

OMAN
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DAILY

Observer

VOL. 44, NO. 196
PAGES 20 BAISAS 200

SUNRISE 05:20 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 03:55 AM
DHUHR 12:09 PM
ASR 03:29 PM
MAGHRIB 06:53 PM
ISHA 08:14 PM

10

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CONTINUES
PERFECT START
IN JORDAN RALLY

OMAN, IRAN TO EXPLORE NEW ECONOMIC AVENUES

H M A N D I R A N I A N P R E S I D E N T H A I L R O L E O F P R I V A T E S E C T O R

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK and President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran affirmed the positive and fruitful role undertaken by the private sector in both countries, expressing their hope that these activities would contribute to augmenting investments and trade exchange between them.

They also expressed satisfaction with the level of political consultation and coordination between the two countries at various levels.

This was stated in the joint communique issued on the occasion of the official visit of President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman on May 27-28. The following is the full text: “In response to an invitation from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran paid an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday and Wednesday.

This visit stems from the deep-rooted historical ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as between their friendly peoples. The visit aimed to strengthen bilateral relations and reaffirm the mutual respect and appreciation between the leaderships and peoples of both countries, which are grounded in the principles of religion, fraternity and good neighbourliness.

An official session of talks was held between His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, and President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran. They reviewed prospects for joint cooperation and bilateral relations, particularly in economic and investment cooperation across various fields, as well as coordination on matters that serve the interests of both countries and benefit their peoples. They expressed satisfaction with the existing level of cooperation and emphasised the need to further enhance it by exploring new avenues of economic partnership.

The two leaders also appreciated the progress made by joint committees and directed the importance of holding

VISIT STEMS FROM THE DEEP-ROOTED HISTORICAL TIES

PRIVATE SECTORS IN BOTH COUNTRIES PLAY BIGGER ROLE

LEADERS REVIEW PROSPECTS FOR JOINT COOPERATION

EXPLORE NEW AVENUES OF ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

LEADERS DISCUSS CRISIS IN THE GAZA, CALL FOR TRUCE

REJECT ANY PLAN TO DISPLACE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE OF OMAN IN US-IRAN TALKS

HM HOPES TALKS WOULD LEAD TO AN AGREEMENT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik hosted a private luncheon in honour of President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran, at Al Alam Palace guesthouse in celebration of the president's official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The luncheon was attended by several Royal Family members and ministers from both sides. After the luncheon, His Majesty the Sultan bid farewell to the Iranian President, wishing him a safe return home.

regular meetings to strengthen bilateral cooperation in various fields.

TRADE AND INVESTMENT
His Majesty the Sultan and the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasised the positive and

fruitful role of the private sector in both countries. They expressed hope that these activities would increase investment and trade exchange between the two nations. They welcomed the signing of several agreements to frame cooperation in

the promotion and mutual protection of investments, legal and judicial cooperation, a preferential trade agreement, a framework agreement for joint cooperation, and several memoranda of understanding in other fields. **TURN TO P2**

Palestinians in Gaza ‘deserve more than survival’, says UN envoy

UNITED NATIONS: Palestinians living in Gaza “deserve more than survival”, the United Nations envoy for the Middle East told the Security Council on Wednesday, as Israel's war there enters its 600th day.

Israel stepped up its military offensive in Gaza, while mediators push for a ceasefire that remains elusive.

The issue of aid has come sharply into focus amid a hunger crisis after Israel imposed a full blockade on Gaza for over two months, before allowing supplies in at a trickle last week. “Since the resumption of hostilities in Gaza, the already horrific existence of civilians has only sunk further into the abyss.



A Palestinian carries an aid supply he received from the US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, in Khan Yunis, on Wednesday. — Reuters

This is manmade,” Sigrid Kaag, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, told the Council.

“Death is their companion,” she continued. “It's not life, it's not hope. The people of Gaza deserve more than survival. They deserve a future.”

The aid that is now coming in “is comparable to a lifeboat after the ship has sunk,” she said.

Kaag warned that there could be no “sustainable peace” in the Middle East without a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, adding that the West Bank also is on a “dangerous trajectory.”

And she called for collective action to revive a two-state solution, saying that a high-level international conference in June presents a “critical opportunity.”

“It must launch a concrete path towards ending the occupation and realising the two-state solution,” she said. When speaking of people in Gaza, “the words empathy, solidarity and support have lost their meaning,” Kaag said.

“We should not become accustomed to the number of people killed or injured. These are daughters, mothers, and young children whose lives have been shattered. All have a name, all had a future, all had dreams and aspirations.” **SEE ALSO P6**

HM hosts private luncheon and bids farewell to Iran President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik hosted a private luncheon in honour of President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran at Al Alam Palace guesthouse in celebration of the president's official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The luncheon was attended by several Royal Family members and ministers from both sides. After the luncheon, His Majesty the Sultan bid farewell to the Iranian President, wishing him a safe return home.



OMAN, IRAN TO EXPLORE NEW ECONOMIC AVENUES

FROM PAGE 1

The two sides also welcomed the existing cooperation between Oman Post and the National Post of Iran, which resulted in the issuance of a joint postage stamp celebrating the depth of bilateral relations and highlighting the efforts of both sides in promoting cultural diplomacy, fostering mutual understanding and strengthening ties between the two peoples.

His Majesty the Sultan and the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran discussed a number of regional and international issues of mutual concern, including the crisis in the Gaza Strip.

In this context, they stressed the necessity of a complete and permanent ceasefire, ending the injustice against civilians and halting the genocide committed by the Israeli occupation forces against the Palestinian people in Gaza and the rest of the Palestinian territories.

PALESTINIAN ISSUE

The two sides called on the international community to fulfil its responsibilities in providing relief aid and humanitarian supplies to the defenceless population across the Gaza Strip. They also expressed their firm rejection of any plans aimed at displacing or persecuting the Palestinian people.

The two leaders expressed satisfaction with the level of political

consultation and coordination between the two countries at various levels.

The President of the Islamic Republic of Iran expressed his country's deep appreciation for the constructive role played by the Sultanate of Oman in facilitating the ongoing indirect talks between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States regarding the nuclear file.

For his part, His Majesty the Sultan expressed hope that these talks would lead to the desired agreement between the two sides, fulfilling shared goals of enhancing regional and international security and peace, and bringing further prosperity and stability to the region.

The two sides emphasised the importance of intensifying efforts to ensure continued security and stability in the region and the world, as well as enhancing coordination and consultation in various regional and international forums on issues that serve global peace and stability.

The President of the Islamic Republic of Iran expressed his gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the government and the people of the Sultanate of Oman for their warm welcome and hospitality. He also extended an invitation to His Majesty the Sultan to visit the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was graciously accepted by His Majesty." — ONA



IRANIAN PRESIDENT VISITS SULTAN QABOOS GRAND MOSQUE

PRESIDENT Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran visited the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque within the framework of his current official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The Iranian President and his accompanying delegation were received by Habib bin Mohammed al Riyami, Chairman of the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science.

During the visit, the Iranian President and his accompanying delegation were briefed on the mosque's history, and its Omani and Islamic architectural designs. President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian went on tour of the mosque's facilities, such as the library, lecture hall and other facilities.

At the conclusion of his visit, the Iranian President signed the VIP visitors' register, expressing his admiration of the mosque's designs and architectural artistry, which represent an outstanding example of Islamic architectural arts and its role in supporting and enhancing Islamic studies. - ONA

President meets Omani, Iranian business people

President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran met at Al Alam Palace in Muscat with a number of Omani and Iranian businesspeople to discuss means of enhancing trade and investment relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

President Pezeshkian emphasised the importance of linking economic corridors and ports in both countries to develop economic, trade and investment relations, aiming to increase trade volume to \$30 billion over the next three years. He affirmed that his country is ready to cooperate with Oman in various economic, scientific and cultural fields, stressing the importance of exchanging views and expertise to strengthen economic ties and engage in joint investment projects across multiple sectors. He also highlighted both sides' efforts to facilitate financial transfers between them. Additionally, he affirmed the Islamic Republic of Iran's commitment to expanding and enhancing security and stability in the region and the world while extending support to all Muslims.

On his turn, Qais bin Mohammed al Youssef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, explained that under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan, Oman is advancing efforts to boost investments and diversify economic sectors. He expressed hope that the trade delegation would explore investment opportunities in various fields, particularly renewable energy, industry, tourism, mining, logistics, food security, medical and food industries, information technology and real estate development.

He noted that trade between the two countries has grown significantly, with last year alone



PRESIDENT MEETS IRANIANS

President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran, met at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel with the Iranian community residing in the Sultanate of Oman. The meeting took place within the context of the Iranian President's current official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, President Pezeshkian underlined their role in fostering direct people-to-people ties between the two nations and strengthening civilisational relations between the two countries. The meeting was attended by some businesspeople from the Iranian side. — ONA

investments in Iran.

For his part, Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), stated that since its establishment, the OCCI has worked to solidify and develop trade relations through various initiatives, including the formation of the Omani-Iranian Joint Business Council. This council aims to activate trade exchanges, facilitate bilateral business meetings, strengthen connections between business leaders in both countries, address challenges faced by traders and investors and expand partnerships in strategic sectors.

Meanwhile, Samad Hassanzadeh, President of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, stressed the importance of enhancing economic, trade and investment relations by outlining a road map for their development and holding regular meetings. He urged business leaders to leverage the preferential trade agreement signed between Oman and Iran to elevate these relations.

Mohammed Abdulhussein Baqer, Omani Co-Chair of the Omani-Iranian Joint Business Council, stated that the council is implementing several strategic initiatives to boost trade and investment growth between the two countries and remove obstacles to trade. He noted that bilateral trade reached over \$2 billion in 2024.

Jamal Razeqi Jahromi, Iranian Co-Chair of the Omani-Iranian Joint Business Council, remarked that the \$2 billion trade volume in 2024 does not reflect the historical ties between Oman and Iran. He called on business leaders to take advantage of all agreements and memoranda of understanding signed to increase commercial and investment initiatives. — ONA



seeing an increase of over 50 per cent. Iranian investments have also expanded considerably, with the number of Iranian companies in Oman rising by 70 per cent

across various sectors. Among these developments, an Iranian biopharmaceutical research and development company has opened a factory in Oman, along with a

petrochemical manufacturing plant and other projects producing industrial salt, fertilisers and buses. He also pointed out that the Sarooj Complex is one of Oman's significant

IRANIAN PRESIDENT RECEIVES SAYYID FAHD



President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian receives HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers.

President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran, received at his place of residence HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers.

The visit took place within the context of the Iranian President's current visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting reviewed aspects of bilateral cooperation across various fields, as well as pathways to enhance common interests in a manner that serves both the Omani and Iranian peoples.

It was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister

and Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Iran, in addition to some officials at the Iranian government.

President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian also received Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy.

The meeting explored the bilateral relations and touched on political developments. It stressed the importance of advancing dialogue and diplomatic efforts to resolve regional conflicts; and enhance regional and international security and peace. — ONA

President of Iran concludes visit

President Dr Masoud Pezeshkian of the Islamic Republic of Iran and his accompanying delegation left the Sultanate of Oman after a two-day official visit.

HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, led the farewell party for President Pezeshkian at the Royal Airport.

The Iranian President was also seen off by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister (Head of the Mission of Honour)

and Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During his visit to the Sultanate of Oman, the Iranian President was accompanied by an official delegation comprising Abbas Aragchi, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Mohsen Haji-Mirzaei, Head of the President's Office; Mohammad Atabek, Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade, Head of the Iranian side in the Oman-Iran Economic Cooperation Joint

Committee; Air Commodore Aziz Nasirzadeh, Minister of Defence and Logistics of the Armed Forces; Gholamhossein Zarei, Deputy Chairman of the Parliament; Mohammad-Reza Parzin, Governor of the Central Bank of Iran; Masoumeh Aghapour Alishahi, Advisor to the President for Economic Cooperation Affairs; Mousa Farhang, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman and several officials from the Iranian government. — ONA



SPOTLIGHT



EXCITEMENT FOR EARLY KHAREEF!

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
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WITH clouds thickening and humidity levels soaring, Salalah residents are abuzz with anticipation, hoping this marks the early onset of the much-awaited Khareef Season. Though the official start is marked on June 21, nature's early signals are raising hopes across the city.

On Saturday and Sunday, the city experienced humidity levels fluctuating between 87 per cent and 69 per cent, as the sun played hide and seek through a thick cover of clouds. Temperatures hovered between 30 °C and 32 °C, leaving many drenched in sweat but filled with excitement.

“Humidity has been steadily rising for the past two days and this morning, we are noticing dew drops on our car windshields. It is a sign of heavy humidity and this is how the monsoon builds up,” said Mohammed al Mashani, a resident of Al Dahariz.

Many residents have begun venturing out to the surrounding highlands in search of cooler air and early signs of monsoon-induced transformation.

While some speculate that the early arrival of monsoon rains in India's Kerala could signal an early khareef in Salalah. Meteorologists, however,

are quick to clarify that the mechanisms driving both weather systems are distinct.

“The monsoon in Oman is influenced by different atmospheric and oceanic factors compared to India's southwest monsoon,” explained a weatherman.

“However, the current levels of humidity,

coupled with cloud movements and light precipitation, do align with what we typically expect ahead of a normal khareef. It may be early, but it's too soon to conclude,” he said.

Despite scientific caution, optimism is high among locals. In Salalah, khareef is more than a meteorological event — it's a season of celebration.

From mid-June to the end of August, the region transforms into a verdant paradise. Fog clings to the hills, light rains cool the air and visitors flock from across Oman and the GCC to experience nature's refreshing spectacle.

“For us, khareef is not just about the weather — it's a cultural heartbeat,” said Fatma al Amri, a teacher and long-time resident.

“We prepare our homes, welcome guests and celebrate the season with festivals, food and family outings. Even if the rains are a few days early, our spirits are already lifted,” she said.

As the clouds linger and humidity holds steady, all eyes remain on the skies. Whether nature chooses to surprise the people of Salalah early or not, one thing is certain — the city is ready to embrace the season with open arms.

SHORT TAKES



AGREEMENT WITH ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has signed a cooperation agreement in the field of higher education and scholarships with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland — Bahrain Royal Medical University in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The agreement was signed by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahroutiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Professor Sameer al Atoum, President of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland — Bahrain Royal Medical University.

The signing of the agreement comes as a result of the relationship between the ministry and the college; and the desire of both parties to enhance and develop cooperation in the field of higher education.

According to the agreement, the ministry will send a number of students to study in the Medical Commencement Programme (MCP) or the Bachelor of Medicine programme. The ministry will provide the college with a list of students selected for study at the beginning of each academic year. — ONA

AL BARWANI HONoured WITH JAYAKAR AWARD



MUSCAT: Prominent Omani technologist, thought leader and community influencer Tariq bin Hilal al Barwani has been awarded the distinguished Jayakar Award by the Indian Science Forum, in a high-profile event held at the National University of Science and Technology. The award was presented by G V Srinivas, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, in the presence of Dr J Retnakumar, Chairman of the Indian Science Forum and Syed Ahmad Salman, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman.

Named in honour of Sir Jayakar, an eminent Indian scholar and visionary, the Jayakar Award celebrates exceptional individuals who have demonstrated unwavering commitment to the advancement of science, education and social development. Al Barwani’s contribution to technology, youth empowerment and cross-cultural collaboration made him a natural recipient of this year’s accolade.

