

UN chief visits Youth Centre

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres visited the Youth Centre in Muscat as part of his current official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. Guterres and the delegation accompanying him were briefed about the centre's experience, its mechanism of functioning and its activities. He also watched a visual presentation that highlighted key indices and statistics of the centre, as well as the programmes conducted by the centre since its establishment. **DETAILS ON P4**

SUNRISE - 05:25 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:02 AM

DHUHR - 12:08 PM

ASR - 03:31 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:47 PM

ISHA - 08:05 PM



HM returns after 2-day Kuwait visit

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home on Tuesday after a two-day state visit to the State of Kuwait. The visit was made in response to an invitation by Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait.

His Majesty the Sultan was received at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth and others.

Earlier in the day, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik left the State of Kuwait after a two-day state visit.

Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, led the farewell ceremony for His

Majesty the Sultan.

Upon his departure, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of thanks to Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait.

In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere appreciation to the Emir of Kuwait for the warm welcome and hospitality.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, on Tuesday held a fraternal meeting at His Majesty's residency in Bayan Palace in the capital city, Kuwait.

During the meeting, the two leaders continued discussing aspects of the bilateral cooperation between the two countries to serve the fraternal relations between the Omani and Kuwaiti peoples and meet their aspirations towards further prosperity, progress and welfare.

The fraternal meeting was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al

Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Dr Saleh bin Amir al Kharousi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the State of Kuwait.

Meanwhile, it was attended from the Kuwaiti side by Shaikh Sabah Khaled Al Hammad al Sabah (Head of the Mission of Honour) and Dr Mohammed bin Nassir al Hajri, Ambassador of the State of Kuwait to the Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**



■ HM, EMIR OF KUWAIT HOLD FRATERNAL MEETING



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah on Tuesday held a fraternal meeting at His Majesty's residency in Bayan Palace in the capital city, Kuwait.

Establishment of Palestinian State can bring ME peace: Oman

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman has said that the termination of the Middle East region's conflicts could only be achieved through the long-overdue establishment of the Palestinian state and by granting it full membership in the United Nations.

A statement to this effect was delivered before the UN General Assembly's 10th emergency special session.

In Oman's speech at the resumed UN session, Sayyid Ahmed bin Hamoud al Busaidy, member of the Sultanate of Oman's permanent delegation to the United Nations in New York, described the setting up of the Palestinian State as "a strategic necessity for the next stage of UN action and a global demand supported by the international community". In its speech, Oman urged the Security Council to reconsider granting the State of Palestine full membership in the United Nations. Oman asserted that "rejecting such a request does not serve security and peace in the Middle East or



A girl walks with a pot to receive food rations from an outdoor kitchen in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. — **AFP**

the world at large".

It added that failure to grant the State of Palestine full UN membership "damages the credibility of the Security Council due to the application of double standards when it comes to the Palestinian cause".

Oman welcomed the UN General Assembly members' vote, by an overwhelming majority, in support for the albeit vetoed resolution on the the State of Palestine's right to obtain full membership in the United Nations. Oman also expressed deep concern over the Israeli occupation forces' persistent military escalation, war crimes and genocide carried out with impunity against unarmed civilians in the Gaza Strip and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Oman added its voice to statements made by four countries representing four international groups supporting the State of Palestine's legitimate demand to obtain full membership in the United Nations, like the rest of the countries of the world. — **ONA**



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HM RETURNS HOME AFTER 2-DAY STATE VISIT TO KUWAIT



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home on Tuesday after a two-day state visit to the State of Kuwait. The visit was made in response to an invitation by Shaikh Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait. – ONA





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HIS MAJESTY VISITS AL SALAM PALACE MUSEUM IN KUWAIT

KUWAIT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday visited Al Salam Palace Museum in Kuwait City as part of his state visit to the State of Kuwait.

Upon his arrival at the museum, His Majesty the Sultan was received by Shaikh Mohammed Abdullah Mubarak al Sabah, Minister of Amiri Diwan Affairs, Shaikha Muna Al Jaber Al Abdullah al Sabah, Head of the Centre for Historical Documents and Amiri Diwan Museums and Libraries, Supervisor-General of Al Salam Palace Museum, and other Kuwaiti officials.

His Majesty the Sultan went on tour of the museum's galleries. He listened to a technology-enhanced briefing about the museum's artefacts and manuscripts that highlight important aspects of the history and civilisation of the State of Kuwait.

His Majesty the Sultan took note of exhibits in the main halls showcasing salient features of

civilisations and events that took place in Kuwait, symbolised by a diverse range of selected antiques.

At the end of the tour, His Majesty the Sultan signed the VIP Visitors Book, in which he expressed his delight at visiting Al Salam Palace Museum, as well as his admiration over the precious archaeological collections and antiques that indicate the historical legacy of the State of Kuwait and its deep-rooted culture. He thanked those in charge of the edifice for their efforts in perfectly documenting Kuwait's history.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan accepted a commemorative gift from the museum's officials.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan was accompanied by Shaikh Sabah Khalid Hamad al Sabah (Head of the Mission of Honour) and members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty during his state visit to Kuwait. — ONA



His Majesty the Sultan went on tour of the Museum's galleries. He listened to a technology-enhanced briefing about the Museum's artefacts and manuscripts. — ONA



During the visit, the UN Secretary-General also listened to a briefing about the experiences of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) showcased at the centre's business incubator. – **ONA**

UN chief in Oman, visits Youth Centre

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MAY 14

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on Tuesday visited the Youth Centre in Muscat as part of his current official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. He was accompanied by Oman's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Mohammed al Hassan.

Guterres and the delegation accompanying him were briefed about the centre's experience, its mechanism of functioning and the activities it undertakes. He also watched a visual presentation that highlighted key indices and statistics of the centre, as well as the programmes conducted by the centre since its establishment.

The UN official toured the centre's facilities, which include shared work spaces, a 3D printing laboratory, a drone laboratory, a virtual reality space, training halls, multi-purpose halls and other facilities.

During the visit, the UN Secretary-General also listened to a briefing about the experiences of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) showcased at the centre's business incubator as part of partnership with the Authority for Small

and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED).

The Youth Center team gave a presentation on the goals and initiatives of the centre and then took the Secretary-General on a tour of its facilities.

The Acting Managing Director of the Youth Centre, Alya al Shanfari, said, "We had a very special tour for the UN Secretary-General. We were very happy to receive the delegation, and we took them around the Youth Centre and introduced them to the training programmes of the centre, the different labs and programmes targeted at the Sustainable Development Goals 2030."

Speaking to the Observer, Al Shanfari said, "At the Youth Centre we target some of the goals that come under it's priority such as education, wellbeing, health etc. Youth Centre's strategic goals are empowerment of youth contribution. The centre also provides spaces within the requirements of the young people, developing cooperation with local, regional and international youth organisations to empower SMEs, works on integration with government and private agencies and institutions as well as civil society organisations in supporting and developing the youth sector in various fields."

Oman participates in preparatory meeting for the Arab Summit Conference

MANAMA: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the ministerial preparatory meeting for the 33rd session of the ordinary Arab Summit Conference which will be held in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the meeting was headed by Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and permanent representative to the League of Arab States.

During the meeting, the report of the presidency of the Arab Summit at its previous 32nd session in Jeddah was discussed, and the implementation of the decisions and commitments taken in it, as well as the items included in the summit programme related to issues of joint Arab action, most notably the Palestinian issue, were discussed.

During the meeting, the Kingdom of Bahrain took over the presidency of the 33rd Arab Summit from Saudi Arabia.

Hossam Zaki, Assistant Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, said in a statement to the Oman News



Oman's delegation to the meeting was headed by Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Arab Republic of Egypt and permanent representative to the League of Arab States.

Agency (ONA): "The meeting discussed the draft agenda of the 33rd session of summit. It includes a lot of items, foremost of which is the Palestinian cause." He stated that the ministers had stressed that the summit would come

out with consistent and agreed-upon decisions that support the Arab positions and aim to achieve the demands of the Palestinian people for declaring a Palestinian state and obtaining full membership in the United Nations.

He added: "The crisis in Sudan was widely discussed at the summit and will take decisions in this regard. The summit will also take decisions on the other crises taking place in the region. A number of initiatives proposed by the Kingdom of Bahrain were also put forward by the ministers. Several other topics were referred by the Economic and Social Council and are awaiting approval."

The delegation of the Sultanate of Oman to the meeting comprised Sayyid Faisal bin Hareb al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Bahrain, Dr Ahmed bin Salem Jaaboub, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the League of Arab States and a number of officials from the Foreign Ministry. — **ONA**

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN 2ND GULF HOUSING WEEK IN DOHA



DOHA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, is taking part in the activities of the second edition of Gulf Housing Week held in the city of Doha, the State of Qatar. The event is showcasing projects for future cities, notably the Sultan Haitham City, Oman Mountain Front project, the Al Khuwair Downtown project and 'integrated residential neighbourhoods' project. As part of the activities, Eng Hamad bin Ali al Nazwani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Housing, participated in a GCC senior housing officials panel discussion titled 'Humanising National Housing Projects'. The second housing week, which lasts several days, seeks to improve and develop housing and real estate sectors, promote a sustainable economy and contribute to achieving social and economic wellbeing. The event also encourages the exchange of expertise and successful experiences in the field of housing and urban planning. – **ONA**

Applications for CEO Programme open: RAM

MUSCAT: At the forefront of leadership development, the Royal Academy of Management (RAM) launched 'The National CEO Programme' whose visionary initiative aligns with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's ambitious vision to develop and empower existing and future leaders of Oman across both public and private sectors.

With a dedicated focus on executive leaders within the private sector, the programme represents a transformative journey towards leadership excellence. It is designed to equip participants with the essential skills and knowledge for navigating the multifaceted challenges of contemporary leadership. From mastering the intricacies of change management and steering strategic initiatives to championing innovation and embracing digital transformation, the programme offers a comprehensive curriculum tailored to empower leaders at every level.

Dr Ali bin Qassim al Lawati, President of the Royal Academy of Management, highlighted the importance of the programme in nurturing a community of future Omani executive leadership to unleash the competitive and sustainable potential of the Sultanate of Oman's private sector, thereby driving sustainable economic growth.

He further emphasised that the programme aligns with the academy's framework to develop national leaders capable of propelling performance and growth by empowering them with the skills needed to emerge as the future leaders who will drive the sector to the forefront of the Omani economy. Applications for the programme are open to all senior executive leaders who meet the eligibility criteria requirements from May 15 to May 26, 2024. For further details and application requirements, interested applicants can visit the official website of the Royal Academy of Management and its official social media accounts. This cohort of the programme will accommodate 35 participants from senior executive leadership in private sector institutions.

Makeen camps prepare young Omanis for AI jobs

MOHAMMED AL DIGHAISHI
MUSCAT, MAY 14

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) celebrated the graduation of the third batch of members enrolled for the 'Makeen' camps conducted by Programming Academy.

The graduation ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaitani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology. Around 100 job-seekers received their qualifications in five disciplines: Data Science and AI, Comprehensive Web Application Development, Smartphone Application Development, Systems Engineering and Cybersecurity.

More than 2,000 candidates applied for the opportunity to enrol for the Makeen Camps. The success rate is typically around 73 per cent for Data Science and AI, 65 per cent for Systems Engineering, 48 per cent for Comprehensive Web Application Development, 40 per cent for Smartphone App Development and 47 per cent for Cybersecurity.

Ahmed bin Salem al Wahaibi, Head of the Training Programmes at the Future Skills Development Department, indicated that the Makeen camps were launched in May 2023, where 100 job-seekers were trained in various fields related to technology. More than half of them were successfully recruited by private



sector companies.

The 6-month programme is followed by four months of training in labs of the Programming Academy, before they become eligible for internships in local companies.

Training across all tracks includes specialised programmes to develop problem-solving and programming thinking skills. Candidates are also exposed to the latest versions of technologies and applications in the local and global market.

The Makeen camps also include programmes to develop personal skills, such as effective communication skills, working skills within a team and developing self-learning skills to ensure the trainee's continuous development.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is looking forward to expanding the Makeen camps in its second edition to include a larger number of graduates and new technical specialisations that keep pace with developments in the Omani and global labour markets.

For the next two batches, enrolment will be expanded to accommodate 200 job-seekers from various governorates, he said.

Recall

Hyundai County & Universe

Recall Date: 15 May 2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Hyundai County	2019- 2023	81
Hyundai Universe	2017- 2023	5

Recall consequence

Description of defect:
Emergency exit label and hammer were not installed in some vehicles
*Emergency Exit Labels Only. (UNIVERSE)
*Emergency Exit Labels & Hammers. (COUNTY)

Recall Action

Procedure:
Install emergency exit label and hammer based on vehicle requirements.

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>

Toll free No 80050003 on all working days between 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM & 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM with effect from Date 15/05/2024



The two-day training course aims to introduce students to the concept of digital entrepreneurship and its indicators

Al Quraim library hosts digital entrepreneurship course

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 14

The Public Knowledge Library in Al Quraim organised a training course entitled 'Digital Entrepreneurship' targeting 56 students, as part of the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science's 2024 cultural activity plan.

The two-day training course aims to introduce students to the concept of digital entrepreneurship and its indicators. It also includes practical workshops to develop digital entrepreneurial ideas and projects from scratch to be sold in the Omani market, using modern digital methods that align with Vision 2040 and artificial intelligence.

Naima bint Rashid al

Masoudiyah, innovation specialist for the first Scientific Olympiad and implementer of the training workshop, said: "The training course aims to introduce students to the concept of entrepreneurship and its indicators in entrepreneurship. The training course will also address practical workshops to develop digital entrepreneurial ideas and projects from scratch to be sold in the Omani market using modern digital methods that align with Vision 2040 and artificial intelligence. In addition, the course will discuss some prominent Omani figures in digital entrepreneurship."

Al Masoudiyah stressed the need to inculcate the concept of digital entrepreneurship among students, and that it should be

studied as a subject in schools in grades 10 and 11. Through these training courses, whether in entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence, or future career skills, students can determine the specialisation that suits their interests after completing their school education.

For his part, Yousef al Amri explained that the library is working to organise and implement cultural events that meet the needs and interests of different audiences. He pointed out that the workshops and events offered are prepared and approved by the Department of Libraries at the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science. They also vary according to the seasons and developments in the cultural and technological world.

Call for concerted push to boost SME sector

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) engaged with 16 government and private entities to analyse the findings of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report 2023.

The focus was on elevating Oman's competitiveness in the entrepreneurship index and enhancing the role of support entities within the entrepreneurship ecosystem. Oman secured eleventh spot in the Entrepreneurship Index among 49 participating nations for 2023/2024, a significant leap from its previous ranking in 2022/2023.

