s narrow streets, I thought about how often climate action stumbles not from lack of will, but from lack of clarity. We do not need to lower our ambition. But we must align it with ecological and market realities. That is how we build trust. That is how we unlock real impact. Because in a thirsty land like ours, it is not enough to plant what survives. We must invest in what works and credit what delivers.

CHARLES’ VISIT TO ‘REINFORCE’ CANADIAN SOVEREIGNTY

ERIC WILLIAMS

King Charles III’s upcoming visit to Canada will “reinforce” the country’s sovereignty against threats from US President Donald Trump, the Canadian high commissioner said.

Ralph Goodale reiterated his country’s independence as Charles and Queen Camilla visited Canada House in central London on Tuesday ahead of the trip to Ottawa later this month. Discussing Trump’s repeated suggestions that Canada could become the 51st state, High Commissioner Goodale said that the king’s visit will show Canada is “the true north, strong and free,” and Canada “will stay that way.”

Charles will open a session of the Canadian parliament — the first time a monarch has done so since 1977.

The visit was organised after the election of former Bank of England governor Mark Carney as Canadian prime minister, amidst a wave of anti-Trump sentiment.

“It’s a very important opportunity for his majesty to be in a forum where he will have the opportunity to speak to Canadians at a time when that message about the significance and the strength of Canadian sovereignty needs to be reinforced by every means possible,” Goodale said.

“The prime minister has made it clear that Canada is not for sale now, is not for sale ever. “The king, as head of state, will reinforce the power and the strength of that message.”

It comes as Charles faces the difficult task of balancing his duties as head of state of Canada and his role in British Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s attempt to maintain strong relations with the US amidst international crises including conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and trade disputes.

The king is expected to host Trump for an unprecedented second state visit, after Starmer handed the president an invitation letter from Charles at the White House in February.

Carney criticised the invitation recently, saying it “cut across” messages his government is trying to send to the White House in response to threats against Canadian sovereignty.

The country’s new prime minister said Canadians “weren’t impressed” by the gesture “given the circumstance.”

Goodale said that Carney’s words were “direct” and “very accurate.”

He said: “The prime minister was asked the clear, direct question: What do Canadians think? “He answered it very directly and very accurately as an assessment of what Canadian public opinion was at that time.” — *dpa*

Robots... the future of work without pause

ACCORDING to published reports and statistics, the global stock of industrial robots reached 3.4 million units by 2024, giving an average of roughly one robot for every seven human beings. These machines have already assumed about 14 per cent of the jobs once carried out by people and 90 per cent of businesses — of every size and type — now plan to incorporate robots into their operations.

These figures come from data released by “Coolest-Gadgets” in a study entitled “Robots Statistics 2024 By Revenue, Usage and Companies”. It is worth recalling that robotics actually predates what we today call artificial intelligence: the first recognisably “mechanical” robot appeared in 1495, when Leonardo da Vinci sketched a knight capable of performing limited, gear-driven motions, while in 1785 Edmund Cartwright patented a water-powered loom that, for its age, was treated as a form of automation.

Such milestones remind us that we are riding a steep scientific curve. The coming decades promise flourishing industry and commerce, yet they also threaten heightened human unemployment. We therefore face twin imperatives: to manage the steady, beneficial flow of technologies — robots foremost among them — and to safeguard every person’s right to meaningful work.

Achieving both aims demands fresh educational strategies and new specialisations so that forthcoming generations can reposition themselves in an altered labour market. Before proposing solutions, however, we must clarify what we mean by robots, how their workings have evolved, what roles they serve now and may serve tomorrow; and what risks their march into factories and offices might entail.

There is a recognised discipline called “robotics”, an



A journalist touches a humanoid robot by UniX AI, at the robotics exhibition centre Robot World, in Beijing.



DR MUAMAR BIN ALI AL TOBI

The writer is an academic and researcher

interdisciplinary science concerned with designing, building and operating robots. Technically speaking, a robot is a machine that performs traditional tasks by imitating human action. The earliest examples were simple mechanical systems created for repetitive industrial chores — welding, assembly, sorting — inside automated production lines.

Such early devices were tightly constrained by classical mechanics: they could not deliberate, nor could they adapt to a changing workspace. Their core components were actuators that supplied motion, rudimentary sensors that offered minimal environmental feedback and a mechanical frame — most often a jointed arm — whose range of movement was fixed by geometric limits suited to a single repetitive duty. Control systems were primitive, relying on rigid physical logic with no capacity to

interpret or process external data. Consequently, these machines were confined to static, predictable environments and could not cope with complexity or dynamism.

Over the years robotics has advanced dramatically. Contemporary robots integrate cutting-edge technologies, micro-electronics, high-fidelity sensors and above all artificial-intelligence software. Thanks to these developments, robots have migrated from mere automation to genuine interaction: they now perceive their surroundings with LiDAR, radar and high-resolution cameras, respond in real time and make swift, context-sensitive decisions. Marrying robotics to machine-learning algorithms allows them to absorb past experience and refine future performance, enabling intricate tasks such as autonomous navigation or conversational engagement.

How to secure refunds from travel companies



KARIM EASTERBROOK

The writer is a former Cambridge School Principal and an Interview Skills Adviser

TRAVEL booking agencies generally operate legitimate businesses, but customers should be aware of potential refund challenges. Always research companies before booking. While agencies may offer competitive fares, some travellers face frustration with customer service, particularly when seeking refunds.

I recently experienced this when a company refused my refund after cancelling a reservation. Their website hadn't clearly explained that a "self-transfer" flight required purchasing separate tickets and obtaining a visa for the stopover country.

Despite immediate cancellation, I received only an automated response citing their no-refund policy. If you face a similar dispute, here's how to secure your refund without legal costs: Avoid involving lawyers, as legal action typically costs more than the ticket itself.

Focus on consumer advocacy instead, as companies have terms that protect them legally. Be prepared for a lengthy process, as companies rely on consumer fatigue. You might receive numerous automated responses before reaching a human

representative.

While your complaint may not constitute a legal violation, emphasise issues any reasonable consumer would find unfair. Remember that travel companies prioritise financial considerations above all else. They generate revenue when customers pay for tickets and when they successfully avoid refunding dissatisfied customers.

Develop a methodical approach that demonstrates your determination. Begin by compiling comprehensive company email addresses, especially those of executives. Many addresses on their websites may bounce back, which is often a deliberate barrier.

Use AI tools to identify harder-to-find addresses across the web. Submit your refund request with clear reasoning to all collected emails. Ignore policy-based rejections, as company policies are designed to minimise refunds. When receiving automated responses claiming your case is "under review," implement reputation-focused pressure tactics. Let the company know you intend to alert partner airlines about your treatment, suggesting they reconsider their relationship with the booking agency. File complaints with consumer protection

Focus on consumer advocacy instead, as companies have terms that protect them legally. Be prepared for a lengthy process, as companies rely on consumer fatigue. You might receive numerous automated responses before reaching a human representative

agencies in all jurisdictions where the company operates.

Contact newspapers with your experience and share detailed accounts across social media platforms. Involve government representatives if possible. Email the CEO directly, stating your intention to file legal action if a refund isn't provided within 14 days. Once you receive correspondence from an actual representative, maintain your resolve while slightly moderating your tone.

Correspond only by email if possible, as they may try to persuade you to soften your stance. Acknowledge their attention while reiterating that planned actions will proceed unless a full refund is issued promptly. Resist compromise offers and consistently repeat your concerns about unfair treatment.

This strategy presents companies with a risk assessment: potentially losing thousands in future bookings versus refunding your purchase. For most businesses, this calculation favours issuing the refund.

The key is unwavering persistence coupled with credible pressure. Focus on fairness and professional conduct rather than accusations of illegality. This methodical approach has proven effective when seeking refunds from even the most reluctant companies.

POLAR BEAR BIOPSIES TO SHED LIGHT ON ARCTIC POLLUTANTS

OLIVIER MORIN AND ETIENNE FONTAINE

With one foot braced on the helicopter's landing skid, a veterinarian lifted his air rifle, took aim and fired a tranquilliser dart at a polar bear. The predator bolted but soon slumped into the snowdrifts, its broad frame motionless beneath the Arctic sky.

The dramatic pursuit formed part of a pioneering research mission in Norway's Svalbard archipelago, where scientists, for the first time, took fat tissue biopsies from polar bears to study the impact of pollutants on their health.

The expedition came at a time when the Arctic region was warming at four times the global average, putting mounting pressure on the iconic predators as their sea-ice habitat shrank.

"The idea is to show as accurately as possible how the bears live in the wild — but in a lab," Laura Pirard, a Belgian toxicologist, said.

"To do this, we take their (fatty) tissue, cut it in very thin slices and expose it to the stresses they face, in other words pollutants and stress hormones," said Pirard, who developed the method. Moments after the bear collapsed, the chopper circled back and landed. Researchers spilled out, boots crunching on the snow. One knelt by the bear's flank, cutting thin strips of fatty tissue. Another drew blood.

Each sample was sealed and labelled before the bear was fitted with a satellite collar.

Scientists said that while the study monitors all the bears, only females were tracked with GPS collars as their necks are smaller than their heads — unlike males, who cannot keep a collar on for more than a few minutes.

For the scientists aboard the Norwegian Polar Institute's research vessel Kronprins Haakon, these fleeting encounters were the culmination of months of planning and decades of Arctic fieldwork.

In a makeshift lab on the icebreaker, samples remained usable for several days, subjected to controlled doses of pollutants and hormones before being frozen for further analysis back on land.

Each tissue fragment gave Pirard and her colleagues insight into the health of an animal that spent much of its life on sea ice.

