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11

SEEB CROWNED JL CHAMPIONS, AL MUSANNAH AND FANJA SECURED PROMOTION

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IN BRIEF

Air travellers told to avoid Ebola-hit countries

HM GREET'S JORDAN AND ARGENTINA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Abdallah II Ibn Al Hussein of the Kingdom of Jordan on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to King Abdallah and the Jordanian people. His Majesty also wished Jordan further progress and prosperity. Meanwhile, His Majesty the Sultan also sent a cable of greetings to President Javier Milei of the Argentine Republic on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments to the Argentine Republic for continuous progress and development in all spheres. His Majesty also lauded the good relations between the two countries.

NATIONS FLAY MOVE ON SOMALILAND

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and a number of his counterparts in Arab and friendly nations condemned in the strongest terms the unlawful and unacceptable step taken by the so-called Somaliland region to open an alleged embassy in the occupied city of Jerusalem 'Al Quds.' This move constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and relevant internationally legitimate resolutions, and represents a direct infringement upon the legal and historical status of occupied Al Quds. The ministers affirmed their complete rejection of any unilateral measures aimed at consolidating an illegal reality in occupied Jerusalem or granting legitimacy to any entities or arrangements that violate the rules of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. They reaffirmed that East Jerusalem (Al Quds Al Sharqiya) is an occupied Palestinian territory since 1967, and that any steps aimed at changing its legal and historical status are considered null and void and bear no legal effect.

COMPLEX SURGERY PERFORMED



A multi-specialty medical team at Al Nahdha Hospital successfully performed a complex surgical procedure to remove an advanced cancerous tumour from a patient's nose and sinuses. The surgery put an end to the malignant tissue growth that had extended to the patient's eye socket, skull base and pituitary gland. **DETAILS ON P3**

MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) on Sunday issued its first circular to travellers and airlines operating in the Sultanate of Oman regarding the Ebola outbreak based on the World Health Organization's recommendations. In light of the current Ebola outbreak caused by the Bundibugyo virus in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Uganda, and its recent international updates,

the CAA, based on coordination with the Medical Response Sector, alerts all airlines operating into the Sultanate of Oman and all travellers arriving from or departing to the affected areas to follow the official health updates issued by health authorities and the WHO. The CAA stressed the importance of avoiding unnecessary travel to areas affected by the outbreak and ensuring that health insurance and

medical evacuation insurance are available when needed. During travel and stay, the CAA advises the public to avoid contact with people who show symptoms of illness, such as fever, bleeding, vomiting, or diarrhoea, and to avoid contact with blood and other body fluids in general, as well as contact with other people or the personal items of infected individuals. The CAA stressed the importance

of washing hands regularly, using sanitiser and avoiding visits to health facilities in affected areas. It also urges all those who travel and stay in affected areas to avoid handling wild animals and eating undercooked meat. The CAA said that upon arriving in Oman, travellers are required to monitor their health for 21 days from the date of leaving the affected areas. — ONA

OMAN, IRAN CALL FOR SAFETY OF SHIPPING MOVEMENT

No rush for deal: Trump

SAYYID Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a verbal message from Dr Seyed Abbas Araghi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This took place when the Foreign Minister received Kazem Gharibabadi, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran for Legal and International Affairs, who is currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman along with a diplomatic and legal delegation. The message comes within the framework of continuous consultation and positive cooperation between the two neighbouring countries in various fields. The message touched upon the ongoing Iranian-US talks mediated by Pakistan and the efforts exerted to ensure their success. The message also addressed the keenness of both countries to resume freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz in a safe and sustainable manner.