This advancement reflects the endeavours of governmental and private entities in raising an incubating environment for entrepreneurship. It also reflects a concerted push to cultivate a conducive climate for the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and innovative startups, aligning with the sub-indicators outlined in the report.

Dr Salim al Riyami, Head of the Studies Department at ASMED, said, "The progress of the Sultanate of Oman in the Entrepreneurship Index proves the efforts made by

the authority and also reflects the integration of government and private efforts in promoting entrepreneurship and advancing the SME sector as it is a basic pillar of the national economy, and ways to raise its competitiveness in the Index leading businesses."

A workshop organised to study the report served as a platform to underscore the imperative of alignment and collaboration across diverse governmental and private institutions to empower SMEs, augment their contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP), and further enhance Oman's standing in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report.

Presentations were delivered by the participating authorities on Oman's entrepreneurship landscape. The Public Authority for Financial Services, the Central Bank of Oman, and the Oman Investment Authority defined their initiatives in SME financing.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and the Ministry of Education elaborated on their efforts to instil an entrepreneurial culture across educational institutions.

Additionally, various entities, including the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, the Ministry

of Labour, the Tax Authority, and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, outlined their supportive policies and legislative measures.

Walid al Maawali, an entrepreneur in the fishery sector and founder of the 'iL Lab Marine' project, underscored ASMED's pivotal role in nurturing entrepreneurs through its training programmes, particularly in technology and innovation-driven ventures. Such initiatives not only bolster emerging enterprises but also contribute to enhancing sub-indicators vital for elevating the entrepreneurship Index.

ASMED's initiatives encompass a spectrum of endeavours aimed at fortifying the SME ecosystem. These include in-country value programmes, ready-made factory projects, the enterprise escalation programme, and initiatives to expand investment avenues and market access for SMEs domestically and internationally.

ASMED prioritises skill enhancement through specialised training programmes and collaborates with entities like the Reyadah Academy to facilitate non-traditional financing avenues for SMEs.



A workshop organised to study the report served as a platform to underscore the imperative of alignment and collaboration across diverse governmental and private institutions to empower SMEs

MoE forum for school admin on Sunday

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision, is organising next Sunday the third school administration forum entitled 'Sustainable Educational Leadership and Visions'. The forum targets more than 1,800 school principals from various public and private schools in the Sultanate of Oman, and the senior supervisors and school administration supervisors. The two-day forum is taking place at Kempinski Hotel - The Wave. Dr Suleiman al Jamoudi, Chairman of the main organising committee of the forum, said: "The third edition of this forum comes within the framework of the ministry's interest in the professional development of school administrations and school administration supervisors, and aims to empower government and private school administrations."



The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees In Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/5	Preparing a macroeconomic framework for exiting the oil sector by 2050	LO: 300 SME: 12 RE: 300 INT: 300	12/6/ 2024

First ● All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second ● Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system: etendering.tenderboard.gov.om

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

✉ etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
☎ + 96824402200



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
200/ 2024	Providing cleaning services to the Child Care Center at Al-Khoud	Companies specialized in the field of cleaning, laundry and pest control services and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Friday 24-5-2024 02:00 PM	Monday 3-6-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
201/ 2024	Furnishing works for the building of the Cerebral Palsy Center and the Early Intervention Center at the General Directorate of Persons with Disabilities at Al-Khoud	Companies specialized in the field of furniture supply and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Friday 24-5-2024 02:00 PM	Monday 3-6-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
202/ 2024	Supplying tools and consumables for the Al-Aman Rehabilitation Center building at Al-Khoud	Companies specialized in the field of supplying medical supplies and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Friday 24-5-2024 02:00 PM	Monday 3-6-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) . On **Wednesday 15/5/2024**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. **(24402200)**.

“ The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry”

www.mosd.gov.om



ISRAELI TANKS PUSH DISPLACED CIVILIANS IN RAFAH

Aid groups have repeatedly urged against a ground incursion into refugee-packed Rafah, warning of a potential humanitarian catastrophe

CAIRO: Israeli tanks forged deeper into eastern Rafah on Tuesday, reaching some residential districts of the southern border city where more than a million people had been sheltering after being displaced in seven months of war.

Israel's international allies and aid groups have repeatedly urged against a ground incursion into refugee-packed Rafah, warning of a potential humanitarian

catastrophe.

Israel has vowed to press on into Rafah even without the support of allies, saying its operation is necessary to root out four remaining groups battalions holed up in the city.

“The tanks advanced this morning west of Salahuddin Road. They are in the streets inside the built-up area and there are clashes,” one resident said. Video on social

media showed one tank on George Street in Al Jneina neighbourhood.

Palestinian movement armed wing said it had destroyed an Israeli troop carrier with an Al Yassin 105 missile in the eastern Al Salam neighbourhood, killing some crew members and wounding others.

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) declined to comment on the report.

In a round-up of its activities, the IDF said its forces had eliminated

several armed Palestinians cells in close-quarter fighting on the Gazan side of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt.

In the east of the city, it said it had also destroyed cells and a launch post from where missiles were being fired at IDF troops.

Israel issued evacuation orders for people to move from parts of eastern Rafah a week ago, with a second round of orders extending

to further zones on Saturday.

They are moving to empty tracts of land, including Al Mawasi, a sandy strip bordering the coast that aid agencies have warned lacks sanitary and other facilities to host an influx of displaced people.

UNRWA, the main United Nations aid agency in Gaza, estimates some 450,000 people have fled Rafah since May 6.

“People face constant exhaustion,

hunger and fear. Nowhere is safe,” the agency posted on X.

Fighting across the strip has intensified in recent days, including in the north, with the Israeli military heading back into areas where it had claimed to have dismantled groups months ago.

Israel says the operations are to prevent them, which controls Gaza, from rebuilding military capacities. — Reuters

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Defence
ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
12/2023	HVAC system works - Mussanah Airbase	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	29 May 2024	01 July 2024	448/- R.O
16/2023	Building works - Adam Air Base	First and above	29 May 2024	01 July 2024	310/- R.O
03/2024	Building works - Mazyonah	First and above	29 May 2024	01 July 2024	146/- R.O
05/2024	HVAC system works - Thumrait	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	29 May 2024	08 July 2024	275/- R.O
08/2024	Electrical tapping from network at varicose location	Specialist in electrical works & registered with grad (B) in DCRP	29 May 2024	08 July 2024	1,400/- R.O
09/2024	Electromechanical works - WUDAM	Specialists in electromechanical (LPG System)	29 May 2024	08 July 2024	100/- R.O

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.

The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 - 1300 Hours).

The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.

Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.

Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.

We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).

You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.

1. Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).

2. Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.

3. Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as SOFT COPY only, and (USB) in two separate files:

A. Financial (bill 1&2 separated file from bill3)

B. Technical files.

4. Confirmation of site visit.

5. All addendums and circulars.

6. List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.

7. List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.

8. Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.

9. Financial Statement for the last Three years.

HRW says Israel repeatedly targets aid workers in Gaza

TEL AVIV: Human Rights Watch said on Tuesday that Israel had repeatedly targeted known aid worker locations in Gaza, even after their coordinates were provided to Israeli authorities to ensure their protection.

The rights watchdog said that it had identified eight cases where aid convoys and premises were targeted, killing at least 15 people, including two children.

They are among more than 250 aid workers who have been killed in Gaza since the war erupted more than seven months ago, according to UN figures.

In all eight cases, the organisations had provided the coordinates to Israeli authorities, HRW said.

This reveals “fundamental flaws with the so-called deconfliction system, meant to protect aid workers and allow them to safely deliver life-saving humanitarian assistance in Gaza”, it said.

The war and siege have triggered a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with the UN repeatedly lamenting aid restrictions even as famine is looming in the north.

“On one hand, Israel is blocking access to critical lifesaving humanitarian provisions and on the other, attacking convoys that are delivering some of the small amount that they are allowing in,” Belkis Wille, HRW’s associate crisis, conflict and arms director, said in Tuesday’s statement.

HRW highlighted the case of the World Central Kitchen, a US-based charity who saw seven of its aid workers killed by an Israeli strike on their convoy on April 1.

This was not an isolated “mistake”, HRW said, pointing to the other seven cases it had identified where GPS coordinates of aid convoys and premises had been sent to Israeli authorities, only to see them attacked by Israeli forces “without any warning”.

“Israel’s allies need to recognise that these attacks that have killed aid workers have happened over and over again, and they need to stop,” Wille said. All of the organisations who had seen structures and staff affected had told HRW that, as far as they knew, “there were no military targets in the area at the time of the attack.” — AFP

Top UN court to hold hearings on Rafah offensive

THE HAGUE: The top UN court said it would hold hearings on Thursday and Friday over South Africa’s request to impose emergency orders on Israel to halt its Rafah offensive.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague will hear lawyers from South Africa on Thursday, followed by Israel’s response the next day, it said in a statement.

Earlier this month, Pretoria petitioned the ICJ for so-called provisional measures over the incursion into Rafah, asking the court to order Israel to “immediately withdraw and cease its military offensive.”

It also requested the court to order Israel to take “all effective measures” to facilitate the “unimpeded” access of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Nearly 450,000 Palestinians have been newly displaced from Rafah in recent days, and around 100,000 from northern Gaza, according to UN agencies, which warn that “no place is safe” in the territory.

Ground fighting and heavy Israeli bombardments have been reported recently around Rafah as well as in Gaza City and Jabalia refugee camp in the north and Nuseirat camp in the centre. — AFP

Palestinians carry their belongings as they prepare to flee Rafah. — AFP



omanobserver.com/podcast

In brief

■ PARIS



TWO FRENCH PRISON OFFICERS KILLED IN INMATE'S ESCAPE

Gunmen on Tuesday attacked a prison van at a motorway toll in northern France, killing at least two prison officers and freeing a convict who had been jailed last week.

President Emmanuel Macron vowed that everything would be done to find those behind the attack as hundreds of members of the security forces were deployed for a manhunt to find the attackers and the inmate who were all still at large.

Two prison officers were killed in the attack and two others are receiving urgent medical care. The incident took place late morning at a road toll in Incarville in the Eure region of northern France. — AFP

■ MUMBAI



MUMBAI POLICE OPEN PROBE AS BILLBOARD COLLAPSE TOLL HITS 14

Police in India's financial capital have opened a criminal case against the owner of a huge billboard that collapsed on a petrol station and killed 14 people.

The giant 70 by 50-metre hoarding in Mumbai's east collapsed on Monday as fierce winds buffeted the city, accompanied by rain and dust storms.

"Medical treatment is currently being provided to 44 injured individuals, with 31 already discharged after receiving treatment," the city's municipal corporation said. "Unfortunately, 14 people (succumbed) to death in this mishap," it added. — AFP

■ BEIJING



PUTIN TO MEET XI IN BEIJING SEEKING GREATER SUPPORT

Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit China this week, both countries announced on Tuesday, meeting Xi Jinping. Putin will be in Beijing from Thursday to Friday, Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said in a statement. "President Xi Jinping will exchange views with President Putin on bilateral ties, cooperation in various fields," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said.

The Kremlin said the two leaders would discuss their "comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation" as well as "define key areas of development and cooperation". — AFP

In Kyiv, Blinken says US aid package arriving



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky attend a meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Kyiv. — Reuters

KYIV: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken told President Volodymyr Zelenskiy during a trip to Kyiv on Tuesday that part of a major US aid package had arrived in Ukraine and that more was on its way that was going to "make a real difference".

Blinken's trip is the first by a senior US official since Congress passed a long-delayed \$61 billion aid package last month. Kyiv's outmanned troops are battling a new Russian offensive in the northeast as well as assaults in the east.

"We know this is a challenging time. But we also know that in the near term the assistance is now on the way, some of it has already arrived and more of it will be

arriving," Blinken said. "And that's going to make a real difference against the ongoing Russian aggression on the battlefield."

Ukraine recaptured swathes of territory during the first year after Russia's attack in 2022, but a Ukrainian counter-offensive faltered last year and in recent months Russia has retaken the initiative at the frontline.

Zelenskiy, addressing Blinken in English, said air defence supplies were "the biggest deficit for us" with Russia conducting long-range aerial attacks since March that have pounded electricity facilities and caused blackouts.

Blinken arrived in Kyiv by train early on Tuesday morning on

the previously undisclosed visit, which comes days after Russia launched a ground incursion into the north of the region of Kharkiv, opening a new front and stretching Ukraine's soldiers.

The trip aimed to "send a strong signal of reassurance to the Ukrainians who are obviously in a very difficult moment," said a US official who briefed reporters travelling with Blinken.

"The Secretary's mission here is really to talk about how our supplemental assistance is going to be executed in a fashion to help shore up their defences (and) enable them to increasingly take back the initiative on the battlefield," the official said.

— Reuters

Georgian parliament passes 'foreign influence' bill despite protests

TBILISI: Georgia's parliament on Tuesday adopted a controversial "foreign influence" law that has sparked weeks of mass protests against the measure, which Brussels has warned would undermine Tbilisi's European aspirations.

Lawmakers voted 84 to 30 to pass in its third and final reading the law, which was widely denounced as mirroring repressive Russian legislation used to silence dissent.

The vote came as street protests continued outside the building for more than a month.

Scuffles had broken out inside the chamber earlier as opposition MPs, who strongly oppose the measure, clashed with lawmakers from the ruling Georgian Dream party ahead of the vote.

And there were also clashes between riot police and protesters outside the building in the centre of Tbilisi.

Critics say the bill is a symbol of the ex-Soviet republic's drift closer to Russia's orbit over recent years.

Around 2,000 mainly young protesters gathered outside parliament for another day of protests on Tuesday.

Tbilisi has seen weeks of mass rallies over the bill that culminated on Saturday, when up to 100,000 people took to the streets in the largest anti-government rally in Georgia's recent history.

The EU has said the law is "incompatible" with Georgia's long-standing bid for joining the 27-nation bloc, while Washington has warned its adoption would signal Tbilisi's departure from the Western orbit.

Both protesters and Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze have vowed not to back down. Fresh rallies have been called for Tuesday evening.

The bill requires NGOs and media outlets that receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad to register as bodies "pursuing the interests of a foreign power".



Georgian demonstrators attempt to break into the parliament through a metal barrier, in Tbilisi. — AFP

The EU repeated on Tuesday its position that the bill undermines Tbilisi's desire to move closer to the bloc.

"EU member countries are very clear that if this law is adopted it will be a serious obstacle for Georgia in its European perspective," said its spokesman, Peter Stano.

Scuffles had broken out inside the chamber as opposition MPs clashed with lawmakers from the ruling Georgian Dream party

Georgian President Salome Zurbashvili has vowed to veto the law, though Georgian Dream has enough MPs to override it.