Analysis of the fat samples showed that the main pollutants present were per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) — synthetic chemicals used in industry and consumer goods that linger in the environment for decades.

Despite years of exposure, Svalbard's polar bears showed no signs of emaciation or ill health, according to the team.

The local population has remained stable or even increased slightly, unlike parts of Canada, where the Western Hudson Bay group declined by 27 per cent between 2016 and 2021, from 842 to 618 bears, according to a government aerial survey.

Other populations in the Canadian Arctic, including the Southern Beaufort Sea, have also shown long-term declines linked to reduced prey access and longer ice-free seasons. — AFP

What Islamic finance can bring to climate resilience

AS ministers representing the 57 member countries of the Islamic Development Bank Group gather in Algiers for the IsDB's 51st annual meeting, the devastating effects of climate change are impossible to ignore. Wildfires consuming entire communities, floods displacing millions of people, and heat waves claiming hundreds of thousands of lives. Such extreme weather events are no longer anomalies; they are the new normal, threatening lives and livelihoods in the world's most climate-vulnerable regions — especially in the Global South.

With traditional responses proving inadequate to this escalating threat, innovative finance must take centre stage. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as many as 3.6 billion people currently live in regions that are highly vulnerable to climate change. Between 2010 and 2020, deaths caused by floods, droughts, and storms in those areas were 15 times more frequent than in low-vulnerability regions, underscoring the severe and unequal toll of the climate crisis.

Conventional wisdom holds that for resource-dependent economies, climate action is a matter of economic survival, while for developing economies, it offers a pathway to sustainable growth and development. But many economies fall into both categories — developing and resource-dependent — compounding the challenge of designing and implementing effective climate strategies.

While a comprehensive strategy for building climate resilience is essential to strengthening developing economies' ability to withstand shocks, resilience and adaptation must go hand in hand. For vulnerable countries, this may involve reinforcing infrastructure to protect against flooding, investing in drought-resistant crops, and diversifying income sources to reduce dependence on climate-sensitive sectors.

But conventional modes of resilience financing remain constrained, both in terms of sources and delivery mechanisms. As a result, vital social safeguards and support systems are often underfunded or insufficient. The



Climate action is a matter of economic survival, while for developing economies.



MUHAMMAD AL JASSER

The writer is Chairman of the Islamic Development Bank Group

problem is made worse by growing uncertainty over the availability of concessional financing from developed countries.

Given this reality, financial innovation must become a central pillar of climate resilience. To that end, financial institutions, governments, and other stakeholders must work together to develop new financing mechanisms aimed at protecting climate-vulnerable regions.

Encouragingly, several innovative financing funds and mechanisms have emerged to support resilience and adaptation efforts. These include the Green Climate Fund, which provides financial assistance to developing countries; the Climate Bonds Initiative, which promotes the growth of the climate bond market; climate insurance, which helps manage and reduce climate-related risks; community-based adaptation, which enables local communities to design and implement their own adaptation strategies; and nature-based solutions, which focus on restoring and protecting natural ecosystems. Even so, such financing falls far short of demand.

Multilateral development banks play a pivotal role in delivering the financing necessary for vulnerable countries to reduce emissions and invest in adaptation projects. According to the most recent Joint Report on Multilateral Development Banks' Climate Finance, MDBs provided a record \$125 billion in public climate finance in 2023. Notably, 60 per cent of that total — \$74.7 billion — was directed to

low- and middle-income countries, highlighting MDBs' commitment to supporting those most exposed to climate risks.

The IsDB is a notable example. In November 2024, the IsDB approved \$1.15 billion in financing to bolster food and water security in Kazakhstan by sustainably irrigating 350,000 hectares of land. The project aims to boost average crop yields by 30 per cent, thereby strengthening community resilience to climate-related disasters and improving the economic well-being of 1.3 million vulnerable people.

Like other MDBs, the IsDB is grappling with the challenge of strengthening climate resilience across its 57 member countries, more than half of which are more vulnerable to climate change than the global average. Addressing such vulnerabilities requires an estimated \$75-90 billion annually through 2030 for sustainable agriculture, water, and infrastructure projects. Adaptation-related financial flows to these countries average \$23.9 billion per year, leaving a 68 per cent funding gap that the IsDB is actively working to close.

The growing supply of adaptation financing illustrates MDBs' indispensable contribution to global climate efforts. But success should not be measured only by the amount of money disbursed; instead, it must be judged by tangible, real-world outcomes. While climate finance is growing, its effectiveness hinges on rigorous monitoring and impact assessment. Establishing robust reporting frameworks is therefore critical to building stakeholders' confidence and channelling more financing toward adaptation projects. To enhance their impact, MDBs should also adopt targeted results-based and policy-based financing models.

Beyond bolstering borrowers' institutional capacity and expanding targeted financing, MDBs also have an opportunity to boost resource mobilisation by attracting capital from non-conventional sources. The IsDB's sustainability framework is a prime example. Under this scheme, the IsDB has mobilised more than \$6 billion by issuing Islamic bonds (Sukuk), attracting both Muslim and non-Muslim investors.

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SPORTS

EXPRESSPACER



Rajasthan Royals' Jofra Archer warms up before the IPL match against Kolkata Knight Riders on May 4. — Reuters

ARCHER OUT OF WINDIES SERIES IN LATEST INJURY SETBACK

LONDON: England fast bowler Jofra Archer has suffered yet another injury blow that could hamper plans for a Test return against India later this season.

The 30-year-old express quick hurt his right thumb while fielding for Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League.

He could now be out of action for at least a month, with England announcing on Wednesday he had been withdrawn from the upcoming one-day international series against the West Indies.

If Archer is sidelined for several weeks, it may also scupper plans England had for reintroducing him to red-ball cricket as well.

Archer was expected to play for the second-string England Lions at home to India next month in the hope of making a much-anticipated return during the subsequent five-match series.

It is now more than four years since he played the last of his 13 Tests, with Archer since plagued by numerous injuries to his elbow and back.

Despite his lengthy absence from Test cricket, Archer is still regarded as a potential match-winner when England look to regain the Ashes in Australia during a 2025/26 tour.

An England and Wales Cricket Board statement issued on Wednesday said Archer “will be reassessed by the England medical team over the next fortnight to determine when he may return to action.” Left-arm seamer Luke Wood, already in the T20 squad, has been named as Archer’s replacement for the three-match ODI series against the West Indies. — AFP

‘T’MBACK’

PACQUIAO COMING OUT OF RETIREMENT TO FACE BARRIOS

MANILA: Manny Pacquiao will come out of retirement to face Mario Barrios for the WBC welterweight championship on July 19 in Las Vegas, the 46-year-old Filipino boxer said on Wednesday.

Pacquiao is the only boxer to win world championships in a record eight weight divisions while he was also the oldest welterweight world champion in history at the age of 40 in 2019.

A Filipino senator from 2016 to 2022, Pacquiao had retired from boxing in 2021 while he also ran for president in 2022.

“I’m back. On July 19, I return to the ring to face WBC Welterweight Champion Mario Barrios at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. Let’s make history,” Pacquiao wrote on Instagram.

The southpaw, who has 62 wins, eight losses and two draws in a 72-fight career, was also elected to the International Boxing Hall of Fame as part of the Class of 2025.

Barrios, a Mexican-American boxer, has 29 wins in 32 bouts, winning 18 by knockout and losing twice. — Reuters



MANNY PACQUIAO

Al Ghafri hits brace as Oman outclass Niger



Oman and Niger players fight for the ball during a friendly match at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

OMAN national football team outclassed Niger team 4-1 in a friendly game on Tuesday as apart of the underway domestic camp in Muscat to gear up for the two remaining fixtures in the Fifa World Cup 2026 Asian Qualifiers.

The closed-door match, arranged upon the recommendation of both teams’ technical staff, featured five goals including four goals for Oman team scored by rising talent Tariq al Saadi who opened the scoring with a penalty in the 25th minute, followed by a brace from Mohammed al Ghafri (45’, 46’) and a penalty goal from Mohsin al Ghassani in the 86th minute. The first half concluded with Oman leading 3-1, before Ghassani sealed the win in the second half.

The second half saw seven substitutions, offering valuable minutes to several squad members including goalkeeper of Al Shabab club AbdulMalik al Badri, Hatim al Roushdi, Yousef al Malki, Ahed al Mashakhey, Hussain al Shahri, Issa al Naabi, and Mohammed Abdulhakeem.



Oman players celebrate a goal.



Oman’s Mohsin al Ghassani celebrates after scoring against Niger.

The fixture allowed the coaching staff to focus on improving offensive coordination and reinforcing defensive structures, as well as enhancing player synergy across all lines.

Head coach Rasheed Jaber, along with his assistant Yaqoob al Sabahi, used the match as a platform to assess player readiness and fine-tune the squad ahead of the critical qualifiers against Jordan on June 5 in Muscat, and against Palestine on June 10 in Jordan.

On the other side, the Oman head coach called up goalkeeper Ahmed al Rawahi and Motasim al Wahaibi to cover the absence of injured Ibrahim al Mukhaini following confirmation from the medical team that Al Mukhaini has sustained a finger injury on his left hand. He is expected to undergo a four-week recovery period under full medical supervision.

Oman currently sit in fourth place in their group with 10 points from eight matches, trailing group leaders South Korea by six points with two rounds remaining. The Red Warriors are determined to capitalise on their recent momentum and aim for two decisive victories to keep their World Cup qualification hopes alive.

Djokovic ‘not in need of a coach’ as French Open looms

GENEVA: Novak Djokovic said on Tuesday he is in no hurry to find a coach to replace Andy Murray as he searches for his first win on clay this season ahead of the French Open.

Djokovic last week parted company with Murray after a tough start to the season for the 24-time Grand Slam champion.