“This award is not just a recognition of past achievements, but a call to continue building, inspiring and transforming lives,” said Tariq al Barwani. “I dedicate this honour to every young dreamer who believes in the power of knowledge, resilience and service to society.”



HH Sayyid Asaad returns home

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, returned home coming from Malaysia after chairing the Sultanate of Oman’s delegation at the GCC-Asean Summit and the GCC-Asean-China Summit, which were held in Kuala Lumpur.

Upon his arrival at the Royal Airport, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik was received by Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour and the Charge D’affaires of the Malaysian Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman.

Fish arrivals slide as temperatures rise

KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

ARRIVAL of fish at the central fish market in Muttrah has been affected due to non-availability of sufficient volumes as temperatures rise compared to last week.

While mackerel and prawns were available, tuna and other costlier varieties were scarce in supply while many bigger varieties migrated from the area closer to the shore to deeper areas due to rise in temperatures.

“For the past few days, the availability of different varieties of fish has been reduced due to high temperatures and the fish has migrated to deeper areas of the sea. The fix is that the takers of bigger and costlier fish are limited and many who look for smaller ones had to return empty-handed,” said Salem Mubarak al Rugaishi, a long-time fish buyer at Muttrah Market.

“The arrival of fish at the market has significantly decreased since temperatures began to rise substantially. We are now only catching enough fish for our livelihood, staying within one nautical mile of the shore,” said Ahmed al Hasani, a fisherman.

A new study report says globally, fish around the world are moving to colder waters as a result of global warming and that the majority of fish populations are moving nearer the north and south poles, or to



Lack of fish is hitting both sellers and buyers.

deeper waters than they usually would live in, in order to stay cool. The study conducted by researchers at the University of Glasgow says that they’re doing this because sea temperatures are rising which affects the fact that whether fish can reproduce, how much they grow and even how well they can

digest their food. “In my opinion, there are more than 2,000 people depending on fish catching or selling and other fish-related activities in and around Muttrah Market; and lack of fish is a real challenge for us albeit it is for a short period,” Al Hasani adds.

However, a report published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) says that Oman’s commercial fish farming has been witnessing a significant growth in production over the recent years, reflecting both a rise in financial value and an expansion in the variety of species being farmed.

The report based on the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources figures says that the production of farmed fish has risen to 5,117 tonnes in 2024, with a total production value of RO 15.1 million. This represents a 7 per cent increase in volume and a notably 50 per cent rise in financial value compared to 2023, which saw production of 4,767 tonnes valued at RO 10.99 million.

The report further says that the Oman fisheries and aquaculture market size is estimated at \$676.26 million in 2025; and is expected to reach \$913.56 million by 2030, at a CAGR of 6.2 per cent during 2025-2030. The Sultanate of Oman has identified aquaculture as a key pillar of diversifying its national economy and it is the most important and oldest in Oman.

Arab-Chinese experts meeting on AI in libraries

NANJING: The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the sixth session of the Arab-Chinese Experts Meeting on Libraries and Information, held in Nanjing, China, during May 26-30 under the theme: “Trends in National and Central Libraries in the Age of Artificial Intelligence.”

The meeting falls within the executive programme of the Arab-Chinese Cooperation Forum for 2024–2026, under the auspices of the General Secretariat of the Arab League and the National Library of

China; and is hosted by the Propaganda and United Front Work Department of the Communist Party of China’s Jiangbei New District Committee, with the participation of the Jiangbei Library.

Oman’s delegation from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth participated in the third session of the meeting, which discussed “Cooperation and Partnerships: Building Collaborative Networks, Exchanging Expertise; and Developing Skills and Competencies in AI for Arab and

Chinese Libraries.”

The participation aimed to strengthen strategic partnerships in the field of libraries and information, exchange expertise in utilising AI technologies and support joint knowledge development efforts between Arab countries and China. This contributes to effective integration and communication between cultural and library institutions.

Additionally, the meeting sought to establish platforms for professional exchange and cooperation between Arab and

Chinese libraries, encouraging joint initiatives that enhance competencies and foster a culture of innovation in the library sector based on trust and mutual benefit.

The event saw broad attendance, with 21 representatives from 10 Arab League member states alongside delegates from 17 Chinese libraries, reflecting shared interest in strengthening cooperation to address the challenges and opportunities posed by the digital revolution in the library sector. — ONA

Food security explored between Oman and East Africa

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH MUSCAT, MAY 28

The two-day Oman-East Africa Trade and Investment Expo explored one of the most important topics the world is facing: food security.

“As the first expo of its kind with a dedicated focus on East Africa, EATIX Oman 2025 will reinforce Oman’s role as a trade and investment hub linking East Africa with the Middle East,” said HH Sayyid Barghash bin Turki al Said, Chairman of the Organising Committee for EATIX.

Shaikh Mohammed Suleiman al Harthy, Chairman of Al Harthy Investments and one of the panelists for the discussion on food security, pointed out that the GCC as a whole spends about \$110 billion in the food sector alone in both retail and wholesale.

“Oman has about \$8 billion in the food sector per annum - so there is a big potential to cooperate with East Africa and the rest of the world to narrow the gap on food security. If we look at coffee, the market in the GCC is about \$8 billion;



Panelists during the discussions.

livestock is \$4 billion and these two commodities alone have great potential for East Africa,” Al Harthy pointed out.

Milk production is an area of

huge potential, said Saleh Kigoye, Managing Director, Royal Milk, Uganda and adviser at the National Agriculture Research Organisation in Uganda.

“I want to address the wastage because we waste about 2.8 billion litres of milk a year. And if we could build a partnership between Oman and Uganda, this could be utilised. Oman imports products from other countries and we would like to explore in the area of milk,” Kigoye pointed out.

According to the Chairman of

East African Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, Richard Ngatia, the synergy sectors between Oman and East Africa, in addition to energy, are food security and logistics.

“Oman’s food-security programmes and water technology can link with East Africa’s arable land and examples are Kenya’s tea and coffee farms and Tanzania’s horticulture. Projects could include dairy, fruit processing, or fisheries as in the case of tuna across the coast of Somalia.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A view of a destroyed plane at Sanaa International Airport in the aftermath of an Israeli air strike. — Reuters file photo

ISRAELI STRIKES DESTROY LAST PLANE AT YEMEN’S AIRPORT

SANAA: Israeli air strikes blew up the last remaining plane at Yemen’s international airport, a Yemeni official said on Wednesday, weeks after an earlier attack inflicted major damage. An air raid involving multiple strikes hit the Yemenia Airways plane and the runway at Sanaa airport, the Al Masirah TV channel posted on X, decrying “Israeli aggression”. Thick black smoke was seen billowing from a stricken plane on the tarmac, in a video posted on X by Sanaa airport director Khaled al Shaief who said it was Yemenia’s last operational aircraft. The airport had only resumed limited commercial services on May 17 after it was closed by a heavy Israeli attack that destroyed six planes 11 days earlier. According to a statement from Yemenia, the plane was about to be boarded by Muslim pilgrims bound for the annual Haj pilgrimage in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Earlier this month, the United States agreed a ceasefire with the Yemeni group Ansar Allah, ending weeks of intense American strikes on several areas. United Nations special envoy Hans Grundberg warned that clashes are “exacerbating an already very fragile situation for Yemen and the region”. — AFP

SENEGAL PRESIDENT OPENS DIALOGUE ON POLITICAL REFORM



Senegal’s President Bassirou Diomaye Faye (R) and Senegal’s Interior Minister Jean Baptiste Tine (L) attend the opening, in Diamniadio. — AFP

DIAMNIADIO: Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye on Wednesday formally opened a national dialogue aimed at steering the west African country through political reform and “consolidating democracy” after a series of violent crises. The move, which the head of state launched along with his prime minister, Ousmane Sonko, comes against a backdrop of tension between Faye’s administration and the opposition. Several opposition parties boycotted the process, however, including that of former president Macky Sall, who was succeeded by Faye last year after 12 years at the helm and who accuses the authorities of persecuting his party’s officials. Faye and Sonko have promised to hold to account former leaders, notably Sall himself, accusing them of mismanagement. A clutch of legal proceedings have been launched against Sall-era officials, and a special court recently indicted five former ministers for alleged embezzlement. Of the five, three were incarcerated. The other two were released on parole. Most opposition forces did, however, take part in the opening ceremony of the consultation in the new town of Diamniadio, just outside the capital, Dakar. — AFP

OFFICIAL STEP-DOWN

Malaysian minister resigns after losing poll



Malaysia’s economy minister said on Wednesday he was resigning from his cabinet post after losing his position as deputy president of the ruling PKR to the premier’s daughter in a party poll. “My defeat in the recent PKR party election means I no longer have the mandate from my party to translate the people’s agenda into government policy,” Rafizi Ramli said in a statement, referring to his People’s Justice Party. — AFP

CZECH FM SUMMONS CHINESE AMBASSADOR OVER CYBERATTACK

PRAGUE: China’s ambassador to the Czech Republic was summoned on Wednesday over a cyberattack that targeted Prague’s foreign ministry, Czech officials said. The Czech foreign ministry said an extensive investigation of the attack “led to a high degree of certainty about the responsible actor”, naming it as group APT31. “I summoned the Chinese ambassador to make clear that such hostile actions have serious consequences for our bilateral relations,” Foreign

Minister Jan Lipavsky said on X. The foreign ministry of the Czech Republic, an EU and Nato member of 10.9 million people, said in a statement the attack started in 2022 and targeted “one of the unclassified networks” of the ministry. “The malicious activity... was perpetrated by the cyberespionage actor APT31 that is publicly associated with the (Chinese) Ministry of State Security,” the ministry added, citing its investigation. “We call on the

People’s Republic of China to... refrain from such attacks and to take all appropriate measures to address this situation,” said the ministry. Lipavsky said that “we detected the attackers during the intrusion”. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas condemned the cyberattack in a statement. “In 2021, we urged Chinese authorities to take action against malicious cyber activities undertaken from their territory,” Kallas said. — AFP

UN blasts new US-backed aid distribution in Gaza

THE UN on Wednesday condemned a US-backed aid system in Gaza after 47 people were injured during a chaotic food distribution, where the Israeli military said it did not open fire at crowds. The issue of aid has come sharply into focus amid a hunger crisis coupled with intense criticism of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), a shadowy group that has bypassed the longstanding UN-led system in the territory. According to the UN, 47 people were injured in the mayhem that erupted when thousands of Palestinians desperate for food rushed into a GHF aid distribution site, while a Palestinian medical source said at least one had died.

Ajith Sunghay, the head of the UN Human Rights Office in the Palestinian territories, said most of the wounded had been hurt by gunfire. Based on the information he had, “it was shooting from the IDF” -- the Israeli military. The Israeli military rejected the accusation, with spokesman Colonel Olivier Rafowicz saying that Israeli soldiers “fired warning shots into the air, in the area outside” the centre managed by the GHF, and “in no case towards the people.”

With the war sparked by Hamas’s October 2023 attack on Israel entering its 600th day on Wednesday, Palestinians in Gaza felt there was no reason to hope for a better future. “Six hundred days have passed and nothing has changed. Death continues, and Israeli bombing does not stop,” said Bassam Daloul, 40, adding that



A Palestinian carries an aid supply he received from Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, in Khan Yunis. — Reuters

UN agencies and aid groups have argued that the GHF’s designation of so-called secure distribution sites contravenes the principle of humanity because it would force already displaced people to move again in order to stay alive

“even hoping for a ceasefire feels like a dream and a nightmare”. The UN has repeatedly hit out against the GHF, which faces accusations of failing to fulfil the principles of humanitarian work. Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, on Wednesday reiterated the criticism. “I believe it is a waste of resources and a distraction from atrocities. We already have an aid distribution system that is fit for purpose,” he said during a visit in Japan. In Gaza, the civil defence agency said Israeli air strikes killed 16 people since dawn on Wednesday. Heba Jabr, 29, was struggling to find food. “Dying by bombing is much better than dying from the humiliation of hunger and being unable to provide bread and water for your children,” she said. Israel imposed a full blockade on

Gaza for over two months, before allowing supplies in at a trickle last week. A medical source in southern Gaza said that after Tuesday’s stampede at the GHF site, “more than 40 injured people arrived at Nasser Hospital, the majority of them wounded by Israeli gunfire”, adding that at least one had died since. The source added that “a number of other civilians also arrived at the hospital with various bruises”. On Tuesday, the GHF said around “8,000 food boxes have been distributed so far... totalling 462,000 meals”. UN agencies and aid groups have argued that the GHF’s designation of so-called secure distribution sites contravenes the principle of humanity because it would force already displaced people to move again in order to stay alive. — AFP



POLITICAL PROTESTS GRIP BANGLADESH

DHAKA: Protests have become part of daily life in Bangladesh’s capital, with residents either taking part as political parties jostle for power after an uprising last year. On Wednesday, at least half a dozen demonstrations were held in the sprawling megacity of Dhaka, home to more than 20 million people. Across Ramna Park in the neighbourhood of Naya Paltan, thousands choked the streets as part of a rally in support of the Bangladesh National Party (BNP). Political parties are readying for hugely anticipated elections which the interim government has vowed will take place by June 2026 at the latest. — Reuters

RARE FATALITY

Thai, Cambodian soldiers exchange gunfire



A Cambodian soldier was killed on Wednesday after an exchange of gunfire with the Thai army at the border, a rare fatality in a long sensitive frontier region. The Royal Thai Army said in a statement that the clash happened after Cambodian soldiers started firing near Ubon Ratchathani province in Thailand’s east. Thai soldiers fired back in response to gunshots from Cambodia’s border force, leading to an exchange lasting around 10 minutes. — AFP

SEVERE WEATHER

Pakistan storms trigger floods, landslides



At least 10 people were killed and 43 injured as strong winds and thunderstorms triggered flash floods and destroyed homes in central and northern parts of Pakistan. Four women and a man died in Kashmir and three in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the State Disaster Management Authority said, while other officials said two died in Punjab. Stormy weather is expected to continue in northern and central parts of the country until Saturday. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



EU High Representative Kaja Kallas gives a press conference, in Brussels. — Reuters

EU PROPOSES BLACK SEA MARITIME SECURITY HUB

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Wednesday proposed creating a hub to boost security in the Black Sea by gathering information from multiple countries to monitor the strategically important region more closely. The move comes as European officials warn about a continued threat from Russia and as concerns deepen across the EU about risks to undersea infrastructure.

The hub would be set up in the short-term and “with a sense of priority due to the Russian war of aggression,” an EU document said. The hub will use contributions from Black Sea and EU countries and “enhance maritime situational awareness and information sharing on the Black Sea, real-time monitoring from space to seabed, and early warning”, the document said.

The proposal from the European Commission and the bloc’s foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas notes that the hub would include monitoring of submarine cables, offshore installations and gas and wind energy operations. Kallas told reporters that the hub could also help monitor the maritime element of a future peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine. — Reuters

BOAT CAPSIZES NEAR CANARY ISLANDS



At least seven people died when a migrant boat capsized as rescuers were escorting it to port in Spain’s Canary Islands, regional emergency services said on Wednesday. Two 5-year-old girls were among the dead. A 16-year-old girl and four women also died, emergency services said. A spokesperson for Spain’s maritime rescue service said a rescue vessel was escorting the boat to the harbour and as it approached, many of its passengers appeared to rush to one side of the precarious vessel, causing it to capsize. — Reuters

US SUSPENDS STUDENT VISA PROCESSING FOR FOREIGN APPLICANTS

WASHINGTON: The US State Department has ordered the suspension of student visa processing in the latest escalation of a Trump administration crackdown on foreign students. President Donald Trump’s administration is seeking unprecedented control over leading US universities, including revoking foreign student visas and deporting some of those involved in protests.