Georgian Dream backed down from pushing through a similar "foreign agents" law a year ago in the face of massive street rallies.

NGOs and government critics have reported months of intimidation and harassment in the run-up to the bill being reintroduced in a targeted campaign that has escalated amid the tensions. — AFP

Indonesia flood death toll rises to 57 with 22 missing

JAKARTA: Rescuers recovered more bodies on Tuesday after weekend flash floods and cold lava flow on Indonesia's Sumatra island killed at least 57 people and left another 22 missing, provincial officials said. Hours of heavy rain caused large volcanic rocks to roll down one of Indonesia's most active volcanoes into six districts on Sumatra island on Saturday evening while flooding inundated roads, homes and mosques.

"To date, 57 victims have been found dead," Ilham Wahab, West Sumatra disaster mitigation agency official said, adding 22 people were still missing.

Workers cleaned up damaged buildings after the deluge while rescuers deployed a thermal drone to help the search, using excavators and their bare hands to try to find survivors in the rivers and rubble.

"For the emergency response, heavy equipment has moved to clean up the disaster areas. And after this, we will go to shelters to ensure affected communities are served well," national disaster mitigation agency (BNPB) chief Suharyanto told reporters on Tuesday.

More than 3,300 people have also evacuated from the affected areas, according to authorities.

They warned the death toll could rise further as the search for the dozens missing continued.

The search was urgent as rescuers only had a "golden time" of six days to find survivors, Suharyanto said.

Residents described the terror late on Saturday as the floods, bringing along volcanic materials and logs, inundated their neighbourhoods and destroyed their houses.

Dozens of houses were swept away and rescuers said many of the victims were found in or around nearby rivers. Workers rushed to clear and repair a damaged bridge to ease access to the area. — AFP



People drive their motorcycles over a makeshift pathway made from wooden slabs to avoid the mud, at Rambatan Village. — AFP



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Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE/24/036 RE-CALL	Remedial Works for Bridges at Muscat Governorate Package 1	22/05/2024	29/05/2024
PRE/24/042 RE-CALL	Beautification of Mutarih Wall	02/06/2024	23/06/2024
PRE/24/048 RE-CALL	Offices Renovation in Building "A" at Muscat Municipality	02/06/2024	23/06/2024
PRE/24/076	Consultancy Services for Supervision of the Construction for Dualization of Al Nuzha Street	02/06/2024	23/06/2024
PRE/24/093	Consultancy Services for Supervision of Roads in AL Khoudh Village	22/05/2024	29/05/2024
PRE/24/115	Maintenance of Roads in Al Amirat & Qurayat	25/05/2024	03/06/2024
PRE/24/116	Maintenance of Roads in Boushar, Al Seeb, Muscat & Muttrah	25/05/2024	03/06/2024
PRE/24/120	Beautification & Development of Al-Sawaqim Area in Qurayat	02/06/2024	23/06/2024
PRE/24/121	RFP for Replacement & Maintenance of Network Switches	02/06/2024	23/06/2024
PRE/24/123	Rehabilitation Works from Municipality Street Intersection to Wadi Al-Kabir Bridge Intersection	02/06/2024	23/06/2024
PRE/24/124	Design & Construction of Wadi Channels, Box Culverts & Protection Works in Al Bustan at Muttrah	02/06/2024	23/06/2024
PRE/24/125	Supply & Installation of Tactile System at Golden Jubilee Walkway	02/06/2024	23/06/2024
PRE/24/126	Construction of Parking in Al Mabela South	02/06/2024	23/06/2024
PRE/24/127	Proposed Solutions to Resolve Storm Water Stagnation in Al Mabela	02/06/2024	23/06/2024
PRE/24/128	Construction of Roads leading to Al Ezab Area in Al Jifneen	02/06/2024	23/06/2024
PRE/24/131	Supply of LED Street Light & Cloud Based Street Light Management System - Phase 3	02/06/2024	23/06/2024

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Climate catastrophe in the shadow of conflict



Rumaitha Al Busaidi

As I watched the harrowing scenes from Gaza unfold on my screen, the stark images of devastation and resilience thousands of miles away resonated deeply with me. While I have never set foot on Gaza, the profound impact of its plight on my consciousness has driven me to engage from afar, working tirelessly with friends on the ground to assist in evacuations and provide support amidst the chaos. From my vantage point, the situation is distressingly clear: Gaza’s environment, already burdened by prolonged conflict, is now facing unprecedented strain from climate impacts directly linked to the ongoing military actions.

The military operations in Gaza have produced emissions greater than the annual carbon footprint of more than 20 of the world’s most climate-vulnerable nations. This staggering revelation comes from a study detailing emissions from aircraft missions, tanks, other vehicles, and the environmental toll of manufacturing and detonating military arsenal. Such insights provide only a glimpse into the vast military “boot print” of war, which extends far beyond the immediate battlefield.

This environmental degradation is more than an ecological issue; it is a profound human rights concern. The aftermath of conflict leaves a scarred landscape where agriculture struggles to rebound, water sources

are contaminated, and civilian populations suffer from increased health problems amidst the ruins. In Gaza, this reality is stark, with essential infrastructure devastated and prospects for recovery grim due to ongoing instability. The assault has disrupted not just the physical landscape but also the capacity of the people in Gaza to respond to and recover from environmental changes, trapping them in a vicious cycle of vulnerability and crisis.

The destruction caused by these military operations often necessitates massive reconstruction efforts, which themselves are significant sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Rebuilding destroyed buildings, roads, and infrastructure requires large quantities of concrete, steel, and other materials whose production is carbon-intensive.

Incorporating these environmental impacts into discussions about military operations is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the true costs of conflict. It highlights the need for global policies that consider the environmental impacts of security and defence strategies, advocating for reduced reliance on military solutions to international disputes and increased investment in sustainable and peaceful alternatives.

The stories of resilience emerging from Gaza have been both heartbreaking and inspiring. Families reuse

THE MILITARY OPERATIONS IN GAZA HAVE PRODUCED EMISSIONS GREATER THAN THE ANNUAL CARBON FOOTPRINT OF MORE THAN 20 OF THE WORLD'S MOST CLIMATE-VULNERABLE NATIONS

greywater to sustain basic life; communities organise to clear rubble and replant, attempting to restore a semblance of normalcy amid the ruins. These acts of resilience are powerful reminders of the human spirit’s capacity to endure and adapt, but they are also a call to action for those of us in the global community.

As an climate advocate, my role extends beyond research and conservation; it involves leveraging my platform to spotlight these critical issues. Advocating for a ceasefire is not just a call for peace but a fundamental prerequisite for any meaningful recovery and climate action. A ceasefire would allow for the necessary assessment and rehabilitation of the environment and provide a framework within which sustainable and resilient rebuilding could commence.

Addressing these issues requires an international focus on not only managing but preventing conflict-induced disasters. This involves holding conversations at global forums about the environmental impact of warfare and pushing for policies that integrate climate considerations into peacemaking and peacekeeping efforts.

The ongoing onslaught in Gaza serve as a stark reminder of the interconnectedness of our environment and geopolitical dynamics. I urge global leaders and communities to consider the broader implications of conflict on our planet.

UN nears deal on combatting biopiracy

AGNES PEDRERO

The fight against biopiracy — plundering genetic resources and the traditional knowledge surrounding them — could soon be based on an international treaty which is being finalised at negotiations that began on Monday.

“Let me be candid — negotiations will not be easy,” warned Daren Tang, head of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), as the diplomatic conference began in Geneva.

After more than 20 years of talks on the subject, WIPO’s more than 190 member states are meeting at the agency’s Geneva headquarters until May 24 for negotiations on finalising a treaty.

The United Nations agency dealing with patenting and innovation will try to conclude an agreement by consensus. Tang said countries were on “the cusp of a truly landmark agreement”.

“There is no contradiction between a robust and predictable IP regime — one that incentivises innovation, attracts investments and drives game-changing research — and one that responds to the needs of all countries and their communities everywhere, including those from Indigenous peoples, as well as from local communities,” he said. The draft treaty text says patent applicants would be required to disclose from which country the genetic resources in an invention came, and the indigenous people who provided the associated traditional knowledge. “It’s about fighting biopiracy — that’s to say the use of traditional knowledge or genetic resources without the agreement of those who held them and without them being able to benefit from them,” said Christophe Bigot, who is leading the French delegation. However, Kenya, speaking on behalf of African countries, said the treaty needed to be more comprehensive and include “mandatory disclosure requirements”.

“We are acutely aware of how our communities have often been marginalised and excluded from the benefits derived from the commercialisation and use of their knowledge and resources,” said Kenya. While natural genetic resources — such as those found in medicinal plants, agricultural crops and animal breeds — cannot be directly protected as international property, inventions developed using them can be patented. These resources are increasingly used by companies in everything from cosmetics to seeds, medicines, biotechnology and food supplements. As it is currently not mandatory to publish the origin of innovations, many developing countries are concerned that patents are being granted that either circumvent the rights of indigenous people. — AFP



Didier Laouras

The writer is AFP’s Security, Defence, Diplomacy correspondent

Russia’s Kharkiv push to stretch Ukraine

Russia’s offensive around Ukraine’s Kharkiv likely aims more at presenting Kyiv with a strategic quandary over where to deploy its already stretched forces than taking the major city, experts say.

Moscow’s troops were by Monday firing on around 30 villages in the northeast region and had occupied tens of square kilometres in the space of a few days.

But analysts don’t see Russia’s immediate aim as taking Ukraine’s second-largest city, with a pre-war population of 1.4 million, after Moscow already failed to capture the industrial hub in its initial invasion from February 2022.

“This Russian force is of insufficient size to seize a city the size of Kharkiv,” Australian former general Mick Ryan wrote on blogging platform Substack.

“It could however hold it at risk with increased artillery strikes,” he added, saying the coming weeks “may be one of the toughest moments for Ukraine in the war so far”.

Over the two years of its war, Russia has been running complementary campaigns of attrition of men and materiel on the battlefield and public opinion among Kyiv’s allies.

It still holds a numerical advantage, bolstered by the months of dallying in Washington over the \$61-billion aid package finally passed in April.

The Ukrainians “were forced to ration their shells and war materiel for months, leading to higher attrition rates,” said Ivan Klyszcz of the Estonia-based International Center for Defense and Security (ICDS).

“The promise of new US military support meant that the rationing does not need to be as rigorous anymore,” Klyszcz added, although Kyiv “must continue to hold as much territory and preserve as many forces as possible”.

Following the failure of Ukraine’s offensive last summer and the “rasputitsa” period of melting snow and thick mud across the country, the initiative is now back with Russia.

Moscow is also able to absorb punishing losses given its “human reserves and industrial capacity much greater than Ukraine’s,” said Pierre Razoux of the Mediterranean



Vovchansk resident holds a covered cage with a parrot as she sits inside an evacuation bus to Kharkiv, amid Russia’s attack on Ukraine, near the frontline town of Vovchansk, Ukraine, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Foundation for Strategic Studies (FMES).

Russia’s government says it wants to create a “buffer zone” to protect its border region of Belgorod that has regularly come under bombardment.

OVER THE TWO YEARS OF ITS WAR, RUSSIA HAS BEEN RUNNING COMPLEMENTARY CAMPAIGNS OF ATTRITION OF MEN AND MATERIEL ON THE BATTLEFIELD AND PUBLIC OPINION AMONG KYIV’S ALLIES

The Kharkiv region’s location on the border means “the Russians can mobilise air support, drones and artillery, firing from within their territory, giving them shorter supply lines and the cover of air superiority,” Razoux said. “They’re in an optimal position.” Ukraine for its part faces a basic strategic dilemma.

“They have to defend the front line, but also strategic sites that they must not lose,” Razoux added, highlighting especially major cities and the roads linking them back to Ukraine’s western boundaries with Romania and Poland.

The question for the defenders is “what’s more important, defending a key objective or holding the front line?” he asked.

For now, pulling off both missions

seems out of Kyiv’s reach.

“This is both a military and a political issue,” Ryan wrote. “If the Ukrainians decide to hold ground at all costs, they will lose more of their increasingly smaller army; if they chose to preserve their army, they will have to give up ground”.

It may not be immediately clear whether the Russians can pull off a major push in the northeast, and it will take still longer for any strategic impact to show up elsewhere along the front line.

“There does not seem to be a fundamental change in (Russian) strategy,” Klyszcz said, as “capturing the entire Donbas region... appears a higher priority for Russia at this stage”.

Retired French general Olivier Kempf wrote on his blog that Russia’s push into the Kharkiv region “is evidence of weak initial resistance”.

Ukrainian forces would have avoided “expending too many forces in salients that are tricky to defend,” he added.

“Now we will see the intentions and capabilities of both sides,” Kempf predicted, judging the ground taken so far “not necessarily significant”.

Russian leader Vladimir Putin is likely aiming to change minds further from the fighting, including among Kyiv’s Western allies. His attention will be on the upcoming American presidential election and the possible return to power of Donald Trump, who has little interest in keeping up Ukraine aid. “If Ukraine flags before the election, Trump would take it as proof Joe Biden is a loser who bet on the wrong horse,” Razoux said.

For those looking for quality life

Driven by low tax rates and innovative residency and citizenship programmes, countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have become the preferred choice of investors and individuals looking for relocation or residency.

Leave alone new investors, Arabs with citizenship in European countries are migrating to the Gulf countries. Reasons cited by experts vary from “ease of doing business” to “golden visas,” which provide residency for investors, entrepreneurs and highly skilled workers.

In addition to this, the region’s modern infrastructure, affluence, abundant natural resources and better quality lifestyle make it an attractive prospect for foreign investors.

“Some immigrants had previously been living in Gulf countries before moving to Europe and chose to leave Europe after failing to integrate,” points out a Media Line, an American news agency.

Statistics quoted by the agency that extensively reports on Middle East events show a surge of over 30 per cent in the number of European citizens of Arab origin in some Gulf countries.

“The number of European immigrants of Arab origin began to increase in 2023 and at the beginning of 2024,” the report indicates, adding, “many left European countries due to economic problems and high taxes, seeking the luxurious lifestyles available in the Gulf”.

Called foreign friendly, the innovative golden visas under the residency by investment programme in Oman, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar offer long-term visas to international investors of high net worth by guaranteeing them access to a high standard of living along with the ability to live, work, study and travel visa-free.

Driven by Vision 2040, Oman, launched the prestigious Golden Visa programme in 2021, with a range of benefits to attract foreign investors, entrepreneurs and skilled professionals.