“At the moment, I’m not in need of a coach,” said Djokovic who opens his title bid at the Roland Garros warm-up event in Geneva against 134th-ranked Hungarian Marton Fucsovics on Wednesday.

“I don’t need to rush in any context. I feel comfortable with the people around me ... in the next few tournaments, and we’ll see what happens.”

Djokovic told journalists that Dusan Vemic, previously part of his coaching team had arrived in Geneva from the US, and would be working alongside Boris Bosnjakovic, his assistant coach and analyst.



Serbia’s Novak Djokovic signs autograph after a press conference ahead of his match at the ATP 250 Geneva Open tournament in Geneva on May 20. — AFP

The partnership with Murray started well, with Djokovic defeating Carlos Alcaraz at the Australian Open, only to be forced to retire during his semifinal against Alexander Zverev as a result of injury.

“We felt like we couldn’t get

more out of that partnership on the court, and that’s all there is to it,” explained Djokovic, who turns 38 on Thursday.

“My respect towards Andy remains the same, even more actually, I got to know him as a person.”

‘MOTIVATION STILL THERE’ The Serb’s wait for a 100th ATP title goes on after his withdrawal from the Italian Open.

Djokovic has not won a single match on clay this season, losing his openers at Monte Carlo and Madrid.

His hopes of a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam triumph, which would take him clear of Australian Margaret Court’s tally of 24 singles major titles, appear to be fading.

“It’s a different chapter of my life that I’m trying to navigate myself through,” said the three-time French Open champion.

After missing the event in Rome, Djokovic explained that he is competing in Geneva to prepare for the upcoming French Open.

“So yes, the motivation is still there.”

Nonetheless, Djokovic added he was comfortable with this new phase of his career. — AFP

NEW-LOOKSQUAD



Peshawar Zalmi's Saim Ayub plays a shot during the Pakistan Super League (PSL) Twenty20 match between Karachi Kings and Peshawar Zalmi at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi. — AFP

PAKISTAN DROP SHAHEEN, AZAM AND RIZWAN FOR BANGLADESH T20S

KARACHI: Pakistan dropped stars Shaheen Shah Afridi, Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan on Wednesday as they named a new-look squad for three home Twenty20 internationals against Bangladesh.

Former New Zealand coach Mike Hesson will take charge for the first time after being appointed last week, replacing Aaqib Javed.

Salman Ali Agha will captain Pakistan as they look towards next year's Twenty20 World Cup, to be hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

Fast bowler Shaheen had played in Pakistan's last T20 series in New Zealand in March, but batsmen Azam and Rizwan were omitted for the second consecutive T20 series after being criticised for slow scoring.

"The squad has been selected based on players' performances in the ongoing Pakistan Super League, which concludes on May 25," the Pakistan Cricket Board said in a statement.

Shaheen has taken 12 wickets for Lahore Qalandars in 10 PSL matches at an economy rate of 8.20.

Opener Sahibzada Farhan earned a recall after topping the PSL batting charts with 394 runs.

Batsmen Saim Ayub and Fakhar Zaman return after missing the New Zealand tour with injuries.

Fast bowler Hasan Ali is back after being sidelined with multiple injuries since May last year.

The PCB said that the matches, which have been affected by a 10-day delay to the PSL caused by the deadly India-Pakistan conflict, will be held in Lahore on May 28, 30 and June 1. — AFP

PAKISTAN SQUAD: Salman Ali Agha (captain), Shadab Khan, Abrar Ahmed, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Hassan Nawaz, Hussain Talat, Khushdil Shah, Mohammad Haris, Mohammad Wasim, Mohammad Irfan Khan, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub

SURYAVANSHI HELPS RAJASTHAN END IPL CAMPAIGN WITH WIN



Rajasthan Royals' Vaibhav Suryavanshi in action against Chennai. — Reuters

TEENAGE sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi hit a half-century as Rajasthan Royals ended their IPL season with a consolation six-wicket win over Chennai Super Kings on Tuesday.

The 14-year-old Suryavanshi, who made waves after he struck a record 35-ball century last month, scored 57 off 33 balls as Rajasthan chased down 188 with 17 balls to

“I don't have words for Vaibhav, he can hit a slower ball over cover. Today when the middle overs were going on, he was going with his job very smartly. He has game awareness at such a young age.

SANJU SAMSON,
Rajasthan skipper

spare in New Delhi.

Suryavanshi, who announced himself on the IPL stage in emphatic style by launching his first ball in the competition for six, set up the chase in his knock laced with four fours and fours sixes.

“I don't have words for Vaibhav, he can hit a slower ball over cover,” Rajasthan skipper Sanju Samson said.

“Today when the middle overs were going on, he was going with his job very smartly. He has game awareness at such a young age.”

Dhruv Jurel sealed the win with his unbeaten 31 off 12 balls.

Both teams had already bowed out of the play-off race but Rajasthan stay above bottom-placed Chennai in the 10-team table with four wins in 14 matches.

Five-time champions Chennai, led by 43-year-old M S Dhoni, have one more match to go in the league phase.

Leaders Gujarat Titans, Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Punjab Kings have all qualified for the playoffs.

Five-time winners Mumbai Indians and Delhi Capitals are competing for the final play-off spot.

Chennai had their chances including when veteran spinner Ravichandran Ashwin struck in the space of five balls to send back Samson (41) and Suryavanshi.

Jurel soon eased the pressure with boundaries in the next over and despite the loss of another wicket in Riyan Parag, Rajasthan raced to victory.

Jurel hit the winning six with Shimron Hetmyer at the other end on 12.

Yashasvi Jaiswal contributed with 36 off 19 balls in a brisk opening stand of 37 with Suryavanshi.

IMPRESSIVE MHATRE

Chennai recovered to reach 187-8 after they slipped to 78-5 inside eight overs, batting first on a hot and humid evening in the Indian capital.

“If you look at the amount of runs we had put on the board, it was very good,” said Dhoni. “But you got to see the wickets column as it puts pressure on the lower-middle order that you might not bat 20 overs.”

Teenage opener Ayush Mhatre lifted the team after two early wickets with his 20-ball 43 before his dismissal triggered a mini-collapse.

The 17-year-old Mhatre, who has impressed in his debut year with a top score of 94, hit eight fours and one six before falling to medium-pace bowler Tushar Deshpande.

Sri Lankan spinner Wanindu Hasaranga took down Ashwin and seam bowler Yuvraj Singh struck for the third time to remove Ravindra Jadeja as Chennai lost half their side in 7.4 overs.

South African batter Dewald Brevis made 42 and rebuilt the innings in a 59-run stand with Shivam Dube (39).

Rajasthan's bowlers pulled things back in the end as they gave away just 17 runs from the last three overs.

Seam bowler Akash Madhwal returned figures of 3-29 to be named player of the match. The IPL resumed last Saturday after being paused due to a deadly conflict between India and Pakistan, forcing a revised schedule with the final now on June 3 in Ahmedabad. — AFP

Gilgeous-Alexander leads Thunder rally past Timberwolves

LOS ANGELES: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points as the Oklahoma City Thunder rallied to defeat the Minnesota Timberwolves 114-88 and grab a 1-0 lead in their NBA Western Conference finals series on Tuesday.

A confident Minnesota looked in the mood for an upset against the top seeds after leading for most of the first two quarters to take a 48-44 lead into half time.

Timberwolves power forward Julius Randle poured in 20 first-half points to rock the Thunder, who struggled to find their shooting touch in front of an expectant home crowd.

Oklahoma City came roaring back in the third, outscoring Minnesota 32-18 to open up what turned out to be a decisive 76-66 lead heading into the fourth quarter.

Gilgeous-Alexander, who had a lethargic first half with 11 points after shooting just 2-of-13 from the field, led the Thunder recovery.

The Canadian point guard, who is vying for the NBA's Most Valuable

Timberwolves power forward Julius Randle poured in 20 first-half points to rock the Thunder, who struggled to find their shooting touch in front of an expectant home crowd.



Oklahoma City Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (2) drives against Minnesota Timberwolves forward Jaden McDaniels (3) in the fourth quarter during game one of the western conference finals for the 2025 NBA Playoffs at Paycom Center. — Imagn Images

Player award, rattled in 12 points in the third quarter while Jalen Williams added nine points to keep Minnesota pinned back.

Crucially, Oklahoma City's defense stepped up to shut down Randle's scoring rate while Minnesota star Anthony Edwards was kept scoreless in the fourth quarter.

Gilgeous-Alexander finished with 31 points, five rebounds and nine assists while Williams added 19 points with eight rebounds, five assists and five steals. Chet Holmgren added 15 points with Isaiah Hartenstein grabbing 12 points.

“Honestly we were a bit rusty in the first half but we shouldn't be,” Gilgeous-Alexander told ESPN in an on-court interview.

“We were missing layups, free throws. We just needed to keep being aggressive and trust our work.

“We got downhill, the layups started to fall and we started making our shots and we started getting stops defensively.” — AFP



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OMAN BACKS GREEN GROWTH AND INTEGRATION AT ISDB MEETING

ALGIERS: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the 50th Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group, held in Algeria under the theme “Economic Diversification, Enriching Life.”

Leading the Omani delegation was Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, who underscored the importance of enhancing economic integration among member countries. He called for stronger cooperation to leverage shared resources—such as natural wealth, skilled

human capital, and strategic geographic locations—to build robust trade and investment networks that promote sustainable and inclusive development.

In his address, Al Habsi also stressed the importance of supporting green economic initiatives and investing in renewable energy, both of which are critical to achieving long-term growth while safeguarding the environment for future generations.

He commended the Islamic Development Bank Group for its instrumental role in accelerating development finance, channeling investments into vital sectors, and empowering the private sector.