A cable signed by Secretary of State Marco Rubio orders embassies

and consulates not to allow “any additional student or exchange visa... appointment capacity until further guidance is issued.” The government plans to ramp up vetting of the social media profiles of international applicants to US universities, the cable said. Rubio earlier rescinded hundreds of visas and the Trump administration has moved to bar Harvard University from admitting non-Americans.

China’s foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning on

Wednesday said Beijing urged Washington to “safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of international students, including those from China.” Hundreds of thousands of Chinese students attend US universities, long viewed by many in China as beacons of academic freedom and rigour. The suspension of visa processing came as Harvard students protested on Tuesday after the government said it intended to cancel all remaining financial contracts. — AFP

Kremlin rebuffs Kyiv’s call for meeting with Trump

THE Kremlin on Wednesday rebuffed a call by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for a three-way summit with Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin as Kyiv seeks to force Moscow to halt its more than three-year-long attack. Moscow said any meeting involving Russian President Putin and Zelensky would only happen after “concrete agreements” had been struck between negotiators from each side.

Putin rejected calls to meet Zelensky in Turkiye earlier this month, when Russia and Ukraine held their first direct peace talks in three years. Putin has repeatedly said he does not see Zelensky as a legitimate leader and called for him to be toppled. US President Trump, meanwhile, has expressed frustration at both leaders for not yet striking a deal to end the war.



Locals pay their last respects to children who were killed in Korostyshiv, Zhytomyr region. — Reuters

The two sides have traded waves of massive aerial attacks in recent weeks, with Ukraine unleashing one of its largest-ever drone barrages on Russia overnight, according to the defence ministry in Moscow. “If Putin is not comfortable with a bilateral meeting, or if everyone wants it to be a trilateral meeting, I don’t mind. I am ready for any format,” Zelensky said in comments to journalists on Tuesday that were published on Wednesday. The Ukrainian leader said he was “ready” for a “Trump-Putin-me” meeting.

Asked about Zelensky’s comments, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: “Such a meeting should be the result of concrete agreements between the two (Ukrainian and Russian) delegations.” The talks in Istanbul earlier this month failed to yield a breakthrough. Moscow has rejected coordinated Western calls for an immediate ceasefire.

Zelensky also urged the United States to deliver a package of hard-hitting sanctions on Russia’s banking and energy sectors. “Trump confirmed that if Russia does not stop, sanctions will be imposed. We discussed two main aspects with him — energy and the banking system. Will the US be able to impose sanctions on these two sectors? I would very much like that,” Zelensky said.

Trump called said Putin was “playing with fire” in rare rebukes of the Russian leader after Moscow’s latest wave of aerial attacks. The US president has repeatedly threatened to impose fresh sanctions on Russia, but has yet to do so. Despite months of US-led diplomacy, the two sides appear no closer to striking a deal to end the war, triggered by Russia’s February 2022 attack.

Tens of thousands have been killed, much of eastern and southern Ukraine has been destroyed, and Moscow’s army now controls around a fifth of Ukraine’s territory, including the Crimean peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014. Ukraine overnight fired almost 300 drones at Russia, where officials reported only minimal damage from the attacks and some air travel disruption. The Ukrainian military said the attack hit several sites involved in missile and drone production.

Zelensky on Wednesday also accused Russia of dragging out the peace process and of not wanting to halt its attack. “They will constantly look for reasons not to end the war,” he said at a press conference in Berlin

alongside German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, criticising Russia for not having agreed to a location for the next round of negotiations.

Kyiv is yet to receive a promised “memorandum” from Russia on its demands for a peace deal that Putin said he would send to Ukraine. Work on the document was in its “final stages”, Peskov said. Zelensky also urged allies to invite Kyiv to a Nato summit in June, warning that otherwise it would be a victory for Russia. Merz said Germany will help Ukraine develop new long-range weapons that can hit targets in Russian territory. Neither leader provided specific details. The Kremlin said Germany’s support to Kyiv would “hinder peace efforts”.

On the battlefield, Zelensky said Russia was “amassing” more than 50,000 troops on the front line around the northeastern Sumy border region, where Moscow’s army has captured a number of settlements as it seeks to establish what Putin has called a “buffer zone” inside Ukrainian territory. Russia’s army said on Wednesday it had captured another village in the Sumy region. — AFP

France-Indonesia pact could lead to new jet orders, says Macron

JAKARTA: France and Indonesia have signed a preliminary defence pact that could lead to new orders of French military equipment including Rafale fighter jets and Scorpene submarines, French President Emmanuel Macron said on Wednesday. “I am delighted that the letter of intent signed today could open up a new perspective with new orders for Rafales, Scorpenes, light frigates,” Macron said at a joint press conference alongside Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto.

Prabowo said France was one of Indonesia’s main partners as it upgrades its military hardware and develops its defence industry through joint production and technology transfers.

Macron arrived in Jakarta from Vietnam on Tuesday night on the second leg of his Southeast Asia tour. The French president is scheduled to fly to Singapore on Thursday. Dassault Aviation shares were up

3.4% in the morning session in Paris. The jets’ performance came under scrutiny last month after reports that Rafales used by the Indian air force were shot down by Pakistan’s Chinese-made jets in clashes. Indonesia has yet to receive any of the Rafale jets from the 2022 deal. The chief of the Indonesian Air Force Mohamad Tonny Harjono said in February that six jets would arrive in early 2026, state news agency Antara reported.

Aside from the Rafale deal, Indonesia in 2024 struck an agreement with French state-owned shipyard Naval Group to buy two “Scorpene” submarines, and in 2023 announced the purchase of 13 long-range air surveillance radars from France’s Thales.

France and mineral-rich Indonesia also signed a host of other agreements and more than 20 MOUs worth at least \$11 billion, said Indonesia’s chief economic minister



French President Emmanuel Macron speaks during a press conference with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto at the Merdeka Palace in Jakarta. — Reuters

Airlangga Hartarto at a business forum. The MOUs included one on cooperation between French mining company Eramet and Indonesian

sovereign wealth funds Danantara and Indonesia Investment Authority (INA). The agreement aims to “explore the establishment of a

strategic investment platform in the nickel sector, spanning upstream to downstream operations,” Eramet, Danantara and INA said in a joint statement.

The partnership aims to develop the raw materials needed for electric vehicle (EV) batteries and the statement said a preliminary assessment will be made to identify projects.

Danantara’s Chief Investment Officer Pandu Sjahrir said in the statement that the two wealth funds will manage long-term financing and Eramet will contribute technical expertise and experience in executing large-scale mining projects.

Indonesia is the world’s largest producer of nickel, and also holds the biggest known reserves of the metal. French food company Danone, and TotalEnergies also signed deals, according to images of a signing ceremony. — Reuters

OPINION

What if climate solution was also our most overlooked?



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

I often find that the most powerful ideas are the ones we overlook. We get caught up in chasing innovation, in launching megaprojects, in building the future as if it is something far away. But sometimes, the real transformation is already here. Quiet. Practical. Waiting for us to notice. That is how I have come to think about energy efficiency.

When I first started the Oman Climate Dialogues a couple of years ago, I wanted to create a space for conversations that were missing. Not panels filled with prepared statements. Not technical deep dives that left no room for reflection. But dialogue that connects policy with practice and intention with action.

At the time, I felt that too many of our climate conversations were happening behind closed doors, framed around technology and finance, but missing the human pulse. We needed to open the space.

This latest conversation focused on energy efficiency. And it revealed a strange contradiction. Across Oman, there is clear evidence of momentum. SOHAR Port and Freezone is implementing both pilot initiatives and large-scale optimisation projects. OQ is embedding efficiency into its operations as part of how it measures performance. The Oman Net Zero Centre

is preparing to announce the results of its first public tender for government building retrofits. The Central Bank of Oman, perhaps unexpectedly, now holds the title of the most energy-efficient public building in the country. These are not small wins. They are proof that change is under way.

And yet, how often do we hear about these successes? These efforts are happening, but they are not being shared. We are doing the work, but we are not telling the story. That silence has consequences. When projects remain tucked inside internal reports or procurement files, we lose momentum. When institutions act alone, we duplicate effort. When something that saves money, reduces emissions and builds local capability is barely mentioned in public discourse, we are missing the point.

Oman has already put the right tools in place. Energy efficiency codes are now mandatory for all new buildings. Every air conditioner sold in the market must meet national performance standards. These policies matter. But what about the buildings constructed before these codes existed? What about the legacy infrastructure still consuming excessive power across ministries, malls and homes?

The current strategy rightly focuses on

Across Oman, there is clear evidence of momentum. SOHAR Port and Freezone is implementing both pilot initiatives and large-scale optimisation projects

large-scale public and commercial buildings first. Residential retrofits will follow. But we should be honest. These early efforts cannot succeed in isolation. They need to be visible. They need to be understood. They need to inspire others. Because energy efficiency is not just a climate tool. It is an economic strategy. It creates jobs in engineering, retrofitting and auditing. It strengthens energy security. It contributes directly to maximising local value. And it opens space for young Omanis and SMEs to lead in a field that is only growing.

So why, with all of this in place, does energy efficiency still feel like an afterthought?

Maybe because we still think of it as a side project. Something technical. Something someone else is doing. But it is not. It is national infrastructure. It is industrial strategy. And above all, it is common sense.

The good news is that we do not need to invent anything new. We need to look again at what is already working and ask why we are not learning from it. We need to talk to each other more openly. Not to impress. Not to compete. But to align. Sometimes, the only thing standing between the overlooked and the obvious is the courage to start the right conversation.

INDIA’S WHEAT HARVEST DEFIES MARKET SPECULATION

RAJENDRA JADHAV AND MAYANK BHARDWAJ

A strong wheat harvest in India is rapidly replenishing stocks, meaning the country will be able to meet domestic demand without imports this year, contrary to market talk that it would need overseas supplies, and a potential drag on global prices.

India banned exports of the staple in 2022 and extended the prohibition as extreme heat shrivelled crops again in 2023 and 2024, draining reserves, pushing prices to record highs and fuelling speculation it would need imports for the first time since 2017.

But things are improving for the world’s No 2 wheat producer, with early state inventory purchases signalling that this year’s crop is about 4 million tonnes bigger than last year’s, six industry and government officials said.

“After barely scraping through without imports in recent years, the country finally seems to be out of the woods and free from the fear of having to import wheat,” said Amit Takkar, chief of New Delhi-based farm consultancy Conifer Commodities.

The Food Corporation of India, the state stockpiler, has bought 29.7 million metric tonnes of new-season wheat from domestic farmers — the most in four years — after missing procurement targets for three consecutive years.

FCI’s total wheat purchases could rise to 32 million-32.5 million tonnes this year, food minister Pralhad Joshi said earlier this month, adding to the 11.8 million tonnes in stock at the start of the marketing year on April 1.

That stockpile of roughly 44 million tonnes would significantly exceed FCI’s annual requirement of 18.4 million tonnes to run the world’s largest food welfare programme, which provides free grain to nearly 800 million people.

FCI’s surging wheat stocks are sufficient to dispel the prospect of imports that has kept the global trading community guessing, the six industry and government officials said.

With the world’s second-largest wheat consumer not needing imports, global prices for the grain are likely to come under pressure, as output remains strong in top exporting countries such as Argentina, Australia and Canada, while import demand from top consumer China has weakened. Global wheat prices have more than halved from the record highs of 2022, sliding earlier this month to their lowest level in nearly five years. — Reuters

Rebuilding Ukraine’s innovation infrastructure

It was a typical wartime afternoon in Ukraine. I balanced my laptop on my knees in a dim concrete cellar, as the walls trembled from nearby explosions and an air-raid siren wailed. A client presentation filled my screen and my team members pinged me from bomb shelters across the city. The absurdity of demoing a new product while the ground shook and the power flickered wasn’t lost on me. But I was determined to keep my digital studio on schedule in that bunker-turned-office: we had clients waiting, war or not.

Scenes like this have become the norm in Ukraine since Russia’s 2022 war. While pitching ideas from a bomb shelter is as difficult as it sounds, many tech entrepreneurs and firms have stubbornly refused to let innovation become another casualty of war. Their resilience stems from a shared ethos of solidarity and improvisation — founders are doing whatever it takes to keep their companies alive.

But the war has pushed Ukraine’s tech industry to its limits. Running on adrenaline and ad hoc fixes isn’t sustainable. This underscores a simple truth: rebuilding the country’s once-booming startup ecosystem cannot wait.

Before February 2022, Ukraine’s IT exports were soaring and its startups were attracting global investors. But once the war started, many of my peers traded their laptops for rifles or fled with their families. Even as the economy collapsed and the Kremlin bombed power grids and internet cables, the tech industry adapted. Firms embraced remote work and in safer cities, like Lviv, entrepreneurs turned basements into buzzing coworking spaces. Amazingly, many companies barely missed a beat, as evidenced by the rise in IT export



The war has pushed Ukraine’s tech industry to its limits.



SALOME MIKADZE

The writer is Co-Founder of the software development company Movadex, is an MBA candidate at the Stanford Graduate School of Business

revenue in 2022.

To ensure that Ukraine’s innovation economy survives and drives the country’s recovery, we must start to fix its foundations — providing reliable power and internet connectivity, office space, access to capital, mentorship opportunities and supportive policies — before the war ends. This is not idealism. It is a strategy grounded in economic pragmatism. With most other industries in tatters, tech startups are propping up the economy. Supporting these innovators would not only help Ukraine but also spark breakthroughs that could have a global impact.

Taking bold action now also sends a message to Ukrainian founders in exile that there will be an ecosystem to come home to and shows foreign investors that Ukraine is open for business. During the war, for example, one of my companies launched a new product to help displaced entrepreneurs that is already gaining international recognition. Crisis reshapes, rather than eliminates, opportunity.

Many of the Ukrainian tech community’s improvised fixes and stop-gap measures should be formalised. Those basement workspaces should become publicly supported permanent innovation hubs. Networks that helped startups relocate must be expanded nationwide and international partners should sponsor incubators and accelerators (virtual or in safer cities), so that Ukrainian founders can continue building at home. The big tech firms that offered free cloud services and grants should turn this emergency support into long-term partnerships. They could even launch a Ukraine innovation fund to provide new ventures with capital and confidence. During the war, Ukrainian policymakers have maintained — and even streamlined — Diia. City, a virtual free economic zone for tech companies.

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In a story of transitions, life requires courage



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

TIME flies! My life is transitioning from one phase to the next. Every year is a blessing, and I am grateful for it. A birthday is like a milestone, and my journey has been one of tribulations and excitement. It is a wonderful opportunity to mark the passage of time and create positive memories. There is a whole new world out there, and it is time to enjoy something new. Within the trend of rewriting attitudes, we, ‘old people’, embrace and adapt changes to fit an alternative lifestyle. I love my wrinkles, the fading of physical features, and the loss of attractive lips. It is challenging to conceal the bags under my eyes; nevertheless, I joyfully embrace the celebration of yet another birthday. Physical appearance is a form of aesthetic capital in sociology, and I am losing such capital. I have reached maturity (hopefully) and an understanding of what it means to advance in life. Aging has only been made difficult by those who set standards. The multifaceted billion-dollar beauty industry tells us that the young are good and the old are bad. This emphasis is part of a broader rise in the importance of values in society. Neither individuals nor society are ready for old age.