Samuel Kutty
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The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

LEAVE ALONE NEW INVESTORS, ARABS WITH CITIZENSHIP IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, INCLUDING IMMIGRANTS WHO OBTAINED PASSPORTS RECENTLY, ARE MIGRATING TO THE GULF COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

It may be noted that Oman does not offer a golden visa or citizenship by investment programme similar to those offered elsewhere. Such golden passport programmes often allow individuals to “obtain citizenship or residency rights through substantial investment, typically in real estate and national development funds”.

One of the major advantages of the Oman’s Golden Visa is the opportunity it provides for individuals to establish and expand their businesses in the country.

As experts point out, investors and entrepreneurs can benefit from the Sultanate of Oman’s strategic location, business-friendly policies and strong economy.

The fact is that residency-based investment programmes are growing in the Gulf countries as more governments diversify their economies to reduce their dependence on oil and gas sectors.

Along with the long-term residency comes the recent creation of a common travel area and tourist visas that are similar to the Schengen Zone. The implementation of this decision will dissolve the requirement for different visas when visiting different GCC member countries.

The new tourist visa that comes as part of the Gulf Strategy for Tourism 2023–2030 will make visitors eligible to use a single tourist visa in order to visit Oman, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

That’s not all. Oman continues to remain a country with one of the lowest taxes and easiest tax compliance regulations as part of its efforts to stay relevant and ensure foreign investors remain interested in the region.

According to a ranking published by expat insurance firm William Russell, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE are the top four affordable tax-free countries to relocate to in 2024.

Among these, Oman comes in at the top with a relocation score of 7.92. Oman is the cheapest country to purchase or rent an apartment, as it has the lowest monthly living costs. It is also the third-cheapest country for monthly utility bills.

THE KING’S PORTRAIT



■ A handout image released on Tuesday, shows a portrait of Britain’s King Charles by artist Jonathan Yeo. – Reuters

A turning point for clean cooking

For most of her life, Florence Auma Ode cooked over an open fire in her Kenyan home. The resulting smoke coated the walls with a layer of soot and filled her lungs — and those of her family members — with particulate matter.

In 2022, Florence’s family invested nearly a month’s salary in a modern two-burner bioethanol stove, which uses affordable fuel and cooks food quickly and cleanly.

The stove has improved the health of the whole family. Equally important, Florence no longer has to spend five hours each day collecting firewood. Now she can use that time to take classes, generate income, or enjoy leisure activities.

In the Global North, achieving clean cooking for all may seem mundane compared to other, more grandiose forms of climate action.

But switching to clean-cooking technologies would cut global carbon dioxide emissions by 1.5 billion tonnes, the same amount generated by all planes and ships today.

And given that forests the size of Ireland are lost each year to fuel-wood and charcoal production, eradicating dirty cooking would significantly reduce deforestation and biodiversity loss.

Despite this enormous potential, 2.4 billion people, mainly women, still cook over and heat their homes with open fires that burn wood, charcoal, or dung, leading to 3.2 million annual premature deaths from particulate pollution



Razan Khalifa Al Mubarak

The writer is UN Climate Change High-Level Champion for COP28, is President of the International Union for Conservation of Nature



Joseph Nganga

The writer is Interim CEO of the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet

exposure.

The problem is most acute in Sub-Saharan Africa, where four out of five individuals lack access to clean-cooking solutions, causing pollution-related diseases to impede productivity and human development.

In addition to reducing emissions and environmental damage, promoting clean cooking would help restore basic dignity to women and girls, who are often expected to bear the burden of domestic labour.

Universal clean-cooking access would mean that, like Florence, women and girls — numbering more than 600 million in Africa — could use the time they now spend collecting firewood and preparing food in hazardous conditions to pursue education, employment and personal growth.

If the benefits are so clear cut, what is holding us back from achieving clean cooking for all? The problem is not technical: KOKO Networks, for example, has developed liquid bioethanol stoves that cost 85 per cent less, and whose fuel costs up to 40 per cent less, than charcoal stoves. Nevertheless, affordability remains a challenge.

This is compounded by entrenched gender norms that often undervalue women’s domestic labour and limit their control over household budgets.

Innovative financing mechanisms such as on-bill lending, which enables families to repay the upfront costs of a stove through their utility bills, would help. But a change in mindset is also needed.

Grassroots education is crucial to normalising clean cooking and bringing along Africans working in the charcoal industry.

According to an assessment by the World Food Programme and The Rockefeller Foundation, as part of The School Meals Coalition in Kenya, a subsidy programme for schools to install modern kitchens would provide ten million children with access to clean cooking.

It would also create around

400,000 jobs and more than two million additional jobs in related sectors, largely for women and young people.

The initiative is projected to avoid at least nine million tons of emissions and preserve around six million trees.

Pulling these levers requires financing.

According to the International Energy Agency, investing \$8 billion annually in stoves and infrastructure until 2030 would provide universal access to clean cooking in Sub-Saharan Africa. To that end, the Global Electric Cooking Coalition is working to enable a mass transition to clean cooking in at least ten countries



Particulate pollution exposure is resulting in 3.2 million premature deaths every year.

across Africa, Asia and Latin America by 2030.

Likewise, the United Nations Climate Change High-Level Champions are collaborating with non-state actors to achieve universal clean-cooking access by 2030, a target that requires at least \$10 billion annually in innovative finance.

The models are in place to scale clean cooking in Africa. Now rich-country governments, multilateral institutions, the private sector and international organisations need to step up and provide the necessary funding.

The continued prevalence of dirty cooking in Africa further underscores that climate finance has long been inefficient and unjust. To reverse this trend, global leaders must introduce a new financing pact for universal clean cooking at this week’s IEA Summit on Clean Cooking in Africa.

The mainstreaming of clean cooking in Africa is more than just a practical solution to the climate crisis; it is a commitment that the Global North must make to the continent that has contributed the least to global warming but is nonetheless most vulnerable to its effects. Most critically, it will ensure that Africa’s women and girls can participate in – and benefit from – building a greener, healthier and more equitable future.

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SPORT

TABILO
FAIRYTALE
CONTINUES
AFTER
DJOKOVIC
UPSET

Chile's Alejandro Tabilo celebrates after winning his match against Serbia's Novak Djokovic at the ATP Rome Open at Foro Italico in Rome. — AFP



Today I'm really proud of myself because I feel like I'm playing better and for sure this was the best day for me in Rome

IGA SWIATEK
Polish World No 1

Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates after winning her quarterfinal match against Madison Keys of the US. — Reuters



USA's Taylor Fritz celebrates after winning his round of 16 match against Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov at the ATP Rome Open on Tuesday. — Reuters



SWIATEK CRUISES INTO ROME LAST FOUR

ROME: Iga Swiatek strolled into the Rome Open semifinals with a straight-sets 6-1, 6-3 win over Madison Keys on Tuesday as Alejandro Tabilo followed up his shock elimination of Novak Djokovic by reaching the men's last eight.

World number one Swiatek continued her bid for a third Rome title in imperious style, dealing with American Keys in little more than an hour on a baking centre court.

"Today I'm really proud of myself because I feel like I'm playing better and for sure this was the best day for me in Rome," said Swiatek.

In the last four, Swiatek will take on Zheng Qinwen or third seed Coco Gauff, who face off in the day's final match on centre court.

She maintained her red-hot form at the Foro Italico, where she has not yet dropped a set, ahead of her French Open title defence later this month.

The three-time Roland Garros champion arrived in Rome off the back of winning a third WTA 1000 title of the season in Madrid.

And she could yet become the first woman since Serena Williams in 2013 to win in the Spanish and Italian capitals in the same season.

UNREAL FEELING

Chile's Tabilo stunned 24-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic in straight sets on Sunday and made the quarterfinals after winning a hugely entertaining battle with Khachanov, 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (12/10).

Tabilo reached the last eight of a Masters 1000 event for the first time and will next play qualifier Thiago Monteiro.

"Just being in my first quarter-final is an unreal feeling, just trying to soak it all in right now. It's a crazy feeling," said Tabilo.

The 26-year-old had a much harder time of it against 18th-ranked Khachanov, whose six tour titles have all come on hard courts, than against Djokovic.

Tabilo came through a thrilling

second-set tie-break which featured 11 service breaks, two set points for Khachanov and five match points, exploding with joy after the winning volley.

"There was just so much nerves there, like feeling that arm really heavy and in the last few service points I was like 'I just gotta risk it all,'" added Tabilo.

"With the win two days ago it's been crazy. I just had to turn off the phone and just kind of be with the team, be with the people close to me and I'm just happy that I was able to refresh the mind."

Next up for the men on centre court will be Alexander Zverev, who faces unseeded Nuno Borges in the men's last 16 for a quarterfinal clash with Taylor Fritz.

FRITZ THROUGH

American Fritz beat eighth seed Grigor Dimitrov after losing a 20-minute tie-break in the second set before eventually coming through 6-2, 6-7 (11/13), 6-1.

"It's easy to go back and I guess dwell on that the whole third set but I did a really good job in just putting it behind me," said Fritz.

Men's champion Daniil Medvedev faces Tommy Paul after coming through a gruelling match against qualifier Hamad Medjedovic on Monday.

The 28-year-old second seed has a great chance to retain his title as the men's tournament has been shorn of a host of big names, including the man he beat to last year's crown Holger Rune.

And with Madrid champion Andrey Rublev and the beaten finalist Felix Auger-Aliassime also falling, an event without the world's top three players is now wide open.

As well as Djokovic's early exit, Italian world number two Jannik Sinner and third-ranked Carlos Alcaraz withdrew injured before the tournament.

Also hoping to pounce is sixth seed and reigning Monte Carlo champion Stefanos Tsitsipas, who takes on Australia's Alex de Minaur. — AFP

Gujarat out of IPL play-off race after washout

AHMEDABAD: Gujarat Titans have been knocked out of the play-off race after rain forced their IPL match against Kolkata Knight Riders to be abandoned without a ball bowled in Ahmedabad on Monday.

The two teams took one point each, confirming a top-two finish for table-toppers Kolkata, who remain the only side to have already qualified for the next stage. The top four teams will make the play-offs, but the first and second-placed sides have the advantage of two chances to qualify for the final on May 26 in Chennai.

The unseasonal rain in Ahmedabad left thousands of fans disappointed at the world's biggest cricket stadium.

Rain was unrelenting for close to five hours as the two captains eventually shook hands without even going for the toss.

Shubman Gill-led Gujarat, who won the IPL in their debut season in 2022 under Hardik Pandya, joined Mumbai Indians and bottom-placed Punjab Kings to be out of the title race.

Kolkata have 10 wins and 19 points in 13 matches to stay ahead of second-placed Rajasthan Royals. Six teams including defending champions Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru stay in the hunt for the remaining three spots for the play-offs. — AFP



ORSC set for first Oman Badminton Club Championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 14

The Oman Racket Sports Committee (ORSC) is set to begin its inaugural edition of 2024 Oman Badminton Club Championship on Thursday. The three-day event will take place at the AMM Arena in Bausher.

As many as 12 clubs representing five governorates across the Sultanate of Oman will take part in the championship including: Al Amerat, Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Bausher, Oman Club, Al Seeb, Al Shabab, Saham, Majees, Salalah, Masirah, Qurayat and Ibri.

Three main categories will feature in this edition of the national event namely: senior category with 30 players registered, 19 players in the double category and 17 players in the Under-15 category.

It is the first badminton event for the clubs at the men's level as ORSC had organised the first edition of badminton tournaments for girls as part of the Women's Sports activities in October 2023 in collaboration with the Women's Sports Department at the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth.

The playing format of the



Dr Abdulrahim al Droushi

tournament will start with group matches as preliminary rounds.

The men's singles and men's doubles competitions have been divided into groups based on player rankings with a round-robin and knockout system in place. The top 16 teams/players in each of these competitions will qualify for the knockout stage and reaching to the final match.

As for the Under-15 category, the same competition format will be applied but without player rankings as it is unavailable currently. Players finishing in the top four positions in each competition will receive cash prizes along with the championship trophy for the first-place winner in



The inaugural Oman Badminton Club Championship will run for three days.

each category.

The international umpire, Seyed Omid Moghadaszadeh from Iran, was appointed as general referee of the tournament besides eight umpires including five Omani referees. The assistant general referee will be Ahmed al Mafaraji.

Dr Abdulrahim bin Musallam al Droushi, Chairman of ORSC, said that it is a great step to host the first edition of the Badminton Clubs Championship. "We are pleased with the number of the clubs who have registered in the tournament as they exceeded our expectations and this reflect the players' and their clubs' keen interest in expanding participation in individual sports. This aligns

with our goals and the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth's strategy to support all sports, particularly individual ones."

"This championship holds great importance for us in developing the level of amateur players. We have opened the door for non-Omani professional players to participate in the men's doubles competition as this step will allow to make a difference in enhancing their levels. Additionally, it serves the purpose of scouting talents for our national teams from the participants in the under-15 category, as well as improving our expertise in hosting badminton events across all technical and administrative aspects," he added.

Oman team takes part in Sharjah Masters chess

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 14

The Oman national chess team is participating in the seventh Sharjah Masters International chess tournament, hosted by the Sharjah Chess Cultural Club from May 14 to 23. The tournament features 300 players from 60 countries.

The Omani national chess team is represented by six players: Mohammed bin Khalfan al Saadi, Rashid al Jabri, Saeed bin Ahmed al Maamari, Khalfan al Hosni, Rashid bin Ali al Balushi and Mazin al Hanbali. The team's training during the tournament will be led by coach Bashir al Qadimi.

In preparation for this major international tournament, the Oman national team has undergone training sessions via video conferencing under the supervision of Kazakhstani coach Dmitry Sasvikan. The tournament brings together top grandmasters, international players and title holders from around the world.

Among the participants are defending champion India's Arjun Erigaisi, Iranian youth world champion Parham Maghsoodloo, Chinese player Yu Yangyi, Azerbaijani World Cup winner Teymur Rejabov and Iranian Sharjah Masters champion in its fourth edition, Amin Tabatabaei.



Indian footballer lauds Oman national team

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAY 14

Oman national team has a great future in making the country proud by winning laurels both at homeland and international matches and it is just a matter of time before they enhance their defensive skills as well as attacking front, says ace Indian footballer Anas Edathodika.

Anas, who represented India at the 2019 AFC Asian Cup and made his senior international debut for India in 2017 in a 3-2 friendly win against Cambodia, was in Oman to attend the Soccer Carnival organised by Indian daily 'Gulf Madhyamam' recently and feted the winners and runners-up.

In a tete-a-tete with the Observer, Anas observed that the first Gulf Cup winners have a long way to go before they win global titles from across the continents.

"When you take the history, Oman was able to pull off a historic win over Japan in the Asian qualifiers for Qatar 2022, thanks to both the team and goalkeeper Fayez al Rushaidi for their immaculate performance in compiling all their tactics in their defence mechanism as well as in securing better position against the



Anas Edathodika

opponents," said Anas.

