

OMAN

عمان

DAILY

Observer

SUNRISE 05:20 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 03:53 AM

DHUHR 12:10 PM

ASR 03:29 PM

MAGHRIB 06:56 PM

ISHA 08:17 PM



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11

BENGALURU BEAT PUNJAB TO WIN MAIDEN IPL TITLE



HM ISSUES ROYAL DECREE

TRANSFERS MEDICAL SERVICES FROM DIWAN OF ROYAL COURT TO MoH

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree No 51/2025 transferring the Directorate-General of Medical Services from the Diwan of Royal Court to the Ministry of Health (MoH). Article 1 states that the Directorate-General of Medical Services should be transferred from the Diwan of Royal Court to the Ministry of Health. Article 2 states that all the allocations, assets, rights, obligations and possessions of the Directorate-General of Medical Services shall be transferred to the Ministry of Health. Article 3 states that the holders of medical and assistant medical positions, and other employees of the Directorate-General of Medical Services, shall be transferred to the Ministry of Health, with the same job status, grades and financial allocations. Article 4 states that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of its issue. — ONA

INBRIEF

DIGITAL BANKS GET GREEN LIGHT



The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued a regulatory framework for the licensing and supervision of digital banks, marking a major step towards modernising the country's financial sector. The framework, which came into effect on June 1, 2025, is aligned with Oman Vision 2040. The framework allows digital banks to operate as either locally incorporated joint-stock companies (SAOC or SAOG) or as branches of foreign banks, subject to regulatory approval in their home jurisdictions. Two types of licences will be offered. Category 1 requires a minimum paid-up capital of RO 30 million and allows full operations. Category 2 requires RO 10 million but comes with business limitations, including caps on customer deposits and corporate lending, and a prohibition on proprietary trading. These limits are waived during the first two years of operation.

DETAILS ON P13

OMAN COMMITTED TO SUPPORT RIGHTS OF PALESTINIANS

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday participated in the 113th session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva. During the conference, a draft resolution was endorsed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to modify Palestine's membership status from "liberation movement" to "non-member observer state", besides recognising Palestine's right to full participation in the ILO meetings. During the conference, the Sultanate of Oman actively contributed to the adoption of the ILO's draft resolution on amending the membership status of Palestine. The step affirmed Oman's commitment to support the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and promote the principles of



Oman participated in the International Labour Conference in Geneva on Tuesday. — ONA

justice in international forums. At a GCC-ILO coordination meeting held on the sidelines of the ILO conference, the Sultanate of Oman's delegation contributed

to the discussion of key topics on the agenda, including a report by the ILO Director-General and a draft programme on budget for the period 2026-2027. The delegation

also coordinated GCC stands on a number of technical issues released for discussion during meetings of specialised committees. In addition, Oman participated in an expanded meeting that included production parties in GCC states. During the meetings, Oman voiced its steadfast commitment to back tripartite dialogue and unify GCC stands towards the technical items listed on the agenda of the 113th session of the ILO conference. The meeting discussed key topics related to the "work environment" and its challenges. The discussion covered the draft convention on tasks related to "digital platform economy", ways of protection against biological risks in the workplace, innovative approaches and other aspects of the labour market. — ONA

27 PALESTINIANS KILLED NEAR GAZA AID SITE

U N D E M A N D S I N V E S T I G A T I O N

AT least 27 Palestinians were killed and dozens wounded by Israeli fire near a food distribution site in southern Gaza on Tuesday, health officials said, in a third day running of chaos and bloodshed to blight the aid operation. The Israeli military said its forces had opened fire on a group of people they viewed as a threat after they left a designated access route near the distribution centre in Rafah and approached their positions. It added it was still investigating what had happened. The deaths came hours after Israel said three of its soldiers had been killed in fighting in northern Gaza, as its forces pushed ahead with a months-long offensive against Hamas militants that has laid much of the enclave to waste. Reuters could not independently verify the reports in northern and southern Gaza. An International Committee of the Red Cross spokesperson said its field hospital in Rafah had received 184 casualties, adding that 19 of those were dead upon arrival, and eight died of their wounds shortly after. Video showed injured people, including at least one woman, being rushed to a medical centre on carts drawn by donkeys. Health officials said at least 18 more Palestinians were killed in other military strikes in the territory on Tuesday. The United Nations human rights office in Geneva said on Tuesday the impediment of access to food relief for civilians in Gaza might constitute a war crime and described attacks on people trying to access food aid as



A boy sits with packed belongings and beddings atop a moving vehicle as displaced people flee from Khan Yunis westwards to Al Mawasi in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday after the Israeli military had issued an evacuation order the previous day. — AFP

"unconscionable". The head of the UN agency, Volker Turk, urged a prompt and impartial investigation into the killings. Israeli government spokesperson David Mencer denied that civilians had been targeted. "The IDF is doing everything in its power to allow Gazans to get to the humanitarian aid. The IDF is not preventing the arrival of

Gazans at humanitarian aid sites. Indeed, we are encouraging it," Mencer said. The US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation launched its first distribution sites last week in an effort to alleviate widespread hunger amongst Gaza's 2.3 million population, most of whom have been forced to abandon their homes to flee fighting. — Reuters

Oman launches first tourist hot air balloon project in Türkiye

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

The Sultanate of Oman launched its first tourist hot air balloon as part of the 'Oman Balloons' project in Cappadocia, the Republic of Türkiye, during the promotional phase of the project. This initiative is part of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's efforts to develop and diversify the tourism product while enhancing Oman's position as a unique regional and international destination. Salim bin Sultan al Abri, founder and CEO of Oman Balloons,

announced that the hot air balloon will arrive in Oman by September, with operations starting in October at Stars Gate Camp in Bidiyah. "Our objective is to make Oman an attractive hot air balloon destination. We plan to participate in all the tourism festivals conducted in different governorates of Oman. We would also like to have a school to train hot air balloon riders. We will also be the agents for the Pasha Balloons to be represented in other GCC countries," he said. Al Abri emphasised Oman's heritage, unique features, nature



The hot air balloon will arrive in Oman by September, with operations starting in October.

and tranquillity, noting that hot air balloon adds entertainment and adventure to the tourism experience. The project aims to bring international expertise in hot air balloon tourism to Oman, enhancing tourism experiences for both domestic and international visitors. "Oman Balloon No 1" will begin flights from the Wilayat of Bidiyah in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, offering passengers a unique opportunity to explore Oman's diverse tourism attractions from the sky. The hot air balloon has been approved by the Civil Aviation

Authority in Oman and is designed to withstand Omani weather conditions, with a capacity for up to 20 passengers and a technical crew consisting of a pilot and an assistant. The "Oman Balloons" project is supported by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for its role in promoting experiential tourism and providing panoramic views of tourist sites. This initiative showcases Oman's natural and cultural heritage from an innovative perspective, attracting a wider range of visitors seeking unique travel experiences.

OMAN

SHORTTAKES



OMAN RADIO WINS
SECOND PRIZE IN
MUSIC COMPETITION

TUNIS: Oman Radio has secured second prize in the “Song” category of the Arab Music and Singing Competition, organised by the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) based in Tunis, for the song Mawtan Al Jalal.

The winning entry features lyrics by Hisham al Saqri, composition and arrangement by Asaad al Raisi and vocals by Abdulhameed al Kiyoumi.

The competition saw broad participation from Arab broadcasting entities, including both public and private radio stations, with 11 songs and 8 musical pieces submitted from Oman, Kuwait, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, Comoros and Libya.

Asaad al Raisi, the composer and arranger of the song, stated that this achievement marks a significant cultural and artistic addition to Oman Radio’s record in the Arab Music and Singing Competition under ASBU.

The competition is among ASBU’s cultural and artistic initiatives, launched as part of its ongoing efforts to support Arab musical and vocal creativity and advance Arabic musical culture. — ONA

More youth to be trained
for hospitality sector

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

A NUMBER of Omani youth will be trained and prepared to work in the hospitality sector, thanks to the ongoing efforts to boost inbound tourism, according to Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) sources.

An agreement to train Omani youth in various fields of hospitality starting with hotel reception was signed by the MoHT with Mitsui E&P Middle East to finance and implement training programmes for the youth.

The training programme will be implemented in cooperation with the Muscat Hospitality Academy, which is part of the internationally accredited Swiss School of Business, Hospitality and Hotel Management programmes.

The three-month programme aims to qualify Omani staff to work in the hotel reception and front office management sector, enhancing the quality of tourism services provided and keeping pace with developments in this vital field.

This agreement comes within the framework of joint efforts to enhance national empowerment in the tourism sector by developing the



The initiative is part of the ministry’s plan to enhance national skills.

The training programme will be implemented in cooperation with the Muscat Hospitality Academy, which is part of the internationally accredited Swiss School of Business, Hospitality and Hotel Management programmes

skills of Omani youth and preparing them for work in the hospitality sector.

This agreement represents a model step for Public and Private Partnerships (PPP), reflecting the ongoing efforts to support the sustainable development of the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman by providing advanced training opportunities that open new horizons for Omani youth to work and contribute to strengthening the national economy.

The ministry affirmed that this initiative is part of its plan to enhance national skills, commending the cooperation with Mitsui E&P Middle East and Muscat Hospitality Academy to achieve these shared goals. This agreement is part of a series of projects the ministry is implementing to support and develop the tourism sector and achieve its vision of building a sustainable tourism sector that contributes to comprehensive development in the Sultanate of Oman.

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Oman, Mexico celebrate 50
years of diplomatic relations

The two nations reaffirmed their commitment to deepening and expanding their bilateral relationship, expressing their determination to enhance cooperation. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the United Mexican States celebrated the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between them, unveiling a commemorative emblem symbolising the advanced ties between the two friendly nations.

This took place during a ceremony held at the Foreign Ministry in Muscat on Tuesday.

Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, commended the bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries, noting that diplomatic relations began on July 31, 1985. He emphasised that this step has contributed to strengthening cooperation in various fields, including political, economic and cultural spheres.

He expressed Oman’s aspiration to further develop fruitful relations with Mexico across multiple domains, underscoring the shared values that unite the two nations and their mutual commitment to building a partnership based on respect and understanding.

On his turn, Aníbal Gómez Toledo, Mexico’s Ambassador to Oman, praised the distinguished bilateral relations between Oman and Mexico, affirming his government’s keenness to enhance all aspects that elevate bilateral ties to wider horizons in all fields.

He also lauded Oman’s diplomatic efforts in resolving numerous regional and international issues, as well as its steadfast commitment to promoting peace and stability in the region and building bridges between

conflicting parties through dialogue, tolerance and respect. He stressed that Oman serves as a model for mediation and peaceful conflict resolution.

He expressed the profound gratitude and appreciation of the Mexican government and people to the Sultanate of Oman for its noble humanitarian efforts in securing the release of the crew of the Galaxy Leader ship, particularly the Mexican citizens, enabling their return to their families.

He affirmed that celebrating 50 years of diplomatic relations between the two friendly nations presents a unique opportunity to set new and ambitious goals that enhance cooperation, increase trade volume, promote tourism and strengthen academic exchanges through university scholarships, joint scientific research initiatives and other fields.

A joint statement stated that Oman and Mexico celebrated five decades of productive and friendly relations across various sectors, noting that political consultations, economic and trade exchanges, and cultural cooperation have deepened mutual understanding and strengthened collaboration.

The two nations reaffirmed their commitment to deepening and expanding their bilateral relationship, expressing their determination to enhance cooperation based on shared interests and to continue working together for the lasting benefit of their peoples. The ceremony was attended by several officials from both the Omani and Mexican sides. — ONA

SHORT TAKES

OMAN, NETHERLANDS DISCUSS DEVELOPMENTS IN YEMEN



MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, met on Tuesday with Janet Alberda, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Yemen.

The meeting discussed regional developments, the latest updates on the Yemeni issue and ongoing efforts to reach a settlement.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Ahmed bin Hashil al Maskari, Head of the GCC and Regional Neighbourhood Department; Stella Kloth, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Sultanate of Oman, and several officials from both sides. — **ONA**



Oman, Qatar explore enhancing ties

MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, received on Tuesday Shaikh Mubarak bin Fahad al Thani, Ambassador of the State of Qatar to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations. They also explored means of enhancing bilateral cooperation in various fields of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by several officials from the Foreign Ministry. — **ONA**

Oman, Bahrain explore strengthening ties

MUSCAT: Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), on Tuesday received Abdulla Adel Fakhro, Minister of Industry and Commerce of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The two sides discussed ways to enhance trade and investment cooperation between Oman and Bahrain, expanding opportunities for private sector partnerships in both countries through joint ventures and knowledge exchange, contributing to bilateral relations and economic integration.

The meeting also reviewed opportunities in key economic sectors of mutual interest and explored mechanisms to activate the private sector’s role in establishing joint projects that support economic development in both nations.

Al Rawas emphasised the significant progress in economic relations between Oman and Bahrain, expressing hope that this meeting would lead to further initiatives boosting trade ties. — **ONA**

Oman-Italy relations based on mutual respect, vision for peace

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabiyousef](#)

The Sultanate of Oman and Italy enjoy a long-standing relationship rooted in mutual respect and a common vision for peace, cultural exchange and sustainable development since pre-historic times, according to Pierluigi D’Elia, Ambassador of Italy to the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking to the media at the Italian National Day in Muscat, named ‘A Night of Culture, Friendship and Diplomacy’ held under the auspices of Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry



The Italian National Day, named ‘A Night of Culture, Friendship and Diplomacy’, was held under the auspices of Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs.

for Administrative and Financial Affairs, at the Grand Hyatt Muscat Hotel, the ambassador emphasised the deep historical ties and shared values between the two nations.

“This event is not only a

celebration of the Italian Republic but also of the enduring friendship between our peoples,” said the ambassador.

The event brought together distinguished guests from Omani government institutions, diplomatic corps, business and cultural communities, as well as Italian citizens residing in Oman. The reception was a tribute to the strong and growing bonds of friendship and cooperation between Italy and Oman.

He further said that Italy’s National Day celebration in Muscat marks a symbolic reaffirmation of Italy’s commitment to its international partnerships,

particularly with Oman, to tackle common challenges and promote peace and stability.

“The Embassy of Italy extends its gratitude to all who contributed to the success of the celebration, including its partners - The Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman, Eurotec, Yenaier by Adante Realty, Scalinatella, Oman Air, Monte delle Vigne, Avicen, Renardet, I Veri Sapori Dell’Etna, Terre Di Shemir, CESI, Al Rofoof Hotel Supplies & Trading (Illy Café), Idea Hub, The Italian Trade Agency, and The Grand Hyatt Muscat Hotel, whose valuable support and collaboration contributed to the success of this year’s celebration,” he said.

GOOD QUALITY NURSERIES KEY TO CHILD’S PERSONALITY

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

Many parents are searching for the best nurseries that adhere to quality standards and continuously improve the services they provide to children.

This is because the quality of nurseries plays a significant role in shaping and building a child’s personality during the pre-school stage, complementing the family’s role.

Nurseries are educational institutions that offer care and education for children, and the Ministry of Social Development is working diligently with all partners to estab-



MARYAM AL OBAIDANI
Head of the Childcare Institutions Department at the Ministry of Social Development

lish appealing nurseries that focus on early childhood development. This stage is crucial in shaping and building a child’s personality during the pre-school years, complementing the family’s role.

By the end of 2024, the number of nurseries had reached approximately 369, with 14 new nurseries opening during that year.

Maryam al Obaidani, Head of the Childcare Institutions Department at the Ministry of Social Development, stated, “The ministry seeks to enhance the quality of services provided by nurseries and address the

challenges they face. Oman is experiencing significant growth in the establishment of nurseries across various governorates, highlighting their importance in early childhood development.”

The National Childhood Guidelines, launched last year, represent a positive step towards a project focused on children and based on a scientific perspective. These guidelines aim to guide individuals involved in nursery institutions on the necessary standards and classification criteria to improve conditions and establish quality institutions for the future.

Rains expected in some parts during Eid holidays

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

In some parts of Oman, cooler temperatures are expected during the Eid holidays as the weather pattern could bring rain on Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

A weather expert at the Oman Met Office said, “Starting on Wednesday and continuing until Thursday, there is a chance of low cloud advection over the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman. The weather pattern could bring early morning or afternoon rain on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. During this period, the temperature could range from 35 degrees Celsius to 36 degrees Celsius.”

Over Al Hajar Mountains, there could be rain during the afternoons. Low clouds or fog formations are expected over the coasts of the Arabian Sea.

Satellite images have been showing that parts of the northern governorates of the Sultanate of Oman continue to be affected by suspended dust, causing a relative decrease in horizontal visibility due to the dust wave.

Satellite images indicated that a dust



Satellite images have been showing that parts of the northern governorates of the Sultanate of Oman continue to be affected by suspended dust, causing a relative decrease in horizontal visibility due to the dust wave.

storm was coming from the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman. Weather experts have been warning that this could reduce horizontal visibility in the coming hours.

There are chances of low clouds/fog patches late at night and early in the morning over parts of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates.

Along the Arabian Sea coasts, winds will be southerly to southwesterly, moderate to fresh, while along the Sea of Oman coasts, winds will be easterly to northeasterly, light to moderate, becoming variable light at night.

Over the rest of the governorates, winds will be westerly to southwesterly, light to moderate, occasionally fresh over deserts and open areas.

Sea conditions are expected to be moderate to rough along the Arabian Sea coasts with a maximum wave height of 3.25 metres, and slight to moderate along the western part of the Musandam coast with a maximum wave height of 1.5 metres, and slight over the rest of the coasts with a maximum wave height of 1.25 metres.