Social media, beauty influencers and clinics bombard us with marketing strategies that uphold beauty standards. Even in the job market, some people prefer hiring young and attractive faces. The obsession with youth and beauty defines social acceptance. It is challenging not to undergo aesthetic procedures. We can craft the outside, but not the inside. Marketing and media messages tell us that life goes south after a certain age, and we are offered anti-aging products and suggestions for lifestyles to help us avoid falling downhill. It is amusing that, at a certain point, we realise we are use-by-date individuals who are forced to relinquish a lifetime of building up. Forget about wisdom or knowledge. Society is not interested. We now live in the age of TikTok and artificial intelligence. In the flip side, aging as a developmental process is liberating because you stop caring much about what others think of you. As I stand before myself contemplating my journey and the shorter path ahead, I feel grateful for each stone along the way, the dreams I had, the tears I shed, the goals I had set for myself and my legacy as a woman, mother and professional. Embracing the privilege of birthday

Aging has only been made difficult by those who set standards. The multifaceted billion-dollar beauty industry tells us that the young are good and the old are bad

celebrations may not be for everyone. Some people don’t like to commemorate. Perhaps they have encountered negative experiences or struggled with the passage of time. As old age brings challenges, everyone reacts to it differently. Emotionally, it is not easy getting older. Loneliness, loss of self-confidence, anxiety, money worries, disability, and unexplained aches and pains are just a few of the reasons people shun celebrations. We should not wake up fearful of falling. We should not be terrified of descending a ladder or stairway. In this journey, there are moments of immense happiness and instants of deep despair. Eventually, I will lean on my cane and walk slower, but the years cannot change how young and cheerful I feel on the inside. With my determination and attitude to keep moving forward, I can still live some of my best days with the understanding that everything has its time. As the years take their toll on me, the smartest approach is to enjoy the moment, as coming down happens naturally and hopefully, peacefully. To quote Lewis Carroll in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, “I can’t go back to yesterday – because I was a different person then”, but I can transform myself. Life is a dynamic entity.

EU ‘WELL ON TRACK’ TO REACH 2030 CLIMATE TARGETS

ADRIEN DE CALAN

The The European Union is on track to reach its 2030 climate targets, Brussels said on Wednesday, but uncertainty remains over the bloc’s ambitions to cut greenhouse gas emissions much further by 2040. The European Commission expects emissions to fall by 54 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990, very close to its 55 per cent target, it said, after analysing member states’ energy and climate plans for the coming years. The EU, however, faces a tough balancing act. It is seeking to boost European industry confronted by fierce competition in the United States and China, ramp up its defenses faced with Russia, and tackle climate change that is wreaking havoc at an alarming pace with wildfires and floods. “The world is in a full geopolitical winter. But despite everything that is going on today, we do feel we have good news, and we’re pleased to say that the EU is well on track to achieve its 2030 target,” climate chief Wopke Hoekstra, said. “It is also fair to say that the ambition on paper needs to be matched by ambition in the real world,” Hoekstra told reporters in Brussels. The bloc has already cut emissions by 37 per cent compared to 1990, including an eight-per cent drop in 2023, the commission said. Brussels said most member states were now aligned with the target of reaching a share of renewable energy in total consumption of 42.5 per cent by 2030. The commission, however, pointed to disparities between member states on cutting emissions and highlighted the problems of protecting forests and carbon storage. It singled out Belgium, Estonia and Poland, which have not submitted their energy and climate plans, urging them to “do so without delay”. “We have reasons to be proud, although we cannot be satisfied. We’ve come a long way, but we’re not where we need to be yet,” said energy commissioner Dan Jorgensen. Climate Action Network Europe’s Giulia Nardi said the 2030 targets were achievable “but without effective national policies and credible financing — both of which are largely lacking in the updated plans — implementation will fall short.” The EU has set a goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2050, and Brussels wants to agree on an interim target for 2040 — with the commission seeking to cut emissions by 90 per cent compared to 1990 levels. “A clear target for 2040 and giving predictability, in our view, is important,” Hoekstra said. But negotiations are stalling between EU countries on the 2040 target, and the commission has shied away from formally proposing the 90-per cent cut to member states. For some countries like the Czech Republic and Italy, the target is unrealistic. The commission is considering greater flexibility in its calculations for 2040, including through the purchase of carbon credits on international markets. — AFP

A mother’s loss and Gaza’s cry for justice

In Gaza, pain has become part of daily life. The world sees numbers, but behind each number is a person, a story, a dream that was destroyed. One of the most painful stories is that of Dr Alaa al Najjar, a paediatrician from Khan Yunis. While she was working in Nasser Medical Complex, treating injured children, her own house was bombed by Israeli warplanes. Nine of her ten children were killed. Only her son Adam, 11-years-old, survived but is now in intensive care. Her sister Sahar told her the terrible news. “The children are gone, Alaa,” she said. Alaa answered with calm faith, “They are alive, being provided for by their Lord.” It was a short reply, but full of patience and deep pain. It shows how mothers in Gaza continue to carry heavy suffering with great strength.

The names of her children — Yahya, Rakan, Ruslan, Jubran, Eve, Revan, Saydeen, Luqman and Sidra — are now names of martyrs. The oldest was just 12, the youngest only six months old. They used to recite the Quran, play and laugh at home. But the bombs turned them into bodies burned and broken, impossible to recognise. Sahar said her sister was trying to save other children’s lives when she received the news. She ran into the street to reach her home and see her children for the last time, but what she found was heartbreaking. “We could not know who was who. All of them were in pieces. All of them were burned,” she said. Dr Alaa’s family says they have no connection to Hamas. “What happened to us is something no one can imagine,” Sahar said. “Our family works in the medical field. Most of us are doctors or nurses. There was no reason for this attack.” The Israeli army later said it had targeted “a number of suspects” in Khan Yunis, and that the civilian deaths were “under review”. This kind of statement is made after every attack, but it does not change the fact that many civilians, especially children, are being killed. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, more than 16,500 children have been killed since October 7, 2023. Among them were



Dr Alaa al Najjar’s son and daughter Rakan and Eve, who were killed in an Israeli air strike alongside seven siblings, are pictured with their father Hamdi.



BADR AL DHAFARI

The writer works for Oman Daily Observer

916 babies under one year old and 311 newborns who died in the war. These are not just numbers. These are children who had a right to live. The statistics show that 4,365 of the children were aged between one and five years old, 6,101 were between six and twelve, and 5,124 were teenagers between 13 and 17. These numbers show the scale of the disaster and the kind of future that is being destroyed in Gaza. In total, more than 49,000 people have been killed in Gaza since the war began. These include over 16,500 children, 12,400 women, 3,853 elderly people, 1,168 health workers, 293 journalists and 719 teachers, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Dr Alaa’s story is not the only one. In May 2025, Anadolu Agency reported the case of five-year-old Arkan Assaf, who was badly injured in an Israeli attack that killed his parents, brother and many relatives. He now lives alone, injured and orphaned. There is also the story of five-year-old Hind Rajab, shared by Al Jazeera. She was the only one to survive a bombing on her family’s car in January 2024. She called the Red Crescent for three hours, asking for help: “I am very scared. Please come. Please send someone to rescue me.” Her body was found

twelve days later, next to her family and the medics who tried to save her. On May 8, 2025, the Government Media Office in Gaza said that the Israeli army had destroyed about 2,200 families completely, removing 6,350 names from the population registry. More than 5,120 families were left with only one survivor. In the middle of all this pain, Dr Alaa al Najjar stands as a symbol of courage and sacrifice. Even after losing nine children, she returned to the hospital to help other people’s children. Her actions show what it means to be strong, to continue giving in the darkest times. Dr Yousef Abu al Rish, a senior health official, said that Dr Alaa had left her children at home to do her duty towards sick children at the hospital. When he saw her, she was calm and quiet, whispering prayers with her eyes full of acceptance and patience. The story of Dr Alaa al Najjar is more than just a sad story. It is a message to the world. The killing of children in Gaza must stop. The world must act, not only with words but with serious steps. These children were not numbers. They were dreams, lives and hopes. Their deaths show us how far we have failed in protecting human values.

SPORTS



Nasser Saleh Al Attiyah on way to victory in Jordan last year.

AL ATTIAH CONTINUES PERFECT START IN JORDAN RALLY

NINETEEN-TIME

FIA Middle East Rally Champion Nasser Saleh

Al Attiyah and his Spanish co-driver Candido Carrera will be aiming to extend their perfect winning start to the season with victory in this weekend's Jordan Rally.

The fourth round of the regional rally series gets underway from the Royal Automobile Club of Jordan (RACJ) in Amman on Thursday evening. Spectators are welcome to attend from 18.00hrs with a display of drift and competition cars also on site before the ceremonial start gets underway at 19.15hrs.

Al Attiyah and Carrera are chasing a fourth successive win this season after victories in Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. While Carrera chases a maiden regional rally title, Al Attiyah will be hoping that a staggering 90 th MERC event win would also net him a record-breaking 17 th success in the Hashemite Kingdom and yet another win with an Autotek-run Škoda Fabia RS.

The Qatari arrived in Amman from South Africa, via a brief pit stop in Doha, and has been mentally preparing himself in Amman away from the punishing heat at the Dead Sea. The team carried out a brief shakedown test on Tuesday afternoon, although the Qatari is aware that he has strong competition over a dozen challenging gravel stages in the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea areas this weekend.

Fresh from a strong result at the recent WRC Rally of Portugal, Rakan Al Rashed will be hoping to build upon that experience to continue his push for a first ever MERC event



Shadi Shaban in action at last year's Jordan Rally.

Al Attiyah and Carrera are chasing a fourth successive win this season after victories in Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. While Carrera chases a maiden regional rally title, Al Attiyah will be hoping that a staggering 90 th MERC event win would also net him a record-breaking 17 th success in the Hashemite Kingdom and yet another win with an Autotek-run Škoda Fabia RS

win in a Toyota GR Yaris. The Saudi and his Portuguese co-driver Hugo Magalhães picked up points for second place in Oman and Saudi Arabia and fourth in Qatar to hold second in the title race, albeit 31 points behind Al Attiyah and Carrera.

Oman's Abdullah al Rawahi won the event outright on his way to the regional title in 2023 and will also benefit from the experience of local co-driver Ata Al Hmoud this weekend. Al Rawahi is third in the Drivers' Championship with points for second place in Qatar being his best result of the season so far.

Al Hmoud said: "We have one target and that is to win the rally. It will not be easy, especially with Nasser in the Škoda RS and Rakan with his Toyota Yaris and Abdulaziz with the Citroën. "We have the experience in Jordan. Hopefully, we can be the top level of the game. The Dead Sea at this time of year is very hot. Weather conditions could be a tough one. I missed Jeddah (Rally Saudi Arabia) because my wife delivered two babies, two young angels, a baby girl and a baby boy. Now I have a bigger family. We will do our best to win this event."

Abdulaziz Al Kuwari is the defending regional champion and also won last year's Jordan National Championship. The Qatari has enjoyed more seat time this season in rallies and cross-country events and showed with a pair of third-place finishes in Qatar and Saudi Arabia that his Citroën C3 is more than capable of challenging for the win. Consistent finishes have lifted Nasser Khalifa Al Atya into fourth in the points' standings in his Ford Fiesta, although the Qatari veteran is also chasing glory in the inaugural FIA Master MERC Championship for Drivers. Three maximum points scores have given Al-Atya a 42-point cushion in that new championship.

Shaikh Bader Al Fayez, Ihab Al Shorafa and Bassel Abu Hamdan complete the line-up of drivers in the Rally2 category in three Škoda Fabias. The Omani duo of Zakariya al Aamri and Abdullah al Zubair are separated by 15 points in their current duel for FIA MERC2 honours. Both Subaru drivers are hoping to follow in the footsteps of last year's champion Shaker Jweihan and lift the region's secondary championship title, although Jweihan is one of several regional drivers aiming to stop the two Omanis running away with the title. Jweihan said: "A new stage and it's the first of the rally. This is a long and important one. I think whoever succeeds there will carry that on throughout the rally. The car feels good and the preparations have gone well. We will see how this rally goes and how the other guys (Zakariya and Abdullah) fit in. We will look at the results and carry on for the experience."

Kuwait's Jassim Al Muqahwi, Lebanon's Shadi Al Fakih and Palestine's Hamada Uda are also chasing MERC2 honours. The QMMF confirmed the late withdrawal of young Qatari Mohammed Al Marri because of business commitments. But 21 cars are expected to attend pre-event scrutineering at the Dead Sea on Thursday morning.

2025 JORDAN RALLY – UPDATED ENTRY LIST:

1. Nasser Saleh Al Attiyah	(QAT)/Candido Carrera (ESP)	Škoda Fabia RS Rally 2
2. Rakan Al Rashed	(KSA)/Hugo Magalhães (POR)	Toyota GR Yaris Rally 2
3. Abdullah al Rawahi	(OMA)/Ata Al Hmoud (JOR)	Škoda Fabia R5 Rally 2
4. Nasser Khalifa Al Attiyah	(QAT)/Ziad Chehab (LBN)	Ford Fiesta Mk II Rally 2
5. Abdulaziz Al Kuwari	(QAT)/Lorcan Moore (IRL)	Citroën C3 Rally 2
6. Sheikh Bader Al Fayez	(JOR)/Vili Oslaj (SLO)	Škoda Fabia Rally 2
7. Ihab Al Shurafa	(JOR)/Ahmad Jankhout (JOR)	Škoda Fabia Evo Rally 2
8. Bassel Abu Hamdan	(KSA)/Firas Elias (LBN)	Škoda Fabia R5 Rally 2
9. Abdullah al Zubair	(OMA)/Taha al Zadjali (OMA)	Subaru Impreza N14
10. Shaker Jweihan	(JOR)/Aisvydas Paliukenas (LTU)	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
11. Jassim Al-Muqahwi	(KUW)/Suleiman Al-Helal (KUW)	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
12. Shadi El Fakih	(LBN)/Joseph Kmeid (LBN)	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
13. Zakariya al Aamri	(OMA)/Mohammed al Mazroui (OMA)	Subaru Impreza N14
14. Salem Al Dhafeeri	(KUW)/Waleed Al Dhafeeri (KUW)	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X*
15. Hamada Uda	(PAL)/Mustafa Juma (JOR)	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
16. Rashid Al-Muhannadi	(QAT)/Gary McElhinney (IRL)	Peugeot 208 Rally 4
17. Payyaakkal 'Saneem' Panikkaveettil	(IND)/Musa Sherif (IND)	Ford Fiesta Rally 4
19. Saad Al Harqan	(QAT)/Pierre Delorme (FRA)	Peugeot 208 Rally 4
20. Shadi Shaban	(JOR)/Samer Issa (JOR)	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX (NAT)
21. Mohammed Al Shorafa	(JOR)/Yazan Juma (JOR)	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX (NAT)*
21. Joanna Hassoun	(LBN)/Sami Fleifel (JOR)	Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX (NAT)

SHORT TAKES

BAMKHALIF ITTF MEMBER FOR 2ND CONSECUTIVE TERM

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 28



ABDULLAH BIN MOHAMMED BAMKHALIF

Chairman of Oman Table Tennis Association

In a significant milestone for Oman’s table tennis, Abdullah bin Mohammed Bamkhalif, Chairman of Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) re-elected as a member of International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) Council for the next four years. The election took place during the ITTF General Assembly which took place on Tuesday night in Doha city, Qatar. This

marks Bamkhalif’s second consecutive term on the ITTF council, reaffirming the international confidence in his leadership and contributions to the sport. In the same election, Sweden’s Petra Sörling was re-elected as ITTF President for a second term, narrowly defeating Qatar’s Khalil al Mohannadi with 104 votes to 102. The Annual General Meeting registered procedural complaints and scenes of disorder which forced the ITTF’s annual congress to be abruptly suspended.