The centre-back, who is currently the defender of the Gokulam Kerala FC, lauded the efforts of expatriate football clubs which are making headways in promoting the game among the residents as well.

"Oman has made headways in football over the past several decades and a well-planned and executed strategy is what is required before it could bring global titles home," he added.

The Soccer Carnival saw 16 football teams from across the country vying for the top spots

at the Bausher Club Stadium, thanks to the first of its kind 'Soccer Carnival 2024', that aimed to offer two days packed with adrenaline rush to the young footballers of the Sultanate of Oman.

Organised by 'Gulf Madhyamam', which is the first international Indian newspaper and the only one being printed in Oman, in association with KMFA - Kerala Muscat Football Association, a body of footballers from both countries. The sevens football tournament was one of its kind which capital city hasn't witnessed hitherto.

The kick-off took place for group-stage matches whereas quarterfinals were held the next day, followed by semifinals and final. Winners took home RO 600 cash along with winner's trophy and runners-up received trophy and RO 300 in cash. Outstanding players were also honoured and prizes were given away to them.

The carnival with non-stop spot games and events involving the spectators and their families, saw Raj Kalesh, celebrity of family audience, add flavour to the excitement. Special commentator Raashid Kottakkal's presence added great value to the carnival with his commentary.



RECALL DATE: 15/05/2024

Recall

TOYOTA
RAIZE

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
Raize	September 12, 2022 through January 13, 2023	65

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected.

#Subject to revision, based on the information received from the manufacturer, from time to time.

Recall consequence Due to the assemble fault at the brake caliper assembly line, the assembly tools interfered with the slide pin boots during assembly, it caused damage on the boots. If the water enters in the slide pin boots and cause the rust, it may lead to early wear of the brake pads.

Recall Action To replace the front disc brake cylinder slide pin boot and if necessary, replace the brake cylinder mounting. This Customer Satisfaction Campaign is set to expire on 31/01/2027

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.go>



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YAMAL, RAPHINHA
TAKE BARCA TO

SECOND

BARCELONA: Lamine Yamal and Raphinha struck to earn Barcelona a 2-0 win over Real Sociedad on Monday, taking their team second, a point above Catalan rivals Girona. Defeat is a setback to La Real's ambitions of playing Europa League football next season, leaving them seventh behind Real Betis, who won on Sunday.

Last season's champions Barcelona are playing for nothing but pride in the final weeks of a disappointing campaign, and finishing above high-flying minnows Girona is imperative to achieve even a modicum of that.

Real Madrid sealed their title win at a canter after Barcelona were beaten 4-2 by Girona little over a week ago.

Barca's brightest light Yamal opened the scoring after 40 minutes and Raphinha added a late penalty to seal the win.

"La Real are a great team, it's an important victory for us, we had a good game in general," Barca coach Xavi told Movistar.

Xavi benched Uruguayan centre-back Ronald Araujo, bereft of form this season and whose red card against Paris Saint-Germain contributed heavily to their Champions League collapse.

With Madrid swiping La Liga back off the Catalans, they end the season trophyless and licking their wounds.

The Canary Islander is still building form and fitness after a string of injury problems ahead of Euro 2024, and helped Barca control the game.

Striker Robert Lewandowski was unusually active in his team's pressing, perhaps motivated by the race to finish as La Liga's top scorer.

At the other end, Marc-Andre ter Stegen denied Sheraldo Becker after he burst beyond Pau Cubarsi, but the



Suriname international had pushed the young defender in any case.

Shortly afterwards, Becker got in behind Barcelona's high line again and this time fired home, but was correctly flagged offside.

Real Sociedad stopper Alex Remiro saved well from Yamal after the 16-year-old winger combined with Ilkay Gundogan to break into the area.

Raphinha struck the post towards

Barcelona's Spanish forward #27 Lamine Yamal celebrates scoring his team's first goal with Raphinha (L) during the Spanish league match between FC Barcelona and Real Sociedad. — AFP

the end of the first half with a long-range effort and Gundogan turned the rebound over after it fell to him at an awkward angle.

It was a warning Real Sociedad did not heed with Yamal sending Barca ahead soon after.

Lewandowski fed Gundogan well with a low through-ball and the German teed up the winger to steer home his fifth league goal of the season.

WE LEAVE HERE HURT

Barcelona started the second half strongly with Raphinha twice coming close with fine long-range efforts.

Real Sociedad almost levelled when Brais Mendez won the ball back high up and fired inches wide of Ter Stegen's far post.

Remiro denied Barca substitute Ferran Torres and Yamal's effort was deflected wide after a fine solo dribble with the hosts struggling to kill off the game.

Eventually they managed it when Alvaro Odriozola's handball led to a penalty — with VAR calling the referee to check the incident long after it occurred — and Raphinha dispatched it with aplomb.

"They took a few minutes to go to the VAR (but) if they gave it then it was a penalty," said Real Sociedad midfielder Benat Turrientes.

"We leave here hurt, we came to win, we've got a lot on the line to try and get into Europe and I think we had chances, especially in the first half, to go in front.

"If you don't score these teams end up scoring against you."

Xavi took off Lewandowski with 15 minutes remaining and the Polish forward, who has 17 goals to his name this season in La Liga, trailing Girona's Artem Dovbyk by three, did not seem thrilled by the decision.

"We needed more fuel, more legs, we put in great effort and Robert did very good work," said Xavi.

"I understand Lewandowski's annoyance, I didn't like being taken off either."

Barcelona face Almeria on Thursday and Rayo Vallecano on Sunday as they try to stay in second place. — AFP



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BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 14

Nama Supply, in partnership with Nama Electricity Distribution and Nama Dhofar Services, hosted a media conference on Tuesday, May 14, 2023, to unveil their programmes focused on enhancing customer satisfaction.

The briefing covered various initiatives aimed at raising awareness regarding electricity consumption efficiency, as well as field campaigns to strengthen the partnership between service providers and the community.

The meeting aimed to educate the customers about their rights, applicable electricity tariffs and how consumers can effectively manage their electricity bills.

During the media conference, the companies' representatives provided detailed information about the eligibility for the National Electricity Subsidy (additional subsidy), while also emphasising the reliability of the electricity network and their readiness to address any emergency outages, particularly during the summer season.

Salim bin Said al Kamyani, CEO of Nama Supply, reiterated the Company's commitment to delivering the highest level of service quality and continuous development.

He highlighted Nama Supply programme to forge partnerships with various segments of the

ELECTRICITY UTILITIES READY FOR SUMMERTIME CONTINGENCIES



Top officials of Nama Group companies participating in the media briefing on Tuesday. PICTURE BY SHAMSA AL HARTHY

community and institutions through field visits and meetings with public organisations and local community institutions.

He stressed that the company strives to provide appropriate solutions that contribute to service improvement and enhance customer satisfaction.

“The company had previously launched a smartphone application called ‘Nama Services’.

The application offers several features, including the monthly electricity bill, consumption comparison with previous periods, instalment payment details, and bill payments.

Additionally, the company introduced “Thabit” service, designed to help customers avoid financial difficulties arising from

high electricity bills during the summer. This service allows customers to make fixed monthly payments throughout the year,” Al Kamyani pointed out.

Eng Alaa bin Hassan al Lawati, CEO of Nama Electricity Distribution, emphasised the company's focus on ensuring the reliability of the electricity network. The recent efforts

involved implementing and enhancing various stations and electricity lines.

Moreover, comprehensive contingency plans have been developed, equipping technical teams to effectively handle any emergency interruptions that may arise during the summer period.

Nama Distribution is also actively exploring the utilisation

of modern technology in monitoring and managing electricity networks.

Notably, the company has embarked on a significant deployment of smart meters, which offer substantial advantages for both customers and society as a whole.

The Company is currently evaluating a range of smart grid projects.

Eng Ali Essa Shammas, CEO of Nama Dhofar Services, highlighted the company's intensified efforts in preparation for the upcoming Dhofar Khareef season.

Nama Dhofar Services is fully prepared to meet the rising demand for electricity in the governorate, ensuring a seamless and efficient supply, he stressed.

Furthermore, the Nama Group companies provided an update on the progress of the smart meters project.

The completion rate has surpassed 45 per cent and work is ongoing to extend coverage to all electricity accounts. This comprehensive deployment aims to maximise the benefits and leverage the project potential to the fullest extent possible.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 14

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has launched a series of initiatives aimed at enhancing financial literacy, expanding market connectivity and aiming for emerging market status.

Haitham al Salmi (pictured), CEO of MSX, detailed these initiatives in an interview on the sidelines of the conference of Federation of Euro-Asian Stock Exchanges (conFEAS) 2024, being held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, emphasising that these efforts are crucial steps toward elevating the Exchange to emerging market status.

The MSX has recognised the critical role of financial education in fostering a culture of investment and informed decision-making among the Omani public.

To bridge the knowledge gap, MSX has introduced an innovative outreach programme that includes setting up an information booth in a bustling mall, a move that brings the stock market closer to the people.

This interactive platform serves as a gateway for potential and existing investors to understand the nuances of investing and to explore the various investment opportunities available through the Exchange.

“We are not just an exchange; we are a partner in financial education,” Al Salmi

MSX EYES EMERGING MARKET STATUS, CONNECTIVITY AND GROWTH



stated. “By demystifying the financial sector, we empower individuals to make better investment choices, which in turn contributes to a healthier economy.”

In line with its educational endeavours, MSX is also making significant strides in creating synergies with international markets. One of the Exchange's top priorities is transitioning to an emerging market classification, a status that will undoubtedly open up new avenues for growth and investment.

In preparation for this

goal is to provide a diversified and sophisticated platform for investment that caters to the evolving needs of our investors.”

In a collaborative effort with the Omani government, the MSX is also working to streamline the process for Initial Public Offerings (IPOs).

With a clear pipeline of IPOs, including 30 companies identified as potential candidates for public investment, the Exchange is setting the stage for a surge in market activity.

These planned IPOs are expected to attract significant capital inflows and offer investors a chance to participate in the growth of Oman's most promising enterprises.

Al Salmi highlighted the importance of a transparent and steady pipeline of IPOs, noting that “it is essential for market growth and for the distribution of wealth among our citizens.”

The clear trajectory for IPOs also serves as an indicator of market maturity and readiness for more sophisticated financial endeavours.

The ambitious vision of the MSX for market expansion reflects a broader strategy to not only enhance the Exchange's infrastructure but also contribute to Oman's economic diversification efforts. By focusing on investor education and market sophistication, the MSX is laying the groundwork for a vibrant investment community.

العمانية للاستثمارات التعليمية والتدريبية
oman education & training investments

TENDER NOTICE No. 001 - 2024 - OETI

Oman Education & Training Investment Co. S.A.O.G is inviting a sealed tender for the Construction of Innovation Centre Phase I at Sohar University Campus from contractors having sufficient experience in relevant field with excellent or first grade.

Tender	Description	Fees OMR	Submission Date
OETI 01- 2024	Construction of Innovation Centre Phase I with Area around 17, 457 M2 at Sohar University Campus	500/-	30/06/2024

Description	Deadline
Tender Release Date	21/05/ 2024
Last Date for collection of tenders after paying tender fee	23/05/ 2024
Receiving clarifications, if any, from bidders	08/06/2024
Respond to bidder clarifications	13/06/2024
Receiving bids	30/06/2024

The tender document will be ready for collection by the company after paying non-refundable amount of RO. 500.000/- via depositing the money in bank or by cash on or before 23/05/2024. Cash will be collected by Mr. Saud Al Jarwani, OETI, Building 20, Sohar University, Sohar. Provide the email id to be sent along with the copy of the receipt. For Bank Transfers our account details as below:

Beneficiary : Oman Education & Training Investment Company SAOG
Account No : 002020004442
Bank : Bank Sohar
Branch : Sohar Branch, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman
Swift Code : BSHROMRU

Please send the transfer receipt to sjarwani@oeti.om to receive the tender documents in CD or USB.

Tenders offers must be submitted online (softcopy with password protected) or in closed envelopes sealed, delivered at the OETI premises, tender number shall be written only on the envelope, no indication shall be made, and deadline for submission of offers is 30/06/2024 14:00 hours.

Tender should be addressed to CEO, OETI Office submitted to Mr. Saud Al Jarwani as given below during office hours 08:00 to 15:30 Sunday to Thursday.

CEO OETI Office
Building 20, Sohar University Campus
P.O Box 44, P.C. 311, Sohar. Sultanate of Oman.
Telephone: 26850100 Ext.: 450 / 612

Sohar International wins top Omani brand in the banking sector

MUSCAT: Sohar International, the fastest-growing bank in Oman, has been recognised as the ‘Top Omani Brand in the Banking Sector - 2024’ by *Alam Al Iktisaad* magazine.

This esteemed recognition underscores Sohar International’s unwavering commitment to growth, excellence, innovation, and superior service within the banking industry.

The awards ceremony, held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Thuwaini al Said, took place at the Sheraton Oman Hotel.

The ‘Top Omani Brand in the Banking Sector’ Award not only acknowledges the bank’s outstanding contributions but also celebrates its significant achievements, affirming Sohar International as a beacon of trust and reliability in Oman’s dynamic banking sector.

Through its dedication to delivering innovative financial solutions, personalised services, and a customer-centric approach, Sohar International has solidified its position as a trusted leader in Oman’s banking landscape, serving as a significant catalyst in



propelling the Sultanate of Oman’s economy forward.

Mazin bin Mahmood al Raisi, Chief Marketing Officer at Sohar International, attended the event on behalf of the bank and received the award.

In response to achieving this significant milestone, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, expressed his appreciation by stating, “We are honoured to receive this prestigious accolade, which acknowledges our leading

position within the banking sector of the Sultanate of Oman.

This recognition stands as a testament to the unwavering dedication and visionary spirit of our esteemed team.

Their steadfast commitment to excellence propels us as industry pioneers, compelling us to surpass conventional boundaries and redefine success with each step.

This achievement symbolises not only our relentless pursuit of innovation but also our steadfast devotion to serving our valued

customers and communities with utmost integrity and enthusiasm.

As the second-largest local bank and the fastest-growing bank in Oman, Sohar International remains steadfast in its commitment to solidifying its position in the market.

Through our unwavering commitment to creating value for Oman, we aspire to become a trusted institution that serves as a significant catalyst in propelling the economy and contributing to the overall development and success of our nation.”

The award ceremony convened a distinguished gathering of industry leaders, market experts, CEOs, senior government representatives, and influential decision-makers.

These prestigious awards, presented beyond mere financial success, honour the Sultanate of Oman’s top-performing companies and celebrate achievements that redefine success. By spotlighting innovation, leadership, and impact, these accolades serve as a cornerstone for strengthening and empowering the financial and business communities.