More than 51,000 students register in HEAC

MUSCAT: As many as 51,027 students were registered in the Higher Education Admission Center (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The number included 25,706 males and 25,321 females.

The figures reflect the number of students who applied to the HEAC to contest seats in government higher education institutions, internal scholarships, private sector grants, external scholarships and grants from Arab countries for the academic year 2025/2026.

The applicants will be given an opportunity to change their study preferences during a “Choice Modification” period that follows the announcement of results of the General Education Diploma (GED) exams in July 2025.

The Higher Education Admission Center



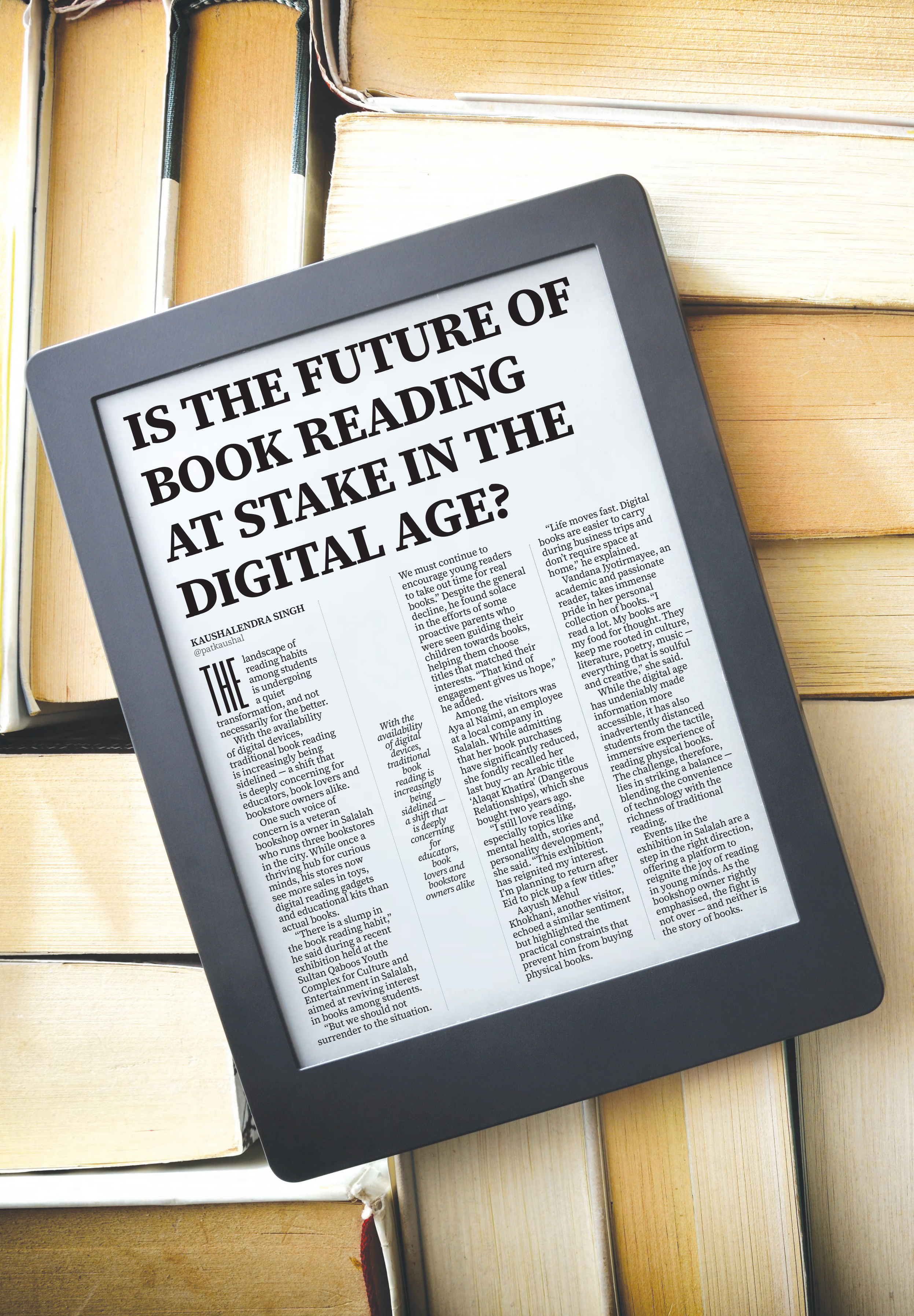
The applicants will be given an opportunity to change their study preferences after the announcement of results of GED exams in July. — **ONA**

announced that the outcome of the first sorting will be made public during the first week of July 2025.

These results are based on students’ performance in the first semester and their current placing of the programmes of their preference. The aim is to enable the students to amend their choices and make the most appropriate decision in consultation with their parents.

The “Choice Modification” period plays a significant role in a student’s admission, because registration during this stage becomes final ahead of the “First Round Sorting”. This stage is followed by procedures like personal interviews, admission tests and medical tests, in accordance with the requirements of the academic programmes. — **ONA**

SPOTLIGHT



IS THE FUTURE OF BOOK READING AT STAKE IN THE DIGITAL AGE?

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

THE landscape of reading habits among students is undergoing a quiet transformation, and not necessarily for the better. With the availability of digital devices, traditional book reading is increasingly being sidelined — a shift that is deeply concerning for educators, book lovers and bookstore owners alike. One such voice of concern is a veteran bookshop owner in Salalah who runs three bookstores in the city. While once a thriving hub for curious minds, his stores now see more sales in toys, digital reading gadgets and educational kits than actual books. “There is a slump in the book reading habit,” he said during a recent exhibition held at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, aimed at reviving interest in books among students. “But we should not surrender to the situation.

With the availability of digital devices, traditional book reading is increasingly being sidelined — a shift that is deeply concerning for educators, book lovers and bookstore owners alike

We must continue to encourage young readers to take out time for real books.” Despite the general decline, he found solace in the efforts of some proactive parents who were seen guiding their children towards books, helping them choose titles that matched their interests. “That kind of engagement gives us hope,” he added. Among the visitors was Aya al Naimi, an employee at a local company in Salalah. While admitting that her book purchases have significantly reduced, she fondly recalled her last buy — an Arabic title ‘Alaqaat Khatira’ (Dangerous Relationships), which she bought two years ago. “I still love reading, especially topics like mental health, stories and personality development,” she said. “This exhibition has reignited my interest. I’m planning to return after Eid to pick up a few titles.” Aayush Mehul Khokhani, another visitor, echoed a similar sentiment but highlighted the practical constraints that prevent him from buying physical books.

“Life moves fast. Digital books are easier to carry during business trips and don’t require space at home,” he explained. Vandana Jyotirmayee, an academic and passionate reader, takes immense pride in her personal collection of books. “I read a lot. My books are my food for thought. They keep me rooted in culture, literature, poetry, music — everything that is soulful and creative,” she said. While the digital age has undeniably made information more accessible, it has also inadvertently distanced students from the tactile, immersive experience of reading physical books. The challenge, therefore, lies in striking a balance — blending the convenience of technology with the richness of traditional reading. Events like the exhibition in Salalah are a step in the right direction, offering a platform to reignite the joy of reading in young minds. As the bookshop owner rightly emphasised, the fight is not over — and neither is the story of books.

SHORT TAKES



The agreement deals with launching a strategic project in Musandam Governorate, with an investment cost of more than RO 5 million in its first phase. — ONA

SHIPBUILDING, MAINTENANCE PROJECT PACT SIGNED

KHASAB: Musandam Global Investment company and its Turkish business partners on Tuesday signed an agreement to establish Musandam Drydock and Marine Industries Company.

The agreement deals with launching a strategic project in Musandam Governorate, with an investment cost of more than RO 5 million in its first phase, to provide a set of vital services like construction and maintenance of fish farming cages, coastal and commercial fishing vessels, marine tugs, service vessels and transport vessels.

The company will take steps to meet the needs of the Omani market and neighbouring regional markets, besides enhancing industrial integration in the marine and fisheries services sector. The project will keep pace with national trends in promoting food security and sustainable industrial growth.

The signing ceremony was attended by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam. — ONA



The Municipality reaffirmed its commitment to enhance cooperation with international organisations.

SPECIALISED TRAINING TO RAISE HEALTH STANDARDS

MUSCAT: In partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), Muscat Municipality successfully conducted a specialised training programme, ‘Preparing Pest Control Professionals’.

This initiative forms part of the Municipality’s ongoing efforts to build national expertise in vector control and raise public health standards.

Aligned with the latest international standards and best practices, the programme was designed to train the national workforce and field operatives in pest control. It offered a comprehensive approach, combining theoretical knowledge with practical application. It focused on pest identification, risk assessment and the implementation of integrated, sustainable and environmentally conscious control strategies. The initiative included a series of scientific lectures and on-site workshops delivered by leading international experts from the WHO. Skilled professionals across the wilayats of Muscat Governorate participated in these sessions, contributing to a dynamic and engaging training environment.

“The collaboration with the WHO underscores Muscat Municipality’s commitment to strengthening partnerships with global institutions and capitalising on their expertise across various fields. It enables us to adopt world-class public health practices and further develop the skills and capabilities of our national workforce, contributing directly to national efforts to mitigate health risks and improve quality of life. We remain steadfast in our investment in human capital, which forms the foundation of the sustainable urban development we aspire to,” said Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality.

Balad Sayt village: A hub for tourism, adventure

NESTLED amid lush oases and towering mountain peaks, Balad Sayt village in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq in Al Batinah South Governorate has emerged as a premier destination for adventure tourism.

The village captivates international thrill-seekers due to its location along Wadi Bani Auf. It also serves as a gateway to an ancient mountain pathway officially recognised among Oman’s mountain trails, linking Balad Sayt to the Wilayat of Al Hamra.

Dr Al Mutasim bin Nasser al Hilali, Director of Heritage and Tourism in Al Batinah South, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the village boasts five tourist facilities with 42 rooms, attracting numerous daily visitors. Its natural and heritage diversity, coupled with unique experiences, makes it particularly popular in winter (September to April) when temperatures drop and tourism peaks. Summer tourism (May to August) also thrives due to the village’s moderate climate.

Balad Sayt lies along an active tourist route promoted by travel companies for its historical



Balad Sayt lies along an active tourist route promoted by travel companies for its historical landmarks, natural springs and traditional markets. These attractions complement the adventure offerings of Wadi Bani Auf and extend towards Al Hamra in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate



landmarks, natural springs and traditional markets. These attractions complement the adventure offerings of Wadi Bani

Auf and extend towards Al Hamra in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The canyon, a dramatic rock fissure in Wadi Bani Auf, earns its name from its serpentine twists. Adventurers can tackle three rappelling points — the highest at 23 metres — and navigate 13 natural water pools across a 3-kilometre stretch. A shorter trail, “Baseer Al Zama,” features a 4-metre rappel and opportunities for swimming and cliff-jumping amid striking rock formations.

Balad Sayt’s origins are deeply rooted in history, with landmarks like the fortified “Al Manie Tower,” the ancient “Al Madiq Mosque,” and the 400-year-old “Great Falaj” irrigation system, now a Unesco-listed architectural heritage site. The village also preserves intangible heritage, including traditional crafts like basket-weaving, rope-making and palm-frond handicrafts.

Funded by the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Al Zubair Institution, the “Agri-Ecotourism in Aflaj Systems” project aims to revitalise rural areas. As Oman’s first such initiative, it seeks to bolster economic sustainability and local community development. — ONA

Lease pact signed for environment friendly plant

SUHAR: SOHAR Freezone has signed a land lease agreement with Matrix Alloys (FZC) LLC, a leader in low-carbon ferrochrome production, to build a state-of-the-art, environmentally friendly ferrochrome plant. This initiative strengthens Oman’s role as a regional hub for sustainable industrial development and supports the goals of Oman 2050 Net-Zero commitment to reduce carbon emissions and diversify the economy.

The project, with an investment of \$10 million, will occupy 2.2 hectares within SOHAR Freezone and aims to produce 20,000 tonnes annually of micro-carbon and low-carbon ferrochrome. The facility will meet stringent purity and sustainability standards demanded by key markets including Europe,



The project aims to produce 20,000 tonnes annually of micro-carbon and low-carbon ferrochrome.

Japan, South Korea and India. Utilising an electric-based production process that avoids coal and heavy-oil pollution, the plant will significantly reduce its environmental footprint and operate with zero waste gas or wastewater emissions. Furthermore, it seamlessly fits into Oman Vision 2040, promoting sustainable industrialisation and encouraging foreign investment to drive long-term economic growth and environmental stewardship. The first phase is expected to be operational by 2026.

Bailin Yi, Chairman of Matrix Alloys (FZC) LLC, said, “Launching our first international ferroalloy plant

in SOHAR Freezone offers us a strategic location with excellent infrastructure, market access, and competitive, stable, and low-cost energy essential for the energy-intensive smelting processes. We are committed to delivering premium low-carbon ferrochrome products that support global stainless-steel producers and promote a cleaner industrial future.”

Mohammed al Shizawi, Acting CEO of SOHAR Freezone, stated: “This agreement underscores the trust that international investors place in SOHAR Freezone’s integrated industrial ecosystem. Matrix Alloys is bringing advanced capabilities to our ferroalloy cluster, aligning perfectly with our vision to attract clean technology investments and strengthen SOHAR Freezone’s position as a competitive gateway for global trade.”

Workshop looks at advancing coastal water sustainability

SUHAR: As part of its commitment to advancing scientific research and environmental sustainability, Sohar University hosted a high-level workshop on Monday entitled: “Assessing the Impact of the Decision Support System for Coastal Waters (DISCO) on Stakeholders”.

The event was organised in collaboration with the Directorate-General of Fisheries Research at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and comes as part of the ongoing activities under the DISCO research project, which is strategically funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and receives a funding support from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

The workshop commenced



The event brought together experts and representatives from major national institutions.

with a keynote address by Prof Kelvin Bwalya, Director of Research Development at Sohar University.

He began by warmly welcoming the delegates on behalf of Vice-Chancellor Dr Hamdan al Fazari, quoting, “I extend a warm welcome to all the delegates to this prestigious

event. Sohar University is always happy to host internationally recognised events to reaffirm our commitment to meaningful research that aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Oman Vision 2040.” Prof Bwalya further expressed pride in the university’s collaboration on a Nasa-funded research

project alongside esteemed partners from the USA and Oman’s Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Dr Dawood al Yahyai, Director-General of Fisheries Research, delivered another keynote address. He emphasised the critical role of the DISCO system in advancing sustainable marine resource management and enabling data-driven environmental decision-making through cutting-edge monitoring technologies.

Led by Prof Dale Kiefer, Principal Investigator from the University of Southern California, the research team presented the developmental journey of the DISCO system and its technical capabilities in monitoring oceanographic and environmental conditions of coastal waters.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Supporters wait for Lee Jae-myung, near the National Assembly in Seoul. — Reuters

LIBERAL LEE
PROJECTED TO
WIN PRESIDENCY

SEOUL: South Korea’s liberal party candidate Lee Jae-myung is projected to win snap presidential election by wide margins, according to exit polls, ushering in a political sea change after backlash against martial law brought down his predecessor. Results of the surveys by the country’s broadcasters, which Reuters has not independently confirmed, were released after nearly 80 per cent of the country’s 44.39 million eligible voters had cast their ballots.

South Koreans are hoping to put six months of turmoil from ousted leader Yoon Suk Yeol’s martial law decree behind them and for a reversal in the ebbing fortunes of Asia’s fourth-largest economy. The joint exit poll by broadcasters KBS, MBC and SBS, which has in previous elections mostly been in line with the final results, put Lee on 51.7 per cent and his conservative rival Kim Moon-soo on 39.3 per cent.

Lee had called the election “judgment day” against the previous Yoon administration and the conservative People Power Party, accusing them of having condoned the martial law attempt by not fighting harder to thwart it and even trying to save Yoon’s presidency. — Reuters

OVER 200 PRISONERS
BREAK OUT OF
PAKISTANI JAIL



Paramilitary soldiers stand outside the district Malir jail, in Karachi, Pakistan. — Reuters

KARACHI: More than 200 inmates escaped from a jail in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi late on Monday when they overpowered prison guards after being allowed to leave their cells following a series of earthquakes, local officials and police said.

The jailbreak began just before midnight and continued into the early hours of Tuesday after hundreds of prisoners were allowed into the courtyard of the District Malir prison because of the tremors, Zia-ul-Hasan Lanjar, the provincial law minister, told reporters at the scene on Tuesday. Police said the prisoners snatched guns from prison staff and forced open the main gate after a shootout, evading paramilitary soldiers. At least one prisoner was killed and three guards wounded, said Provincial Police Chief Ghulam Nabi Memon.

“I heard the firing for quite some time and then some time later prisoners made their way out running in all directions,” Bukhsh, a private security guard at a residential complex opposite the jail, said. He added that some of the prisoners entered the apartment complex before being taken away by police. — Reuters

RETAINING OFFICIALS

Philippines keeps Cabinet unchanged



Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has retained the majority of his Cabinet ministers, two weeks after requesting their resignations in “bold reset”. Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin confirmed that Marcos had decided to keep several key officials, including the secretaries of agriculture, education, labour, health, and social welfare. Marcos had earlier maintained his economic team, with the heads of the defense, justice, and interior departments. — Reuters

UNITED
NATIONS
AID CONVOY
HIT IN
SUDAN,
CASUALTIES
REPORTED

PORT SUDAN: A United Nations convoy delivering aid to the besieged city of El Fasher in Sudan’s famine-stricken western Darfur region was attacked, Unicef said on Tuesday. Initial reports indicated multiple casualties, a UN spokesperson said, as the world body’s refugee agency announced four million people had fled Sudan’s brutal war.