The Sultanate of Oman was represented at the General Assembly by a delegation led by Bamkhalaif, along with Vice-President Sajad bin Mohammed al Lawati and Board Member Samira bint Shanain al Shukaili. The assembly addressed a wide range of topics aimed at advancing the development of table tennis across all continents. Following the conclusion of the meetings, Bamkhalif expressed his gratitude, as he said: “We are deeply honored by the trust placed in us by the Chairmans and representatives of national associations around the world. Being re-elected to the ITTF council is a responsibility we do not take lightly. We will continue our dedicated efforts to promote the growth and development of table tennis globally and to strengthen international partnerships between the ITTF and its member federations.”

“Oman’s representation within the highest governing body of global table tennis is a matter of great pride. This achievement will greatly benefit the sport within the Sultanate of Oman, allowing us to draw on the ITTF’s expertise and resources to expand the game’s reach and improve performance. We are committed to leveraging our position to create new opportunities for Omani players, coaches, referees and administrators through various ITTF programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing the overall standard of table tennis in Oman.” He ended

YAMAL SIGNS NEW 6-YEAR BARCELONA DEAL

BARCELONA: Barcelona’s teenage star Lamine Yamal signed a new contract until 2031 with the Catalan giants on Tuesday after a spectacular

season. The 17-year-old winger is already one of the club’s key players and helped them land a domestic treble of La Liga, the Copa del Rey and the Spanish Super Cup. “Barcelona and Lamine Yamal have reached a deal to extend his contract to June 30, 2031,” said the Catalan club in a statement.



LAMINE YAMAL

“Lamine Yamal’s renewal is a demonstration of the solidity of Barca’s project. His emergence on to the world football scene is like few others, and it began with his debut on April 29, 2023, still at the age of 15.” Spanish media reported the new deal makes him one of Barcelona’s best paid players. After triumphing at Euro 2024 with Spain last summer, Yamal scored 18 goals and provided 25 assists in 55 matches across all competitions during a sensational campaign. Operating on the right flank and a prodigious dribbler, Yamal’s skill and speed contributed greatly to Barca netting 102 league goals this season as they reclaimed the crown from rivals Real Madrid. Yamal, who came through the club’s feted La Masia youth academy and is often compared to all-time Barcelona great Lionel Messi, made his debut in 2023 under Xavi Hernandez at just 15.

— AFP



Alcaraz in action during his second round match. — Reuters

Alcaraz into 3rd round, Ruud crashes out

TITLE favourite Carlos Alcaraz overcame a minor blip to reach the French Open third round on Wednesday. Reigning men’s champion and second seed Alcaraz came through 6-1, 4-6, 6-1, 6-2 against Hungarian Fabian Marozsan to earn his 17th win in 18 matches on clay this season.

“Second set, he started to play better and he didn’t miss a lot so it was a little bit difficult to deal with his game,” said Alcaraz. “I’m really happy I stayed strong and refreshed myself. In the third set, I started to play better and better which helped me have a really good last two sets.”

Alcaraz, a four-time Grand Slam winner, goes on to face French 31st seed Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard or Bosnian Damir Dzumhur for a place in the last 16.

However, twice former French Open runner-up Casper Ruud crashed out after going down in four sets to Portugal’s Nuno Borges. Seventh seed Ruud won the first set against world number 41 Borges but was hampered by a leg injury as he slumped to a 2-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-0 defeat.

“I actually felt it quite early in the first set,” said Ruud, revealing his recent struggles with a knee injury. “It’s hopefully nothing too serious.”



Ruud in action during his second round match. — Reuters

There were no such problems for in-form Italian eighth seed Lorenzo Musetti, who raced past Colombian lucky loser Daniel Elahi Galan 6-4, 6-0, 6-4. Musetti has reached at least the semi-

finals in all three Masters 1000 events on clay in 2025. He will next play Argentina’s Mariano Navone. Jasmine Paolini moved into the women’s third round as she brushed aside Ajla Tomljanovic 6-3, 6-3 to stretch her winning streak to eight matches following her triumph at the Italian Open earlier this month. “A little bit of ups and downs but I’m happy I won,” said last year’s runner-up Paolini, who advances to play Ukraine’s Yuliia Starodubtseva. Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen punched her ticket to the last 32 with a 6-2, 6-3 win over Colombia’s Emiliana Arango. The Chinese star faces another Grand Slam debutant in the next round, 18-year-old Victoria Mboko of Canada. Ukrainian 13th seed Elina Svitolina and US 16th seed Amanda Anisimova also progressed. Meanwhile, Poland’s Swiatek is bidding to become the first woman to win four consecutive French Open titles since Suzanne Lenglen 102 years ago. She arrived in Paris under a slight cloud, having not reached a WTA final since lifting the Coupe Suzanne Lenglen last year. But the 23-year-old, who has slipped to fifth in the world rankings, opened her campaign with a confident straight-sets win against Rebecca Sramkova. — AFP

Oman return home proud after successful USA tour

MUSCAT: Oman narrowly missed out on a perfect tour finish after falling just nine runs short against hosts USA in a high-octane match of the ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup League 2 tri-series at Central Broward Regional Park in Lauderhill, USA, on Tuesday. Despite the narrow loss, Duleep Mendis’ men can take pride in a hugely successful campaign, winning three out of four matches to consolidate their overall third place in the League 2 standings with 24 points — just behind leaders USA (28) and second-placed Netherlands (26). All three teams have played 20 games each.

Scotland are fourth with 20 points from 16 games, followed by Canada (20 from 20), Namibia (14 from 20), UAE (6 from 16), and Nepal (6 from 12).

On Tuesday, chasing a formidable target of 294 after the hosts posted 293/8, Oman staged a spirited fight led by a blistering 72 off 51 balls from all-rounder Sufyan Mehmood. However, USA held their nerve in the closing overs to clinch a nail-biting victory, restricting Oman to 284/9. Mehmood’s late counterattack, featuring five boundaries and three sixes, nearly pulled off a sensational heist. He was well supported by Vinayak Shukla (46 off 37) and Hammad Mirza (50 off 52). But wickets fell at regular intervals, and Mehmood’s dismissal in the 48th over at 273 proved pivotal. Earlier, USA rode on a steady team



Hammad Mirza celebrating his 50

performance to post a strong total. Saiteja Mukkamalla top-scored with a fluent 73 off 79 deliveries, while Harmeet Singh was named Player of the Match for his all-round contribution — 33 off 36 balls and a crucial bowling spell of 3/69. Key contributions also came from openers Smit Patel (41)

and Shayan Jahangir (37), with Sanjay Krishnamurthi providing a late flourish through a rapid unbeaten 40 off 27 balls. Oman’s bowlers shared the workload: Mehmood (3/58), Aamir Kaleem (2/43), and Shakeel Ahmed (2/52) were among the wickets. Despite disciplined efforts, the USA batters paced their innings well, accelerating at the death to push the total just beyond reach. In response, Oman lost Aamir Kaleem early but skipper Jatinder Singh (42) provided a solid platform. The middle-order trio of Mirza, Shukla and Mehmood revived the chase, and with 21 needed off the last two overs and two wickets in hand, Oman still had a shot. But Jasdeep Singh (3/64) and Harmeet Singh ensured USA finished on top. Although Oman missed out on a perfect four-win record, the team captained by Jatinder, return home with their heads held high. The tour was a strong statement of their consistency and growing strength in the 50-over format.

BRIEF SCORES: USA 293/8 (Smit Patel 41, Shayan Jahangir 37, Saiteja Mukkamalla 73, Sanjay Krishnamurthi 40*, Harmeet Singh 33; Sufyan Mehmood 3/58, Shakeel Ahmed 2/52, Aamir Kaleem 2/43) beat Oman 284/9 (Jatinder Singh 42, Hammad Mirza 50, Vinayak Shukla 46, Sufyan Mehmood 72; Jasdeep Singh 3/64, Harmeet Singh 3/69)

A banner advertisement for AWASR. On the left, the AWASR logo is displayed in white on a teal background, with the tagline "Experience Better" below it. The main section has a purple background. It features a young boy sitting at a desk, focused on his laptop. Behind him, there are faint, hand-drawn educational diagrams: a triangle with internal angles labeled A, B, and C, a lightbulb, and a mathematical formula $x = \frac{\sqrt{b^2 - c^2}}{c} + \frac{c - b}{2}$. To the right of the boy, there is a QR code and the text "SUBSCRIBE NOW! WhatsApp 80001000 Website: awasr.om". Below the main headline, there are two bullet points: "Get Ashel Educational Platform for free!" and "Unlimited data for all plans".

KNICKS TO MOVE ONE WIN SHY OF REACHING NBA FINALS

TYRESE HALIBURTON delivered his second career playoff triple double to power Indiana over New York 130-121 on Tuesday, lifting the Pacers one win from the NBA Finals.

Haliburton scored 32 points, passed off 15 assists and grabbed a career-high 12 rebounds while making no turnovers over 38 minutes becoming the first player in NBA playoff history with 30-15-10 and no turnovers.

Indiana, who blew a 20-point lead in a game-three home loss, seized a 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference finals with the home triumph.

“I was just trying to be aggressive, trying to respond,” Haliburton said.

"I felt like I let the team down in game three so it was important to come out here and just make plays.

“Guys put me in position to make plays and play my game and man, it’s a big win for us.” Game five is set for Thursday in New York’s Madison Square Garden.

"I'm excited about it. It's going to be a lot of fun," Haliburton said.

"It's a tough environment to play in. We've got to be ready. Just one more game, take what we can from this and be ready for game five." The East winner will face either Oklahoma City or Minnesota in the NBA Finals starting June 5.

Haliburton's father was in the arena



Mikal Bridges shoots a layup over Indiana Pacers guard Tyrese Haliburton. — Reuters

after a month-long ban following an on-court incident with Milwaukee's Giannis Antetokounmpo earlier in the playoffs.

"Hell yeah. I'm glad pop is in the building," Haliburton said. "It makes it that much more sweet. Had a little bit to do with it." Haliburton, who also had four steals, made 11-of-23 shots from the floor and 5-of-12 from three-point range.

ENERGY AND URGENCY

"We tried giving him different looks," Knicks coach Tom Thibodeau said. "We'll look at the film. We just have to do better." Pascal Siakam added 30 points for the Pacers while Bennedict Mathurin scored 20 points off the bench for Indiana. "We just wanted to come out with more energy, more urgency," Siakam said.

"I thought we did that from the beginning. They made runs but we stuck to our game plan." Indiana coach Rick Carlisle praised Mathurin. "He was great. He gave us a huge lift," he said.

Jalen Brunson led the Knicks with 31 points while Karl-Anthony Towns had 24 points and 12 rebounds, O G Anunoby had 22 points and Mikael Bridges netted 17 points. New York gave up 17 turnovers.

“Our defense wasn’t good enough. Our defense and turnovers probably hurt us,” Thibodeau said. “The important thing is to reset. We’re not playing the series. We’re playing the game.” — **AFP**

Jitesh, Kohli power Bengaluru into IPL qualifier 1

LUCKNOW: Skipper Jitesh Sharma hammered an unbeaten 85 and Virat Kohli hit 54 as Royal Challengers Bengaluru stormed into qualifier 1 of the IPL playoffs with a six-wicket win over Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday. Bengaluru chased down 228 to go second in the 10-team table in the last league match of this season and set up a meeting with table-toppers Punjab Kings on Thursday.

The result pushed Gujarat Titans into third spot. They will face Mumbai Indians in the eliminator on Friday.

The winners of qualifier 1 go straight to the final on June 3 but the losers have a second chance of joining them as they will face the winner of the eliminator in qualifier 2 to decide who will head to Ahmedabad.

Lucknow skipper Rishabh Pant signed off with an unbeaten 118 off 61 balls in his team's 227-3, but Bengaluru knocked off the target with eight balls to spare.

Kohli set up the chase
with his 30-ball knock and



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Jitesh Sharma in action. — Reuters

after his departure stand-in-skipper Jitesh put on an unbeaten stand of 107 with Mayank Agarwal, who hit 41, to trump Lucknow, who were already out of the playoffs.

“I will not be able to express my thoughts, I can’t believe I played that knock,” said player of the match Jitesh. “When Virat bhai (brother) was out, I was just thinking of taking it deep.”

The 36-year-old Kohli, who earlier this month announced his Test

retirement alongside Rohit Sharma, went past 9,000 runs for Bengaluru — the most by a batsman for one team in men's T20 cricket. The next is Rohit's 6,060 for Mumbai.

PANT IN VAIN

Kohli put on 61 with opening partner Phil Salt, who made 30, but the chase wobbled after Lucknow hit back with wickets, New Zealand quick Will O'Rourke taking two in two balls.

O'Rourke sent back

regular skipper and impact substitute Rajat Patidar, for 14, and next ball had Liam Livingstone, leg before for a golden duck.

Jitesh turned things around with his first IPL fifty. He hit eight fours and six sixes, including the winning hit over the fence, in his 33-ball knock.

Earlier Pant, who struggled for runs after being brought by Lucknow for a record \$3.21 million in the auction, saved his best for last as he hit his season-best score.

But it was not enough and he said, "Eventually you've got to play 40 overs of good cricket. Twenty overs aren't going to save you."

Wicketkeeper-batsman Pant, a swashbuckling left-hander, reached his 100 in 54 balls and celebrated with a somersault. He had scored only 151 runs from 12 previous innings and averaged just 13.72.

Pant led the charge in a 152-run second-wicket stand with Mitchell Marsh, who hit 67 off 37 balls, after the captain promoted himself to number three in the batting order. — AFP

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The project utilises cost savings from a deferred royalty rate increase.

TRA ADVANCES
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OPTIC ROLLOUT

MUSCAT: The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has successfully completed the first phase of a nationwide initiative to enhance telecom services in underserved areas. The joint initiative, involving the government, TRA and licensed operators, aims to improve service quality in regions with infrastructure challenges by shifting from satellite to fibre optic technology.

The project utilises cost savings from a deferred royalty rate increase to upgrade connections for several telecom towers, improving stability and performance.

Omar bin Abdullah al Qatabi, Vice-President of the Telecommunications Regulatory Sector at TRA, stated that the initiative aligns with the Authority’s mission to expand access to cutting-edge telecommunications across Oman. This move supports the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which targets a digitally advanced and sustainable economy.

The shift to fibre optics in rural areas is expected to significantly improve network reliability, opening up new opportunities for social and economic development. It also empowers SMEs by enabling them to offer services in network maintenance, connectivity and project management, while creating both direct and indirect job opportunities.

The initiative is part of a broader national effort to develop an inclusive digital infrastructure, paving the way for emerging technologies such as AI, cloud computing, digital government services, e-commerce and e-learning to benefit all sectors of society. — ONA

Oman and Yemen power
grid link under study

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 28

WELL-KNOWN

international energy sector engineering services consultancy firm Monenco has announced that it has secured a contract from Omani authorities to study the feasibility of interconnecting the power grids of Oman and Yemen.

The client is Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the majority state-owner and operator of Oman’s national grid. OETC – part of Nama Group – also manages interconnectivity with the grids of neighbouring countries via the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA), a joint initiative by member states of the GCC to support electricity exchanges.