Empowering future leaders for a sustainable tomorrow



MUSCAT: The Sustainable Leaders Youth Camp (SLY), organised by Carbon6, concluded its impactful two-day event, leaving a lasting impression on 53 young participants who embody the future of sustainability leadership.

Took place on May 10 and 11, the camp served as a vibrant platform for youth to tackle pressing environmental and social issues, fostering innovation and leadership in sustainability.

Out of 281 initial applicants, 53 exceptional young minds were chosen to attend the SLY camp, showcasing their unwavering dedication and passion for creating positive change.

Throughout the event, participants engaged in workshops, interactive activities, and inspirational talks, equipping themselves with the skills and mindset needed to address the challenges of tomorrow.

The closing ceremony on May 11 was graced by Dr Hashil al Mahrouqi, CEO of Omran, as the guest of honour. Omran’s platinum sponsorship reflects a strong commitment to sustainability and youth development.

Additionally, beah’s participation as a golden partner brought valuable perspectives on environmental conservation, while the strategic collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth highlighted governmental support for empowering young

individuals and advancing sustainable development.

The SLY camp featured enlightening talks by esteemed speakers: Debbie Richardson, Senior Corporate Affairs Strategist; Talal Hassan, CEO of 44.01; and Nick Little, Community Outreach Coordinator at Waste Lab.

These talks delivered invaluable insights and motivation, encompassing a range of sustainability and innovation topics.

Dr Hashil al Mahrouqi commended the participants’ dedication during the final ceremony, where awards were presented in categories such as: Best Idea in Innovation and Technology; Best Idea in Circular Economy and Environment; Best Idea in Sustainable Tourism and Hospitality; and Best-Performing Team.

With esteemed partners and a thoughtfully crafted agenda, the SLY camp is primed to nurture the upcoming generation of leaders committed to instigating positive change and shaping a more sustainable future.

Carbon6 stands as a prominent organisation dedicated to cultivating awareness and action on sustainability among the youth.

Through innovative programmes and collaborations, Carbon6 empowers young leaders to confront environmental and social challenges, steering towards a brighter and more sustainable world.

OAB offers 48-hours approval on Al Dar housing loans

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) is setting a new benchmark in house financing with an unprecedented turnaround time of just 48 hours for Al Dar Housing Loan approvals, subject to complete documentation.

Designed to significantly simplify and expedite the homeownership process for both Omanis and residents alike, more families across the Sultanate of Oman can now own their dream homes.

Providing flexible solutions for multi-purpose financing needs including purchase of ready and under construction properties, land, renovation and self-construction, the loans are structured to be incredibly customer-friendly, requiring minimal branch visits and providing an easy-to-navigate



application process.

For first-time home buyers, the Al Dar Housing Loans offer an attractive Loan-to-Value ratio (LTV) of up to 90 per cent, while for subsequent home purchases, an LTV of up to 80 per cent can be availed. Competitive interest rates further add to their appeal.

“Our quick and efficient approval process is a game-

changer in the housing loan sector,” said Khalid al Amri, Chief Retail Banking Officer at Oman Arab Bank.

“Owning a home is an important milestone in a person’s life and for many, a life-long dream. We understand the sense of permanence, pride, stability and security it brings and we are proud to be able to help customers

turn their dreams into reality.”

The Al Dar Housing Loan scheme was prominently featured at the Oman Real Estate Expo, which took place during the Oman Design & Build Week at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The event provided the perfect platform for introducing the new loan scheme to a wider audience, showcasing OAB’s role in facilitating innovative and accessible home ownership solutions. One lucky customer who visited OAB’s stall has won a furniture voucher worth RO 500 each.

Customers can learn more about how Al Dar Housing Loans can facilitate their journey to owning a home, by visiting the nearest OAB branch or the Bank’s website.

Bank Muscat participates in Auto Expo Oman

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, announced its participation in the Auto Expo Oman which will be organised from May 16-18, 2024 in the Used Cars Complex in the Wilayat of Sohar, Al Batinah North Governorate.

The event aims to provide a platform to showcase the latest innovations and developments in the automobile industry, as well as create a space to exchange knowledge and expertise, attracting those who are interested in the sector and enhancing the export market in the Sultanate of Oman. During the 3-day exhibition, customers will be able to visit Bank Muscat’s stall and know more about Sayyarati finance and familiarise themselves with the various benefits and services introduced.

Customers will also get the

chance to benefit from Sayyarati auto finance offer with the best rates in the market that start at just 3.75% per annum on both new and pre-owned cars for Omani nationals and expatriates.

With this year’s “Sayyarati” offer, customers may start paying after 2 months of loan disbursal.

It must also be noted that Sayyarati has some of the best interest rates in the country including 4% for a period up to 2 years and 4.25% for loan tenors of 3 years and 4.5% for a 4-year loan tenor.

The special rates are available for Omani individuals employed in government, quasi — government, Tier 1 and Tier 2 companies and expatriates individuals employed in government and quasi-government institutions as well as Tier 1 companies, considering that all terms and conditions related to Sayyarati Auto Loan will

be applied.

The “Sayyarati” financing product features multiple advantages including enabling customers to apply for a loan up to RO 60,000 for both new and used vehicles, a tenor up to 8 - 10 years for Omani nationals, and free third-party insurance in case of pre-owned car financing.

On this occasion, Taya bin Eid Bait Sabeea, Deputy General Manager - Interior Regions, Bank Muscat, stated: “Bank Muscat is keen to provide various offers and financial facilities to enhance customer experience and enable them to benefit from the services offered. Sayyarati auto finance has been receiving good feedback due to the value-added benefits it offers.

We are pleased to take part in this exhibition to meet our valued customers and introduce Sayyarati auto finance.



Sayyarati Auto Loan



I would like to take this opportunity to invite our customers and people interested

in cars and benefit from the special offer on Sayyarati auto finance.”

Customers may apply for “Sayyarati” financing loan online via Bank Muscat’s Internet Banking and Mobile Banking platforms or by visiting the nearest Bank Muscat branch or Sayyarti Centres in Wattayah and Salalah.

Customers are also required to submit the relevant documents to process the loan facility, including the ID card for Omanis, passport for expatriates, salary assignment letter, quotation /car valuation from the approved valuator, driving licence, Mulkiya (for pre-owned cars only) and seller’s ID card (for pre-owned cars only).

The monthly loan instalments are automatically deducted from the customer’s account once the mandate to do so is provided to the Bank. It is noteworthy that loans are disbursed within 24 hours subject to applicants meeting the concerned requirements.

Oman Flour Mills receives second direct shipment from Australia

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 14

Oman Flour Mills SAOG (OFM), the country's biggest integrated food company, has taken delivery of a second shipment of wheat directly from Australian farmers — a cost-advantageous initiative it now wants to build on by exploring shared farming opportunities with its Australian partners.

Publicly traded OFM, part of Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaj), said the second shipment — facilitated by its wholly-owned Australian subsidiary OMAUS Pty — arrived in Oman during the first quarter of this year.

It comes roughly a year after OFM secured its maiden shipment from Australian wheat farmers in March 2023 in support of its grain procurement programme — a key component of Oman's national food security strategy.

Dubbed a 'trial shipment', the 34,500-metric-tonne consignment of Australian Premium White (APM) grain was the first such procurement organised by OMAUS Ltd directly with Australian growers.



Grain silos of Sohar Flour Mills, a subsidiary of Oman Flour Mills.

It contributed to cost savings during the aggregation process, in addition to ensuring a superior quality and better consistency of wheat.

Commenting on the most recent shipment, OFM Chairman Ahmed bin Ali al Balushi said: "The vision of the group is to pursue a more direct relationship with the farmers, minimising the extended supply chain and the costs incurred along the way. With the successful receipt of the first shipment in Q1 2023, OFM had received the second shipment from OMAUS in the first quarter of 2024."

Significantly, following the successful delivery of the second shipment, Oman Flour Mills has "commenced discussions with Australian growers to (explore) the feasibility of shared farming," he noted.

Following disruptions in global grain supply two years ago, triggered by the Ukraine war, Oman Flour Mills began exploring a deeper relationship with Australia — a key source of wheat for the Omani market.

OM AUS was established in 2022 to help secure OFM's grain requirements by working directly with local growers, as opposed to

the mega corporations involved in the global wheat trade.

Meanwhile, Oman Flour Mills continues to firm up plans to expand domestically and regionally as well, primarily through a number of mergers and acquisitions, according to the company.

A corporate strategy and roadmap, commissioned to this end, identifies the potential for OFM to consolidate its market position in the feed industry. In its sights is a "target company" currently the subject of a valuation, according to the chairman. Likewise, OFM's investment arm, Atyab Investments LLC, has submitted a bid to acquire the assets of a company engaged in the "sweet and confectionery business".

At the same time, Atyab Food Industries (AFI), a wholly owned subsidiary, has completed the valuation of a potential target bakery, for which an investment proposal is being prepared.

Additionally, AFI and a large Saudi group are jointly undertaking a feasibility study for establishing a green-field bakery in Saudi Arabia. Besides, AFI is exploring a potential with "large bakery", he added.

OQ launches preventative driving simulator to enhance road safety



Named V-traineR, the programme utilises a driving simulator integrated with virtual reality technology.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 14

OQ, the global integrated energy group, represented by OQ Exploration and Production, has launched the first road safety training programme in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

The programme, named V-traineR, complies with the OPAL Road Safety Standard, and utilises a driving simulator integrated with virtual reality technology. It uses advanced artificial intelligence to provide a realistic, risk-free training environment, helping drivers develop essential safe driving skills and thereby reducing vehicle-related accidents.

This initiative underscores the company's commitment to the well-being of its employees and contractors across its operational areas. To maximise accessibility, the programme is available in four languages.

Developed through a fruitful

collaboration between OQ's road safety experts and external AI specialists, the programme features over 50 comprehensive training modules.

The training programme is structured into four stages: Preventative Driving Basics, Preventative Driving on Paved Roads, Preventative Driving on Dirt Roads, and the Dirt Roads Simulator. This design ensures it is suitable for all trainees, regardless of their educational background or prior experience.

Hamed bin Saud al Shaidhani, Vice-President, HSE at OQ Exploration and Production, stated: "Virtual reality technology is a groundbreaking and effective training method that has demonstrated its ability to improve driving skills and enhance risk awareness."

"We are proud to be the first company to adopt this modern technology to achieve our goal of reducing road accidents and reaching zero injuries."

Air Liquide extends partnership with OQ

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 14

Air Liquide Sohar Industrial Gases (ALSIG), the subsidiary of the Air Liquide Group in Oman, has renewed its long-term contract for the supply of nitrogen to global integrated energy company OQ in the country.

This new step in their collaboration demonstrates the trust both companies have built over the years.

ALSIG was established in 2005 for the purpose of producing and supplying industrial gases to customers in oil refining, chemical and metallurgical sectors in the Sohar Port and Freezone and Muscat.

The company operates three air separation units and an extensive pipeline network

delivering the industrial gases. ALSIG has solid safety and reliability records with 100 per cent reliability to its customers and 0 Lost Time Accidents (LTA).

Air Liquide is a world leader in gases, technologies and services for industry and healthcare. Present in 72 countries with 67,800 employees, the Group serves more than 4 million customers and patients.

Oxygen, nitrogen and hydrogen are essential small molecules for life, matter and energy. The Group develops solutions contributing to climate and the energy transition — particularly with hydrogen — and takes action to progress in areas of healthcare, digital and high technologies. Air Liquide's revenue amounted to more than 27.5 billion euros in 2023.

Takatuf Oman felicitates cohort 2023 with 110 scholars

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, MAY 14

Takatuf Oman hosted the Recognition Ceremony for Cohort 2023 of the Ruwad Oman Enrichment Programme on May 13, spotlighting the dedication of 110 Takatuf scholars in their educational and personal development journeys.

The ceremony, held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aafi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, at the OCEC, was a lively celebration of achievement and potential, bringing together scholars from eight governorates across Oman.

The Enrichment Programme, the initial phase of the comprehensive Ruwad Oman programme, spans 14 months and includes a Summer Residential Programme, an Individual Learning Phase, and a concluding Winter Workshop.

Throughout this period, 11th-



Cohort 2023 with the chief guest Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aafi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

grade candidates develop critical 21st-century skills such as time management, leadership, critical thinking and collaboration.

This transformative experience culminates in the development of not only academic prowess, but also professional acumen and personal passion.

Highlighting the evening were inspirational stories from current international scholars and alumni, such as Al Julanda al Abri,

a McGill University graduate who is now flourishing in his career at Amazon in London, and Sara al Lawati, a current student at the University of Texas at Austin, who has secured a prestigious internship at Chevron for the second consecutive year.

Atheer al Hinai shared insights from her ongoing master's studies of Environmental Technology at Imperial College London, and Rashid al Abri, currently

pursuing a PhD in Computer Science at Columbia University, discussed his contributions to notable publications in *Nature* magazine.

40 of the 110 scholars received the International Scholarship, a prestigious recognition that offers them an opportunity to continue their studies abroad — two years at an international boarding school followed by four years at a globally ranked university.

Forum reviews tax developments, challenges and systems

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 14

In a significant gathering under the auspices of Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Chairman of the Tax Authority, the Omani Tax Forum was held yesterday. Organised in partnership with Ernst & Young, a leading accounting firm, the forum brought together over 300 representatives from major companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman.

Setting the tone for the event, Said bin Ahmed al Shanfari, Director-General of the Second Directorate-General of Taxes, delivered a message on behalf of

the Tax Authority, emphasising the importance of community partnership and knowledge sharing.

He highlighted the forum as a platform for exchanging experiences and insights to drive the development of the tax system in Oman, aligning with the needs of taxpayers both locally and internationally.

The forum featured three impactful working papers that delved into critical areas of tax practice. Ahmed al Aisari, Head of Tax Consulting Services in the Middle East Region and North Africa at Ernst & Young, presented the first paper titled "The Most



Said bin Ahmed al Shanfari, Director-General of the Second Directorate-General of Taxes, delivers a message on behalf of the Tax Authority.

Important Updates to Tax Practice." This session explored global and regional tax trends,

Gulf initiatives and international commitments.

Additionally, Alkesh Joshi, Tax

Leader at Ernst & Young, discussed the main challenges facing tax practices in Oman, focusing on the Omani tax environment and assessment procedures.

The second paper, led by Mtiul Patel and Muzoon al Jabri, discussed "Developments in Indirect Taxes and Electronic Invoicing." Their presentation covered updates in applying indirect taxes within the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, as well as changes to VAT and excise tax in Oman. Sarah al Harthy shed light on the evolving landscape of e-invoicing systems, emphasising the importance of adapting to global and regional developments.