The attack, which took place in North Darfur where over a million people are on the brink of mass starvation, is the latest assault on

aid in a country gripped by what the UN calls the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. The convoy, including trucks from the UN children’s agency and World Food Programme, was in Al Koma, North Darfur, “waiting for approval to proceed to El Fasher” when it came under attack on Monday, UNICEF spokesperson Eva Hinds said. She did not specify who was behind the attack.

The two warring sides traded blame over Monday’s attack which

took place in an RSF-held town. The army-aligned government said the trucks were targeted by drones from the RSF, which in turn accused the army of carrying out the attack with military aircraft. Both sides have been accused of using starvation as a weapon of war and looting or obstructing aid.

Since war began, four million people have fled across Sudan’s borders, UNHCR spokeswoman Eujin Byun said at a press briefing in Geneva on Tuesday. — AFP

Attacks on Gaza aid sites
‘a war crime’, says UN

UN human rights chief Volker Turk said on Tuesday that “deadly attacks” on civilians around aid distribution sites in the Gaza Strip constituted “a war crime”. Rescuers in the Palestinian territory said Israeli fire targeting civilians near an aid distribution centre in the southern city of Rafah killed 27 people on Tuesday, raising an earlier toll. It came after a similar incident on Sunday when rescuers said 31 people were killed at the same location, witnesses saying they had been on their way to collect aid.

“Deadly attacks on distraught civilians trying to access the paltry amounts of food aid in Gaza are unconscionable,” Turk said in a statement. “For a third day running, people were killed around an aid distribution site run by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. This morning, we have received information that dozens more people were killed and injured.” The US-backed GHF is a recently formed group that Israel has cooperated with to implement a new aid distribution mechanism in Gaza.

The United Nations does not work with the foundation because of concerns that it does not meet core humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. Turk called for a prompt and impartial investigation into each attack, and for those responsible to be held to account.

“Attacks directed against civilians constitute a grave breach of international law, and a war crime,” he said. “Palestinians have been presented the grimmest of



Palestinians carry their belongings as they flee their homes in Khan Yunis. — Reuters

choices: die from starvation or risk being killed while trying to access the meagre food that is being made available through Israel’s militarised humanitarian assistance mechanism. “This militarised system endangers lives and violates international standards on aid distribution, as the United Nations has repeatedly warned.”

Tuesday’s shooting in the southern city of Rafah came as the agency reported 19 people killed in other Israeli attacks in the territory, and as the Israeli army announced three soldiers had been killed in northern Gaza. “Twenty-seven people were killed and more than 90 injured in the massacre targeting civilians who were waiting for American aid in the Al-Alam area of Rafah,” said civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal, who earlier said that the deaths occurred

“when Israeli forces opened fire with tanks and drones”.

The Al Alam roundabout is about a kilometre (a little over half a mile) from a centre run by the US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF). Rania al Astal, 30, said she had gone to the area with her husband to try to get food. “The shooting began intermittently around 5:00 am.

Every time people approached Al Alam roundabout, they were fired upon,” she said. “But people didn’t care and rushed forward all at once — that’s when the army began firing heavily.”

Israel has come under mounting pressure to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, where people are facing severe shortages after Israel imposed a more than two-month blockade on supplies. — AFP



EXPLOSION REPORTED IN UGANDA

KAMPALA: An explosion killed two suspected rebels including a female suicide bomber near a Roman Catholic shrine in Uganda’s capital Kampala on Tuesday morning, but no other people were reported hurt, authorities said.

The two assailants were thought to be linked Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a Congo-based rebel group allied to IS which claimed responsibility for multiple bombings in 2021, Ugandan army spokesman Chris Magezi said. Magezi wrote on X that a “counter-terrorism unit this morning intercepted and neutralized two armed terrorists in Munyonyo, an upscale city suburb.” — Reuters

DISASTER STRIKE

Nigeria flooding death toll jumps past 200



Flash flooding in north-central Nigeria killed more than 200 people, the Niger state humanitarian commissioner said, while hundreds more remain missing and are feared dead. “We have more than 200... corpses,” Ahmad Suleiman told Nigerian broadcaster Channels Television, adding: “Nobody can tell you the number of casualties in Niger state right now because up till now, we are still looking for some corpses.” “We’re still looking for more,” he added. — AFP

INTENSE WILDFIRES

Smoke from Canadian fires reaches Europe



Heavy smoke from intense wildfires in Canada has reached northwestern Europe, the European Union’s climate monitoring service said. “Smoke originating from the wildfires in the Canadian provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan has been transported across the Atlantic,” the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service (CAMS) said. Satellites tracked the smoke showing plumes reaching as far east as Greece and the Mediterranean. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



German Chancellor Friedrich Merz delivers a speech, in Berlin. — AFP

GERMAN MERZ DEFENDS MIGRATION CRACKDOWN

BERLIN: German Chancellor Friedrich Merz on Tuesday defended his government’s migration crackdown as vital to “protect public safety”, a day after a court ruled one of its flagship policies was illegal. The Berlin court said on Monday that German border officials cannot turn away asylum seekers before it is determined which country should process their cases under EU rules.

The court decision could “limit our room for manoeuvre a little”, he acknowledged in a speech to a gathering of local government officials in Berlin. But he insisted the ruling was “preliminary”, adding: “We know that we can continue with pushbacks”.

“We will do it to protect public safety and order in our country and to prevent cities and municipalities from becoming overwhelmed”. He said the policy, which has caused tensions with some of Germany’s neighbours, would be carried out “within the framework of existing European law”. The measures were temporary until security at the European Union’s external borders “is significantly improved”, he stressed. — AFP

NEW SEARCH OF MADELEINE BEGINS



Portuguese Criminal Investigation Police (PJ) investigators stand in a road for new search operations amid the investigation into the disappearance of Madeleine McCann in Lagos, in the Algarve region. Portuguese and German police on Tuesday started a new search in the hunt for missing British toddler Madeleine McCann — 18 years after she disappeared while on holiday with her parents. Investigators are equipped with ground radar technology that can scan the ground down to 4.5 metres in depth. The new searches are expected to continue until Friday. — AFP

POLISH PRIME MINISTER CALLS CONFIDENCE VOTE AFTER NAWROCKI WINS

WARSAW: Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk on Tuesday announced a parliamentary confidence vote next week, hoping to demonstrate continuing support for his pro-EU government after nationalist Karol Nawrocki won the presidential election. European far-right leaders have hailed the election of 42-year-old Nawrocki, a fan of US President Donald Trump who has said he will oppose the Tusk government’s progressive agenda.

Nawrocki won Sunday’s runoff

in the highly polarised EU and Nato member state with 51 per cent of the vote to 49 per cent for Tusk’s liberal ally Rafal Trzaskowski.

Former EU chief Tusk set the confidence vote for June 11 and vowed to stay on, telling reporters: “Some things can be done better, faster. And this vote of confidence should be a new beginning: offensive, not defensive.”

The announcement came after opposition leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski of the right-wing

Law and Justice (PiS) party said Poles had shown the government the “red card”. Celebrating his victory, Nawrocki said he wanted Poland to be “a state that matters in international, European and transatlantic relations”.

Nawrocki could revive tensions with Brussels over rule-of-law issues and complicate ties with neighbouring Ukraine as he opposes Nato membership for the war-torn country and wants to cut benefits for Ukrainian refugees. — AFP

Ukrainian officials visit US amid strikes on Russia

SENIOR Ukrainian officials visited Washington on Tuesday seeking US support against Russia, as Kyiv showed its ability to fight on by setting off an explosive device under a bridge that has become a symbol of the Kremlin’s claims on Ukrainian territory. A day after talks in Istanbul that made little progress towards ending Russia’s war in Ukraine, Kyiv launched what appeared to be one of its biggest waves of coordinated attacks of the conflict.

Ukraine’s SBU security service said it had hit a road and rail bridge that links Russia and Crimea below the water level with explosives. The extent of any damage was not clear but there were no immediate signs of traffic disruption. The bridge is a flagship project for Russian President Vladimir Putin, built after he annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, in a precursor to the latest conflict.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian drones and shelling targeting the southeastern Zaporizhzhia region and the Kherson region in the south damaged electricity substations, leaving at least 700,000 people without power, Russia-installed officials said. Underlining the gulf between the two sides after more than three years of war, the Kremlin said work on trying to reach a peace settlement was extraordinarily complex and that it would be wrong to expect any imminent decisions.

Andriy Yermak, chief of staff to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, arrived in the United States along with Deputy Prime Minister Yuliia Svyrydenko. Ukraine says Moscow is stalling the peace talks and Yermak signalled that he would press Ukrainian demands for tougher sanctions on Russia. “We will actively promote issues that are important for Ukraine. Our agenda is rather comprehensive,” Yermak said after arriving in Washington. “We plan to talk about defence support and the situation on the battlefield, strengthening sanctions against Russia.” Yermak said the officials would also discuss a deal that gives the US preferential access to new Ukrainian mineral projects and sets up an investment fund that could be used for the reconstruction of Ukraine.



Police officers stand at the site of Russian missile strike, amid Russia’s attack on Ukraine. — Reuters

Kyiv appears determined to show US President Donald Trump that it can still fight on, despite the rising death toll and destruction in the deadliest conflict in Europe since World War Two.

Ukraine’s attack on Russian-occupied territory in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions followed multiple Russian attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure that have at times left millions of Ukrainians without power during the war.

“There is no electricity throughout the region,” Yevgeny Balitsky, the Russian-installed governor of Zaporizhzhia, said. “The Ministry of Energy ... has been instructed to develop reserve sources of electricity as soon as possible. Healthcare facilities have been transferred to back up power supply sources.”

The attack followed drone strikes at the weekend on Russian military airfields, some of which housed long-range nuclear-capable bombers. Ukraine’s success in striking deep into Russia has prompted calls by some Russian military bloggers for a harsh response. A Russian artillery strike on the northeast Ukrainian city of Sumy on Tuesday killed three people and wounded 25, local

officials said. “That’s all one needs to know about the Russian wish to end this war,” Zelensky said.

Moscow has responded to such accusations by saying Ukraine is not making a genuine effort to seek peace. At Monday’s talks in Istanbul, Russia told Ukraine it would agree to end the war only if Kyiv gives up big new chunks of territory and accepts limits on the size of its army.

Ukraine rejects the Russian conditions as tantamount to surrender. “The (peace) settlement theme is extremely complex, it consists of a large number of nuances...,” said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, adding that “it would be wrong to expect any immediate solutions and breakthroughs here”.

Russia’s state Investigative Committee accused Ukraine on Tuesday of carrying out “acts of terrorism” by blowing up two railway bridges in Russia over the weekend. The attacks were planned to target hundreds of civilians, the committee said.

It said seven people were killed and 113 injured, including children, when two trains crashed in Russia’s Kursk and Bryansk regions as a result of the attacks. — Reuters

Dutch PM Schoof resigns, hours after Wilders exits coalition

THE HAGUE: Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof said he would resign on Tuesday, just hours after populist Geert Wilders pulled his PVV party out of the right-wing coalition, in a move that is likely to trigger snap elections.

Ministers from Wilders’ PVV party will leave the cabinet, while the remaining ministers will continue for now in a caretaker government. Any election will likely not be held before October, and the formation of a new government traditionally tends to take months in the fractured Dutch political landscape.

This comes as the hard right is growing in Europe, with anger over migration and the cost of living at risk of eroding Europe’s unity over how to deal with Russia and with US President Donald Trump.

Wilders said earlier on Tuesday that his party was pulling out because the other three coalition partners were not willing to

support his ideas on asylum and immigration.

“No signature under our asylum plans. The PVV leaves the coalition,” Wilders said in a post on X.

The others parties in the coalition now have the option to try and proceed as a minority government, though they are not expected to. Opposition parties on Tuesday called for new elections.

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“No signature under our asylum plans. The PVV leaves the coalition,” Wilders said in a post on X.

The prospect of a new election adds to political uncertainty in the Netherlands.

It would likely delay a decision on boosting defense spending to meet new Nato targets, and would leave the Netherlands with only



Dutch far-right leader Geert Wilders speaks to the media, in The Hague. — Reuters

a caretaker government when it receives world leaders for a Nato summit later this month.

Wilders’ coalition partners responded with disbelief and anger to his decision. “This is

irresponsible, this is no moment to walk away,” finance minister, Eelco Heinen, of the conservative VVD party, told reporters before he entered the crisis cabinet meeting. The others parties now have the option to try and proceed as a minority government, though they are not expected to.

Opposition parties on Tuesday called for new elections.

“I see no other way to form a stable government,” said Frans Timmermans, the leader of the Labour/Green combination.

VVD leader Dilan Yesilgoz said she did not want to exclude any options. Junior coalition party BBB leader Caroline van der Plas said: “This coalition is done. But maybe other parties see a way forward.” “The most obvious outcome will be new elections after the summer, end of October, November,” said political scientist Joep van Lit at Radboud University in Nijmegen. — Reuters

OPINION

How to stop being so hard on yourself



CHRISTINA
CARON

The writer is a
reporter based in
New York, covering
mental health

If a friend is struggling with a big challenge or feels defeated, it’s usually our first instinct to offer words of comfort and understanding. But often it’s not so easy to do this for ourselves. We can be our own harshest critics. Practicing a little self-compassion, though, goes a long way. Research shows that when people go through challenges or stressful situations, those who display more self-compassion are more resilient. “We can say, ‘I made a mistake,’ as opposed to saying, ‘I am a mistake,’” said Kristin Neff, an associate professor of educational psychology at the University of Texas at Austin who has studied self-compassion for more than two decades. “It’s a healthier alternative to self-esteem, because it’s not about judging yourself positively, it’s just about being helpful and kind to yourself.” What is self-compassion? Self-compassion is the process of expressing support, warmth and understanding towards yourself during difficult times — and recognising that you aren’t alone in your imperfections. It arises from mindfulness, which involves staying focused on the present moment without judgment. Self-compassionate people can identify when they are feeling defeated or inadequate, but avoid becoming lost in those feelings so that they can respond to themselves with kindness instead of

ruminating, Neff said. Being kind to yourself doesn’t mean hosting a pity party. Our suffering is not unique — flaws and failures are part of what make us human. And while we all suffer in different ways, the knowledge that suffering is universal can help prevent feelings of shame or isolation. One common myth is that self-compassion will undermine motivation to improve yourself or your circumstances. But research suggests that support, encouragement and constructive criticism are more effective motivators than negative feedback, Neff added. Another myth is that self-compassion is self-indulgent. But in reality, Neff said, it has been shown to reduce burnout and therefore allow us to better care for others. Self-indulgence, on the other hand, involves behaving in a way that is ultimately harmful — either to yourself or to others. Finally, self-compassion is sometimes confused with self-care, but it’s not just about soothing, said Steven C Hayes, a clinical psychologist and the creator of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, which emphasises the types of skills that are useful for building self-compassion, like living in the moment and focusing on values rather than imposed expectations. Self-compassion “is the empowerment to

One common myth is that self-compassion will undermine motivation to improve yourself or your circumstances. But research suggests that support, encouragement and constructive criticism are more effective motivators than negative feedback

be yourself, to feel what you’re feeling, fully and without needless defence,” he said. There are a number of ways to practice self-compassion: Say kind things to yourself every day: Think about how you show up for yourself throughout your day. Are you supportive and encouraging? “The vast majority of people are significantly more compassionate to others than they are to themselves,” Neff said. If you’re prone to beating yourself up, she added, then try speaking to yourself kindly, just like you would to a good friend in the same situation. Take a compassion break: Tara Brach, a psychologist and the author of “Radical Acceptance,” suggests the RAIN method: Recognise, allow, investigate and nurture. The idea here is to recognise the emotions you’re having and then allow those feelings to exist without reflexively pushing them away. Next, investigate how your body is affected by your emotions — is there a hollowness in your stomach or a clenching in your chest? Take time to also explore the beliefs associated with those emotions — are you assuming that something is wrong with you? “That is probably the biggest suffering that people have: ‘I’m unlovable. I’m falling short. I should be doing more,’” Brach said. — The New York Times

NO QUICK ‘BREAKTHROUGHS’ IN ‘COMPLEX’ TALKS

MOSCOW: Russia on Tuesday said it was wrong to expect a quick breakthrough in Ukraine talks, a day after Moscow rejected Kyiv’s call for an unconditional ceasefire at negotiations in Istanbul. The sides agreed on a large-scale swap of captured soldiers and exchanged their roadmaps to peace, or so-called “memorandums”, at the discussions, which lasted under two hours. More than three years into Russia’s offensive — which has killed tens of thousands on both sides and forced millions from their homes in eastern Ukraine — the two sides appear as irreconcilable as ever. “The settlement issue is extremely complex and involves a large number of nuances,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Tuesday. “It would be wrong to expect immediate solutions and breakthroughs,” he added. Moscow demanded Ukraine pull its troops out of four eastern and southern regions that Moscow claims to have annexed as a precondition to pausing its offensive, according to the document handed to the Ukrainians that was published by Russian state media. Kyiv had pressed for a full and unconditional ceasefire. Russia instead offered a partial truce of two to three days in some areas of the frontline, its top negotiator said after the talks.