The annual gathering featured meetings of the Bank’s Executive Board, affiliated institutions, and the Supreme Council of the Al-Aqsa and Al-Quds Fund. It also included a range of seminars and panel discussions with participants from governments, international organizations, academia, civil society, and the private sector. — ONA

11th 5-year plan focuses on decentralised growth

THE Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030) will mark a major milestone in Oman’s journey toward decentralised and regionally balanced growth, said Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, at a national workshop held in Muscat on Wednesday, May 21.

Speaking at a high-level seminar organised by the Ministry of Economy, Al Saqri emphasised that the upcoming plan aims to translate the ambitions of Oman Vision 2040 into actionable, region-specific development programmes.

“The new plan empowers governorates to take the lead in driving economic and social transformation, based on their local priorities and competitive advantages,” he stated.

Al Saqri underscored the government’s commitment to decentralisation by enhancing the capacity and autonomy of local administrations.

“The Eleventh Plan places governorates and cities at the heart of national development. It prioritises infrastructure improvements, economic diversification and the creation of vibrant urban centres that are both economically dynamic and culturally rich,” he said.

He added that the participatory planning approach adopted for the new plan expands stakeholder



The Eleventh Plan places governorates and cities at the heart of national development. It prioritises infrastructure improvements, economic diversification, and the creation of vibrant urban centres that are both economically dynamic and culturally rich

DR SAID BIN MOHAMMED AL SAQRI
Minister of Economy



The workshop brought together more than 200 participants, including officials from government entities, private sector representatives, and technical teams.

involvement at both central and governorate levels.

“This workshop reflects our belief in inclusive planning and meaningful dialogue. By engaging national teams and local entities, we ensure that development programmes respond to real needs on the ground,” he affirmed.

The workshop brought together more than 200 participants, including officials from government entities, private sector representatives and technical teams from across Oman. Attendees engaged in interactive sessions to review the plan’s general features and propose localised initiatives under the priority of sustainable

development in governorates and cities.

According to the Ministry of Economy, the Eleventh Plan is being developed using a rigorous scientific and participatory methodology, incorporating lessons from previous plans and international best practices.

It aligns closely with national strategies, including Oman’s urban strategy and the outcomes of national laboratories, to ensure holistic and sustainable development.

The session was also attended by a number of their highnesses and excellencies, governors and senior officials involved in steering and preparing the plan.

OETC plans 51 power transmission projects across Oman by 2029

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 21

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the majority state-owned operator and owner of the country’s national grid, has unveiled plans for substantial investments in a broad portfolio of network expansion and modernisation projects aimed at supporting Oman’s ambitious clean energy and industrial growth strategies.

As many as 51 key projects have been identified by OETC – part of Nama Group – for implementation over the next five years spanning the 2025-2029 timeframe.

“Most of the projects are designed to increase the transmission system capacity to meet the future growth in demand, connect new generations from renewable energy and conventional resources, connect new rural areas, and meet the Transmission Security Standard,” said Saleh bin Nasser al Rumhi, Chief Executive Officer, in the latest Annual Transmission Capability Statement issued on Tuesday, May 20, 2025.

Targeted for grid connection



SALEH BIN NASSER AL RUMHI
CEO, OETC

over the next five years is an array of solar PV Independent Power Projects (IPPs). They include the 500 MW Ibri Solar III project, which is expected to be connected to the grid by Q2 2026; the 280 MW Al Kamil Solar IPP and 220 MW Solar PV IPP 2028 project slated to be connected by Q3 2027, and a pair of Solar PV IPPs with proposed sites in Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South governorates, each contributing 500MW. In parallel, a large slate of wind farms is planned to be integrated into the national grid as well.

The list includes the JBB Ali wind farm, with a planned capacity of 100MW, and scheduled to be connected to the grid by Q2 2026. Additionally, the existing 50MW Dhofar I wind farm is set for expansion, with an additional 120



A large portfolio of solar PV and wind farms are planned to be integrated into the national grid over the next five years.

MW planned for grid connection by Q4 of 2026.

Other significant wind projects include Ras Madrakah (250MW) and Mahout (350 MW), both planned for connection Q2 2027.

By the Q2 2029, several additional wind farms are expected to be operational, including Mahout II (350MW), Al Jazer (100MW), Shaleem (100MW), and Sadah (90MW), further

boosting Oman’s renewable energy generation capacity.

Also slated for grid connection is a pair of conventional gas-powered IPPs planned at Misfah (1600 MW) and Duqm (800 MW).

The Misfah IPP, which is designed to secure power supply to the Muscat demand centre, will also necessitate major reinforcement initiatives in the Main Interconnected System

(MIS), including five 400kV grid stations with associated lines. It will be connected to the grid by Q3 2027, followed by the Duqm IPP by Q2 2028.

Meanwhile, Phase 2 of the strategic North-South Interconnector Project (Rabt) – focusing on a stretch extending from Duqm to Dhofar – is slated for completion by Q4 2026.

Commenting on its overall significance, OETC’s CEO stated: “The interconnector (Phase 1&2) will add significant benefits for the Sultanate of Oman due to the expected fuel savings from the improved dispatch coordination among different power systems, access to areas with the potential of renewable energy, sharing of spinning reserves (reducing operating costs), reduction of dependency on diesel generation, generation capacity harmonisation and improvement of grid resiliency.

In addition, it will contribute to the evacuation of new renewable sources, future integration of large-scale potential hydrogen project integration and enhancing MIS and Dhofar systems resiliency,” he added.

ADVERTORIALS

KEY MILESTONES



The 2024 report details key strategic milestones of Ominvest.

OMINVEST PUBLISHES THIRD SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

MUSCAT: Ominvest announced the release of its third Sustainability Report for the fiscal year 2024, marking a transformative year of progress across its sustainability journey. This report underscores the Group's deepened commitment to responsible investing practices, transparent disclosure and alignment with international recognised ESG standards.

The 2024 report details key strategic milestones, including the alignment of Ominvest's ESG strategy with MSX and relevant global frameworks. Notably, Ominvest integrated ESG due diligence into its investment process, conducted its first double materiality assessment and completed a comprehensive review of its sustainability strategy and related policies.

The company also launched its first recycling partnership and implemented Group-wide ESG training and ISSB capacity-building initiatives, reinforcing its commitment to fostering a sustainability-conscious organisation.

Abdulaziz al Balushi, Group CEO of Ominvest, commented: "The publication of our third Sustainability Report marks a significant step forward in Ominvest's ongoing sustainability journey. This report reaffirms our steadfast commitment to responsible investing, transparent disclosure and alignment with global ESG benchmarks.

The milestones achieved in 2024 reflect our proactive approach to cultivating a more sustainable and resilient future for all our stakeholders."

Waleed al Yarubi, Chief People, Corporate Communication and Sustainability Officer at Ominvest, added: "Our achievements in 2024 underscore Ominvest's ambitions to establish new standards for ESG excellence within the region and demonstrate the effectiveness of cross-functional collaboration across the Group.

From preparing for ISSB adoption to refining our policies, we are building a more agile and accountable ESG foundation, with the objective of driving positive impact and sustainable growth throughout our portfolio and beyond."

As the sustainability landscape continues to evolve, Ominvest remains committed to lead the drive towards sustainable investment and setting benchmarks for the regional investment ecosystem — further reinforcing its role as a responsible investor and corporate leader.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL AND SOHAR ISLAMIC LAUNCH CREDIT CARD CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: Reinforcing their customer-first philosophy and commitment to delivering superior banking experiences, Sohar International and Sohar Islamic have recently launched a Credit Card Acquisition and Spend Campaign aimed at enhancing value, convenience and access for both new and existing clients.

The campaign encourages customers to apply for and actively use their Visa Credit Cards, unlocking a suite of exclusive



benefits and a chance to win premium prizes through monthly raffle draws.

Abdul Qader al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer at Sohar International, stated, "At Sohar International, we firmly

believe that banking excellence is not merely about delivering financial solutions, it's about enriching our customers' lives through exceptional value-added benefits.

Our credit card packages are thoughtfully designed to address a wide range of needs, from comprehensive insurance and 24/7 global assistance to concierge services, travel and shopping privileges; and exclusive deals from leading international brands.

Reimagine every drive with the Toyota Fortuner

THE Toyota Fortuner, a true icon in the SUV world, continues to elevate expectations and captivate hearts with its unmatched blend of strength, elegance and off-road prowess. Engineered for those who demand more from every drive, the Fortuner is designed to conquer with confidence and inspire every journey.

At the heart of the Fortuner's powerful performance lies a choice between two dynamic petrol engines. The 2.7-litre four-cylinder engine delivers a solid 164 HP and 25.0 Kg-m of torque, offering smooth, responsive driving ideal for everyday city commutes and weekend escapes alike.

For those who crave greater exhilaration, the mighty 4.0-litre V6 engine powers forward with an impressive 235 HP and 38.3 Kg-m of torque, unleashing the full potential of the Fortuner on highways and harsher terrain.

Both powertrains are paired to a sophisticated 6-speed automatic transmission, providing seamless gear shifts, optimal fuel efficiency and complete command across every terrain. Whether it is a regular



Fortuner is designed to conquer with confidence.

Whether it is a regular city drive, a desert drive, or a coastal road trip, the Fortuner is built to perform, without compromise.

city drive, a desert drive, or a coastal road trip, the Fortuner is built to perform, without compromise.

Step inside the Fortuner and you will discover a refined cabin. Every detail is crafted for comfort, style and practicality.