“We’re proud to announce that Monenco Oman has been awarded the highly strategic Oman-Yemen Power Grid Interconnection Project by Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) under Tender No 15/2025,” Monenco noted in a recent post.

“Monenco will be responsible for delivering the feasibility study, engineering services and full supervision during implementation up to successful energisation.

“This project is a major step towards enhancing energy security and fostering regional power connectivity across the Arabian Peninsula and the wider GCC region,” the company further added.

The initiative aligns with an ongoing bid by Oman to explore grid interconnectivity with all of its neighbours with which it shares a land border, as well as with Iran across the Strait of Hormuz.

On Tuesday, Oman signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Iran to review a feasibility study of a grid interconnection project between the two countries.



Interconnectivity enabled the export of 775,637.38 MWh of power from Oman, and import of 63,948.41 MWh through the existing GCCIA linkage.

The MoU was among 18 cooperation pacts inked by the two countries during the official visit of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to Muscat. Signing on behalf of Oman was Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, while Iran was represented by Seyed Mohammad Atabak, Minister of Industry, Mining and Trade.

Meanwhile, linkages between Oman and the GCCIA network continue to expand and strengthen. According to OETC, a new 400kV direct transmission line between Oman and the GCCIA network is currently in the design stage.

“This new line will establish a vital link between the OETC Ibri IPP and the Silaa grid stations (in the UAE), with the project scheduled for completion in Q1 2027.

“The interconnection will enhance the reliability and resilience of the transmission system by increasing the total transfer capacity between Oman and the GCCIA networks to 1,700MW, strengthening regional grid integration, supporting the energy transition and improving energy security,” OETC

affirmed in its recently published Transmission Capability Statement.

As part of the new direct link, GCCIA will build and own a new 400kV grid station at Ibri, not far from the existing Ibri IPP grid station.

This new Ibri GCCIA 400kV grid station will be connected to the Silaa 400kV grid station owned by GCCIA with total overhead-line length of about 528 km (88.2 km from Ibri GCCIA 400kV to the border and 470 km from the border to Silaa and introducing a middle point station at UAE).

Importantly, the new direct link builds on an existing interconnection between Oman and the GCCIA network, which has been operational since November 2011.

It connects Mahadha grid station in Oman with the Al Oha grid station at Al Ain in the UAE.

In 2024, Oman exported 775,637.38 megawatt-hours (MWh) and imported 63,948.41 MWh through the existing GCCIA interconnection, “reflecting a robust interconnection and mutual support within the region’s energy sector,” OETC remarked.

Nama subsidiaries unveil major initiatives for enhanced utility services

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 28

TWO KEY subsidiaries of the Nama Group — Nama Electricity Supply Company (NESC) and Nama Dhofar Services — in a media briefing held on Tuesday, May 27, unveiled their latest initiatives and strategic projects aimed at enhancing customer experience, promoting sustainability and supporting Oman Vision 2040.

The CEO of Nama Electricity Supply Company, Salim bin Said al Kamyani, outlined several major projects planned for 2025. Among them is the rollout of an advanced digital system allowing customers to track transactions in real time, view daily consumption through the mobile app and automatically recharge their prepaid accounts. New features such as load



These announcements underscore Nama Group’s collective commitment to sustainable growth, enhanced utility services, and alignment with national development goals.

management and real-time consumption tracking under the “Sabiq” service will empower users to better control electricity usage.

As part of its corporate social responsibility, NESC also launched the first phase of its Air Conditioner Maintenance Initiative to improve AC efficiency and reduce electricity bills.

Complementing these efforts is the “Sahalat” campaign, offering flexible payment options including:

- Thabit:** A fixed monthly bill payment plan.
- Yusr:** Monthly instalment plans for customers with outstanding dues.
- Sabiq:** A prepaid option with real-time monitoring for smarter energy use.

Meanwhile, Nama Dhofar Services presented its 2024 achievements and future plans

during the same media event.

CEO Ali bin Issa Shamas announced large-scale infrastructure projects, including the RO 27 million Ashour desalination plant and a RO 35 million expansion of the wastewater treatment plant.

The company also reported strong operational results: 99.7% water network reliability, over 22 million cubic metres of high-quality recycled water produced, and more than 56% of treated water reused.

In electricity services, 84% of meters have been upgraded to AMR systems, supported by the launch of 33 e-services and electronic billing for customer convenience.

Tenders worth RO 137 million were awarded for various service and grid expansion projects,

including rural electrification aimed at replacing diesel generators and enhancing carbon neutrality.

Human resource development was also highlighted, with 40,000 training hours recorded and a zero lost-time injury rate maintained since 2018. Customer satisfaction reached 75%, with 98% of complaints resolved. The company also launched innovative community programmes such as the Nama Dhofar Services Hackathon and Nama Dhofar Memory to strengthen documentation and knowledge management.

These announcements underscore Nama Group’s collective commitment to sustainable growth, enhanced utility services and alignment with national development goals.

ADVERTORIALS

UNMATCHEDRECORD



This year’s edition recognised outstanding work in brand development and strategic design.

OHI LEO BURNETT CLINCHES BIG WINS AT 2025 TRANSFORM AWARDS MEA

MUSCAT: Oman’s leading communications agency, OHI Leo Burnett, once again raised the bar in brand excellence across the region, winning three major accolades at the Transform Awards MEA 2025 in Dubai.

This year’s edition, held at the Mandarin Oriental Jumeirah, recognised outstanding work in brand development and strategic design. OHI Leo Burnett proudly represented the country as the only shortlisted agency from Oman — continuing an unmatched record of 12 consecutive years of recognition at the Middle East and Africa’s most prestigious brand transformation awards.

The agency secured:

- Gold for its bold rebranding of OQ Exploration & Production (OQEP)
- Silver for the branding of the Oman Institute for Energy (OIE)
- Bronze for a dynamic rebrand of Douglas OHI

100% Omani-owned entity, OHI Leo Burnett is led by a homegrown team of professionals across client servicing, creative and digital communications.

Their work is supported by a multicultural team that blends regional and international experience — positioning the agency to serve both legacy clients and future-focused brands across Oman.

“We are proud of the recognition OHI Leo Burnett has received at the Transform MEA 2025 Brand Awards. This reinforces our competitive standing in Oman and the region; and further strengthens our belief in the power of partnerships with our clients,” said Ammar al Saleh, Chairman of the OHI Group.

“OHI Leo Burnett’s track record is more than just a streak of awards — it’s a sign of strategic consistency and creative depth,” said Aaron Hennessey, Group Chief Operating Officer at OHI.

As we expand our footprint across the region, this agency plays a vital role in how we tell our story and support our clients in building brands that last.”

OHI Leo Burnett’s sustained recognition reinforces its leadership in branding — not just in Oman, but across the region — as it continues to champion the region’s brand narratives through purposeful creativity.

AMOUAGE AND OMAN AIR TAKE THE OMANI ROCK ROSE TO THE SKIES

MUSCAT: In a shared celebration of artistry and heritage, Amouage, the independent Omani High Perfumery House and Oman Air, the national airline, have joined hands to honour the treasured Omani Rock Rose through a flavourful collaboration designed exclusively for Business Class guests.

At the centre of this collaboration is a signature dessert created by Michelin-starred Chef Peter Gast inspired by Amouage’s Guidance Eau de Parfum. Available for a



The dessert is available for a limited time only.

limited time only, this bespoke dessert brings a new dimension of storytelling and sensory delight

to the airline’s award-winning Business Class menu, offering guests a refined taste of Oman at 30,000 feet.

The carefully crafted, seven-petal creation is an elegant balance of textures and layered depth, revealing unexpected contrasts with every bite.

Beneath its soft pink exterior and crisp chocolate shell, its petals part to unveil a velvety cream and a delicate crunch that lingers on the palate.

MG Motor unveils the next-generation MG ZS

BUILDING on the success of its predecessor, which secured a leading position in the compact SUV segment, MG Motor proudly introduces the all-new MG ZS — a bold and stylish evolution designed for modern urban explorers. Packed with cutting-edge technology, enhanced performance and advanced safety features, the latest MG ZS continues the legacy while setting new bench-marks in its class.

Delivering an engaging driving experience, enhanced by state-of-the-art safety and infotainment systems, the MG ZS is now available in Oman. The latest iteration of MG’s popular SUV is set to capture the attention of young drivers and families alike.

The MG ZS offers two dynamic powertrain options tailored to different driving needs. The efficient 1.5L engine delivers 112HP for smooth city cruising, while the turbocharged variant boosts performance to an exhilarating 168HP.

With three selectable Drive Modes, the MG ZS adapts effortlessly to both urban streets and open highways, ensuring a confident and engaging drive.

Tom Lee, Managing Director



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of MG Motor Middle East, stated: “With its bold styling, cutting-edge technology and impressive performance, the MG ZS delivers exactly what today’s drivers seek — style, capability and outstanding value.

As one of our most successful models, the ZS continues to evolve with advanced features while maintaining its strong

price competitiveness, ensuring accessibility for a wider audience. This latest generation reflects MG’s commitment to innovation, not only through upgraded technology but also as part of our broader vision to integrate new EV technologies into our global lineup. We are excited to bring this model to our customers across the region, offering a dynamic and future-ready driving experience.”

Commenting on this occasion, Mohsin Hani al Bahrani, CEO, MHD ACERE, stated that, “At MHD ACERE, we are proud to introduce the next-generation MG ZS to the Omani market — a compact SUV that perfectly balances performance, technology and style.

The MG ZS reflects our continued commitment to bringing innovative and accessible mobility solutions to our customers. With its advanced safety features, bold design and exceptional value, the new MG ZS is crafted for the modern driver who seeks both practicality and personality in their everyday drive.”

The MG ZS makes a bold statement with its refined yet dynamic styling. Featuring a striking front fascia with a wide grille and connected ‘Hunter-Eye’ LED headlights, it exudes a confident and contemporary appeal.

UFC officially opens newest branch in Al Maabela

MUSCAT: United Finance Company (UFC) proudly marked the official opening of its newest branch in Al Maabela on Monday, May 19, under the gracious auspices of Shaikh Ahmed bin Ali al Shihi, Wali of Al Seeb.

Located in the heart of Al Maabela’s vibrant automotive and commercial zone, the new branch is a key milestone in UFC’s broader strategy to bring financial services closer to customers, enhance convenience and support growing businesses through seamless, customer-centric solutions.

The event welcomed over 80 guests, including esteemed auto dealers, long-



The new branch is a key milestone in UFC’s broader strategy.

standing partners and senior representatives from UFC. Traditional Omani hospitality was offered, accompanied by a live oud performance and

UFC-branded giveaways. The ceremony began with opening remarks from Mahmood al Hadi, AGM — HR, Administration & Recovery, one of the founding

members of UFC, who reflected on the company’s journey and reaffirmed its purpose-driven growth.

Abdullah al Khayyari, Chairman of UFC, followed with a message focused on customer-centric expansion, highlighting Al Maabela as a key location in line with UFC’s vision for sustainable market leadership.

Fawaz al Riyami, Chief Business Officer, outlined the branch’s role in UFC’s transformation road map: “This branch represents more than a physical space — it embodies our continued push towards faster service, deeper community engagement and digitally empowered customer experiences.”

Sohar International hosts insightful Viewpoints Forum

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its steadfast commitment to fostering intellectual dialogue and the exchange of impactful ideas, Sohar International hosted a compelling session of its signature Viewpoints Forum at the Mandarin Oriental, Muscat, on May 22, 2025. Attended by industry leaders, financial professionals and decision-makers both in person and online, the event provided timely insights into global market trends under the theme “Politics, Policy

& Prices — Impact on Markets: A Walkthrough.” The forum featured James Ashley, Managing Director, Head of International Market Strategy and Head of Strategic Advisory Solutions at Goldman Sachs Asset Management.

Ashley delivered a comprehensive analysis of how geopolitical developments, policy shifts and economic indicators influence global markets, offering attendees valuable perspectives drawn



The event provided timely insights into global market trends under the theme “Politics, Policy & Prices — Impact on Markets: A Walkthrough.”

from his strategic expertise. Moderating the discussion was Sarah Cocker, acclaimed financial journalist and former CNBC Squawk Box anchor. Her dynamic and thoughtful facilitation enriched the conversation and brought clarity to complex global issues.

Commenting on the event, Abdulwahid Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer at Sohar International, said, “Knowledge, when paired with access and

perspective, becomes a powerful driver of opportunity.

Our aim through initiatives like these is not only to exchange insights, but to ignite critical thinking, challenge convention and equip our stakeholders to navigate an increasingly complex investment landscape with confidence. This forum reflects a broader commitment to strategic foresight and the kind of dialogue that drives long-term value.

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



Canada climbs to 32nd place among GCC trade partners despite a 14.1% drop in bilateral trade.

CANADA-GCC
TRADE REACHES \$8.5
BILLION IN 2023

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 28

Trade between the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Canada amounted to \$8.5 billion in 2023, according to recent data published by the GCC Statistical Center.

This figure represents 14.1 per cent decline in trade in 2023 in comparison with 2022’s total of \$9.9 billion.

Most notably, GCC exports to Canada decreased by 32.2 per cent (\$1.5 billion) to \$3.2 billion in 2023, versus \$4.7 billion in the previous year.

Minerals fuels, oils and waxes, totalling \$2.1 billion in value, represented a 65.6 per cent share of exports. This was followed by miscellaneous items (12.5 per cent of exports) valued at \$0.4 billion.

Iron and steel represented 9.4 per cent of total exports amounting to \$0.3 billion, followed by precious stones and metals which represented 6.3 per cent of total exports valued at \$0.2 billion.

Machinery and mechanical appliances and iron and/or steel products accounted for 3.1 per cent of exports with a value of \$0.1 billion.

On the other hand, imports from Canada increased by 0.8 per cent (\$0.1 billion) in 2023 to \$5.3 billion. Miscellaneous items worth \$2.0 billion made up 37.7 per cent of total imports, while “commodities subject to special provisions” accounted for an 18.9 per cent share worth \$1.0 billion.

Imports of precious stones and metals, machinery and mechanical appliances, vehicles and vehicle parts collectively accounted for a 13.2 per cent share of exports, valued at \$0.7 billion. Edible vegetable oils accounted for a 3.8 per cent share of imports with a value of \$0.2 billion.

Despite the decline in the trade volume, Canada moves up a rank to become the 32nd trade partner of the GCC in 2023.

Earlier in January, Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Jasem bin Mohamed al Budaiwi, received the Canadian Minister of International Development at the General-Secretariat’s headquarters in Al Riyadh to discuss bilateral relations between the GCC and Canada, in addition to ways to enhance cooperation in various aspects.

JAPAN ENACTS LAW
FOR FIRMS TO JOIN
CARBON TRADING

TOKYO: Japan’s parliament enacted a law on Wednesday obliging hundreds of major companies to participate in a carbon emission trading system as part of its efforts to achieve the country’s climate goals.

The revised law requires companies producing 100,000 tonnes of carbon emissions to participate in a trading system, which will be introduced in the fiscal year starting in April 2026. — AFP

OPEC+
MEETS
AS OIL
OUTPUT
HIKE LOOMS

LONDON: Ministers of the Opec+ oil alliance, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, hold talks on Wednesday to discuss their production levels as another hike looms despite falling prices.

The 22-nation group began a series of cuts in 2022 to prop up crude prices, but Saudi Arabia, Russia and six other members surprised markets recently by sharply raising output for May and June. The move has put pressure on prices, which have also fallen as



A 3D-printed oil pump jack is seen in front of the displayed stock graph and Opec logo in this illustration picture. — Reuters

investors worry that US President Donald Trump’s tariff onslaught will cause an economic slump and weigh on demand.