Peskov also dismissed the idea of a summit between the presidents of Russia, Ukraine and the United States. “In the near future, it is unlikely,” Peskov told reporters when asked about the chances of the leaders meeting, adding that such a summit could only happen after Russian and Ukrainian negotiators reach an “agreement”. The White House had said on Monday US President Donald Trump was “open” to the idea, which is also backed by Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelensky and Türkiye’s Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Zelensky on Tuesday accused Russia of “deliberately” targeting civilians in a rocket attack on the city of Sumy, some 30 kilometres (18 miles) from the Russian border, that killed three people. Russian troops have accelerated their advance, seeking to establish what Putin called a “buffer zone” inside Ukraine’s northeastern Sumy region. Zelensky posted a video from the emergency services showing destroyed cars and the body of one victim lying on the road. The attack “says everything one needs to know about Russia’s so-called ‘desire’ to end this war”, he added, calling for “decisive actions” from the United States and Europe to push Russia into a ceasefire. — AFP

The Phoenix doctrine: Why Iran grows stronger

MANY years ago, while writing a research paper on Iran, I was impressed by a recurring theme: Researchers and visitors alike consistently spoke of the depth of Persian civilisation and culture, in addition to falling deeply in love with the country. They described breathtaking landscapes in the south and the north, profound ancient history in Takht Jamshid and Isfahan, and a culture marked by extraordinary warmth, poetry and intellectual depth in Shiraz. We, in Oman, appreciate this enduring appeal and how it stands in sharp contrast to the image sometimes portrayed internationally. This is evident in the recent warm welcoming of the Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to Muscat. Today, Iran faces intense military and economic pressure from the US and regional actors. Yet, history and current realities suggest a counterintuitive outcome: Iran is poised to emerge stronger from this fire. This resilience is deeply rooted in Persian civilisation and refined by decades of defiance. Forged in the fire The relentless economic sanctions, while causing undeniable hardship, have paradoxically forced Iran to diversify its economy away from crippling oil dependence, fostering significant self-reliance. The doctrine of the “Resistance Economy”, actively promoted, prioritises boosting domestic production, slashing non-essential imports, and ramping up non-oil exports. The results, though emerging amidst high inflation (around 35 per cent as of mid-2024, IMF estimates), are tangible. Iran’s non-oil exports reached a record



KHALID ALSAFI
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innovator and an
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Iran demonstrates a system adapting and hardening under pressure. It is building a more diverse economic base out of necessity, maintaining formidable asymmetric deterrence and harnessing a potent narrative of national resistance deeply connected to its historical identity

\$53 billion in 2023 (Iran Customs data). Sectors like agriculture, petrochemicals and mining have grown, while domestic manufacturing — especially in vital areas like pharmaceuticals and basic goods — has surged out of sheer necessity. Projections even indicate modest economic growth for 2024 (around 2-3 per cent, IMF/ World Bank). This echoes the pragmatic ingenuity seen in Cyrus the Great’s administration, which governed a vast, diverse empire through systems promoting local governance and infrastructure, fostering stability through adaptation. Strategic depth Military pressure and isolation have pushed Iran to invest heavily in building a network of regional partnerships and developing potent asymmetric capabilities. This strategy creates deterrence and extends influence far beyond its borders at a relatively low cost. Iran’s advanced drone and missile technology, starkly demonstrated in operations like the April 2024 strike involving over 300 projectiles, showcases a capacity that complicates any direct military confrontation. Sanctions have demonstrably failed to halt the advancement or proliferation of these capabilities. Historically, the Safavid Empire (1501-1736) faced similar encirclement by powerful Ottoman and Mughal rivals. They survived and thrived by leveraging strategic alliances, fortifying key positions and innovating militarily, ultimately defining Persian culture as a unifying force against external pressures. The cement of cohesion External pressure often acts as a powerful unifying force in Iran,

strengthening nationalist sentiment and rallying diverse populations against a perceived common aggressor. Sanctions are consistently framed domestically as an attack on the nation itself, not merely the government. While significant internal social and economic discontent exists, overt external threats consistently trigger a rallying effect. The massive national outpouring of grief and unity following the series assassinations of generals, ministers and the former president, with millions filling the streets, exemplified this dynamic. Continued pressure reinforces a deep-seated narrative of Iran as a besieged civilisation standing firm, a legacy stretching back to symbols like the defiant stand at the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BC) and the national mobilisation during the gruelling Iran-Iraq War. Costs and challenges This trajectory is not without severe costs or contradictions. Iran’s regional interventions, while enhancing its leverage in some arenas, have also incurred disastrous consequences. Actions perceived as overreach or sectarian have demonstrably harmed Iran’s standing among significant segments of the Muslim and Arab world, creating resentment and fuelling regional instability. In Syria alone, half a million lives were lost and fifteen million people became refugees. This damage to its broader Islamic and Arab reputation is a serious strategic liability that cannot be ignored. Furthermore, brain drain and sanctions inflict deep suffering on ordinary Iranians, and the focus on security can come at the expense of domestic freedoms and development.

A vision for a sustainable digital future



SAMUEL KUTTY

The writer is a freelance journalist and author who worked in Oman and India

DIGITAL transformation is a crucial catalyst for a country’s development. Its adoption across various sectors enables nations to achieve significant improvements in productivity, efficiency and innovation. The Sultanate of Oman is a country that has made significant strides towards creating a digitally empowered society and economy. Aligning with Oman Vision 2040, the country’s digital transformation aims to build a sustainable knowledge society and increase the contribution of the digital economy to its GDP, improve government services and empower the workforce. The country is now poised to unlock new opportunities, enhance efficiency and improve the quality of life for its citizens and residents. Many international agencies have acknowledged and honoured Oman for this transformative journey to modernise its economy and society. In this context is Oman’s improvement 2024 ranking in the Government Electronic and Mobile Services Maturity Index (GEMS) with a score of 72 per cent, up from 66 per cent in 2023. The report released by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia covers 17 Arab countries and assesses digital government performance across three key dimensions – service availability and development, service uptake and satisfaction, and government outreach and engagement. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

led the index with scores of 96 per cent and 95 per cent, respectively, reflecting strong progress in national digital transformation. The index covers a wide range of sectors, including health, education, transportation, finance, justice, trade, tourism and social affairs. In a recent report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), “underpinned by its Vision 2040, Oman has embarked on an ambitious reform agenda aiming at reducing its reliance on hydrocarbons and creating a more sustainable, more inclusive and knowledge-based economy.” Oman Vision 2040 aims to elevate the country’s ranking to be among the top 20 countries globally in developing electronic services and improving its global standing in e-government development and ease of doing business indicators. The IMF eLibrary report that took stock of the state of digital transformation in Oman highlights the recent launch of the country’s National Digital Economy Programme also known as “Tahweel” that aims to provide a strategic direction for the development of the digital economy and increase its contribution to the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from its current level estimated at 2 per cent to 10 per cent by 2040. The Tahweel programme plays a crucial role in enhancing participation and enabling individuals, citizens, residents and private sector institutions to contribute effectively to developing government services by submitting reports, complaints and suggestions.

Oman is now poised to unlock new opportunities, enhance efficiency and improve the quality of life for its citizens and residents. Many international agencies have acknowledged and honoured Oman for this transformative journey to modernise its economy and society

In addition, this programme aims to advance Oman’s global ranking in various digital economy indicators identified in Vision 2040, such as the e-government development index and the network readiness index. However, the IMF report suggests that while Oman has progressed well on many aspects of digitalisation, such as Internet penetration and 4G and 5G population coverage, it still needs to deploy additional investments and efforts to match its GCC peers on several other aspects. “Further efforts are particularly needed to raise Internet connection speed, increase the prevalence of advanced ICT skills among the population, usher in digital innovation and promote e-commerce. The analyses indicate that enhanced digitalisation, can, in turn, engender substantial gains,” the report suggests. A report by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology stated that government entities in Oman have made remarkable progress in implementing digital transformation requirements. According to the report, the Tahweel programme has achieved an overall performance rate of 73 per cent by the end of November 2024, a significant increase from 53 per cent in 2023. Government institutions demonstrated an average performance of 77 per cent in meeting digital transformation requirements, while governorates averaged 71 per cent.

DEAL WITH IRAN MUST TACKLE BLIND SPOTS

VIENNA: UN inspectors monitoring Iran’s Fordow nuclear site confronted a major gap in their knowledge last year as they watched trucks carrying advanced uranium-enriching centrifuges roll into the facility dug into a mountain south of Tehran. While Iran had notified the International Atomic Energy Agency that hundreds of extra IR-6 centrifuges would be installed at Fordow, the inspectors had no idea where the sophisticated machines had come from, an official familiar with the UN monitoring work said. The episode encapsulated how the UN nuclear watchdog has lost track of some critical elements of Iran’s nuclear activities since US President Donald Trump ditched a 2015 deal that imposed strict restrictions and close IAEA supervision. Key blind spots include not knowing how many centrifuges Iran possesses or where the machines and their parts are produced and stored, quarterly IAEA reports show. The agency has also lost the ability to carry out snap inspections at locations not declared by Iran. The US has started new talks with Iran, aiming to impose fresh nuclear restrictions on Tehran. For any deal to succeed, though, those IAEA blind spots will need to be closed, according to more than a dozen people familiar with Iran’s atomic activities, including officials, diplomats and analysts. “There are gaps in our knowledge of Iran’s nuclear programme that must be addressed in order to have a baseline understanding of its current scale and scope,” said Ali Vaez, Iran project director at the International Crisis Group think-tank. “That may take months to piece together but it’s critical if the IAEA and parties to the negotiations are to have confidence in the non-proliferation benefits of an agreement.” The IAEA, which answers to 180 member states, declined to comment for this article. The Iranian foreign ministry and Iran’s Atomic Energy Organisation didn’t respond to queries. Iran has long held that it was entitled to scrap its commitments to enhanced IAEA supervision under the 2015 deal after the US unilaterally withdrew. It rejects Western accusations that it is at least keeping the option of building a nuclear weapon open, saying its aims are purely peaceful. The Islamic Republic has nonetheless made big strides in uranium enrichment in recent years. When the US and world powers struck the nuclear deal with Iran in 2015, they sought to limit Tehran’s “breakout time” - how long it would need to produce enough fissile material for a single atom bomb - to at least a year by capping the purity to which it could enrich uranium at below 4%. Now that breakout time has all but evaporated. — Reuters

Making sense of the new global economy

AS the world becomes more volatile and confusing, policymakers, business leaders and investors will need to rethink the mental models they use to analyse the global economy. Specifically, they should pay attention to three structural dynamics that are altering the global landscape: capital flows, demographic shifts and political ideology, which are ushering in a more fragmented and siloed world. Changes to capital flows are driven largely by regulatory requirements (such as the US ban on investments in China) and investors’ pursuit of new opportunities for higher returns across sectors and regions. The US represents nearly 70 per cent of stock-market capitalisation worldwide, attracting more than 70 per cent of flows into the \$13 trillion global market for private investments, which include equity and credit. This is true despite the recent sell-off. The US stock market is where investors can generate the most attractive returns, because the US is a global innovation leader with broad, liquid and deep capital markets. But global debt has reached 237 per cent of world GDP, raising concerns about who owns outstanding liabilities and the extent to which there is hidden leverage in the global financial system. The US government alone owes \$36 trillion (or 124 per cent of GDP) – a large proportion of which is held by China, with which relations are strained. Moreover, hidden leverage and the shadow banking sector’s debts could become a problem. According to S&P Global, shadow banks held \$63 trillion in financial assets at the end of 2022 – representing 78 per cent of global GDP. And further analysis has also shown that in 2024, shadow banking accounted for 70 per cent of US mortgage origination and leveraged lending. Investors and business leaders will need to ask themselves who holds what debt, and where debt obligations and major pools of



DAMBISA MOYO

The writer is an economist and author

Keep a close eye on capital flows, demographic shifts and ideological realignments, all of which are ushering in a more fragmented and siloed world. While there is no way to eliminate extreme uncertainty, it can at least be managed.

financial leverage may lie. The second big worry concerns demographics. The global population continues to grow at a rapid clip, with the UN forecasting that there will 11.2 billion people by 2100, up from 8.1 billion now. Already, almost 90 per cent of the world’s population lives in poorer emerging markets, and economically poorer regions – such as Africa, India and the Middle East – are projected to experience population growth at or above the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman. Thus, these regions will continue to skew younger. Across Africa, 50-60 per cent of the population is below the age of 25, compared to only 20 per cent across the OECD. Meanwhile, other countries are aging rapidly and registering lower birth rates, with forecasts for Europe and China pointing to marked population declines. According to Eurostat, the European Union’s population is projected to peak at 453.3 million in 2026, before gradually decreasing to 419.5 million by 2100. And UN data suggest that China’s population will fall below 800 million by 2100, from 1.4 billion now. Such trends have far-reaching implications for global demand and production across a wide array of commodities such as foodstuffs and energy. For example, India, with its large, poorer population, is still heavily dependent on coal and fossil fuels, as compared to renewables. Demographic changes will also alter financial portfolios as aging populations switch from being capitalists (willing to take on risk) to rentiers (desiring stable, predictable fixed incomes). But markets will also have to calibrate for unprecedented intergenerational wealth transfers from baby boomers to millennials. Cerulli Associates estimates that this could amount to \$84 trillion by 2045. Finally, the ideological splits across countries and regions must be factored in. The breakdown of multilateralism and the fragmentation of trade, capital

flows, migration and ideas are all being priced in, and policymakers and business leaders will have to keep these trends in mind. America’s largest multinationals still generate more than half of their revenues outside the US. But they now need to consider what strained US alliances and traditional trading relationships will mean for their businesses. For business more broadly, deglobalisation has forced a shift towards more centralised procurement, hiring and trade in goods and services. It is also jeopardising carry trades (borrowing cheaply in New York and London to invest in higher-yielding regions) and making it harder to repatriate profits. In the near term, the Trump administration’s tariffs and deportations could affect salaries and fuel higher inflation in consumer goods, wages and prices across sectors. Higher inflation, moreover, will likely drive up the cost of capital, which could suppress business investment. And over the long term, deglobalisation and technological advances – such as AI and quantum computing – will further entrench today’s ideological splits. Geopolitical fissures have already raised big political questions. There is a tug of war between state capitalism and market capitalism, and over the reconfiguration of alliances and country groupings. New blocs such as the BRICS+ are vying for global influence and looking to circumvent traditional multilateral institutions. The BRICS+ countries already represent 45% of the world’s population and 35% of its GDP, and they are playing a growing role in the pricing and trade of many internationally traded goods and commodities. Such developments are making it harder for countries to achieve global alignment; even previously celebrated efforts like the United Nations Climate Change Conferences have been hobbled. — ©Project Syndicate 2025

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Simone Inzaghi

COACH INZAGHI TO LEAVE INTER MILAN

ROME: Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi is leaving after four years by “mutual agreement”, the club announced on Tuesday, as Italian media reported he was moving to Saudi Arabia.

“The club and Simone Inzaghi are parting ways. This is the decision taken by mutual agreement,” Inter said in a statement.

Both Inter and Inzaghi said the decision had been made at a meeting involving the coach and club President Giuseppe Marotta on Tuesday afternoon.

The parting came just days after Saturday’s 5-0 thumping by Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League final.

Talk had already been swirling about his exit, and last month Inzaghi played down rumours about a two-year deal with Saudi Pro League club Al-Hilal worth 50 million euros.

Italian media said Tuesday this reported had been confirmed.

Inzaghi took over Inter in 2021 and had a contract until 2026.

The 49-year-old guided the club to one Serie A title — Inter’s 20th — and two Italian Cups. He led the team to two Champions League finals in the past three seasons but lost both.

On track to repeat the treble heroics of 2010 just a few weeks ago, Inter ended the season trophyless after falling away in each competition.

In its statement, the club said Inzaghi’s management was “characterised by great passion, accompanied by professionalism and dedication”.

His trophies had “brought the club back to the top of Italian and European football”, it said.

Marotta thanked him “for the work done, for the passion shown and also for the sincerity in today’s discussion, which led to the common decision to separate our paths”. — AFP

Al Zubair takes Al Manar to Gold Cup victory

AL MANAR

Racing by Team WRT’s Al Faisal al Zubair,

Jens Klingmann and Ben Tuck delivered another driving and strategic masterclass to finish fourth overall and first in the Gold Cup class at the second round of the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup powered by AWS at Monza late on Sunday afternoon.

Despite qualifying in seventh, the trio carried out their pit stop strategy perfectly and were able to move through the field during a yellow flag-interrupted three-hour race to finish fourth overall ahead of nine other rivals in the Gold Cup category in their BMW M4 GT3 EVO. It was another proud day for Al Zubair and the Sultanate of Oman in endurance racing.

The Verstappen.com Racing Aston Martin was a distant second overall and the Tresor Attempto Racing Audi rounded off the Gold Cup podium.

A delighted Al Zubair said: “I’m happy to clinch the win in the Gold Cup Category. Honestly, this is a dream come true. Especially because we started the race from seventh on the grid. But the strategy from Team WRT was excellent. We had the speed throughout the weekend, but in qualifying we faced some issues, particularly in Q3.

“Fourth position in the overall classification and winning the Gold Cup category, this was fantastic. I’m very proud to raise the Omani flag high. We are aiming to achieve even more.” From a start position of seventh in the Gold Cup category, Al Zubair held eighth until a full course yellow brought proceedings to a stop after around 20 minutes. The Garage 59 McLaren had the lead from the CSA Racing McLaren.