Seat yourself in the plush leather seats and grip the leather-wood finished steering wheel with paddle shifters, designed to put control and sophistication right at your fingertips. From the cool glove box to keep beverages chilled to the power back door system that makes loading a breeze, every feature enhances your experience on the road. Cruise control adds ease to

long-distance drives, while smart ergonomics and premium materials ensure every ride feels first-class.

Packed with innovative technology, the Fortuner keeps you connected and in control wherever you go. The intuitive navigation system helps you find your way with ease, while a rear-view camera ensures you park and reverse with confidence. The 6-speaker audio system fills the cabin with rich, immersive sound, setting the perfect mood for every adventure.

Toyota's unwavering commitment to safety is evident in the Fortuner's robust suite of advanced safety systems.

From the anti-lock braking system (ABS) and vehicle stability control (VSC) to the comprehensive SRS airbag system (including driver, passenger, side, curtain and knee airbags), every aspect of the Fortuner is designed to protect.

The tyre pressure monitoring system (TPMS) monitors the wheels for optimum performance and safety, while the three-point emergency locking retractor (ELR) seatbelts respond instantly in case of impact. No matter the terrain or the challenge, peace of mind comes standard.

BEAT THE HEAT WITH COOL OFFERS FROM MITSUBISHI MOTORS OMAN

MUSCAT: General Automotive Company (GAC), the official distributor of Mitsubishi Motors in Oman, is bringing the heat down this season with its limited-time summer campaign, offering customers exceptional value and exclusive benefits across the Mitsubishi lineup.

This summer, owning a Mitsubishi comes with added ease and savings, thanks to low EMI options starting from just RO 89, making it the ideal time to upgrade your drive.

Along with special financing, customers can enjoy a host of complimentary benefits, including free service packages of up to 5 years or 100,000 km, free insurance and registration, Llumar window tint, a gift voucher of RO 50 and Mitsubishi's 6-year unlimited kilometre warranty that ensures



long-term peace of mind.

"This summer, our goal is to offer customers cool savings and unbeatable value on the Mitsubishi range," said Manoj Ranade, General Manager of GAC.

"Whether you're planning road trips or everyday drives, this campaign provides

the flexibility and support that customers need to make the most of their summer with confidence and comfort."

This exclusive offer is available across Mitsubishi's full range, allowing customers to choose the vehicle that suits their lifestyle best. From the sleek and spacious Outlander to the rugged Montero Sport built for adventure, each model combines reliability with refinement.

The bold new XForce stands out in the compact SUV segment with its stylish design and agility, while the Xpander offers space and practicality for families. The L200 continues to be a dependable partner for heavy-duty performance; and the ASX and Eclipse Cross deliver sporty, dynamic driving experiences for urban explorers.

United Securities named Oman's best broker by Euromoney for 2025

MUSCAT: United Securities LLC has been recognised as Oman's Best Broker for 2025 by Euromoney, the globally renowned financial publication.

This prestigious award underscores United Securities' industry leadership, relentless innovation and continued contribution to the development of Oman's capital markets.

The accolade reflects a year of exceptional achievement for United Securities, marked by advancements in trading technology, deeper institutional engagement, enhanced liquidity provision and a comprehensive buildout of its research and digital capabilities.

In 2024, United Securities fortified

its number one position on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) through strategic investments in infrastructure and digital transformation.

From the deployment of cutting edge trading technologies to the launch of intelligent mobile platforms and AI enabled onboarding systems, the firm has significantly raised the bar for brokerage services in the region.

By streamlining client onboarding and execution flows; and by integrating sophisticated trading tools — including algorithmic strategies tailored for institutional and high-net-worth clients — United Securities made market access more seamless, efficient and inclusive.



The accolade reflects a year of exceptional achievement for United Securities.

Driving Institutional Reach and Research Depth

United's institutional footprint expanded meaningfully during the year, with focused investor outreach in key GCC markets and strengthened collaborations with global funds. The firm's research franchise remains one of the most comprehensive in the country, offering actionable insights on a wide array of listed Omani companies and key economic sectors.

The award was formally announced and presented at a glittering ceremony held last week in Tunis, Tunisia, organised by the Arab Federation of Capital Markets. United's Chairman and CEO, Mustafa

Ahmed Salman and Managing Director, Hassan Ali Jawad, jointly received the award on behalf of the firm. The ceremony was attended by senior regional officials, including representatives from the MSX, who were also present to witness United's recognition on a regional stage.

"Our approach has always been rooted in client trust, strategic clarity and technology-first thinking," said Mustafa Salman, Chairman and CEO of United Securities. "This recognition by Euromoney is a testament to the strength of our team, the loyalty of our clients and our long-term commitment to shaping a more vibrant and liquid capital market in Oman."

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



Exports from GCC member states to the US decreased significantly by 19.8% in 2023.

US-GCC TRADE REACHES \$93.6 BILLION IN 2023

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

Trade between the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the United States of America amounted to \$93.6 billion in 2023, according to recent data published by the GCC Statistical Center. This figure represents a slight decrease of \$1.16% (\$1.1 billion), in comparison to 2022's total of \$94.7 billion.

GCC exports to the US decreased by 19.8% (\$8.9 billion) to \$36.1 billion in 2023, versus \$45.0 billion in the previous year. Petroleum and hydrocarbon products, totalling \$16.2 billion in value, represented a 44.9% share. This was followed by miscellaneous items (26.6% of exports) valued at \$9.6 billion.

Gold and precious stones represented 9.1% of total exports amounting to \$3.3 billion, followed by aluminium and aluminium products which represented 8.6% of total exports valued at \$3.1 billion.

On the other hand, imports from the US increased by 15.7% (\$7.8 billion) in 2023 to \$57.7 billion. Miscellaneous items worth \$20.7 billion made up 36% of total imports, while machinery and mechanical appliances accounted for a 28% share worth \$16.1 billion.

Vehicles and vehicle parts represented 17% of imports, valued at \$9.8 billion, while aircraft, spacecraft and parts accounted for a 7% share, valued at \$4 billion. This was followed by electrical machinery and equipment (6.3%) valued at \$3.6 billion, and instruments and precision goods (5.7%) valued at \$3.3 billion.

The United States was ranked the GCC's 4th largest trading partner in 2023, while China was ranked first with trade total of \$286.9 billion, followed by India at \$154.7 billion. Japan came next with \$76.7 billion.

LOGISTICS SECTOR EYES RO 14 BILLION CONTRIBUTION TO OMAN’S GDP BY 2040

MUSCAT: Invest Oman, in a recent post, highlighted the impressive performance and ambitious targets of the Sultanate of Oman's logistics sector, reaffirming its central role in driving national economic growth.

According to the post, the logistics sector is projected to contribute RO 2.25 billion to Oman's GDP in 2024, making it the second-largest sector in terms of GDP contribution. This underscores the strategic importance of logistics in Oman's economic diversification plans under Oman Vision 2040.

Further supporting the sector's momentum, the investment volume has already reached RO 2.3 billion as of Q1 2025.

This surge in capital inflow reflects growing investor confidence and the competitiveness of Oman's integrated ports, free zones and infrastructure network.

SHARP CLIMB

Britain inflation jumps in April



Britain suffered a bigger-than-expected inflation surge in April, prompting investors to bet on the Bank of England slowing its already gradual pace of interest rate cuts.

The annual inflation rate hit 3.5% in April, its highest reading since January 2024. The increase from 2.6% in March was the largest between two months since 2022 when price growth was rocketing above 10%. — Reuters

DIALOGUE HIGHLIGHTS BANKING SUPPORT FOR OMANI SMES

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 21

THE real estate market in the Sultanate of Oman has witnessed notable activity in recent years, particularly with the launch of Smart City projects such as Sultan Haitham City, and integrated residential neighbourhoods under the 'Sorouh' initiative, all of which aim to provide a comprehensive urban environment aligned with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

However, this momentum faces several obstacles that threaten the pace of growth and investment in this vital sector chief among them being weak purchasing power among citizens, high construction costs and land development challenges.

The Observer spoke with several prominent real estate developers during the 20th Oman Real Estate Conference and Design and Build Week, where they outlined the major issues confronting the sector and proposed realistic solutions to enhance market efficiency.

FINANCING: THE MAIN BOTTLENECK
Nasser al Badi, General Manager of Al Badi Investment Group,

MUSCAT: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA), in collaboration with the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), held a dialogue session in Muscat focused on enhancing banking services for small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Discussions covered key areas such as supportive banking policies and legislation, licensing requirements for financial service providers, and enablers for SME growth. These included training



The session emphasised the vital role of partnerships between banks and SMEs.

programmes, partnerships, incentives, business incubators, accelerators and financing options.

The session emphasised the vital role of partnerships between banks and SMEs in strengthening service delivery and addressing challenges that hinder SME performance and competitiveness.

As of March 2025, Oman has registered approximately 149,219 SMEs, with 27,611 holding Entrepreneurship Cards across the country's governorates. — ONA

Developers seek solutions to real estate challenges



Oman's real estate sector currently struggles with a disconnect between strong government planning and the citizen's financial ability to keep up.

emphasised that the concept of integrated residential neighbourhoods, introduced by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning about four years ago, marked a qualitative leap in the housing sector, with the pilot project "Hayy Al Naseem" initially showing strong sales. However, he noted that it soon faced marketing difficulties due to citizens' limited access to financing.

"It's unrealistic to expect citizens to purchase homes costing between RO 25,000 and 50,000 when their monthly income barely covers basic needs. Banks lend to those earning RO 325 a month, then deduct RO 150 in repayments — how can someone live on the remaining amount?" Al Badi

lamented.

He clarified that the problem isn't with the integrated neighbourhood concept itself, but with the absence of financing mechanisms that align with citizens' incomes. He proposed long-term loans extending up to 50 years, with monthly deductions capped at 20-25% of income to ensure a dignified standard of living without overwhelming debt.