The final paper of the forum, "Transfer Pricing and BEPS 2.0 Rules," was presented by Guy Taylor and Qasim Talajwala from Ernst & Young. They shared insights on transfer pricing developments in the Middle East Region and North Africa, along with strategies to address tax base erosion and profit shifting.

The discussions encompassed the second pillar of combating BEPS 2.0 and its implications for GCC countries. Wrapping up the event, participants engaged in productive discussions and proposed ideas to enhance tax practices through the integration of modern systems.

UK is back to growth after one of shortest slumps



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The author is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

The British economy surged back to growth in a major boost to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak just a week after the Conservatives suffered local election drubbing across the country. After one of the shortest recessions on record, official figures showed GDP rose by a stronger than expected 0.6 per cent in the first three months of this year.

Head of financial analysis at broker AJ Bell, said: “The UK has charged out of what will go down in the history books as the shortest recession on record.

After months of floundering around a flatline growth of 0.6 per cent will give the UK economy a real confidence boost.”

The figures suggested the economy may finally be gaining some momentum after years of

slow growth as it emerged from the shallow recession at the end of 2023.

It was a surprise in the financial district of London and sent the FTSE 100 index of leading shares powering to an all-time high. The blue chip index stood at 8,442 up around 60 points.

This announcement last week, showed the key Services sector, which accounts for 80 per cent of output, growing at 0.7 per cent between January and March, while the production sector, which includes manufacturing, was 0.8 per cent higher but construction fell by 0.9 per cent.

In a note entitled ‘Finally a good news story for the UK’, the economics team at Japanese bank Nomura said: “This seems to be genuinely strong numbers. With some GDP releases it is possible to point to a few volatile factors

driving the strength or weakness, however, with this release it looks like the fundamentally most important factors were all positive.”

Crucially “real GDP per head” increased by 0.4 per cent in the first quarter following seven consecutive quarters without positive growth.

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt seized on the upbeat economic data and floated the prospect of interest rate cuts which would be a “massive relief to families with mortgages”, more pre-election tax cuts, and sought to argue that a Labour government would mean French-style higher unemployment.

Hunt said on radio: “What’s encouraging about these figures is that we have actually grown faster not just than France or Germany but faster than the United States

as well.” But shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves said: “This is no time for Conservative ministers to be doing a victory lap.

“Prices are still significantly higher in the shops, families are paying hundreds of pounds more on monthly mortgage bills, and the economy is forecast to grow by just one per cent next year.”

Liberal Democrat Treasury spokeswoman Sarah Olney added: “If Rishi Sunak thinks hard-hit households will be celebrating today, he is even more out of touch than we thought.”

The figures come after the Bank of England (BoE) last week, once again left its main rate at 5.25 per cent, amid growing hopes in the City (the financial district) of a cut in June. With a general election set for the autumn, Hunt said he could foresee interest rates cut this year. He said: “The Bank

of England governor says he is optimistic that we are on the right track.” But the economics director at the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, Suren Thiru said: “The strong exit from recession may inadvertently keep UK interest rates higher for longer by giving those policymakers still worried about underlying inflationary pressures enough comfort on economic conditions to continue putting of cutting interest rates.”

The BoE’s monetary policy committee slightly upgraded its forecast for GDP growth in 2025 and said inflation, 3.2 per cent in March, will be below its two per cent inflation target through 2026 and 2027.

The economic news came after the Conservatives lost nearly 500 councillors in the May 2 local elections.

Cryptoverse: Traders sit out bitcoin rally



MEDHA SINGH

The author is a markets correspondent at Reuters.

were also trapped in the implosion of high profile crypto companies, including Three Arrows Capital, Celsius Network and FTX, whose founder Sam Bankman-Fried was sentenced to 25 years in prison for fraud.

“The key force behind the reduced activity stems from lessons learned throughout the harrowing year, which was 2022,” said Vette Lunde, analyst at K33 Research.

“The contagion and collapse of a vast portion of retail-facing lending platforms illustrated that considerable risks were hiding behind the attractive yields.”

Some market participants reckon bitcoin, which accounts for more than half of the \$2.26 trillion digital assets market capitalisation, will be hit by a period of rotation as investors take profits on the coin and decide to buy riskier altcoins such as the no. 2 crypto ether and others.

Indeed, ether lags its larger rival bitcoin and is yet to exceed its 2021 peak.

“Instead of just blindly jumping into crypto in whatever seems to be hot at the time, people are now focused much more on what is a secure and safe asset to invest in,” said John Glover, chief investment officer at crypto lending platform Leden.

It remains to be seen if or when speculative crypto traders will return to the market in force.

Right now, bitcoin’s tumble to \$62,809, 15 per cent below its mid-March record high is serving as a reminder of the sharp volatility and risk that comes with the asset.

“The meme in crypto is — bitcoin needs to hit \$100,000 for retail to come back,” said Rinko at Delphi Digital. “Who knows if that’s the magic number but we do need to get to a number that really ignites FOMO.”

— Reuters

5G-Advanced is already underway



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The author is founder of Knowledge Oman knowledgeoman.com

I had the privilege to attend the annual SAMENA Telecommunications Council’s Leaders’ Summit 2024 at Atlantis — The Palm in Dubai, UAE. Held under the theme “Evolving toward Integration, Intelligence & Sustainability in Infrastructure”, the annual international industry-leadership meeting brought together over 20 telecom regulators, more than 30 regional telecom operators and carriers, and more than 300 industry leaders, policymakers, industry associations, and leading global technology firms.

The event hosted critical discussions on topics like leading the 5G-A (5G advanced) era, digital transformation, and new spectrum opportunities, highlighting the region’s strategic drive to move towards a more prosperous intelligent world.

It’s no secret that digitalisation or digital transformation is accelerating across the Middle East, and many economies, including Oman, are experiencing a paradigm shift marked by unmatched productivity and never-seen-before innovations.

I was particularly excited about the upcoming 5G-A era as this evolution promises to redefine the landscape of information and communications technology (ICT) across the region.

As we know, the rollout of 5G has marked a revolutionary shift in connectivity, with around 28 networks launched across the Middle East and Central Asia since 2019.

These technologies are not just improving mobile broadband speeds but also play a pivotal role in supporting emerging applications such as the Internet



Image for representation only.

of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and Augmented Reality (AR).

They have facilitated many advancements, from building smart city infrastructures to achieving industrial automation, which has been critical in driving the digital economy forward.

At the SAMENA Leaders’ Summit, the 5G-A Leaders’ Forum discussed the evolution of 5G technology towards 5G-A. This revolutionary new technology will drive digital innovation and intelligence across the Middle East.

Dr Sherif Ragaei Sherif, Sr Strategist, Technology Strategy, Omantel, participated in a panel discussion on the topic of Business Success in the 5G-A Era, moderated by Dr. Mohamed Madkour, VP of ICT Marketing and Solution Sales at Huawei.

Dr Sherif highlighted that Oman laid the foundation for 5G in 2019, but the traffic increased quickly, paving the way for 5G-Advanced.

He added that 5G-Advanced is not just a brand or a show but a necessity for Omantel’s business. He explained that it will help increase capacity and speed and improve efficiency.

With over 300 commercial 5G networks already deployed globally and advancements continuing, the transition from 5G to 5G-Advanced is poised to revolutionise network capabilities

and user experiences. While 5G laid the groundwork for faster speeds and more reliable connections, 5G-Advanced is set to push these boundaries further, offering significant enhancements in terms of network efficiency, coverage, and performance.

The benefits of 5G and 5G-A technologies extend well beyond conventional telecommunications.

They reshape consumer experiences by enabling high-bandwidth applications like seamless 3D video streaming and immersive AR/VR gaming experiences.

On the business front, these technologies integrate features like enhanced video calling, real-time translation, and interactive user interfaces into services, thereby enriching digital interactions and opening new avenues for revenue in the digital services sector.

Huawei has been at the forefront of advancing 5G and 5G-A technologies in the Middle East and Central Asia. The company’s approach is comprehensive, involving significant investments in research and development — amounting to \$23.4 billion in 2023 alone.

This substantial investment in innovation is critical for developing solutions that meet the unique needs of the region and for driving the adoption of

advanced network technologies.

At the 5G-A Leaders’ Forum, Cao Ming, President of Wireless Solution, Huawei, gave a speech and emphasised the importance of accelerating the development of 5G-A, which can help the digital economy reach a new level.

He said, “5G-A is not just a step forward; it is a key milestone on the path to the future. With everyone’s joint efforts, we believe 5G-A will build the foundation for a fully connected, intelligent world.”

James Chen, President of Huawei’s Carrier Sales Department, also emphasised the critical role of 5G and 5G-A in bringing social and economic prosperity.

Speaking at the event, he congratulated the Middle East region on becoming the global leader in 5G-A commercialisation and stated, “ICT is becoming a general-purpose platform in the intelligent world. 5G and 5G-A are at the core of this development, bringing prosperity to all.”

The SAMENA Leaders’ Summit buttressed the critical industry discussions on the commercial process of 5G-A and generally recognised that 2024 is the first year of commercial use of 5G-A. Exciting developments ahead and yes I will continue sharing these to you periodically.

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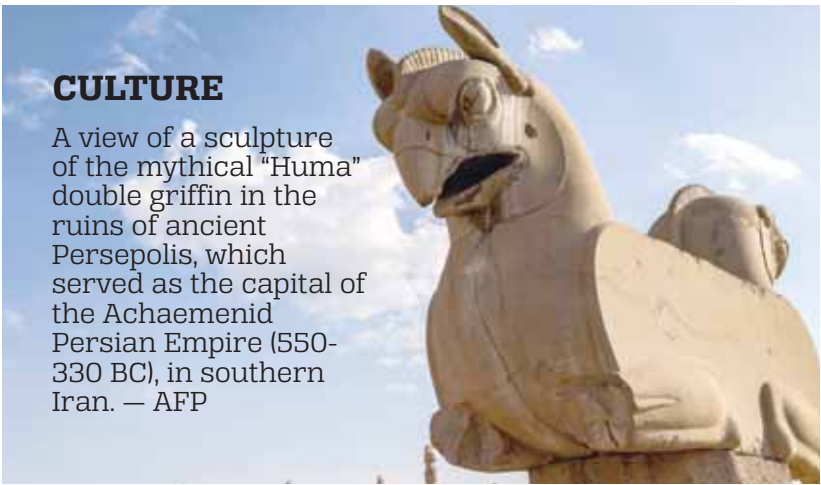
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Observer



CULTURE

A view of a sculpture of the mythical "Huma" double griffin in the ruins of ancient Persepolis, which served as the capital of the Achaemenid Persian Empire (550-330 BC), in southern Iran. — AFP



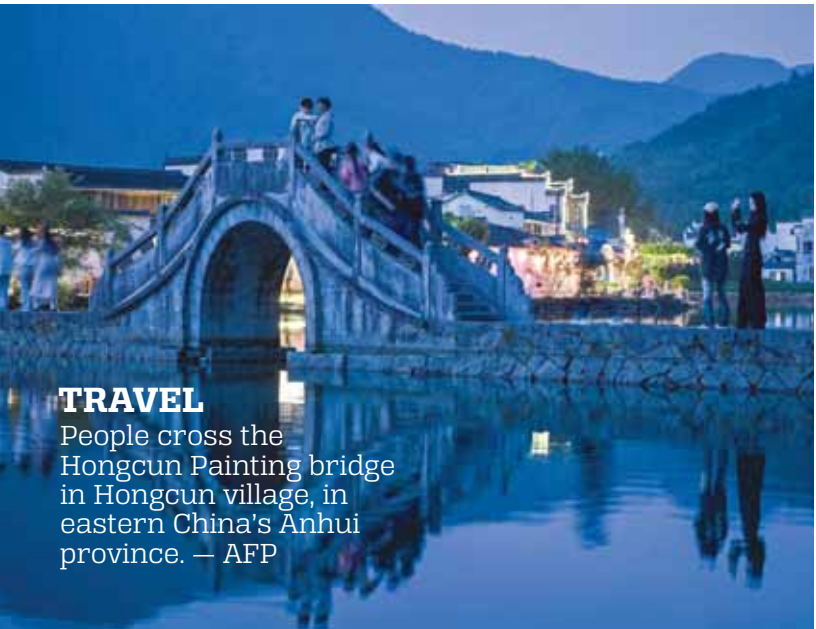
LIFESTYLE

South Korean comedian Youn Sung-ho, known as 'NewJeansNim' wearing monk's robes, performs during an electronic dance music party (EDM) event for the annual lotus lantern festival to celebrate the upcoming Buddha's birthday in Seoul. — AFP



IN THE DOCK

British actress Charlotte Lewis arrives at the Batignolles district courthouse for the judgement in lawsuit against film-maker Franco-Polish Roman Polanski. — AFP



TRAVEL

People cross the Hongcun Painting bridge in Hongcun village, in eastern China's Anhui province. — AFP



CULTURE

Farmers working at a rice field in Bijie, in southern China's Guizhou province. — AFP

art & life

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Omani fashion designer Aalia al Habsi ventures into children's fashion by blending traditional Omani elements with modern designs. Inspired by her daughters, she crafts unique garments, navigates industry challenges, and aims to elevate her brand globally, emphasising patience, passion and excellence in her craft... **P20**



FASHION

Gucci takes over London's Tate Modern for cruise line catwalk show

GUCCI TURNED LONDON'S Tate Modern art gallery into a catwalk on Monday, as the Italian luxury label presented its cruise 2025 line in the British city that once inspired its founder.
Creative director Sabato De Sarno opened the show with brown suede jackets and ensembles, often bearing the Gucci horsebit emblem and paired with chiffon blouses.
Walking around the gallery's basement blooming with lush greenery and in front of an audience including model Kate Moss, actor Paul Mescal and singer Debbie Harry, models wore coats and dresses in chamomile flower prints, loose denim shirts and trousers.
De Sarno nodded to British tailoring, presenting short coats or boxy jackets.
"I owe a lot to this city, it has welcomed and listened to me. The

same is true for Gucci, whose founder was inspired by his experience there," he said in shownotes.
Guccio Gucci worked as a porter at London's Savoy hotel before opening his eponymous shop selling leather goods in Florence.
De Sarno also presented pleated gowns in pastel colours and several designs, including a coat and dress, had sparkling beaded fringes.
Models mainly wore flat shoes in the cruise line, which refers to designs produced by stylists in addition to twice-yearly seasonal collections.
"This is another piece of me, more romantic, more contradictory," De Sarno said.
"I like taking something that we think we know and breaking away from its rules, taking it as far as it can go, without ever distorting it. Bringing it towards its opposite and