Action resumed around the half-hour mark and Al Zubair made up a place to take seventh shortly afterwards. The Omani maintained his composure and was soon up to sixth with the Garage 59 McLaren continuing to lead from the Verstappen.com Racing Aston Martin. Herberth Motorsport’s Porsche was



Al Faisal al Zubair and Team WRT teammates on the podium

sidelined after 13 laps.

Al Zubair retained sixth to another full course yellow with around 1hr 50min of the race remaining. The handover to Tuck was a good one and, when action resumed, Tuck held the lead from the Garage 59 McLaren and the Verstappen Aston. The leading six Gold Cup cars were tightly bunched but Tuck retained the lead through 48 laps with 68 minutes of the race remaining. The CSA Racing McLaren had fallen by the wayside after 36 laps. With less than an hour to run there was yet another full course yellow with Tuck still leading. Racing resumed under a green flag with 54 minutes to go and the final changeover to Klingmann was a successful one with the team retaining an advantage over the Aston Martin and the Optimum Motorsport McLaren.

A seventh interruption to the race happened with 31 minutes to run and Klingmann holding the

lead and a superb fourth overall. But it was a brief stoppage and the German retained his position, only for a yellow to halt the race for the eighth time with just three minutes left of the 84-lap race.

Al Manar Racing by Team WRT carried out a short unofficial test session on Friday with Al Zubair posting a best lap of 1min 46.840sec.

Free practice took place on Saturday morning for the 10-car field and the fastest lap of the session went to the Nordique Racing Mercedes in the hands of Japan’s Kotaka Kazuko. Tuck’s best run for the Al Manar Racing by Team WRT operation was 1min 46.345sec and that put the BMW M4 in the middle of the group in fifth.

Pre-qualifying saw the Al Manar Racing BMW down in a subdued eighth with a best lap of 1min 46.694sec in a session won by the Verstappen.com Racing Aston Martin.



Fourth position in the overall classification and winning the Gold Cup category, this was fantastic. I’m very proud to raise the Omani flag high. We are aiming to achieve even more.

AL FAISAL AL ZUBAIR

Red Warriors charged up for Jordan encounter

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

With anticipation building and stakes higher than ever, the Oman national football team continued their final preparations ahead of the crucial clash against Jordan on Thursday in the decisive rounds of the AFC Asian Qualifiers — Road to 2026.

The Red Warriors will conclude their warm-up sessions with a final training on Wednesday night at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, the same venue that will host Thursday’s pivotal encounter. This match marks the penultimate fixture for Oman in Group C, to be followed by an away challenge against Palestine on Tuesday in Amman city in Jordan.

Oman’s head coach Rasheed

Jaber, supported by his assistant Yaqoob al Sabahi, is counting on the depth and experience of key players including: Ali al Busaidy, Ahmed al Khamisi, Harib al Saadi and Esam al Subhi, who recently scored the decisive goal in Oman’s 1-0 friendly win over Lebanon. The squad also boasts promising young talents, such as Tariq al Saadi, who are ready to contribute in this defining phase beside many other young players. The striker Mohsin al Ghassani will miss Jordan match due to the yellow cards accumulative.

The Jordanian team, led by head coach Jamal Salami, is expected to hold their official training session at the match venue on Wednesday, after concluding two warm-up days at Seeb Stadium.

Jordan, like Oman, is targeting an automatic qualification berth



Oman players during the training session

and will be eager to protect their advantage from the first-leg win 4-0 last October.

However, the calculations will be much different on Thursday assignment as Red Warriors will take the advantage of the home and fans support to register a positive result that will keep Oman’s hopes alive for sealing direct berth towards USA, Mexico and Canada next year.

Both teams will hold their official pre-match press conference and technical meeting on Wednesday, offering final insights into their preparations and strategies for what promises to be a tense, high-stakes contest. Oman, With ten points in hand, will aim to produce a statement performance to bring their Fifa World Cup 2026 dreams closer to reality especially they will receive an advantage of home support.

SHORTTAKES



Japanese baseball legend Shigeo Nagashima. — AFP

JAPAN’S BASEBALL
LEGEND NAGASHIMA
DIES AT 89

TOKYO: Los Angeles Dodgers superstar Shohei Ohtani led the tributes to Japanese baseball legend Shigeo Nagashima following his death on Tuesday aged 89.

Known as “Mr Pro Baseball”, Nagashima starred for Japan’s most popular team, the Yomiuri Giants, winning nine straight Japan Series titles from 1965 to 1973.

He formed a lethal partnership with Sadaharu Oh, who holds the world record for hitting the most home runs, and the pair are credited with cementing baseball’s status as Japan’s favourite sport.

Their batting exploits captivated a Japanese public enjoying new economic prosperity out of the ruins of World War II, with families tuning in to watch games on black and white televisions.

Nagashima’s outsized personality and easy charisma made him a popular public figure and symbol of a confident new Japan.

He hit a dramatic walk-off home run to seal a win for the Giants in the first professional game ever attended by Japan’s emperor in 1959.

“May your soul rest in peace,” Ohtani wrote on Instagram to his 9.5 million followers, along with a picture of himself with Nagashima.

Oh also paid tribute, telling reporters that he was “really shocked” to learn of his former teammate’s death.

“I’m really disappointed that Mr Nagashima, who shines brightly in the history of Japanese baseball, has departed after a long bout with illness,” the 85-year-old Oh was quoted as saying by the Kyodo news agency.

“He taught me a lot of things. I’m grateful to have been able to play with him.”

Nagashima retired in 1974 after a 17-year playing career during which he won the Central League batting title six times and was home run king twice.

He played in 2,186 games and hit 444 home runs. He also had two stints as the Giants’ manager, winning two Japan Series titles over 15 seasons.

Japan’s Chief Cabinet Secretary said Nagashima was “a sunny person”.

“He left so many brilliant records in the world of professional baseball for many years and gave bright dreams and hopes to society as a national star,” he said.



Virat Kohli celebrates with teammates after winning the IPL. — Reuters

Bengaluru beat Punjab
to win maiden IPL title

ROYAL

CHALLENGERS
BENGALURU posted 190-9 against Punjab Kings in the Indian Premier League final on Tuesday after opening batsman Virat Kohli topscored with 43.

Both the teams are hunting for their first title in the T20 tournament and thousands of Kohli fans filled the world’s biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad, anticipating an IPL crown for their star batter.

The 132,000-capacity stadium was nearly packed with a sea of Bengaluru’s red and Kohli’s jersey number 18 dominating the stands as chants of “Kohli, Kohli” rang out.

Punjab skipper Shreyas Iyer won the toss and invited Bengaluru to bat first with the two teams unchanged from their previous victories.

Known as “King Kohli” for his prolific run-scoring, the opener was not at his best in the knock, which came in 35 balls and included just three fours.

He lost opening partner Phil Salt for 16 when New Zealand quick Kyle Jamieson struck in his first over to send the England batter out in the deep off a good catch by Iyer.

Kohli attempted to anchor the innings and take the attack to the opposition with Mayank Agarwal, who made 24, and then skipper Rajat Patidar, who hit 26.

But Punjab kept coming back with wickets as leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal got Agarwal and Jamieson trapped the captain lbw.



Kohli hung around for a bit but mistimed a rising delivery from Afghanistan pace bowler Azmatullah Omarzai for a caught and bowled. He looked nearly as disappointed as his fans.

Jamieson took his third wicket to cut short Liam Livingstone’s knock of 25 off 15 balls.

Wickets kept tumbling as wicketkeeper-batsman Jitesh Sharma fell for a 10-ball 24 and Romario Shepherd for 17 off nine balls.

Left-arm quick Arshdeep Singh took three

wickets including Shepherd in the 20th over and gave away just three runs.

Bengaluru had defeated Punjab in the first playoff to book their fourth final. Punjab beat five-time champions Mumbai Indians in the last playoff to reach their second final and need 191 to win their first title.

The 18th edition of the world’s richest cricket league is ending nine days late due to a pause because of the military conflict between India and Pakistan. — AFP

Platense claim 1st Argentine Apertura title

SANTIAGO DEL ESTERO, Argentina: While many football fans drooled over the prospect of an Apertura final between giants Boca Juniors and River Plate, the title will instead be contested by Huracan and Platense, two hungry sides chasing history in a rare decider.

After decades spent in the shadow of the country’s heavyweights, Huracan are chasing their first league title in over 50 years, with Sunday’s final set for the Estadio Unico Madre de Ciudades in Santiago del Estero.

Platense secured their first top-flight Argentine Apertura tournament title on Sunday with a 1-0 victory over Huracan thanks



Platense players celebrate with the trophy. — AFP

to a second-half goal from Guido Mainero.

Platense’s first major trophy since promotion in 2021 followed a brilliant run as giant-killers, led by the coaching duo of Sergio Gomez and Favio Orsi.

“It’s crazy, but we were convinced we could do it. The only thing I would have liked is to celebrate it with my father, it is a very big emotion. It cost us a lot to get here, but to be champions we had to beat them all and that’s what we did,” coach Orsi told broadcaster ESPN after the match.

Regarded as a dark horse, the Argentine side, who have spent over two decades oscillating between

the lower divisions, ended Racing Club’s six-game unbeaten run in the round of 16, shocked River Plate in a penalty shootout at the Monumental Stadium, and edged past San Lorenzo 1-0 in the semi-finals.

In a tense match at the packed Estadio Unico Madre de Ciudades, Huracan dominated the early stages. Agustin Urzi drove them forward in the first half, while Eric Ramirez came closest to scoring with a header from a Matko Miljevic cross.

Platense, who surprised many by sneaking into the knockout stages with a sixth-place finish in Group B, broke the deadlock shortly after the hour mark. — Reuters

SPORTS



DJOKOVIC, SINNER, ZVEREV

INTO FRENCH OPEN QUARTERS



ANDREEVA, BOISSON, GAUFF

INTO NEXT STAGE

NOVAK DJOKOVIC sailed into a record 19th French Open quarterfinal on Monday, while world number one Jannik Sinner dismantled Andrey Rublev in straight sets.

World number 361 Lois Boisson knocked out women's third seed Jessica Pegula to become the first home quarterfinalist at Roland Garros since 2017.

The 38-year-old Djokovic dusted aside Britain's Cameron Norrie in three sets, his 6-2, 6-3, 6-2 victory on Court Philippe Chatrier bringing up the Serbian's 100th match win at the French Open.

His tally of 19 quarterfinal appearances at Roland Garros is the record for a single Grand Slam tournament, surpassing Roger Federer's 18 Wimbledon quarterfinals.

But Djokovic, a three-time French Open champion, is focused on much bigger goals as he chases a new outright record of 25 Grand Slam titles this week.

"I feel good. I know I can play better. But 12 sets played, 12 sets won, it's been solid so far," said Djokovic, who will likely face a much more difficult test against world number three Alexander Zverev. "It's great, but victory

Boisson sent shockwaves through Roland Garros as she kept the French flag flying with an improbable 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 win over 2024 US Open runner-up Pegula, to join Coco Gauff and Mirra Andreeva in the last eight

number 101 would be better. I'm very honoured... But I need to continue now."

Djokovic has not played anyone ranked higher than 73rd through the first four rounds. Zverev is last year's runner-up and advanced when Djokovic retired injured from their last meeting in the Australian Open semifinals in January. Zverev moved into his seventh Roland Garros quarterfinal when Dutch opponent Tallon Griekspoor quit with an abdominal problem while trailing 6-4, 3-0.

The German is still hunting a first Grand Slam title. He lost the 2024 final to Carlos Alcaraz and then finished runner-up to Sinner in Melbourne.

"Novak Djokovic will never be a (dark) horse. For me, Carlos is the favourite," said Zverev. "Then I would say the next three in line are Jannik, myself, and Novak, right? I still believe that."

World number one Sinner fired a warning shot to his title rivals with a ruthless 6-1, 6-3, 6-4 victory over Russian 17th seed Rublev in the night session. Sinner, who returned from a three-month doping ban last month at the Italian Open, will face the unseeded Alexander Bublik for a place in the last four.

Italy's Sinner is targeting a third consecutive Grand Slam title after

lifting the US Open trophy last year and winning his second successive Australian Open in January.

"Today was a very good performance but we try to keep going and see how it goes," said the three-time major champion.

Bublik took down his second top-10 rival in Paris as the rejuvenated Kazakh came from a set behind to defeat British fifth seed Jack Draper 5-7, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4.

Bublik, ranked 62nd, is into his first Grand Slam quarterfinal.

WILDCARD BOISSON SENDS PEGULA TUMBLING

Boisson sent shockwaves through Roland Garros as she kept the French flag flying with an improbable 3-6, 6-4, 6-4 win over 2024 US Open runner-up Pegula, to join Coco Gauff and Mirra Andreeva in the last eight. Boisson, 22, came from a set down against last year's US Open runner-up to prolong her dream run on her Grand Slam debut.

She is the first French singles quarterfinalist in Paris since Caroline Garica and Kristina Mladenovic made it to the same stage eight years ago. Mary Pierce was the tournament's last French champion in 2000. "I really don't know what to say," said Boisson, who was roared on by the home fans on Court Philippe Chatrier.

"To play on this court with such an atmosphere was incredible. I was confident before the match and knew I could do it even if she was really strong."

Boisson missed last year's French Open after tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee a week before it started. She is the lowest-ranked woman to reach a Grand Slam quarterfinal since former top-20 player Kaia Kanepi at the 2017 US Open. Kanepi had dropped to 418th at the time.

Boisson goes on to face 18-year-old Russian rising star Andreeva on Wednesday for a place in the semifinals.

Sixth seed Andreeva moved through in straight sets as she cut short an attempted fightback by Daria Kasatkina to advance 6-3, 7-5.

Andreeva is through to her second major quarterfinal, having reached the last four at Roland Garros 12 months ago when she knocked out Aryna Sabalenka.

World number two Gauff brushed Russian 20th seed Ekaterina Alexandrova aside 6-0, 7-5 to step up her pursuit of a first Roland Garros crown, and second Grand Slam title.

Former US Open champion Gauff will play reigning Australian Open champion Madison Keys in an all-American quarterfinal. — Reuters

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The largest share of subsidies, amounting to RO 565 million, was directed to the electricity sector.

RO 2.1 BILLION
DISBURSED IN
SUBSIDIES LAST YEAR

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

OMAN allocated more than RO 2.1 billion in 2024 to fund targeted support across critical sectors and public welfare programmes, as part of its broader fiscal strategy to promote economic resilience and social stability.

According to official data released by the Ministry of Finance, the largest share — RO 565 million — was directed to the electricity sector to maintain affordability and ensure continued access to essential services. The government also committed RO 501 million to bolster the national social protection system, in line with the objectives of the Social Protection Law and Oman Vision 2040. In a move to strengthen fiscal health, RO 400 million was allocated for debt servicing. The petroleum sector received RO 232 million in fuel subsidies, helping cushion consumers from international price fluctuations.

Key utilities and infrastructure were also prioritised. The water and sanitation sector was allocated RO 203 million, while the waste management sector received RO 71 million. The transport sector was granted RO 84 million to support mobility and logistics development.

To ease the cost of living, the government allocated RO 24 million for food subsidies and RO 41 million to support interest payments on housing loans for eligible citizens. An additional RO 47 million was distributed to support other essential public services and initiatives.

Digital banks in Oman get
green-light from CBO

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

THE Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued a regulatory framework for the licensing and supervision of digital banks, marking a major step toward modernising the country's financial sector. The framework, which came into effect on June 1, 2025, is aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

The framework allows digital banks to operate as either locally incorporated joint-stock companies (SAOC or SAOG) or as branches of foreign banks, subject to regulatory approval in their home jurisdictions.

Two types of licences will be offered. Category 1 requires a minimum paid-up capital of RO 30 million and allows full operations. Category 2 requires RO 10 million but comes with business limitations, including caps on customer deposits and corporate lending and a prohibition on proprietary trading. These limits are waived during the first two years of operation.

All digital banks must maintain a physical head or registered office in Oman.

They may open administrative offices for customer support, but not traditional branches for transactions. Shareholding limits apply: individuals and their affiliates may hold up to 15 per cent of voting shares; corporate bodies up to 25 per cent; and holding companies up to 35 per cent. Cross-ownership in multiple



Two types of licences will be offered. Category 1 requires a minimum paid-up capital of RO 30 million and allows full operations. Category 2 requires RO 10 million but comes with business limitations, including caps on customer deposits and corporate lending and a prohibition on proprietary trading. These limits are waived during the first two years of operation.

CENTRAL BANK
OF OMAN



The new framework is expected to pave the way for digital-first banking models, improve access to finance and foster innovation in Oman's financial sector.

banks is restricted to 15 per cent.

Applicants must present a detailed five-year business plan covering digital services, target segments, profitability projections, and a financial inclusion strategy.

The plan must outline IT architecture, cybersecurity readiness and disaster recovery procedures.

Digital banks are expected to adopt modern technologies such as AI, open banking, blockchain and cloud computing. Omanisation targets start at 50 per cent and rise to 90 per cent by Year 5.

The CBO mandates the submission of an exit plan alongside the licence application. It must define conditions under which the bank would voluntarily cease operations, such as capital

or profitability deterioration. The plan should address customer protection, risk triggers, and exit funding without regulatory assistance.