Analysts say the hikes have likely been aimed at punishing Opec members that have failed to meet their quotas, but it also follows pressure from Trump to increase production.

Opec+ ministers are not expected to change the alliance’s collective policy during their online meeting on Wednesday. — AFP

Telegraph Island project
hits 50% completion

THE historic development project on Maqlab Island, commonly known as Telegraph Island, has reached 50 per cent completion, marking a key milestone in Musandam Governorate’s efforts to boost sustainable tourism and preserve cultural heritage. The initiative is part of a broader strategy to enhance economic growth in the governorate while revitalising the island’s unique historical significance.

Eng Ahmed bin Mohammed al Shehhi, Director of the Projects Department at Musandam Municipality, said the project is anchored on several strategic goals: restoring and showcasing the site’s historic structures in an educational and attractive way, promoting sustainable tourism to generate jobs and boost local incomes and conserving the island’s rich marine environment, home to vibrant coral reefs and fish.

He emphasised that the project offers a rare opportunity to connect the past with the present by using heritage as a foundation for tourism and cultural development. With a balanced approach between preservation and renewal, the project aims to transform the island into a regional and global



The initiative is part of a broader strategy to enhance economic growth in the governorate while revitalising the island’s unique historical significance.

destination that highlights a forgotten chapter in the history of global communications.

The development includes a 731-square-metre multi-use hall, a 130-square-metre service building, an 8-metre-long marine landing platform with a floating system, a guard room with full access facilities, a utility building for electricity generators and fuel storage, and a shaded canopy area.

Additionally, a mountain walkway will link the island’s facilities, along with two dedicated photo platforms offering views of its main landmarks.

Al Shehhi noted that Maqlab Island gained historical importance in 1864 as a transmission station

The project offers a rare opportunity to connect the past with the present by using heritage as a foundation for tourism and cultural development.

IMF revises up UK growth forecast for 2025

LONDON: The International Monetary Fund slightly upgraded its UK growth forecast for this year but warned over fallout from US tariff threats as it held its estimate for 2026.

Britain’s economy is expected to expand 1.2 per cent in 2025, up from 1.1 per cent estimated last month, the IMF said in its latest outlook document for the UK, partly citing “very strong” first-quarter growth on better-than-expected business investment.

It warned, however, that global trade tensions would hit UK growth by 0.3 per cent for the remainder of this year.

This is due to “persistent uncertainty, slower activity in UK trading partners, and the direct impact of remaining US tariffs on the UK”, the IMF said.



A view of the Port of Felixstowe in Suffolk, Britain’s biggest and busiest container port. — AFP

The Fund held its forecast that the UK economy would grow by 1.4 per cent in 2026.

Britain’s Labour government welcomed the updated figure, with finance minister Rachel Reeves emphasising that

three recently-struck trade agreements — with the US, EU and India — would help with “protecting jobs, boosting investment and cutting prices”.

The UK and the United States this month reached a post-Brexit

deal which reduces tariffs on British cars and removes those on steel and aluminium.

Britain in return will open up markets to US beef and other farm products. But a 10-per cent levy imposed on the UK remains intact as part of Donald Trump’s tariffs blitz on key trading partners.

The IMF added that the three trade deals are “just first steps”.

“We see them as very important at the sectoral level, but not necessarily impacting massively or significantly our forecast,” IMF mission chief to the UK Luc Eyraud said in a press briefing.

The Fund added that “persistently weak productivity remains the UK’s primary obstacle to lifting growth and living standards”. — AFP

PRODUCTION SHUT

Oil prices inch up on supply risks



Oil prices inched up on Wednesday, with the US barring Chevron from exporting crude from Venezuela and production shut-ins from Canada, while markets eyed an expected production increase from Opec+.

Brent crude futures rose 54 cents, or 0.8%, to \$64.21 a barrel by 1050 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude gained 64 cents, or 0.9%, to stand at \$61.56 a barrel. — Reuters

PUSHED PRICES

Google facing £25 bn legal claim in UK



Google is facing a £25 billion (\$33.7 billion) legal claim in the UK, accusing the tech giant of abusing its dominant position in the online search advertising market.

The claims that Google’s agreements with mobile device manufacturers to make Google Search the default search engine on devices has pushed prices up for UK advertisers. The claim is being led by Roger Kaye KC. — dpa

HURTING BUSINESS

EU firms’ sentiment in China hits new low



The mood among European firms in China has reached a new low, according to a new survey by the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China.

Just 29% of the firms surveyed said they were optimistic about their growth prospects in China over the next two years. Chamber president Jens Eskelund said in Beijing that the current level of unpredictability is hurting business confidence. — dpa

OPINION

Oman’s presence at Expo Osaka to boost Japanese tourism



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UNDOUBTEDLY, significant efforts have been made to ensure the country’s participation in the international expo currently being held in Osaka, Japan. The expo began on April 13, 2025, and will continue until October 13, 2025.

Several government agencies, along with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, have contributed to the financial cost of sponsoring Oman’s presence at this global event, which is held every five years. Several government delegations have also contributed to organising the expo and made official visits.

Recently, an Omani trade delegation from the Chamber participated in this expo and some of its important activities.

The Sultanate of Oman has consistently participated in this international event since the nineties of the last century. Its first participation was at the Expo International Exhibition in Madrid, Spain, in 1992. The expo’s theme was “The Global Age of Transportation,” given the importance of transportation in bringing peoples together and driving human progress.

The expo highlighted the transformation of transportation from ancient maritime routes to modern technology, while also showcasing countries’ innovations in infrastructure,

railways, aviation, and telecommunications.

However, the Japan Expo, held on the artificial island of Yumeshima in Osaka, Japan, is expected to attract millions of visitors, providing a unique global platform bringing together more than 160 countries and international organisations.

Government institutions and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry are keen to raise awareness of the importance of these international exhibitions.

This requires organising media trips to raise awareness and educate people about the importance of this event

. This requires sending more media professionals to discuss this participation and its benefits at the national level, as well as ways to promote Japanese tourism to Oman in the coming years, given the large number of Japanese tourists who travel to various countries around the world annually.

Japanese tourists are among the most organised and detail-oriented, and these traits are reflected in their spending patterns and preferred destinations.

The average tourist from Japan spends on tourism for example, in Indonesia, around \$1,462 per visit in 2022, and approximately \$1,300 per visit to cities in the United States. Japanese tourists stay for extended periods, typically about two weeks in the United States, more than 18 days in France, 12 days

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in Indonesia, and five days in Korea.

Now with direct flights between some Gulf cities, such as Dubai and Doha, and other cities in the region, attracting Japanese tourism has become easier.

However, it requires companies that can convince the Japanese public to make these visits to Oman, for example.

Japanese tourists also prefer group trips, especially older travellers, due to their need for rest and organisation, while young people are also eager to experience unique experiences.

In general, such international exhibitions provide a great opportunity for countries to promote their national identity and build their image by showcasing their cultures and creativity, which contributes to strengthening their image on the international stage.

Through this participation, Oman will work to foster greater cooperation in achieving sustainable development goals, enhancing economic and trade cooperation and benefiting from future innovations and technologies.

This presence at Expo Japan represents a strategic opportunity to enhance its international presence, expand economic and cultural relations and contribute to building a sustainable and interconnected future, in addition to significantly promoting Japanese tourism to the country.

SAUDI’S REFINING BOOM HELPS IT WEATHER OIL PRICE WAR

RON BOUSSO

Saudi Arabia has been cranking up oil refining operations to capture strong profit margins, helping the kingdom offset revenue lost from declining crude prices and exports.

The world’s top oil exporter has in recent years invested heavily in expanding and modernising its refining and petrochemical capacity at home and overseas to meet growing demand for fuel and plastics while also securing outlets for its crude oil.

Saudi Arabia has nine local refineries with a combined capacity of 3.33 million barrels of oil per day (bpd), accounting for roughly 3% of global demand, which is configured to process its domestically produced crude oil.

It operates another 4.3 million bpd of refining capacity abroad, including in China, the United States and Malaysia. The kingdom’s domestic refineries processed 2.94 million bpd in March, the highest-ever volume for that month and only a smidgen below the record high of 2.96 million bpd in April 2024, according to data from the Joint Organizations Data Initiative (JODI).

The 12% monthly increase in refining crude intake in March was 23% above the 10-year average for the same period. It correlates with a 12% month-on-month drop in Saudi crude exports to 5.75 million bpd in March, according to the data, highlighting the kingdom’s flexibility between directly selling crude to other refiners and refining it itself.

Saudi refinery rates likely declined by around 200,000 bpd in April due to planned plant maintenance but should remain at elevated levels ahead of peak summer demand season, according to Keshav Lohiya, CEO and founder of analytics firm Oilytics. Saudi’s refined product exports, which include diesel, gasoline, jet fuel and fuel oil, rose to a record 1.58 million bpd in March, before declining to 1.48 million bpd in April and 1.42 million bpd so far in May, according to data from ship tracking firm Kpler, likely reflecting refinery turnaround.

This integrated strategy offers Saudi Aramco, the country’s national oil company, an effective way to manage oil price volatility as refining margins - the profit made by processing crude oil into transportation fuels and chemicals - typically rise when feedstock prices decline.

It will likely prove valuable going forward after Opec+, an alliance of major producing countries unofficially led by Riyadh and including Russia, started to rapidly unwind 2.2 million bpd of output since April.

The move to add a large volume of oil into an already well-supplied market concerned by the impact of US President Donald Trump’s tariffs on global economic activity put heavy pressure on oil prices, which dropped to around \$65 a barrel from a high of \$82 in mid-January. — Reuters

Euro’s strength creates new challenges for export

EXPORTERS in the European Union are facing unexpected headwinds as the euro has strengthened in recent weeks, hurting competitiveness. The euro and dollar were trading close to parity early in the year, when Donald Trump took office for his second term as the US president.

That gap had gradually widened before the White House rowed back its war of words with the US Federal Reserve. Even that had a limited impact on the currencies, with the Euro still close to its highest level since 2021.

Bank of Ireland chief economist Conall MacCoille said that, at its most basic, the strength of the Euro makes Irish exports to the US less competitive. The combination of a currency swing along with tariffs, exports from Ireland to the US means exporters will feel a squeeze on their margins, or pressure on prices.

MacCoille said: “People will have to make a decision which comes down to the question of price elasticity – can they raise prices without hurting demand?” That question is going to be different for every sector and even for businesses within sectors, he said.

“Exporters have to deal with foreign exchange movements all the time and it should be noted the dollar had been extraordinarily strong,” he added.

The currencies gap reflects increased faith in the euro-area economy – in particular the prospect of Germany boosting demand to restore growth – as well as shaken confidence in a dollar battered by radical and unpredictable policies in the White House.

But the current strength of the euro had not been a widely expected result of the Trump presidency, Mac Coille said. It had been widely anticipated that tariffs would push up inflation and interest rates and the dollar would have been strengthened. The question now is what the Trump administration’s dollar policy really is.

“You are looking at potentially



Euro banknote is displayed on US dollar banknotes in this illustration taken. — Reuters

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very volatile policy, a huge US federal debt, negotiations over the US budget, and in the background this idea of a “Mar-a-Lago accord” – so the dollar has gone in the opposite direction,” Mac Coille said.

The national ‘Mar-a-Lago accord’ is an idea that has been floated in financial circles, that the Trump White House could try to engineer a weaker dollar and lower borrowing costs for itself as part of a wider negotiation to re-order global finances.

It hasn’t happened, or even been proposed, but the idea and the possibility that it could be tried has weighed on confidence.

The strong euro will have the biggest impact on businesses exporting certain items, such as, beverage and butter – goods that

have relatively slim margins, says Dan O’Brien, chief economist at the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA).

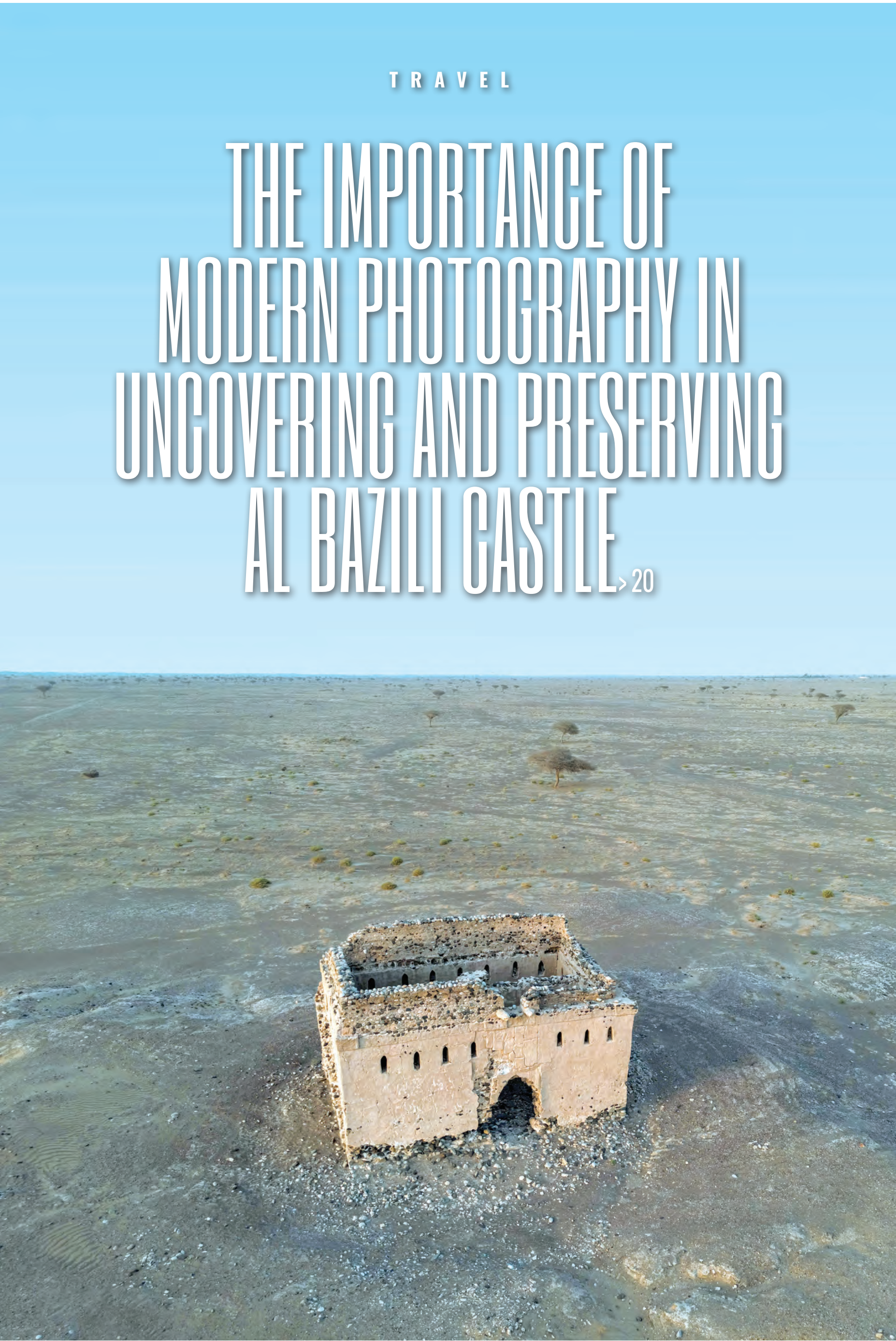
It’s likely to have the least impact in sectors such as pharma, which are high margin and where sales to the US are primarily intra-company.