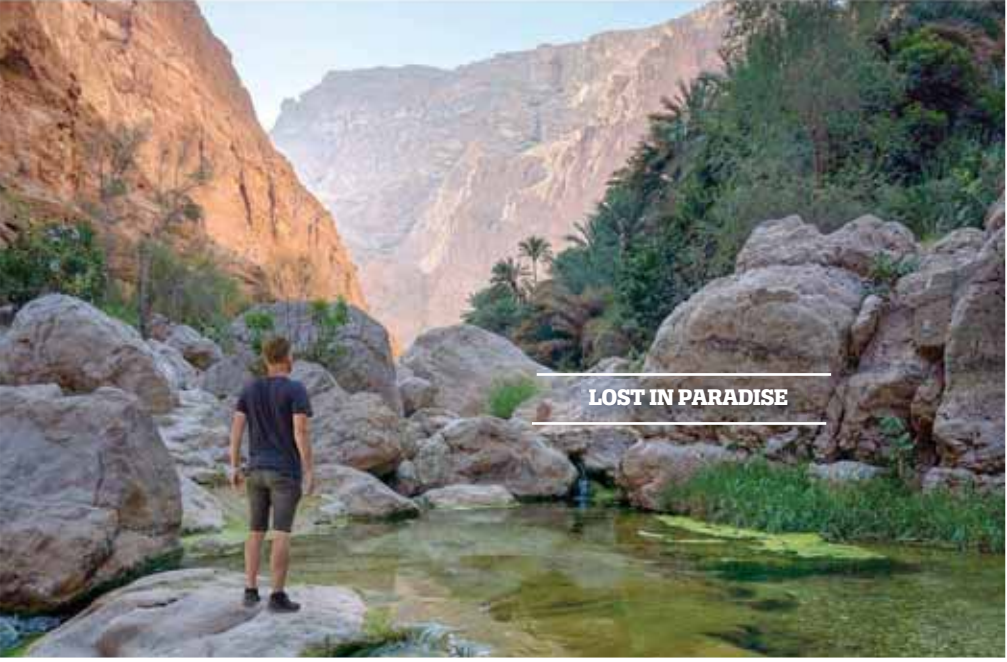
finding harmony."
De Sarno made his catwalk debut for Gucci, the star label of French luxury group Kering, last September, with his first designs coming into stores in mid-February.
His pared-back styles have contrasted from his predecessor Alessandro Michele's more flamboyant designs.
Last month, Kering said it expects a 40-per cent to 45-per cent plunge in first-half operating profit after first-quarter sales declined as wealthy shoppers curbed spending on Gucci products. The warning prompted concern in the luxury sector about prospects for rebound in the all-important Chinese market, where a property crisis and high youth unemployment have weighed on shoppers' appetite for high-end fashion. — Reuters

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

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PAST 50,000
YEARS

THE RATE OF atmospheric carbon dioxide increase is currently 10 times faster than at any point in the past 50,000 years, research in Scotland and the United States has shown.

A team of researchers led by Oregon State University and the University of St Andrews undertook a detailed chemical analysis of ancient Antarctic ice, revealing the stark findings and the impact of human emissions.

The findings, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS), provide important understanding of abrupt climate change periods in Earth's past and offer insight into the potential impacts of climate change.

The rate of carbon dioxide (CO2) increase was branded unprecedented and driven by human emissions.

When the gas enters the atmosphere, it contributes to warming of the climate due to the greenhouse effect.

In the past, the levels have fluctuated due to ice age cycles and other natural causes, but today they are rising because of human emissions, according to scientists.

Dr Kathleen Wendt, an assistant professor in Oregon State University, College of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Sciences (CEOAS) and the study leads author, said: Studying the past teaches us how today is different. The rate of CO2 change today really is unprecedented.

Our research identified the fastest rates of past natural CO2 rise ever observed, and the rate occurring today, largely driven by human emissions, is 10 times higher. Ice that built up in the Antarctic over hundreds of thousands of years includes ancient atmospheric gasses trapped in air

bubbles.

Scientists used samples of ice, collected by drilling cores up to two miles deep to analyse the trace chemicals and build records of the climate in the past.

The US National Science Foundation supported the ice core drilling and the chemical analysis used in the study.

Previous research showed that during the last ice age, which ended about 10,000 years ago, there were several periods where carbon dioxide levels appeared to jump much higher than the average, but the measurements were not detailed enough to reveal the full nature of the rapid changes, limiting scientists' ability to understand what was occurring.

Wendt said: You probably wouldn't expect to see that in the dead of the last ice age.

But our interest was piqued, and we wanted to go back to those periods and conduct measurements at greater detail to find out what was happening.

Using samples from the West Antarctic Ice Sheet Divide ice core, Wendt and colleagues investigated what was occurring during those periods, and identified a pattern that showed the jumps in carbon dioxide occurred alongside North Atlantic cold intervals known as Heinrich Events that are associated with abrupt climate shifts around the world.

Christo Buizert, an associate professor in the College of Earth, Ocean, and Atmospheric Sciences, and co-author of the study, said: These Heinrich Events are truly remarkable. We think they are caused by a dramatic collapse of the North American ice sheet. This sets into motion a chain reaction that involves changes to the tropical monsoons, the Southern hemisphere wester-

ly winds and the large bursts of CO2 coming out of the oceans.

Dr James Rae, from the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of St Andrews, and co-author of the study, said: These Heinrich Events kick off an astonishing sequence of rapid shifts in climate around the world. They start with a weakening of the North Atlantic circulation system, which causes rapid cooling in NW Europe, sea ice expansion from Scotland to New York, and disruption to tropical monsoons.

Our paper shows they also change winds and circulation in the ocean around Antarctica, which belches out CO2.

During the largest of the natural rises, carbon dioxide increased by about 14 parts per million in 55 years, and the jumps occurred about once every 7,000 years or so compared to current rates, when that magnitude of increase takes only five to six years.

Evidence suggests that during past periods of natural carbon dioxide rise, the westerly winds that play an important role in the circulation of the deep ocean were also strengthening, leading to a rapid release of CO2 from the Southern Ocean.

Other research has suggested that these westerlies will strengthen over the next century due to climate change.

The findings suggest that if that occurs, it will reduce the Southern Ocean capacity to absorb human-generated carbon dioxide, the researchers noted.

Wendt said: We rely on the Southern Ocean to take up part of the carbon dioxide we emit, but rapidly increasing southerly winds weaken its ability to do so. — **PA Media/dpa**

TRAVEL

Erdogan confirms ancient Istanbul church converted to mosque

TURKISH PRESIDENT RECEP Tayyip Erdogan on Monday confirmed the reopening of a mosque in Istanbul converted from an ancient Byzantine Orthodox church, in the face of Greek protests.



by Christians.

He complained to Erdogan about the latest move.

"I discussed with Erdogan the conversion... I expressed my dissatisfaction to him," the Greek premier said after meeting with the Turkish leader.

"It is very important to preserve the unique cultural value of this monument, which is listed as Unesco world heritage, so that it can remain accessible to all visitors."

CHURCH TO MOSQUE

The church was converted into Kariye Mosque half a century after the 1453 conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks. It became the Kariye Museum after World War II, when Turkey sought to create a more secular republic from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire.

Erdogan in 2020 ordered the building to be reconverted into a Muslim place of worship. His order came followed a similarly controversial ruling on the Unesco-protected Hagia Sophia cathedral in Istanbul.

At the time of the Kariye Mosque's reopening on May 6, Greece's foreign affairs ministry called the move a "provocation".

Erdogan said on Monday he attached "great importance" to "protecting any mon-

ument that constitutes an item of Unesco cultural heritage and to making it accessible for the benefit of our nation and all humanity." The changes were seen as part of Erdogan's efforts to galvanise his more conservative and nationalist supporters. Erdogan's ruling AKP party has Islamist roots.

TRADE TARGET

Despite the disagreement, the two leaders said they were working to normalise relations after decades of tension.

Erdogan called it an "extremely productive, honest and constructive meeting".

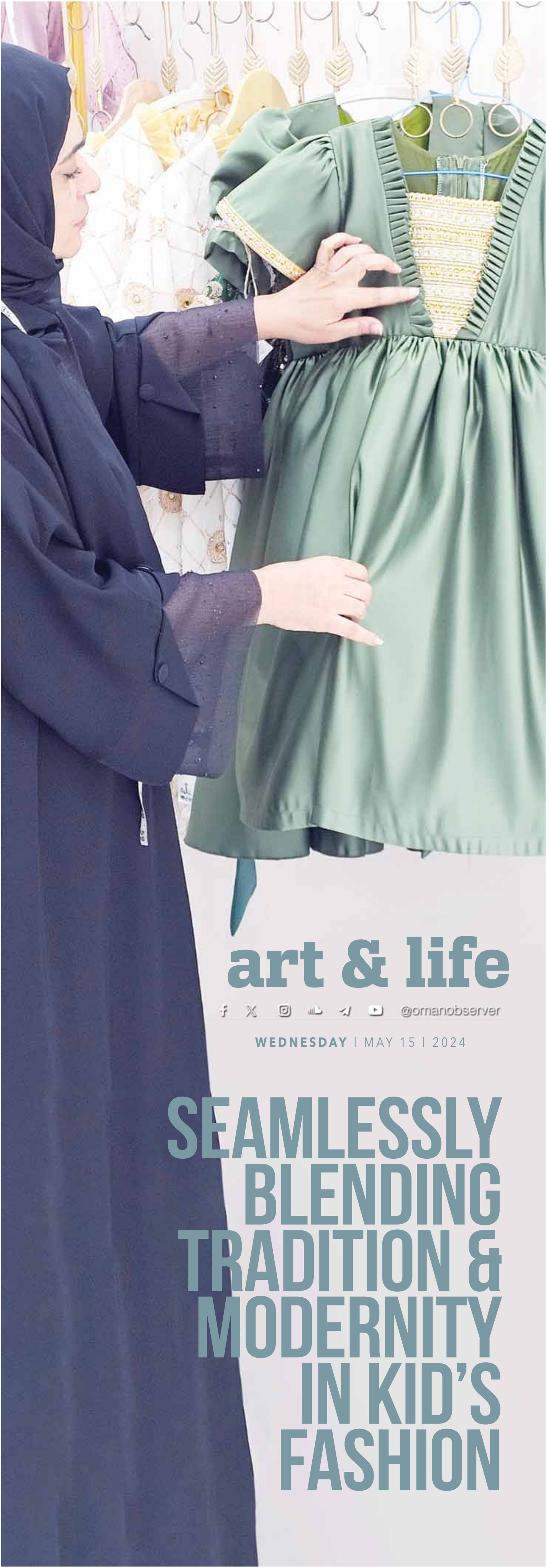
"We think that strengthening the spirit of cooperation between Turkey and Greece will be beneficial for both countries and for the region," Erdogan said.

He said the two sides had agreed to raise their bilateral trade from \$6 billion to \$10 billion.

"We have shown that, besides existing disagreements, we can turn over a new leaf," Mitsotakis said.

"We wish to intensify our bilateral contact. We continue on a positive path."

The two countries signed a cooperation agreement on disaster and emergency management, following a devastating earthquake in Turkey in February and forest fires in Greece last year. — **AFP**



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WEDNESDAY | MAY 15 | 2024

SEAMLESSLY BLENDING TRADITION & MODERNITY IN KID’S FASHION



BY RUQAYA AL KINDI
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Children's fashion design has become an emerging trend among Omani women, with Aalia al Habsi standing out as one of the devoted designers deeply passionate about fabrics and threads.

Aalia's journey into fashion design began in 1998 when she took the first step in learning tailoring and eventually learned that, while it looks easy from the outside, it is a complex process with a lot of learning and creativity required.

It was Aalia's daughters who served as the true inspiration, propelling her towards crafting the most exquisite and unique designs for children.

"When I had my beautiful daughters, I felt very happy when I made clothes for them that combined simplicity and beauty. When my daughters wore the school uniform that I lovingly knitted for them, their friends were mesmerised by the style and sophistication," Aalia shared.

Over time, Aalia honed her craft, delving deep into the nuances of various fabrics, mastering their names, and understanding their distinct characteristics.

Having honed her skills over time, Aalia embarked on her venture, setting herself apart by seamlessly blending modernity with Omani authenticity. Her creations embody a fusion of the past and present, where meticulous fabric selection converges with elements from diverse sources, resulting in designs reminiscent of artistic masterpieces.

"My designs take inspiration from Oman's traditional clothes. For example, it is noticeable in many of my designs that use lace fabric (dentelle) made of golden Zari thread. I added them to the design in different ways to give the clothes their distinction," she shared.

"Other than the threads, I also combine traditional fabrics with modern dresses. I want the kids wearing them to be both showcasing the beauty of tradition mixed well with modernity," she added.

Aalia understood that she could benefit from joining fashion shows and exhibits for exposure to a wide audience. These events offer opportunities to showcase talent, attract clients, stay updated on trends and enhance credibility in the industry.

Aalia's involvement both within and beyond the Sultanate has afforded her invaluable expertise in her domain.

"I took part in the inaugural children's fashion show in Al Sharqiyah Governorate in 2022, where my designs garnered admiration from the audience," she recalled. Additionally, her immersion in the intricacies of fashion exhibitions was deepened during her participation in a 2022 event held in the capital, Dar es Salaam, in the United Republic of Tanzania — a place with shared historical and cultural ties with Oman. This event, organised by the SHEs Development Authority, broadened her understanding of the foundations and methodologies of fashion shows.

While an increasing number of Omani women aspire to excel in this field, the journey may not unfold seamlessly from the outset. "Self-employment or freelance work demands unwavering perseverance and patience," Aalia emphasises.

"It's not about expecting substantial income initially; rather, the focus should be on building a sterling reputation and fostering efficient management skills to navigate the inevitable challenges and hurdles. Success, then, becomes an organic progression."

Aalia aims to uphold her distinctiveness and retain customers by consistently offering great designs.

"Demand spikes during festive occasions like holidays, Ramadhan gatherings and national events, so I ensure a fresh inventory to match these joyful seasons. I prioritise excellent customer service, adeptly handling orders, and embracing feedback to enhance performance and foster customer loyalty," she said.

She stressed: "Satisfying existing customers can attract new ones. Maintain



customer loyalty and imbue your work with your unique signature of excellence."

Aalia's profound affection for fabrics manifests uniquely. "I ponder over each fabric, envisioning its final design for days. When a new design emerges, I involve my family, explaining my intense focus on fabric and design intricacies. I oversee every step with my tailor until the envisioned masterpiece materialises," she shared.

Looking ahead, Aalia said, "I aim to elevate my brand locally and represent my country as a premier fashion designer on the global stage."

She advises aspiring entrepreneurs to exercise patience, emphasising the importance of establishing a sturdy foundation before expecting significant outcomes.