Licensed digital banks must comply with the Banking Law 02/2025, National Payment Systems Law 08/2018, and AML Law 30/2016.

They are also subject to digital onboarding rules, cybersecurity frameworks, consumer protection regulations and fraud prevention protocols. The CBO may require independent technical assessments at the applicant's expense. Non-compliance could trigger enforcement measures, including licence revocation.

The CBO reserves the right to reject incomplete applications or withdraw approvals if information is found to be inaccurate.

11 new financial institutions licensed in Oman last year

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

A TOTAL of 11 new financial institutions were licensed by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) to operate in the Sultanate of Oman in 2024 – a significant uptick that underscores the rapid growth and evolution of the country's banking and financial sector, the apex bank said.

As many as 1,020 applications were received during the course of the year, seeking licences and approvals for new financial institutions, establishments and branches, new products and services, and other licensing-related matters.

The 81 per cent jump in requests can be attributed to the growth of financial institutions established, as well as the expansion of existing institutions, the Central Bank noted in a report on licensing statistics for 2024.

“This positive trend reflects the strengthening of Oman's financial sector, driven by favourable

11 NEW FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS
LICENSED IN 2024



As many as 1,020 applications and requests were received by the Central Bank in 2024.

economic conditions, regulatory enhancements and an overall increase in investor confidence.

Additionally, the introduction of new financial products and services has further fuelled the demand for licences/approvals, contributing to the overall rise in requests/applications,” the Central Bank stated.

Of the 11 financial institutions that received licences were three foreign banks looking to establish branches in Oman. They are Gulf International Bank, HSBC Middle East and Mashreq Bank.

Additionally, one local investment bank was also established. “Oman Investment Bank holds a prominent position as the first investment bank to be established in the country, offering a wide range of services such as corporate banking, asset management and financial advisory.

This establishment helps further diversify the banking sector, contributing to Oman's economic growth and financial stability,” the Central Bank noted. It adds that two other applications are on hold, pending the completion of

regulatory and procedural steps by the applicants. Of the remaining 7 successful applications, one – First Exchange LCC – received a licence to operate as a Money Exchange Entity (MEE). Six others – Amwal Al Raqamia, Ooredoo Fintech, ONEIC Pay, Global Pay, OIFC (Khidmah) and FriendiPay – received licences to operate as Payment Service Providers.

In addition, Ahli Bank was given approval to open an overseas branch in the United Kingdom, while Bank Nizwa received the green light to open an overseas branch in Dubai International Financial Center.

Hundreds of official requests were also received from commercial banks, as well as Money Exchange Entities, Finance & Leasing Companies, and Payment Service Providers, according to the report.

“The increase in requests across all categories — especially from banks and MEEs — reflects the growing demand for licensing and regulatory support as the

financial sector in Oman continues to evolve. Compared to 2023, this upward trend can be attributed to several factors, including the expansion of financial services, the introduction of new regulatory frameworks, and the increasing complexity of the sector.

This distribution highlights the varied needs of our stakeholders and underscores the CBO's ongoing efforts to manage and address the increasing volume and complexity of requests efficiently,” the Central Bank stated in its report.

Affirming its commitment to transparency in application processing and approvals, the apex bank also announced the launch of a system to automate the branch licensing process for all financial institutions, including the issuance of certificates.

“The system is designed to replace the current manual process. It is currently in its final stages (testing phase) and is projected to go live by 2025,” it added.

ADVERTORIALS



This agreement reflects the shared commitment of all parties to support Oman's long-term prosperity.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL & AL MOUJ MUSCAT SIGN MOU FOR STRATEGIC CREDIT FACILITY AGREEMENT

MUSCAT: In a significant move to advance economic growth and sustainable urban development, Sohar International and Al Mouj Muscat have signed a Memorandum of Understanding for a strategic credit facility agreement valued at RO 63 million to Al Mouj Muscat.

This agreement reflects the shared commitment of all parties to support Oman's long-term prosperity through innovation, high-quality urban development, and strong financial stewardship enabled by trusted institutional partnerships.

Abdulwahid al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, said: "At Sohar International, we take great pride in actively contributing to Oman's infrastructure development, which is central to Oman's broader national growth agenda.

Our support for Al Mouj Muscat visionary project through this strategic credit facility reflects our commitment to empowering landmark initiatives that drive economic diversification and position Oman as a leading destination for investment and tourism.

As we continue to deliver innovative financial solutions tailored to the ambitions of our partners, we remain steadfast in our vision to offer an integrated banking experience that creates sustainable value for our clients and contributes meaningfully to the national economy."

Structured as a combination of term and revolving loan facilities, the agreement provides Al Mouj Muscat with the financial flexibility to accelerate ongoing and future developments, enhance operational efficiency and pursue strategic expansion.

This support will not only strengthen its diverse portfolio of residential, commercial and hospitality assets but also enable the delivery of elevated experiences that meet the evolving expectations of its community, investors and partners — setting new benchmarks for excellence in the real estate sector within the Sultanate of Oman.

Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, commented: "Since the inception of Al Mouj Muscat in 2006, we have shouldered a great responsibility to become Omans' premier waterfront development and also a benchmark project for integrated mix-use developments. This agreement with Sohar International is a testament to the strength of our financial position and a clear vote of confidence in our vision for the future of the project".

OAB LAUNCHES “EIDIYAH” CASHBACK CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: In the spirit of Eid Al Adha, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has announced the launch of its festive cashback initiative, “Eidiyah from OAB”, designed to reward customers during one of the most joyful times of the year.

This limited-time campaign offers credit cardholders a chance to win back RO 20 when they spend RO 200 or more from June 1 to 5, 2025.

The promotion is open to all OAB Visa Infinite, Platinum, Gold



and Classic credit cardholders and includes both local and international retail transactions.

The first 250 eligible customers to meet the spend threshold will receive RO 20 cashback, bringing a festive boost to their holiday spending.

Juma al Fulaiti, Deputy Head of Retail Banking at Oman Arab Bank, stated, “Eid is a time of generosity, connection and celebration. We wanted to extend that spirit to our customers by giving something meaningful in return.

Bank Muscat manages RO 100m sukuk issuance

BANK MUSCAT, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, announced that it successfully managed series 9 of the Sovereign Sukuk Issuance launched by the Oman Sovereign Sukuk Company, with a total value of RO 100 million.

The sukuk carries a 7-year maturity and offers an annual profit rate of 4.65%. Bank Muscat was appointed as the official issue manager and collecting bank for the subscription, in collaboration with other local financial institutions.

This mandate reinforces the bank's leadership in executing major investment transactions within the Sultanate of Oman and across GCC capital markets.

The Oman Sovereign Sukuk Company had opened the subscription window from May 27 to June 1, 2025, with the sukuk settlement scheduled for Wednesday, June 4, 2025.

The sukuk was priced within a competitive yield range, with an average yield of 4.625%, a minimum yield of 4.57%, and a maximum yield of 4.64%, reflecting strong investor confidence and market stability.

The sukuk payouts will be made semi-annually on June 4 and



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December 4 each year until maturity on June 4, 2032. The issuance witnessed participation from all categories of investors, retail as well as institutional.

The sukuk is structured in accordance with Sharia-compliant principles and is fully tradable on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) at prevailing market prices.

All allocation details and investor records will be maintained and administered by Muscat Clearing and Depository Company, as the central registrar and depository for the sukuk.

Commenting on the occasion, Khalifa Abdullah al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager, Investment Banking and Capital Markets at

Bank Muscat, expressed pride in collaborating with the team at Oman Sovereign Sukuk Company and the Ministry of Finance, Sultanate of Oman for this successful issuance.

He noted: “The Bank's appointment as the official issue manager for the sukuk issuance is a testament to the company's trust in Bank Muscat's capabilities and leadership in managing major investment transactions for a range of corporate and institutional clients.

The Bank, represented through its Investment Banking and Capital Markets division, has extensive experience in structuring and executing large-scale capital market deals, both on debt as well as equity side, and its specialised team is well-equipped to navigate evolving market dynamics and complexities.

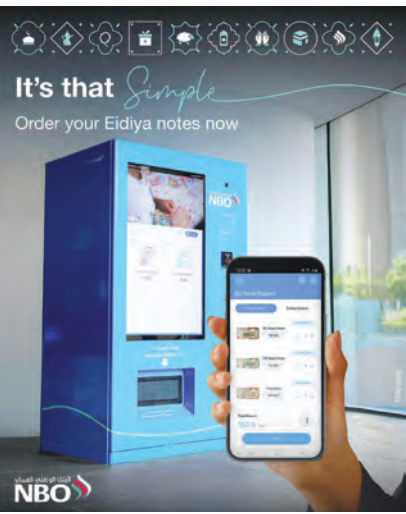
Bank Muscat is committed to supporting the growth of local financial markets by offering a comprehensive suite of banking and financial solutions tailored to institutional and retail customers alike.”

The selection of Bank Muscat as the issue manager underscores its strong local, regional, and international reputation among individuals, corporates and financial institutions.

NBO STREAMLINES EID NOTE COLLECTION WITH SMART BOOKING

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has launched an exclusive limited-time new feature on its NBO app, that allowed customers to pre-book their Eid notes in advance and enjoy a seamless and timely experience without the need to wait in long queues.

The exclusive service has enabled customers to choose from a range of denominations; 100 baisas, 500 baisas, RO 1, RO 5, and RO 10 – and receive a reference number upon booking to track requests and



collect the notes conveniently from their preferred branch, including Central Business District (CBD), Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Ghala and Barka.

Additionally, customers were able to monitor the status and cancel requests directly through the app.

Commenting on the initiative Dr Ali bin Salim al Shekaili, Assistant General Manager and Head of Digital and E-Channels at NBO, said: “Eid is a spiritual time for connection, giving and

joy - values that resonate with our customer service.

Through this new feature, we emphasised the simplicity and speed of digital banking by enabling customers to pre-book Eidiya notes from the NBO app, removing barriers, reducing queues and enhancing their banking experience.

Moreover, our Eid Note Dispensing Machines contributed to our digital banking capabilities, reinforcing our dedication to seamless and customer-centric service.”

Khimji Ramdas special projects deliver world-class indoor shooting range

MUSCAT: Inaugurated under the esteemed auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth recently, ‘Action Point’ has been engineered to cater to a wide audience - from hobby shooters and competitive marksmen to private security agencies and government entities - in a controlled, immersive and highly secure environment.

The Special Projects Division of Khimji Ramdas LLC has successfully completed and handed over a state-of-the-art Indoor Shooting Range ‘Action Point’, a one-of-its-kind world-class sporting facility designed to elevate Oman's standing in shooting sports and

tactical training. ‘Action Point’s – Indoor Shooting Ranges’ has been developed by the Special Projects Division of Khimji Ramdas LLC in collaboration with Cubic Technologies Singapore PTE LTD - global leaders in defence training systems.

The state-of-the-art Indoor Shooting Range, represents a one-of-its-kind, fully equipped facility that delivers an unparalleled live-fire experience. Located at the Active Oman Centre (Oman Automobile Association), it combines international expertise with local execution, showcasing Oman's commitment to advanced sports infrastructure and youth



Action Point is a one-of-its-kind world-class sporting facility designed to elevate Oman's standing in shooting sports and tactical training.

engagement. The facility features six specialised shooting ranges: Two 25-metre pistol ranges with retrievable targets for 9mm pistols;

one 50-metre tactical range featuring LOMAH (Location of Miss and Hit) target systems; one 100-metre rifle range with retrievable targets for 5.56 mm calibre rifles; a globally unique indoor shotgun (skeet/trap) range; an air gun range (currently under development).

All ranges are equipped with smart bullet traps that safely collect projectiles into designated channels, advanced electronic target systems for real-time feedback, and air purification systems that ensure a healthy and safe environment by removing dust and gases generated by shooting. The facility is designed to cater to a wide spectrum of users - ranging from first-time visitors

and hobby shooters to competitive marksmen, private security agencies and government entities.

The experience begins with a comprehensive safety briefing at a dedicated reception and briefing area, followed by closely monitored sessions where each visitor is accompanied by a qualified instructor who ensures safety and provides technical guidance throughout.

Col (Retd) Nasser bin Ali al Amri, General Manager - Action Point, stated: “Action Point was envisioned as more than just a facility - it is an experience that combines adrenaline, precision, and professionalism.”

BUSINESS

GROWTHPERFORMANCE



The IMF commended Oman's economic performance, noting that real GDP grew by 1.7% in 2024—up from 1.2% in 2023.

IMF PRAISES OMAN’S ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND FISCAL DISCIPLINE

MUSCAT: A visiting International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission has concluded its preliminary meetings with the Government of Oman as part of the 2025 Article IV Consultation.

The discussions focused on recent economic, financial and monetary developments, as well as structural reform progress in the Sultanate of Oman.

The IMF commended Oman's economic performance, noting that real GDP grew by 1.7% in 2024 — up from 1.2% in 2023 — thanks to robust non-oil sector growth, particularly in manufacturing, logistics, tourism, and renewable energy. Growth is forecast to accelerate to 2.4% in 2025 and 3.7% in 2026, supported by the easing of OPEC+ production caps and ongoing economic diversification.

Inflation remains well contained at just 0.9% year-on-year for the first four months of 2025.

The Fund lauded Oman's prudent fiscal policy, which delivered a 3.3% budget surplus in 2024 despite rising infrastructure and public service investments. However, the surplus is projected to narrow to 0.5% of GDP in 2025 and 2026 due to lower oil prices, before improving again in the medium term.

Public debt fell to 35.5% of GDP in 2024. The IMF highlighted Oman's continued fiscal reform momentum and targeted investments in priority sectors, praising the Oman Investment Authority's role in enhancing governance of state-owned enterprises.

Oman's banking sector was described as strong, with high asset quality, solid capital and liquidity buffers, and sustained profitability. Credit to the private sector continues to expand, fuelled by growing deposits and healthy net foreign assets.

The Central Bank of Oman received praise for improving liquidity management and promoting financial sector development and inclusion.

OMAN REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS TOP RO 833 MILLION BY APRIL

MUSCAT: The total value of real estate transactions in Oman surged to RO 833.9 million by the end of April 2025, marking a 9.7% increase compared to RO 760.2 million during the same period in 2024. According to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information, legal transaction fees rose by 18.4% year-on-year to RO 24.3 million, up from RO 20.5 million. The traded value of sale

contracts jumped 13.7% to RO 408.5 million, despite a slight 1.4% drop in the number of sale contracts, which stood at 21,087.

In comparison, 21,385 contracts were registered during the same period last year.

Mortgage activity also expanded, with the traded value rising 6.1% to RO 421.5 million across 7,164 contracts — up from RO 397.2 million for 6,482 contracts in 2024.

Swap contracts recorded a slight dip, with 436 contracts worth RO 3.9 million, compared to 465 contracts totalling RO 3.6 million last year. The number of new real estate properties issued increased by 1.7% to reach 73,432.

However, property ownership among GCC nationals declined by 3.9%, with 394 properties issued to GCC citizens compared to 410 a year earlier. — ONA

Pact signed to turn oilfield waste into clean energy

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

SULTAN Qaboos University (SQU) has signed a pioneering research agreement with ARA Petroleum to explore innovative ways of converting produced brine — a waste byproduct from oil and gas operations — into sustainable energy resources such as biohydrogen and biochar.

The agreement was signed at the University's Cultural Centre by Professor Amer bin Saif al Hinai, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies and Research at SQU, and Dr Omar bin Salim al Jaaidi, Vice-President of ARA Petroleum.

The project will be fully funded by ARA Petroleum and supported with its technical expertise, bringing together academic research and industrial know-how to support Oman's sustainability goals.

In an interview with the Observer, Dr Saleh al Saadi, Director of the Sustainable Energy Research Centre at SQU, said the collaboration reflects the University's core mission to advance technologies that address real-world challenges.

"This partnership aligns directly with SQU's vision



The agreement was signed by Professor Amer bin Saif al Hinai, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Postgraduate Studies and Research at SQU, and Dr Omar bin Salim al Jaaidi, Vice-President of ARA Petroleum.

of advancing sustainable technologies by addressing real industrial challenges through research," Dr Al Saadi said. "By converting produced water into biohydrogen and biochar, the project supports Oman Vision 2040 and Net-Zero 2050 goals. It contributes to renewable energy development, water reuse and environmental protection while building local research capacity."

Produced brine, typically high in salinity and contaminants, is one of the oil sector's most complex waste streams. Dr Al Saadi's research team aims to overcome technical barriers such as low hydrogen yields and inefficiencies in the conversion

process.

"We are tackling major challenges like the high salinity and toxicity of produced water," he explained. "Our team is developing an optimised two-stage fermentation system to increase hydrogen output, using biochar to enhance gas quality.

In addition, we plan to incorporate AI modelling to improve process efficiency and ensure the project's economic viability. The aim is to transform waste into clean energy and agricultural inputs."

The collaboration is also notable for integrating public, private and academic stakeholders. It has received strong backing from the

Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, with its Ejaad platform playing a vital role in linking academia with industry.

"This collaboration unites academia (SQU), industry (ARA), and government (Ejaad) to address national priorities," said Dr Al Saadi.

"It shows how joint innovation can drive Oman's transition to a knowledge-based and sustainable economy. It not only enables the development of real-world solutions but also builds national expertise and accelerates the commercialisation of green technologies."

Dr Omar bin Salim al Jaaidi remarked, "This collaboration underscores the strength of local expertise and the potential of Oman's young generation. By working with Sultan Qaboos University, we are not only developing sustainable energy solutions but also empowering the next generation of innovators and researchers to lead efforts to address global environmental challenges."