Qais al Bahri, CEO of Dream Villa, described housing finance as the "fundamental dilemma", stating that the challenge isn't legal but financial — where loan ceilings are not in line with citizen incomes or current property prices.

He suggested that collaboration with banks, as seen

in Saudi Arabia, could create holistic financing solutions.

RIISING CONSTRUCTION COSTS
The rising prices of construction materials, along with permitting and approval fees, have created additional pressure on both developers and buyers.

Al Badi explained: "To start a project, we have to pay thousands — RO 7,000 for mining approvals, RO 3,000 for environmental permits and RO 18,000 for civil defence clearance. These fees ultimately inflate property prices."

Al Bahri attributed the increase to global factors beyond local control, stressing that reducing construction quality to cut costs is not an acceptable solution.

MORE REGULATORY REFORMS NEEDED
Both developers acknowledged notable progress in real estate laws over recent years.

According to Al Bahri, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has become more flexible, offering easier eligibility for housing ownership. For instance, citizens can now purchase property even outside their native governorates, and support can reach up to RO 30,000 or even RO 50,000.

SULTAN HAITHAM CITY TO HOST SOCIO BY THE LUX COLLECTIVE

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 21

The hospitality group The Lux Collective, in partnership with Adanté Realty, has announced the official launch of SOCIO by The Lux Collective, the first-ever hotel and branded residences in Sultan Haitham City.

The landmark agreement between Adanté Realty and The Lux Collective brings 219 branded residences keys and 170 hotel keys to Plot 97 to 99 within Yenaier Residences, the flagship sustainable development of Sultan Haitham City.

Strategically located in Phase 1 of Oman's first smart city, SOCIO by The Lux Collective introduces a vibrant lifestyle destination that combines luxury design, community-driven experiences and long-term investment potential.

SOCIO by The Lux Collective is a bold expression of contemporary living of the



SOCIO by The Lux Collective introduces a vibrant lifestyle destination that combines luxury design, community-driven experiences and long-term investment potential.

future, where design meets purpose and form, community is cultivated and global citizens come together.

Dr Aadil Alexander, Chief Executive Officer of Adanté Realty, stated: "With the official signing now complete, we are

thrilled to formally launch SOCIO by The Lux Collective, a bold new chapter for residential living in Oman.

"This partnership reflects our shared vision to create elevated living experiences grounded in purpose, sustainability and global design."

Olivier Chavy, Chief Executive Officer of The Lux Collective, added: "We are truly honoured to embark on this like-minded partnership with Adanté Realty – one that is built on creativity and a shared belief in future living.

"As part of our Group's strategic global expansion and strong commitment to the Middle East region, we are proud to announce the signing of our new urban lifestyle brand SOCIO in Oman – SOCIO by The Lux Collective."

SOCIO by The Lux Collective is located on Plots 97, 98 and 99 within Sultan Haitham City, Oman's first smart and sustainable city.

FINANCIAL RISK

ECB warns of instability from trade rifts



Customs disputes and rifts in international alliances could, in the view of the European Central Bank (ECB), pose a risk to financial stability in the euro zone.

"Rising trade frictions and related downside risks to economic growth are weighing on the outlook for financial stability," ECB Vice-President Luis de Guindos said on Wednesday as he summarised the findings. — dpa

SUPPLY DISRUPTION

Oil prices jump over 1% on supply fears



Oil prices rose more than 1% on Wednesday after reports that Israel could be preparing to strike Iranian nuclear facilities raised fears of a supply disruption in the Middle East.

Brent futures rose to \$66.17 a barrel. US West Texas Intermediate crude jumped to \$62.85. US intelligence suggests that Israel is preparing to strike Iranian nuclear facilities, CNN reported, citing US officials. — Reuters

OPINION

Can Oman leverage its soft power to drive economic growth?



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

OMAN'S soft power stems from various political and economic factors, particularly its active role in global diplomacy and economic affairs. It is rooted in a number of interconnected elements that shape its positive image regionally and internationally. Omani institutions are now working very effectively to exploit these areas of soft power. Their strength is highlighted, for example, by the political neutrality and quiet diplomacy that Oman has been known for decades.

It is known for its balanced and neutral stances in regional and international conflicts, and its ability to bridge differences with other countries, in addition to its current role as a mediator in numerous issues (such as the Iranian nuclear issue and its relationship with the United States, the Yemen crisis) and other issues.

Oman has also opened the door to dialogue with all countries of the world, and its clear policy regarding the Israeli occupation of the Palestine State since the establishment of this occupying entity in 1948, as well as other issues related to the environment, climate and international seas.

This soft policy has earned a good reputation and international confidence,

opening the door to political and diplomatic mediation at high levels. Oman has a long history of the cultural heritage, maritime and cultural exchanges, along with ancient trade relations.

Rich cultural heritage of Oman reflects coexistence, tolerance, and acceptance of others, which represents soft and influential source of attraction in enhancing the country's public image. This is an important factor in attracting investment, tourism, and global confidence in prestigious economic businesses.

The Omani government's moderate educational and media policies also help present a non-hostile and moderate media discourse, which helps promote the values of tolerance and coexistence and opens the door to dialogue for all followers of all faiths.

Oman leverages its neutrality and the trust of all parties to enhance its role as a mediator in resolving conflicts, granting it international influence without resorting to hard power. Furthermore, its presence in international forums as a "moderate voice" could gain it greater roles in regional and international organizations in the coming decades.

In the economic sphere, soft power—bolstered by internal stability and moderate policies that reassure foreign investors—

Oman has a long history of cultural heritage, maritime and cultural exchanges, along with ancient trade relations. Rich cultural heritage of Oman reflects coexistence, tolerance and acceptance of others, which represents soft and influential source of attraction in enhancing the country's public image.

supports growth in tourism and culture, facilitates economic agreements across sectors, and advances tourism as a key pillar of Oman Vision 2040.

This will also help build economic partnerships with countries not involved in conflicting axes by strengthening the accumulated trust in Omani behavior. It will also help enhance Oman's role in global peace, which is a strategic lever for strengthening the national economy.

However, it can be argued that economic soft power requires more than a positive reputation and calm policies. It requires tools that enable this reputation to be transformed into actual economic relationships.

Political and security stability are certainly a very important factor in attracting investment, especially in an unstable Middle Eastern environment.

However, the state must strive to diversify sources of income and reduce its dependence on oil. It must also work to exploit its strategic geographic location as a gateway to Asia and Africa and effectively market these ideas as part of soft power.

This requires significant efforts in external economic promotion, marketing Oman as a global investment and tourism, financial and technological hub to attract emerging global companies.

NEW WORLD DRAGS HONG KONG BANKS INTO A LOAN TANGO

KA SING CHAN

HSBC and its fellow lenders have a task ahead of them with New World Development. The money-losing Hong Kong property group wants to refinance \$11 billion of loans, but CEO Echo Huang has yet to reverse a four-year revenue slump. The banks have to weigh up the borrower's problems against the pain a default could inflict on the rest of their property exposure in the city.

The shrinking top line forced the troubled developer to report its first net loss in two decades last year. There's likely to be a repeat this year: in February, less than three months after taking over as CEO, Huang had to unveil a six-month net loss of HK\$6.6 billion (\$852 million) as the continuing property slump and high interest costs ate into its bottom line. Its total debt amounted to HK\$146 billion by the end of 2024, against HK\$22 billion of cash.

Over the past couple of years, as the Federal Reserve was raising interest rates, banks had been calling in property loans. That prompted the city's regulators to step in with relief measures for borrowers, especially those from small and medium enterprises.

Dealing with a well-connected corporate giant like New World is a different affair. Blue-chip developers and the families who control them have ranked as local banks' most important clients for decades. Sonia Cheng, daughter of New

World Chair Henry Cheng, sits on the board of HSBC's Asia-Pacific subsidiary as an independent non-executive director.

The bank run by Georges Elhedery had more than \$33 billion in Hong Kong commercial property loans on its books at the end of 2024. Some \$3.2 billion of such debt was classified as credit impaired as of June last year, a six-fold jump in six months. Elhedery, though, told his shareholders in February that future credit losses on it were unlikely to be big.

Nonetheless, a default by New World, one of the traditional big four developers of the finance hub, would send shockwaves to investors and jar lenders' property exposure further.

The good news is the property market outlook has improved as interest rates are easing. This week, Hong Kong's one-month interbank rate dipped below 1% for the first time in three years.

HSBC and Bank of China have pledged to take part in New World's refinancing deal, per Debtwire, one of the biggest of its kind in Hong Kong's corporate history. How this saga unfolds will affect not just New World's creditworthiness but also the general health of Hong Kong's economic pillar. — Reuters

What's eating European Union's food system?

FOOD prices have surged in recent years across the European Union. In March 2023, food-price inflation hit a record high of 15%. In Germany, consumers are paying nearly 30% more for food than they did in 2021, even though energy and production costs have declined.

Some economists have attributed this to food processors and retailers reaping windfall profits at the expense of low-income households. Meanwhile, the share of retail food prices reaching farmers keeps shrinking. German producers, for example, received just 21.7% of retail prices in 2021, and this figure continues to decline. The fall in farmers' share of bread prices is a striking example: in 1970, farmers earned 19.2% of the shelf price; by 2022, that share had plummeted to 5%.

Milk producers face similar challenges. Between 2014 and 2024, milk prices consistently failed to cover rising production costs. As a result, many farms operate at a loss and depend on subsidies to survive.

Farmers are expected to produce high-quality food while also providing – often under burdensome bureaucratic requirements – environmental, climate and animal protection. But as value creation shifts away from producers, profits are increasingly concentrated among a few powerful processors and retailers.