A strong euro is a positive for importers, he pointed out, including energy importers – and will push down inflation in the euro area, keeping the European Central Bank on course to lower interest rates further as a result.

The stability of the euro and sterling despite wider turmoil is also a positive, O’Brien said. “Sterling is hugely important for lower margin exporters and has proved very stable post-Brexit,” he said. “However, the spectre of policy-driven volatility from the White House cannot be ignored,” he added.

“There has never been a time when a major power has jumped around on policy like this. Unless there is a return to some sort of normality, then the dollar is in line for a period of weakness. However, it should be said no market is more unpredictable than currencies.”

ART/LIFE



T R A V E L

THE IMPORTANCE OF MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY IN UNCOVERING AND PRESERVING AL BAZILI CASTLE > 20

ENTERTAINMENT

Jackie Chan, Ralph Macchio join martial arts forces in ‘Karate Kid: Legends’



JACKIE CHAN and Ralph Macchio blend fighting techniques to train a new karate kid in the latest instalment of the martial arts movie franchise.

“Karate Kid: Legends”, released this week, stars Ben Wang as Beijing kung fu whizz Li Fong who moves with his mother to New York, where he befriends pizza restaurant owner and retired boxer Victor and his daughter Mia.

When that friendship irks a local karate champion, Li enters a karate tournament and begins training with his old kung fu teacher Mr Han, played by Chan, and Macchio’s Daniel LaRusso, the protagonist of the original 1984 film “The Karate Kid” who learned karate from mentor Mr Miyagi.

“They presented the concept to me ... connecting the Miyagi to the Han family and how that made sense ... I was like ‘That’s kind of clever. Okay, so how do we maintain this connective tissue into Li Fong’s story that is organic and truthful,’” Macchio said in a joint interview with Chan and Wang.

“That was the challenge at first and figuring that out. Working with Jackie was like, ‘Woohoo sign me up - when, where?’ And then who’s the kid? If we don’t love this kid, then you have no movie. So all those, like it happens with ‘The Karate Kid’ universe, is magic dust that comes down and somehow it continues to resonate. So I’m excited for the next generation version.”

The movie is Macchio’s fourth “Karate Kid” film playing LaRusso, a character he also portrayed in the “Cobra Kai” television series.

Chan reprises the role of Mr Han, a character he first played in the 2010 film “The Karate Kid” opposite Jaden Smith.

“Now we’ve both become a Miyagi,” Chan said, referring to both his and Macchio’s characters becoming mentors.

“I remember when I saw the first one. Why him (Macchio)? Why not me?...I want to be ‘The Karate Kid’. (Now) We work together.”

Wang, 25, said Chan’s 2010 film introduced him to the franchise.

“Stepping into it, it’s a terrifying thing in a certain way because it’s a beloved franchise and ... the fans love it so much so I want to do right by them,” he said. “But it’s also a great honour because a lot of people auditioned for this part so I know how special and lucky it is that I get to do this with the two of them.”

— Reuters

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



TRAVEL

Tourists look at museum exhibits displayed at the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), which set to officially open fully on July 3, following a partial opening last year in Giza. —Reuters



MUSIC

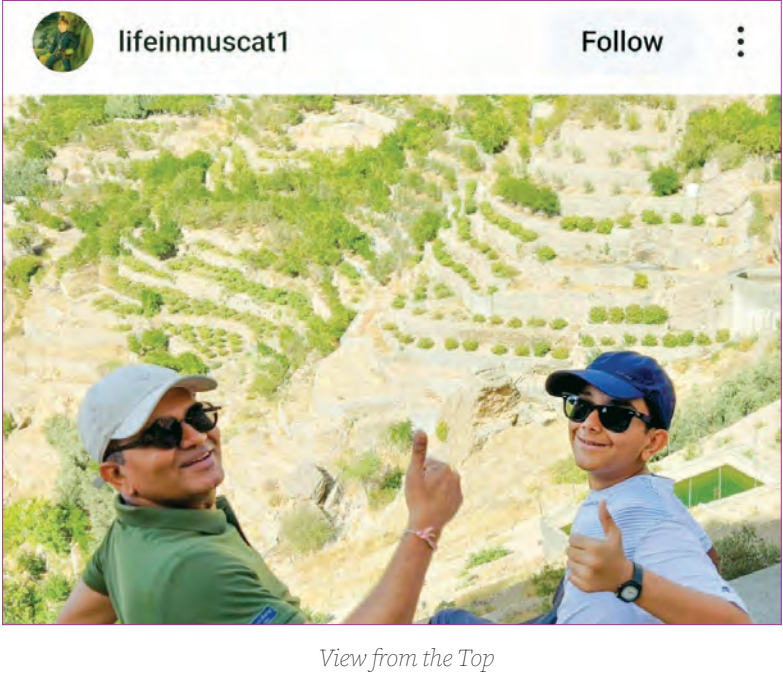
US singer Becky G poses with the award for Favourite Female Latin Artist in the press room during the 51st American Music Awards at the Fontainebleau in Las Vegas. —AFP



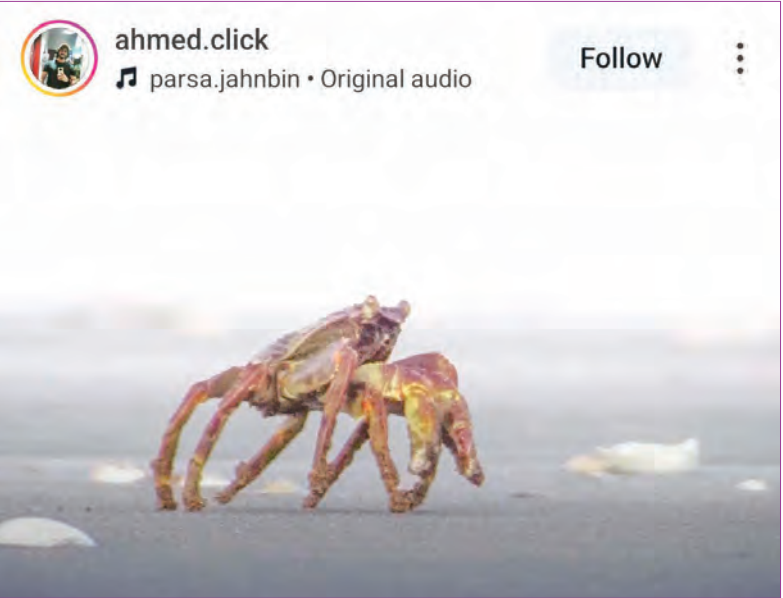
FILM

Bollywood actor Rajkumar Rao attends the screening of his Indian Hindi-language romantic comedy film ‘Bhool Chuk Maaf’ in Mumbai. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



View from the Top



Life by the Beach

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. To be selected, follow us on Instagram and every time you upload or share your photos, make sure to tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

Louis Vuitton holds fashion show at France’s Palais des Papes



LOUIS VUITTON womenswear designer Nicolas Ghesquiere showed the label’s Cruise 2026 collection in the main courtyard of the towering medieval Palais des Papes monument in southern France last week. The audience sat in risers lining the runway set, with French first lady Brigitte Macron, actors Catherine Deneuve and Cate Blanchett and Vuitton’s menswear designer Pharrell Williams in the front row. Models marched out just after sunset in metallic suit jackets, wide capes with flame-like patterns and gladiator boots covered in mirrored glass. Some looks had extra pleats or rows

of chains that added movement and volume, while looser looks included a layered bohemian skirt and a wide-sleeved blouse. The event from the LVMH-owned (LVMH.PA), opens new tab label - the world’s biggest luxury brand - took place as the luxury industry grapples with a prolonged slump, with a number of fashion brands including Kering-owned Gucci and Balenciaga, privately owned Chanel and LVMH’s Dior all recently naming new designers. Ghesquiere, meanwhile, is set to stay in his position, which he took up in 2013, for several more years after a contract renewal in late 2023. — Reuters



Ancient town and its manuscripts face ravages of the Sahara



FROM HIS roof, Sidi Mohamed Lemine Sidiya scans the mediaeval town of Oualata, a treasure that is disappearing under the sands of the Mauritanian desert. “It’s a magnificent, extraordinary town,” said Sidiya, who is battling to preserve the place known as the “Shore of Eternity”. Oualata is one of a Unesco-listed quartet of ancient, fortified towns or “ksour”, which in their heyday were trading and religious centres and now hold jewels dating back to the Middle Ages. Doors crafted from acacia wood and adorned with traditional motifs painted by local women still dot the town. Centuries-old manuscripts, a rich source of cultural and literary heritage handed down through the generations, are also held in family libraries. But the southeastern town near the border with Mali is vulnerable to the ravages of the Sahara’s extreme conditions. In the punishing heat, piles of stone and walls that are ripped open bear witness to the impact of the latest, especially heavy, rainy season. “Many houses have collapsed because of the rains,” Khady said, standing by her crumbling home, which she inherited from her grandparents. An exodus of people leaving Oualata only compounds the problem. “The houses became ruins because

their owners left them,” said Sidiya, a member of a national foundation dedicated to preserving the region’s ancient towns. ENCROACHING SANDS For decades, Oualata’s population has been dwindling as residents move away in search of jobs, leaving nobody to maintain the historic buildings. Its traditional constructions are covered in a reddish mudbrick coating called banco and were designed to adapt to the conditions. But once the rains have stopped, the buildings need maintenance work. Much of the old town is now empty, with only around a third of the buildings inhabited. “Our biggest problem is desertification. Oualata is covered in sand everywhere,” Sidiya said. Around 80 per cent of Mauritania is affected by desertification — an extreme form of land degradation — caused by “climate change (and) inappropriate operating practices”, according to the environment ministry. More plants and trees used to grow in the desert, Boubacar Diop, head of the ministry’s Protection of Nature department, said. “The desert experienced a green period before the great desertification of the 1970s caused the installation of sand dunes,” Diop said. By the 1980s, Oualata’s mosque was so covered in sand that “people

were praying on top of the mosque” rather than inside it, Bechir Barick, who teaches geography at Nouakchott University, said. Despite being battered by the wind and sand, Oualata has preserved relics attesting to its past glory as a city on the trans-Saharan caravan trade route and centre of Islamic learning. “We inherited this library from our ancestors, founders of the town,” Mohamed Ben Baty said, turning the pages of a 300-year-old manuscript in a banco-covered building that remains cool despite the outside temperature. Like his forebears, the imam is the repository of almost 1,000 years of knowledge, descending from a long line of scholars of the Koran. The family library in Oualata holds 223 manuscripts, with the oldest dating to the 14th century, Ben Baty explained. These invaluable texts, once poorly stored and exposed to damage, are fragile, with water stains evident on some. The library, established in the 1990s with Spanish support, contains over 2,000 restored and digitised books. Due to limited funding, its preservation relies on dedicated enthusiasts like Baty, who advocates for expert management to safeguard these documents on languages, history, and sciences. Oualata faces challenges from desert encroachment, lack of tourism, and regional instability but continues efforts to preserve its rich cultural heritage through festivals and community initiatives. — AFP

FEATURES



THE IMPORTANCE OF MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY IN UNCOVERING AND PRESERVING AL BAZILI CASTLE

BY ZUWAINA AL SULIMANI
PHOTOS BY SHIHAB AL SHANDOUDI

OMAN IS a land of striking contrasts—towering mountains, sprawling deserts, lush wadis. While many are familiar with its grand mosques and bustling souqs, the country also conceals numerous ancient forts that whisper stories of bygone eras. Among these lesser-known marvels is Al Bazili Castle, an ancient fortress that has largely remained under the radar, waiting for someone to tell its story.

Recently, a talented Omani photographer named Shihab al Shandoudi set out on a mission to do just that: to uncover and showcase the beauty of this forgotten site. His journey offers a rare glimpse into Oman's historical fabric and highlights why preserving these ruins is crucial to

understanding Oman's past and nurturing its sense of identity.

THE HISTORY BEHIND OMAN'S FORTS

Before diving into Al Bazili's story, it's worth understanding why forts have played such a vital role in Oman's history. For centuries, Oman's strategic location on the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula made it both a trading hub and a battleground. Fortifications were essential to protect settlements, control trade routes, and defend against invading forces.

Omani forts are renowned for their resilience and distinctive architecture, often built from coral stone, mud bricks, and reinforced with stone. Many of these forts date back to the early Islamic period, with some pre-dating that, and served as military and administrative centres well into the 19th and 20th centuries.

Some of the most famous forts have

become a major draw for tourists. For example, Nizwa Fort stands as a testament to Oman's golden age, offering spectacular views over the ancient city and insights into traditional Omani life. Bahla Fort, a Unesco World Heritage Site, is famed for its imposing walls and labyrinth of alleyways. Jibreen Castle, with its finely decorated interiors, stands as a reminder of Oman's medieval splendour. These sites attract visitors from around the world, eager to walk through history. However, many other forts, like Al Bazili, remain relatively obscure, their stories waiting to be told. This is where modern photography, driven by passion and curiosity, becomes a powerful tool for cultural preservation.

drone shots, AlShandoudi captured the castle from perspectives most visitors would never see. His preferred times for shooting? Dawn and dusk—the moments when the light softens and bathes the ruins in a warm, golden hue. It's during these quiet hours that the textures of the ancient stonework are revealed most vividly.

While the summer heat is fierce, Al Shandoudi emphasises that patience and preparation turn challenging conditions into creative opportunities. Even under Oman's baking sun, the glow of sunset or early morning light can transform a forsaken ruin into a hauntingly beautiful scene.

"Many people tell me, 'I didn't know



DISCOVERING AL BAZILI CASTLE

About 35 kilometres from the wilayat of Dhank, Al Dhahirah Governorate, hidden within a rugged desert landscape, lies Al Bazili Castle. Its battered stone walls and ancient arches stand as silent witnesses to centuries of history. Shihab al Shandoudi first encountered a fleeting glimpse of the fort in a brief video clip years ago. The image haunted him, and his curiosity grew, compelling him to seek out the site for himself.

His journey wasn't straightforward. The location isn't easily found—without local knowledge, it could easily be missed or mistaken for a natural formation. With a little local guidance, however, Al Shandoudi finally reached the site and was immediately captivated by its silent grandeur.

"Apart from its age and structure, what struck me most was the intricate craftsmanship—the way the arches and geometric patterns reveal a traditional beauty that's hard to find elsewhere," he explained.

Using a combination of advanced photography techniques, including aerial

about this place' or 'I never thought a site like this could be so beautiful,'" he says with a smile. His photos serve as a visual reminder of what's at stake—these sites are part of Oman's collective memory and cultural identity.

Looking ahead, Al Shandoudi remains committed to uncovering more of Oman's hidden gems. His camera never rests, always seeking the overlooked, the abandoned, and the forgotten. His mission is simple: to tell stories through images and inspire others to explore and preserve Oman's rich past.

"The world doesn't need yet another picture of a famous monument," he says. "It needs to see what's been hiding in plain sight — these stories that can tell future generations who they are and where they come from."

Through his eyes, Al Bazili Castle transforms from a silent relic into a vivid chapter of Oman's ongoing story. Every frame captured is a brushstroke in a broader effort to safeguard and celebrate the country's cultural legacy. It's a reminder that Oman's history isn't just written in books or etched into plaques — it lives in the stones, arches and walls of its ancient forts.