As the world moves towards more circular and sustainable energy practices, this initiative places Oman at the forefront of research-driven solutions for resource recovery and decarbonisation in the hydrocarbon sector.

Space Engineering Lab under development in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 3

THE National Space Programme is currently developing a space engineering laboratory in collaboration with Sultan Qaboos University (SQ), according to a key official associated with the initiative.

Dr Saud bin Humaid al Shueili, Head of the National Space Programme at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), the Space Engineering Lab initiative underscores Oman's investment in local talent and research.

"Oman has the personal talent and the Universities in the country with the clear potential to deliver and sustain a space industry. The national space programme is working closely with Sultan Qaboos University to develop the Oman Space Engineering Laboratory. This is an important national



The National Space Programme is working with universities and private companies to integrate space education into existing courses.

project for developing domestic capability and building space skills for the Omani population. Oman has many excellent universities producing graduates in relevant science

subjects," Dr Al Shueili added in an interview featured in SpaceTech Gulf.

The official also shared that the programme is working closely with academic establishments and the private sector to explore opportunities for incorporating space education into existing courses.

"The National Programme is working with private companies and universities to understand how we can further integrate space specific elements into existing courses such as engineers, data science, and GIS," he added.

Capacity building has been identified as a key pillar of the Oman Space Policy and Executive Programme, a 10-year framework aimed at positioning Oman as a regional and global hub for space applications.

The policy outlines a national strategy to upskill graduates, embed space content into academic programmes, and strengthen

academia-industry cooperation. It also encourages the creation of mentorship, business coaching, and technical training opportunities that reflect real market demand.

Last September, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology unveiled a tender for the development of a space accelerator programme which aims to support entrepreneurs and local startups in the sector by providing resources, funding and guidance to help them expand and bring innovative products to the local and global markets.

According to the ministry, the programme will focus on various activities in the space sector including communications, earth observation, geospatial analytics, drones, artificial intelligence and machine learning, big data processing, data storage and preservation, space sustainability and spacecraft simulation.

TRIMMING ESTIMATES

OECD lowers global economic outlook



Global economic growth is slowing more than expected only a few months ago as the fallout from the Trump administration's trade war takes a bigger toll on the US economy, the OECD said on Tuesday.

The global economy is on course to slow from 3.3% last year to 2.9% in 2025 and 2026, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development said. — Reuters

CONCLUDE TALKS

US, India trade negotiations progress



Trade negotiations between the United States and India are making progress and a deal could be finalised soon, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said on Monday, as both sides push to conclude talks ahead of a July deadline.

"You should expect a deal between US and India (in the) not-too-distant future because I think we have found a place that really works for both countries," Lutnick said. — Reuters

GAINED NEARLY

Oil steadies as weaker dollar support



Oil steadied on Tuesday, supported by rising geopolitical tensions as Russia and Ukraine ramped up the war and Iran was set to reject a US nuclear deal proposal that would be key to easing sanctions on the major oil producer.

Crude had gained 3% on Monday after Opec+, kept its July output hike at 411,000 barrels per day, the same as earlier months and less than some in the market had feared. — Reuters

Insights for developing sustainable data centres in Oman



**DR MUHAMMAD
ABDUL QYYUM**

The writer is an Assistant Professor, Department of Petroleum and Chemical Engineering, Sultan Qaboos University.

As artificial intelligence becomes central to modern economies, the global surge in high-performance data centres is driving significant increases in electricity consumption and carbon emissions. These digital facilities underpin technological progress but are among the fastest-growing energy consumers globally. With data centres accounting for 2 to 3% of global electricity use, and this figure is expected to climb with the expansion of AI applications, digital twins, and large language models, the need for sustainable infrastructure is more urgent than ever. Oman, with its strategic location in the GCC and abundant renewable energy potential, is well-placed to lead this sustainable digital revolution. Oman Vision 2040 outlines Oman’s road map toward a diversified and knowledge-based economy. With vast potential in renewable energy, particularly solar and wind, combined with its advancing hydrogen economy, CCUS (carbon capture, utilisation, and storage) initiatives, and LNG infrastructure, Oman can become a leader in sustainable digital transformation. The country can capitalise on its clean energy ecosystem to host AI infrastructure that is not only energy-efficient but also

climate-aligned. Recent efforts by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), including the establishment of the National Centre for Space, Advanced Technologies, and Artificial Intelligence, reflect a growing commitment to integrate AI across key sectors. Energy is a priority, and integrating AI with energy systems will be essential to ensure efficient, resilient, and scalable data infrastructure. In particular, AI-optimised energy management systems and predictive cooling models can minimise operational costs and reduce carbon emissions. From a technical standpoint, Oman must invest in sustainable thermal management technologies suitable for its arid climate. Innovations such as liquid immersion cooling, thermal energy storage systems, and advanced hybrid air-liquid systems should be piloted. These technologies not only reduce energy consumption but also enhance system reliability under high ambient temperatures. Coupling these with renewable-powered microgrids and smart grid integration can improve grid stability and reduce dependency on fossil fuels. Additionally, research into AI-enabled fault prediction,

With vast potential in renewable energy, particularly solar and wind, combined with its advancing hydrogen economy, CCUS (carbon capture, utilisation, and storage) initiatives and LNG infrastructure, Oman can become a leader in sustainable digital transformation.

load balancing, and real-time optimisation of cooling and power systems is crucial for operational efficiency. Strategically, a national R&D lab hosted at Sultan Qaboos University, supported by MoTCIT, industrial zones like Sohar and Duqm, and international technology partners, could serve as a testbed for future-ready data centre solutions. Such a lab would facilitate applied research, prototype demonstration, and the development of localised cooling and hydrogen-based power systems. This initiative would enhance in-country value (ICV), promote workforce development, and support capacity building in AI-energy convergence. Oman must view sustainable data centres as essential to its digital future and climate leadership. Beyond meeting regional digital demand, these centres can become engines for innovation, clean technology commercialisation, and economic diversification. By investing in targeted R&D, smart infrastructure, and public-private collaborations, Oman can position itself as a regional hub for clean energy-powered digital ecosystems aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and global net-zero targets.

SHELL-BP MERGER’S KEY INGREDIENT IS TIME

YAWEN CHEN

Wael Sawan must feel like it’s Groundhog Day. In recent weeks Shell’s chief executive has been fielding one question over and over again: whether he’s considering merging his \$198 billion group with struggling UK rival BP. Drill down into whether a swoop for the \$77 billion oil major makes any sense, and Sawan’s lack of enthusiasm is understandable. Yet a year from now, conditions could look more favourable. Shell-BP would be a seriously big beast. At around 5.4 million of daily barrels of oil equivalent output, it would create a European giant that dwarfs even US peer Exxon Mobil, the biggest Western oil major. The same would apply to its 3.1 million barrels of daily refining capacity, putting it second behind Exxon. Extensive overlap of oil fields, especially in the United States, implies scope for big cost savings. Even so, the market likes the cost cuts and deleveraging Sawan has managed since joining in January 2023. Shell has outperformed even US giants like Exxon and Chevron, and BP’s market capitalisation now lies below 40% of its domestic rival’s – the level at which managers internally start to feel it’s worth seriously considering a merger, according to a person familiar with the matter. Even so, the M&A math still has to be convincing. Right now, it isn’t. Assume Shell offered a typical 30% premium, valuing BP’s equity at \$100 billion. Add in BP’s \$27 billion of net debt, \$13 billion of leases and \$17 billion of hybrid bonds, and BP’s enterprise value would be \$157 billion. Going forward, Goldman Sachs analysts expect BP to make less than \$17 billion of operating profit in 2026, which factors in expected hits from lower oil prices. Taxed at the 40% tax rate BP guides to, that’s a 6% return on invested capital – less than BP’s cost of capital of around 8%, as estimated by Morningstar. That number admittedly doesn’t include the synergies. Cost savings of anything between 25% and 50% of the target’s distribution and administrative expenses – which include rents and other overheads – are possible on big fossil fuel mergers, according to a person familiar with deals in the industry. Assume that Shell can strip out 25% of BP’s \$16 billion of such costs in 2024 – roughly in line with synergies from Exxon’s landmark Mobil swoop in 1999 and Chevron’s 2023 offer to buy Hess – and BP’s operating profit would expand to the tune of \$4 billion. Even then the overall return would still be less than 8%. Given the execution and antitrust risks inherent in such a deal, plus chunky one-off transaction costs, that’s not a juicy enough return. Sawan is gaining plaudits simply by buying back \$3.5 billion of his shares each quarter and reckons Shell’s free cash flow per share will grow 10% or more annually out to 2030. — Reuters

AI agents will soon assist you in real life

Eid holidays are just a few days away. Some people and families are planning to travel, while others just plan to search and book local hotels and for some activities that they and their children could engage in around the city as a retreat. I know for a fact that I personally need a quick getaway plan immediately after Eid to refresh, re-energise, and prepare for the remaining engagements set for the next balance months (the second half of the year). The good news is that all this (search and booking) is now virtually possible today on the information superhighway (the Internet). The bad news is that it would require one to research so as to spend a considerable amount of time in order to have an ideal plan created.

For the executives or the likes, this may be an easy affair via their personal assistant. For the rest, it’s a tedious manual activity that one cannot avoid, unfortunately. Wouldn’t it be just awesome if there were a digital assistant or helper who could fulfil the service for you? Welcome to Artificial Intelligence (AI) agents. What are they and how do they work? Is what I will focus on in my article today. First things first, let me clarify that AI agents are not chatbots or voice assistants (like Amazon’s Alexa, Apple’s Siri, Microsoft’s Cortana, and Samsung’s Bixby). AI agents are digital assistants/helpers that go beyond just responding to user inputs/prompts where they actually act proactively and not reactively to user/your requests per se. Simply, they understand what you want (as in your goals) and find out ways (as programmed via logic) on what to do to get you the ideal results (for your goals). The typical AI consumer apps that many use today (e.g., ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, Claudia, etc.) are based on LLMs (Large Language Models), yet AI agents are powered by LLMs. They are proactive (don’t wait for you to ask things) but instead get things/tasks done for you.



AI agents are digital assistants/helpers that go beyond just responding to user inputs/prompts where they actually act proactively and not reactively to user/your requests, per se.



**TARIQ
AL BARWANI**

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman

Examples include reading your emails, reviewing your calendar, scheduling meetings in advance, analysing and summarising reports, and/or making decisions on your behalf using logic (programmed or taught to them). The sky is the limit on what these AI agents can do for you, and time will prove their worthiness (as you are witnessing today with ChatGPT and similar apps). How do these AI agents actually work? Quite simply, you set a goal, and it goes out to get it or them done for you. For example, referring to my wish at the beginning of the article today on a getaway travel plan, I would set a plan via the AI agent as “Look for the best hotel deals in Indonesia under a specific budget X and closer to specific attraction X.” Obviously, I will share the budget in mind and a few attractions I have heard of or been recommended. The AI agent would, in return, break down the query/input into smaller actions, surf the web, summarise if it found anything via the links generated, probably draft an email, communicate and negotiate with the hotel(s) and attraction(s) in question, reflect

on the outcome received, and return with a recommendation (and sometimes even decide and take action for you, as you had programmed it/them to do). What more? These AI agents can also talk with other AI agents and support one another to get you the final result. Pretty cool? Yes, and trust me, it’s not part of a science fiction movie but rather a reality in the making. AI agents are quite new and in the early stages of their full potential. Human intervention and/or supervision may still be required at times to ensure it works and is trained correctly. Nevertheless, like at the beginning of the consumer AI apps of the likes of ChatGPT and the rest, I expect AI agents to mature and become extremely useful in the coming year or so, where almost everyone (including myself) will have a digital helper at the office and/or at home, supporting 24/7 on every and any task, including Eid holiday getaways that I mentioned at the beginning of the article this week. Until we catch up again, I wish you a blessed and happy Eid Mubarak.

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INDIAN male MBA, 20 years experience in Oman & GCC in Project sales/ Dealer market in All construction materials including Cables & Accessories having D/L looking for the post of Sales Manager/Assistant Manager. Contact: 00968 78099493

CHIEF accountant, MBA finance, 9+ years experience in financial statements, auditing, budgeting, VAT, tax, fixed assets, reconciliation, payroll. Seeking a full-time or part-time position in a senior role. Contact: akramhaniffa@yahoo.com / 93988825.

SRI LANKAN Male — (CGMA ACMA+ CPA+BBA) Asst. Finance Manager/ Chief Accountant, 12+ Experience in Oman & GCC, Expert in Finan. Reporting (MIS), VAT, Audit, Cashflow, Budget, AR AP Recon, IFRS, Payroll, Banking. Contact: 78773250. Email: alih.mohamedown@gmail.com

B.E Electrical Engineer (14yrs Exp) 6yrs in Oman with Oman D/L GSM: 77405954 Email: michaelmathu@gmail.com

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ENTERTAINMENT

Clint Eastwood at 95 on film-making: do something new, or stay home



HOLLYWOOD star Clint Eastwood urged fellow film-makers to come up with new ideas as he approaches his 95th birthday this weekend, observing in a newspaper interview that the movie business is now full of remakes and franchises.

Oscar-winning director Eastwood told Austrian newspaper Kurier he planned to keep working, saying that he was still in good physical shape and hopeful that no one would have to worry about him in that regard “for a long time yet.”

Eastwood’s most recent film, legal drama “Juror#2”, came out in the United States last year and the newspaper said he was currently in the pre-production phase for another movie.

When asked for his view on the current state of the film industry, the star of movies such as “The Good, The Bad and The Ugly” and “Dirty Harry”, and director of dozens of films including “Unforgiven” and “Million Dollar Baby”, said:

“I long for the good old days when screenwriters wrote movies like ‘Casablanca’ in small bungalows on the studio lot. When everyone had a new idea,” according to the German text of the interview published on Friday. “We live in an era of remakes and franchises. I’ve shot sequels three times, but I haven’t been interested in that for a long while. My philosophy is: do something new or stay at home,” added Eastwood, who will turn 95 on Saturday.

Asked where he got his energy from, Eastwood said:

“There’s no reason why a man can’t get better with age. And I have much more experience today. Sure, there are directors who lose their touch at a certain age, but I’m not one of them.”

Eastwood, who made World War II thriller “Where Eagles Dare” in Austria with Welsh actor Richard Burton in the late 1960s, told the paper the secret to his success was that he had always tried something new as a director and an actor.

“As an actor, I was still under contract with a studio, was in the old system, and thus forced to learn something new every year,” he said. “And that’s why I’ll work as long as I can still learn something, or until I’m truly senile.” — Reuters

QUICK FEATURES



HERITAGE

The artefact gold funerary mask in the treasures tomb of Pharaoh Psusennes I is displayed, on the day of a press conference held by the Supreme Council of Egyptian Antiquities and the Italian Embassy, in Cairo. —Reuters



EVENTS

Jane Fonda attends the MOCA (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) Gala annual fundraising event in Los Angeles, California, US. — Reuters



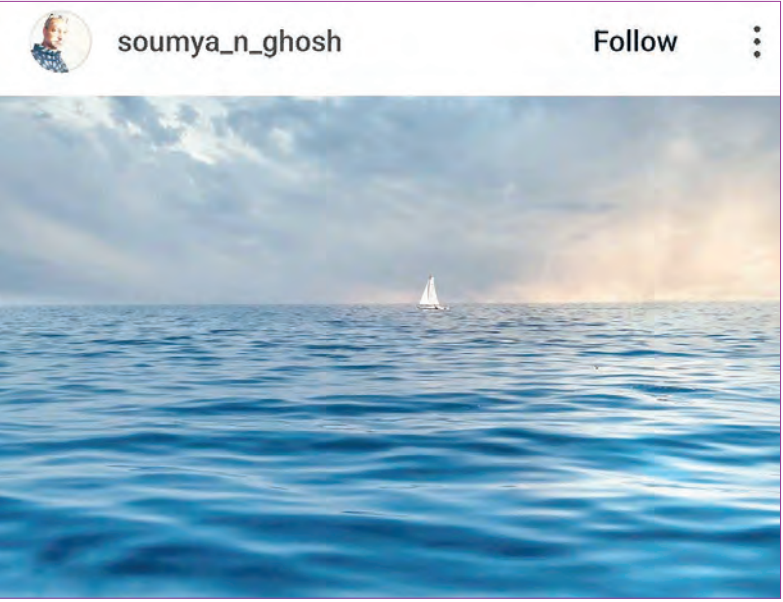
LIFESTYLE

A Super Mario character is pictured at a Nintendo display ahead of the launch of the company’s Switch 2 console, an electronics store in the city of Nagoya. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



On the Road



Beauty of Remote Places

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This Dinosaur Had Feathers and Probably Flew Like a Chicken