The widespread of farmers' protests in early 2024 revealed deep-rooted frustration across the EU's agriculture sector.

But the political response was underwhelming. Under pressure from conservative and liberal factions, the bloc's Common Agricultural Policy was rapidly stripped of environmental standards, amounting to a powerful blow against the CAP's already-fragile ecological pillar. Meanwhile, the core issue – ensuring fair prices along the value chain – has not been sufficiently addressed.

Fortunately, the issue of fair pricing in agriculture is finally gaining political traction. The EU is now revising both its Unfair Trading Practices Directive and the Common Market Organization



The widespread of farmers' protests in early 2024 revealed deep-rooted frustration across the EU's agriculture sector.



ELMAR HANNEN

The writer is a third-generation dairy farmer and a former vice-president of the European Milk Board.



MARTIN HÄUSLING

The writer, an organic dairy farmer, is a member of the European Parliament for the Greens/EFA group.

rules. These reforms are the result of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture – a policy forum launched by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in 2024 – which brought together a broad coalition of stakeholders. The EU's Agriculture Commissioner Christophe Hansen has incorporated parts of its recommendations into his policy agenda.

But fixing Europe's broken food supply chain requires more than cosmetic changes. Prices must be set from the bottom up, which implies four key reforms, starting with the enforcement of contractual obligations.

Dairy farmers, in particular, often deliver their products without knowing the price – an arrangement that would be unthinkable in most other sectors.

EU law already provides leeway for reform, as seen in France and Spain, where binding written contracts are mandatory.

Spain even prohibits sales below production costs. In Germany, however, attempts to introduce similar measures have been blocked by the agricultural lobby and its conservative and liberal allies.

Second, contractual obligations must extend to farming cooperatives. Although founded

on progressive principles, many of these cooperatives now operate like conventional large corporations, prioritising the lowest possible purchase prices over the interests of milk producers. Yet in countries like Germany – where cooperatives account for 70% of milk processing – they remain exempt from such requirements.

Third, the rights of producer organisations must be strengthened. While dairy giants like Arla and DMK would control up to 13% of the EU's milk volume following their planned merger, current EU rules cap the market share of farmer-led producer organisations at just 4%. Despite years of intensive discussions, this imbalance persists, hindering fair negotiations.

Lastly, EU policymakers must curb market concentration in food retail. In Germany, just four retailers control 85% of the food market. The food processing sector is also highly concentrated. A 2024 report by the German Monopolies Commission warned that rising market concentration is harming both producers and consumers.

Amid these challenges, promising models are beginning to emerge. One example is Germany's recently piloted three-party contract, which is based on the French model.

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PASSPORT LOST

RASHID Abdullah Al Harthy has lost Tanzanian Passport No TAE401594. Finder please handover to ROP.

SAHIYA Nassor Juma has lost Tanzanian Passport No TAE581874. Finder please handover to ROP.

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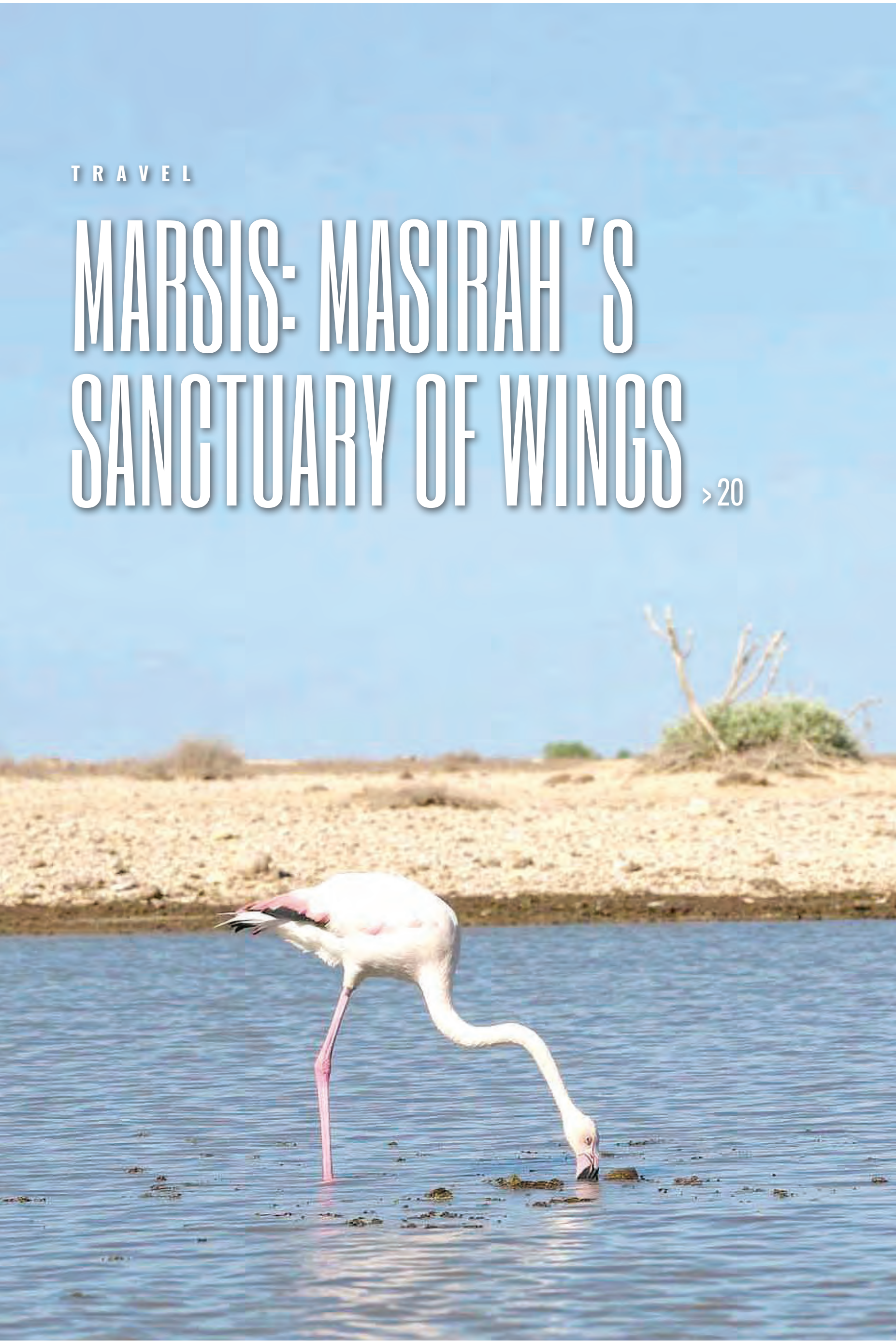
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DINING

‘Lilo & Stitch’ live-action remake brings human connection to the fore



“**LILO & STITCH**” is the latest Disney (DIS.N), opens new tab animation to get a live-action remake, with the medium allowing a closer look at the main characters’ relationships, its makers say.

Like its predecessor, the new movie, which begins its cinema rollout on Wednesday, tells the story of a young Hawaiian girl called Lilo, played by newcomer Maia Kealoha, who befriends a fugitive alien who crash lands on Earth, and names him Stitch.

After the death of her parents, Lilo is under the care of her sister Nani, who is struggling to juggle all her responsibilities - all while new family addition Stitch wreaks havoc around them.

“It has the same heart and it has the same fun and Hawaiian rollercoaster ride of chaos that is Stitch,” actor Sydney Agudong, who plays Nani, said.

“But at the same time, I think the beautiful thing about being able to do a live-action is that you get the nuance of human connection. And I think with Maia and I’s bond... hopefully (audiences) get that true sense of family and that it doesn’t actually always have to be blood.”

Director Dean Fleischer Camp said the 2002 animation’s characters and setting allowed for scope to work in a new form.

Several cast members from the 2002 animation return in the new film, including Chris Sanders, who once again voices Stitch. Tia Carrere, who voiced Nani, plays new character Mrs Kekoa, with co-stars Amy Hill and Jason Scott Lee also in new roles. — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



HERITAGE

Actors dressed as vikings participate in a re-enactment at the ‘Boyne Valley Viking Experience’ festival, in Slane, Ireland. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

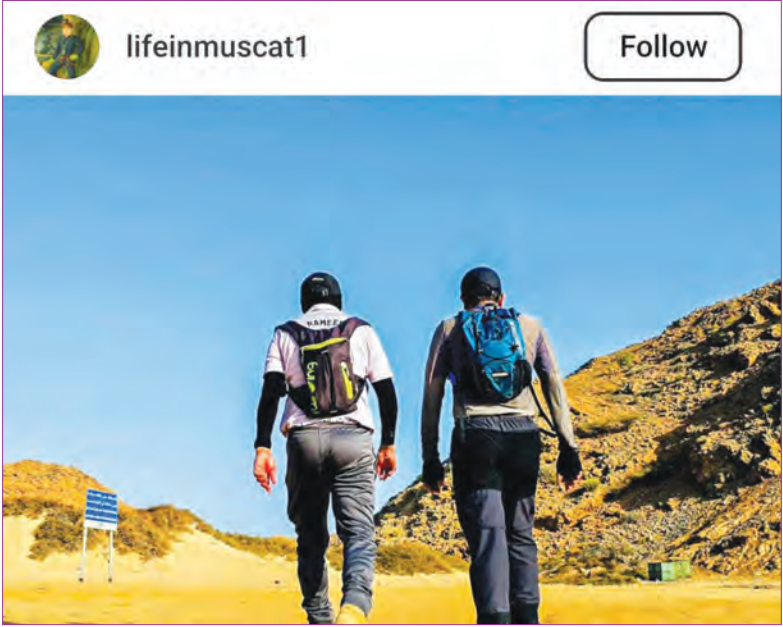
US director Scarlett Johansson and British actress Erin Kellyman pose during a photocall for the film “Eleanor the Great” at the 78th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP



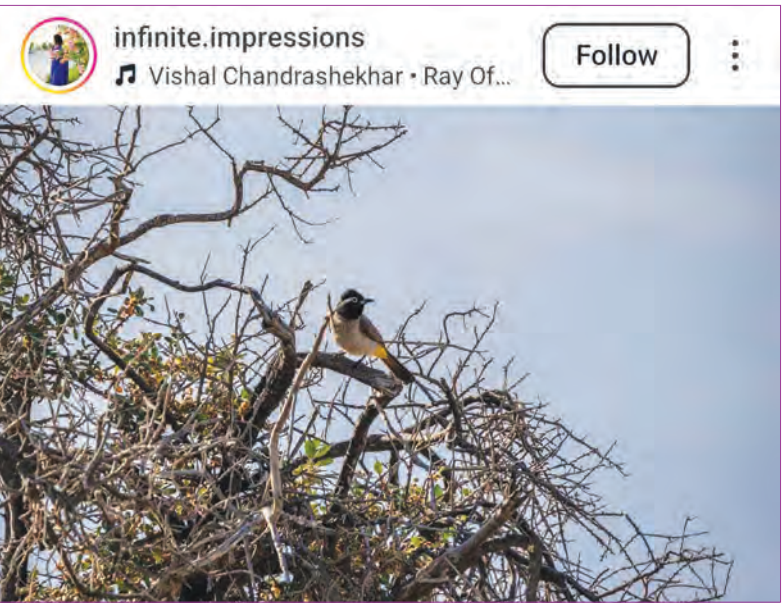
LIFESTYLE

People visit the exhibition ‘Space: Could Life Exist Beyond Earth?’ at Natural History Museum, London, Britain. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Long Road Ahead



Beauty of Remote Places

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Scarlett Johansson
faces tough reviews
in director debut



SCARLETT Johansson received mixed reviews for her directorial debut, *Eleanor the Great*, premiered at Cannes to a VIP crowd. This year at Cannes, several actors like Kristen Stewart and Harris Dickinson have also showcased their first films, but Johansson's transition appears more challenging. Critics were largely unfavourable; *Variety* called it "an unconvincing crowd-pleaser", *The Hollywood Reporter* described it as "wobbly", and *The Guardian* gave it two stars, labelling it "frankly odd". Conversely, *Screen* suggested streamers should be interested, while *The Times* praised its emotional blend of tears and humour.

The film's standout performance came from 95-year-old June Squibb, praised universally for her portrayal of a grieving retiree exploring themes of friendship, grief and

forgiveness, which Johansson emphasised as relevant topics today. *Eleanor the Great* is competing in Cannes's "Certain Regard" section, dedicated to emerging directors, alongside Stewart's and Dickinson's projects. Harris Dickinson, 28, asked critics to be "gentle" with *Urchin*, a poignant story about a London homeless man. Early reviews compared his work to veteran director Mike Leigh, noting its social-realist tone. While actors transitioning to directing have mixed success — like Clint Eastwood and Greta Gerwig — others like Nicole Kidman underscore the scarcity of women's major box office wins in directing. Kristen Stewart's debut, *The Chronology of Water*, received enthusiastic praise, with *Rolling Stone* hailing her achievement and her excitement for future projects. — AFP



New opportunities
bloom for young Omani
designers at ROHM



BY YERU EBUEN

IMAGINE the excitement of being asked to create something for a major international event. For emerging designers in Oman, participating in The Violetta Project at the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) offers a chance to showcase their talent and gain valuable experience. It's not just about designing costumes; it's about taking part in a cultural event that can open doors to new opportunities. For young creative minds, this experience can be inspiring and motivating. The project focused on reimagining the character of Violetta from Verdi's *La Traviata*, encouraging students to interpret her emotional journey through fashion. The participants explored her story, transforming her character's complexities into visual designs. For many of these young designers, it was their first encounter with a project of this scale and significance. They had the chance to learn new skills, collaborate with professionals, and imagine how their work could contribute to storytelling in the performing arts. It was an opportunity to see how fashion can help bring a dramatic character

to life, marrying design with narrative. Oman's fashion scene has been growing steadily over recent years. Designers like Amal al Raisi have made a name for themselves by creating modest clothing that appeals across the Middle East. Her designs blend traditional styles with modern influences, helping to define a unique contemporary identity. Amal has built a brand that resonates with many, becoming a symbol of how local talent can influence regional fashion and expand its reach. Another prominent figure in Oman's fashion industry is Atelier Zuhra. Known for its high-end gowns, the brand has attracted international attention and has dressed some of the world's biggest artists and celebrities. This success story shows how Oman's creative industry is developing rapidly, with local brands gaining recognition on the global stage. It proves that with talent and dedication, Oman can compete in the international fashion market. These achievements are happening alongside initiatives like those at the Royal Opera House Muscat, which actively supports young talent and cultural exchange. The partnership with the Scientific College of Design is a good example. It offers students a rare chance

to work on projects that connect fashion, theatre and music — broadening their experience and exposing them to international standards. Such collaborations help bring fresh ideas into Oman's creative industries and encourage dialogue between local and international artists. Recent performances of *La Traviata* featured acclaimed singers and a renowned conductor, Plácido Domingo. But it's programmes like The Violetta Project that tap into the real potential of Oman's growing arts scene. When young designers get involved in projects like this, they gain not just skills but confidence. They see that their work can reach wider audiences and have a real impact. By supporting these kinds of initiatives, Oman is building a stronger arts and fashion scene. These opportunities help young talent gain exposure, learn from experts and prepare for future success. They also demonstrate Oman's commitment to developing its creative industries — creating a space where new ideas thrive and cultural stories are told through many forms of art. For these young designers, participating in such projects isn't just a chance to learn; it's a step towards a brighter future for Oman's cultural landscape.

FEATURES



MARSIS: MASIRAH'S SANCTUARY OF WINGS

BY NAJAH AL RIYAMI

JUST BEYOND the southern edge of Masirah Island, where the ocean begins to breathe in wider rhythms and the horizon opens into emptiness, lies Marsis — a flat, low-lying islet that is both fiercely protected and quietly extraordinary. Though only a short distance from Masirah's coast, Marsis is not open to the public. Access is strictly controlled, granted only with permission from environmental authorities. And for good reason: Marsis is a sanctuary, not just in name, but in every sense of the word. It is alive with wings.



To set foot on Marsis — on the rare days when the sea is calm enough and permission has been granted — is to enter a realm ruled by birds. The soundscape is unlike anywhere else on the Omani coast: a chorus of screeches, whistles, flaps, and cries that rises with the wind. Thousands of birds, sometimes in synchronised flight, sometimes scattered like flecks of ink across the shore, make this islet their temporary home. Amal al Junaibi, a local entrepreneur, explains: “Marsis Island may be tiny, but it plays a big role in protecting birdlife around Masirah. It's one of the few places where seabirds can nest and lay their eggs undisturbed. Its quiet, untouched nature makes it a crucial sanctuary that reminds us how important it is to protect these fragile ecosystems.” Ospreys perch sentinel-like on the rocks, scanning the water for fish. Western reef herons, both in white and slate-grey morphs, wade along the tidal edges. Caspian terns — the world's largest terns — swoop with powerful grace, while Saunders's terns, delicate and nimble, dart and dip closer to the surface. Sooty gulls, bold and noisy, claim the open flats, jostling for space. Flamingos, tall and ghostly pink, are sometimes seen in the nearby shallows, especially during the cooler months, feeding in the tidal flats with surreal elegance. Their presence, though occasional, adds to the ecological richness of the area — reminders of the regional connectivity of Oman's coastal ecosystems. The diversity is staggering. Depending on the season,



one might also spot whimbrels, ruddy turnstones, grey plovers, bar-tailed godwits and greater sand plovers, many of them long-distance migrants resting before their journeys stretch onward across continents. In total, over 40 species of birds have been observed in and around Marsis, making it one of the richest birding sites in the region. What makes Marsis exceptional is not just the sheer variety of birds — it's the fact that so many of them nest here. The islet's surface, seemingly barren at first glance, is in fact delicately patterned with shallow nests. Bird eggs — speckled, fragile and perfectly camouflaged — are tucked into the sand, marking the beginning of countless lifecycles in this raw and vulnerable environment. “Marsis Island is incredibly important for bird nesting,” said Andrew Wilson, founding director at Future Seas Global SPC. “The birds are incredibly



sensitive to disturbance during the nesting season — birds scared from the ground by visitors can leave nests unguarded from predators, with the eggs exposed to direct sunlight... all things that interfere with survival during the incubation process.” Marsis lies within the Masirah Island Important Bird Area, as recognised by BirdLife International. This designation reflects the islet's critical role in supporting globally significant populations of seabirds and migratory species. Additional information about bird species, their nesting habits and migration seasons is publicly available through BirdLife's database and other conservation platforms. Yet Marsis remains utterly undeveloped. There are no trails, no shelters, no structures. And that's exactly how it must stay. The absence of human interference is what allows this place to function as a cradle of life. Conservationists know this. So do the local communities, who have long respected Marsis's role in the ecosystem and the unspoken rule: this is not a place to visit casually, it is a place to protect. As Oman deepens its environmental commitments and expands its understanding of marine and coastal ecosystems, Marsis stands as a vital marker of what can still be preserved when restraint and reverence guide policy. It is not an island for tourism. There are few places left like it. Fewer still that are both known and left alone. Marsis is one of them. A sanctuary of wings, eggs and silence — a place where life gathers, rests and begins again.