In 1861, scientists discovered Archaeopteryx, a dinosaur with feathers, in 150 million-year-old limestones in Solnhofen, Germany. They didn't know it at the time, but that fossilised skeleton — and the several that followed — provided a key piece of evidence for the theory of evolution, as well as for the fact that birds were actually dinosaurs. Since then, researchers have pored over every detail of available specimens, trying to puzzle out how birds came to fly. So you might expect that such a well-studied fossil species wouldn't be capable of surprises. But in a new paper, a team led by Jingmai O'Connor, a palaeontologist at the Field Museum in Chicago, revealed previously unrecorded soft tissues and skeletal details from a new specimen, known as the Chicago Archaeopteryx. What they found also helps explain why some feathered dinosaurs got off the ground, if only for short-haul flights. Many Archaeopteryx

specimens are too flattened by geology to discern important skeletal details. The latest specimen, acquired by the Field Museum in 2022, let O'Connor's team address some of the anatomical uncertainties. Unlike other specimens, the bones of the Chicago Archaeopteryx were preserved in three dimensions, allowing the researchers to better evaluate the skull's palate. That showed the earliest signs of an evolutionary trajectory toward the skulls of modern birds. In another accident of fossilisation, the carcass's wings were separated from the body, leaving them "pristinely preserved." The team confirmed that rather than having two layers of wing feathers, Archaeopteryx actually had three. In modern birds, that third layer helps link the shorter forearm to the body to create a continuous lift surface, which allows for sustained flight. — ASHER ELBEIN/ NYT



In Cairo, the little indie cinema that could

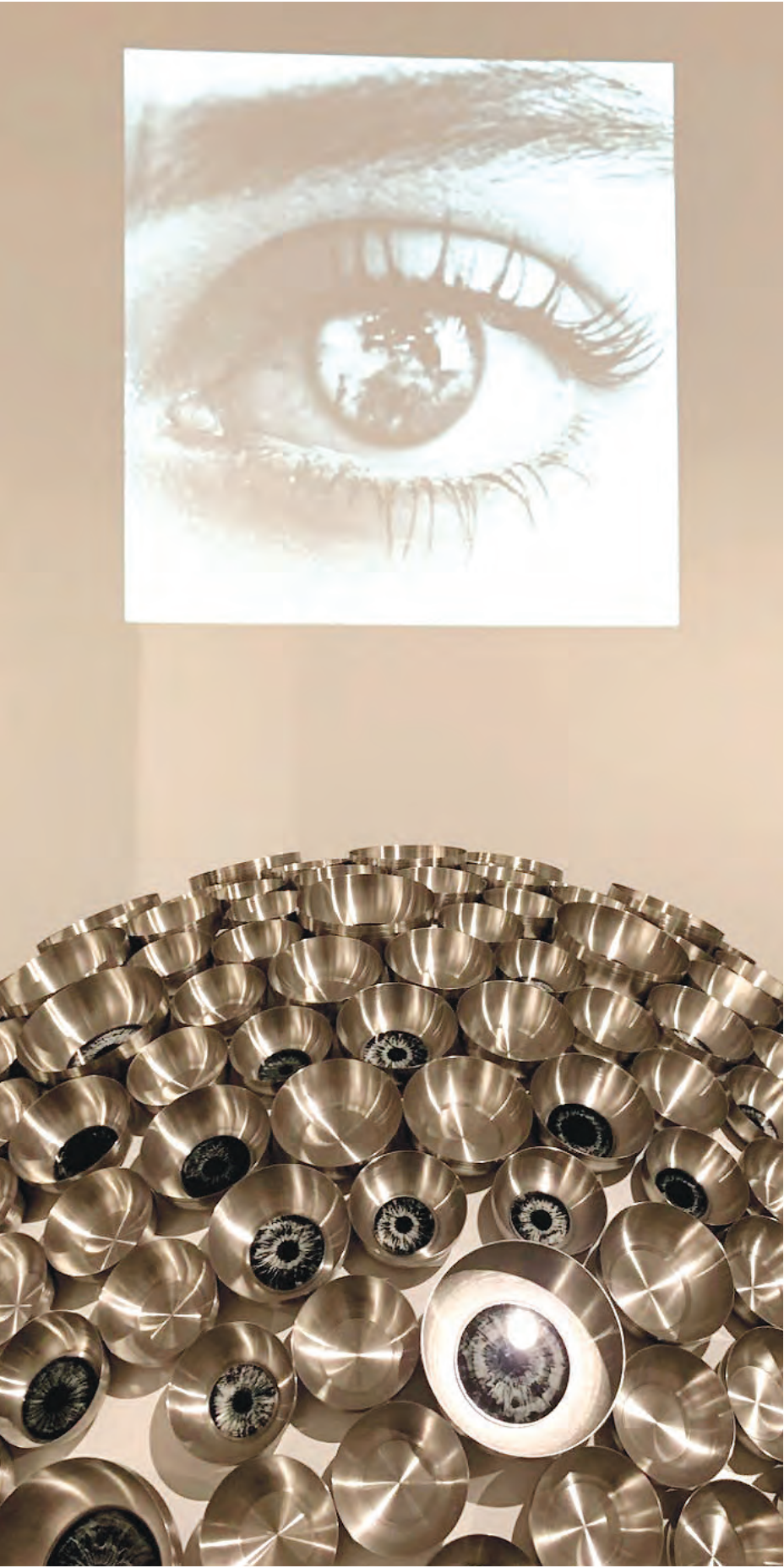
IN THE heart of Cairo, a small cinema has for over a decade offered a unique space for independent film in a country whose industry is largely dominated by commercial considerations. Zawya, meaning "perspective" in Arabic, has weathered the storm of Egypt's economic upheavals, championing a more artistic approach from the historical heart of the country's golden age of cinema. Zawya was born in the post-revolutionary artistic fervour of the 2011 uprising that toppled longtime president Hosni Mubarak. "There was this energy where people wanted to produce and create, not just in cinema, but in all the arts, you could feel it," said Zawya founder Youssef Shazli. In the time since, it has escaped a wave of closures — some forced — of art centres across the capital. Egypt had long been known as the Hollywood of the Arab world, but in the decades since its mid-century heyday, the domestic industry has largely been restricted to crowd-pleasing blockbusters. "It's often said that we're lucky to have a large film industry, with infrastructure already in place," said film-maker Maged Nader. "But the truth is this industry operates solely on a commercial logic," leaving little room for independent film-makers, he added. Yet Zawya has survived in its niche, in part due to the relative financial stability afforded to it by its parent company Misr International Films. Founded in 1972 by Egyptian cinematic giant Youssef Chahine — Shazli's great uncle — the company continues to produce and distribute films. YOUNG TALENT For Shazli, Zawya is "a cinema for films that don't fit into traditional theatres". But for young cinephiles like 24-year-old actress Lujain, "it feels like home," she said as she joined a winding queue into the larger of Zawya's two theatres.



Since 2014, Zawya's year-round programming — including both local and international short films, documentaries and feature films — has secured the loyalty of a small but passionate scene. Its annual short film festival, held every spring, has become a vital space for up-and-coming directors trying to break through a system that leaves little room for experimentation. "I didn't even consider myself a film-maker until Zawya screened my short," said Michael Samuel, 24, who works in advertising but says the cinema rekindled his artistic ambition. For many, that validation keeps them going. "Zawya has encouraged more people to produce these films because they finally have somewhere

to be seen," said the cinema's manager, Mohamed Said. When Mostafa Gerbei, a self-taught film-maker, was looking for a set for his first film shoot, he also turned to the cinema. Without a studio or a budget, Zawya "just lent us their hall for free for a whole day", he said, saving the young director 100,000 Egyptian pounds (around \$2,000) to rent a location. THE HEIR The light of its marquee spilling onto downtown Cairo's Emad al-Din Street, Zawya is the 21st-century heir to a long artistic tradition that still lingers, though often hidden away in corners of the district's broad avenues. "It's a unique neighbourhood with an equally unique flavour of artistic and intellectual life," said Chihab El Khachab, a professor at the University of Oxford and author of the book "Making Film in Egypt". Starting in the late 19th century, the area was home to the city's biggest theatres and cabarets, launching the careers of the Arab world's most celebrated singers and actors. Today, its arteries flowing out of Tahrir square — the heart of the 2011 uprising — the neighbourhood is home to new-age coworking spaces and galleries, side by side with century-old theatres and bars. Yet even as it withstands the hegemony of mall multiplexes, Zawya cannot escape Egypt's pervasive censorship laws. Like every cinema in Egypt, each film must pass through a state censors before screening. "Over time, you learn to predict what will slide and what won't," Shazli said. But even the censors' scissors have failed to cut off the stream of ambition among burgeoning film-makers. "Around Zawya, there's a lot of talent — in every corner," Shazli said. "But what I wonder is: are there as many opportunities as there is talent? That's the real issue we need to address." — AFP

FEATURES



Deciding to pursue her artistic instincts was no small feat. Huria admits the transition from a student of architecture to an independent artist was full of hesitation. Yet, her heart’s compass pointed unwaveringly in that direction. “Choosing art over architecture was a leap,” she says. “It wasn’t practical, but I knew I had to follow it.”

Initially, she envisioned a life where her days would be filled with creating mesmerising works that radiated her soul. She believed that artistic freedom would breathe joy into her life, filling every moment with colour and meaning. However, the reality proved more complex. Turning her passion into a livelihood brought unforeseen hurdles — not least, the challenge of managing a business.

Huria quickly realised that being an independent artist meant wearing many hats. “You’re not just creating art; you’re managing finances, marketing, and administration,” she explains. Her days often involve a delicate balance of creating new pieces, negotiating commissions, and strategising her brand. This multiplicity of roles has shaped her resilience, but it hasn’t diminished her dedication. For her, art remains an emotional outlet, a vessel for expression and connection.

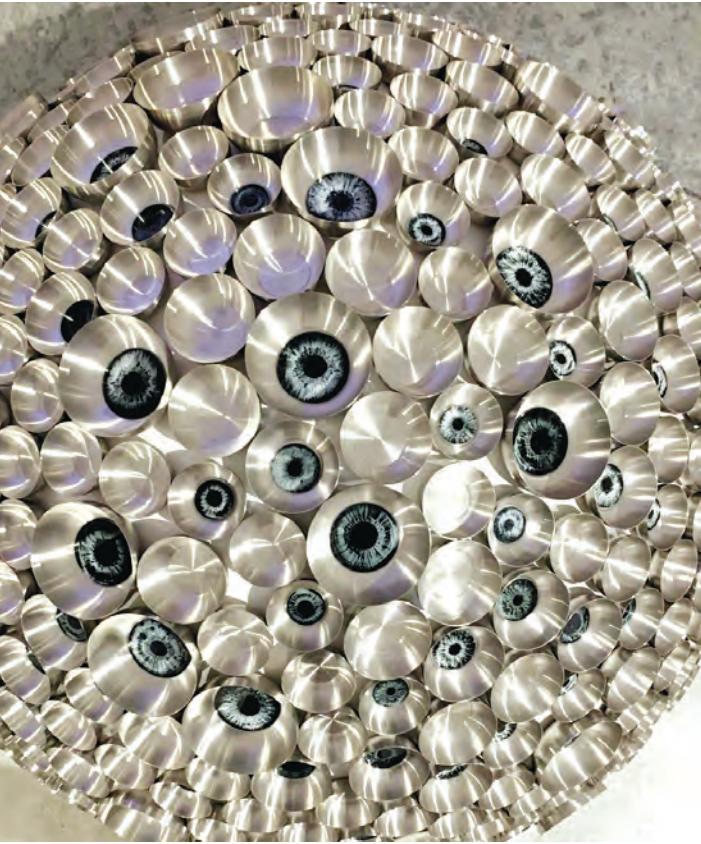
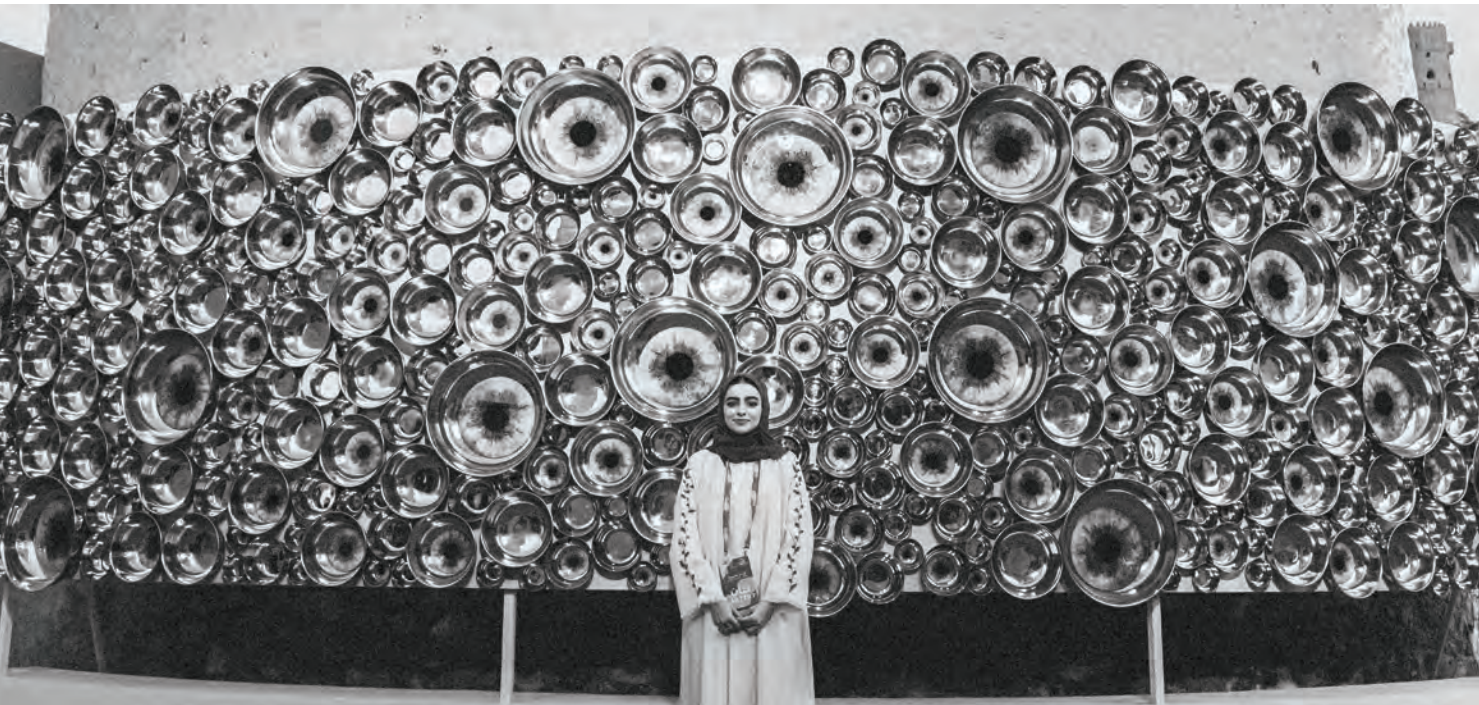
Financial sustainability, however, remains a

persistent concern. In Oman, the art market is still emerging, and opportunities are sparse. “I had a conversation that was a wake-up call,” she recalls. An experienced artist bluntly told her, ‘Art doesn’t put bread on the table here.’ It was a harsh reality check, but one that spurred her to adapt.

Today, Huria balances her creative pursuits with a career in graphic design — a choice born out of necessity. While her design work pays the bills, her artwork stays close to her heart. “Art isn’t about income for me,” she affirms. “It’s about the emotions it evokes. When someone tells me they saw my work and felt something — that’s the real reward.”

Her studio is a reflection of her creative spirit—a haven where colours blend seamlessly into the air, shelves overflow with jars of paints, brushes, and sketches, and sunlight streams through a large window, illuminating her latest piece. Imagine a space where walls are lined with emerging ideas, interwoven with tools of the trade: textured fabrics, canvases of various sizes, and delicate details that reveal her meticulous nature. It’s a place that invites curiosity, a testament to her dedication.

Yet, her journey is not without obstacles. Large-scale projects, like murals or oversized rug designs, often clash with her limited space and resources.



DISTINCTIVE VISUAL IDENTITY ROOTED IN HERITAGE

BY BUTHAINA AL RIYAMIYA

HURIA AL HARRASI’S studio offers a glimpse into a universe she has meticulously crafted. Walls are adorned with vivid sketches, vibrant colour palettes rest on shelves, and the faint hum of creative energy fills the space. This workshop isn’t just a place of work — it’s Huria’s sanctuary, a sanctuary where imagination transforms into tangible art.

From childhood, Huria’s life was a kaleidoscope of colour and sketches. “I used to draw everywhere — on notebooks, the corners of the house, even the walls,” she recalls, her eyes shining with youthful fervour. Her innate curiosity about design led her to study Architectural Design, a subject she initially believed would marry her passion for art with a pragmatic career. “It felt close to my passion,” she explains. But as she progressed through her studies, she sensed a different calling. “After graduation, I realised that my true path was elsewhere.”

“Sometimes, I get commissions that are too big for my studio,” she sighs. “I wish I had a larger workshop to bring these visions to life.” She also faces the all-too-familiar challenge of pricing her work accurately. Striking a balance between valuing her effort and meeting market expectations tests her resilience. “There’s a constant inner debate,” she confesses. “There are times I underprice because I want to make a sale, and others when I refuse to compromise on my worth.”

Looking ahead, Huria’s aspirations stretch beyond the borders of Oman. She dreams of showcasing her work internationally, not merely to gain recognition but to exchange ideas and grow as an artist. She envisions a distinctive ‘visual signature’ that becomes her hallmark — a style recognisable even before her name is spoken. “I want people to see my work and immediately know it’s mine,” she says confidently. Improving her skills is her next goal, as she seeks to diversify her creativity and avoid repetition in her exhibitions.

To aspiring artists, Huria offers a grounded piece of advice: “Don’t leap into the field just because you’re excited at the moment. It’s vital to plan, seek guidance, and learn from others’ experiences. Sustainability comes through patience, dedication, and continuous growth.”