Following the meeting, the Omani and Iranian sides held an expanded meeting to discuss a set of principles governing freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz in accordance with the rules of international law. The two sides exchanged views and ideas in light of new developments and the need to build and develop capabilities ensuring the safety of shipping movement, trade, and supply chains. Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said he had told his representatives not to rush into any deal with Iran, appearing to



An Iranian woman holds an image of Iran's supreme leader Mojtaba Khamenei, as she and others gather in Tehran to commemorate those killed in wars, on Sunday. — AFP

Oman and Iran touched upon the ongoing talks with US mediated by Pakistan, and the efforts exerted to ensure their success and the hope to resume freedom of navigation through Hormuz

dampen hopes of an imminent breakthrough in the three-month-old war that had been raised by both sides a day earlier. The US blockade on Iranian ships on the Strait of Hormuz would “remain in full force and effect until an agreement is reached, certified and signed”, Trump wrote on Truth Social. Negotiations were progressing and the US relationship with Iran had become more professional and productive, he said. But he added, “Both sides must take their time and get it right. There can be no mistakes!” A day earlier, Trump said Washington and Iran had “largely negotiated” a memorandum of

understanding on a peace deal that would reopen the Strait of Hormuz. The two sides remain at odds on several difficult issues, such as Iran's nuclear ambitions, its demands for the lifting of sanctions and the release of tens of billions of dollars of Iranian oil revenues frozen in foreign banks, and Israel's war in Lebanon with Hezbollah. Various media in the US and Iran had said the memorandum setting out a framework for ending months of fighting would, if concluded, initially lift a US blockade on Iranian vessels and reopen the waterway, which Iran has shut with threats to attack shipping. **SEE ALSO P6 & 7**

New package of programmes to nurture young talents

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth reviewed its key achievements and performance indicators for 2025, alongside its future plans and strategic directions, during its 2026 annual media briefing held under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, in the presence of officials, media representatives, and stakeholders from the cultural, sports and youth sectors. In his opening remarks, Sayyid Saud said that the culture,

sports, and youth sectors form an integrated national system for human development, strengthening Omani identity, enhancing quality of life, and empowering youth. He noted that the achievements made reflect the continued support of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the close follow-up of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, which have contributed to establishing impactful national programmes and initiatives. He added that the ministry will launch a new package of qualitative programmes aimed at discovering

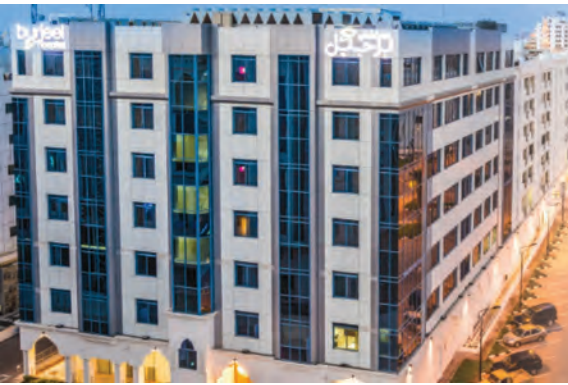


Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, addressing the media conference on Sunday.

and nurturing young talents, building their capacities, and providing an enabling environment for their growth. These efforts align with Oman Vision 2040, with a focus on deepening community impact and expanding services across all governorates. The ministry revealed that it has implemented 687 activities and events in 2025, benefiting more than 105,000 individuals. These included 242 cultural activities, 298 sports programmes, and 147 youth initiatives, reflecting the breadth and diversity of engagement across the society.

The briefing also highlighted international cooperation efforts, with 15 memoranda of understanding and nine executive programmes signed between 2022 and 2025, further strengthening Oman's global presence and fostering cultural, sports and youth exchange. In the cultural sector, Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, said that the cultural work in Oman is guided by a vision rooted in national identity and sustainable development. **SEE ALSO P10**

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SHORT TAKES



Sayyid Badr welcomed the Tanzanian Ambassador, wishing her success in her duties.

Sayyid Badr receives copy of Tanzanian Ambassador’s Credentials

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Sunday a copy of the credentials of Maulidah Bwanakheir Hassan, Ambassador-designate of the United Republic of Tanzania to the Sultanate of Oman.

Sayyid Badr welcomed the Ambassador, wishing her success in her duties and further progress and development for the bilateral relations between Oman and Tanzania.

FAREWELL TO BRAZILIAN AMBASSADOR

Meanwhile, the Foreign Minister received Alfredo Cesar Martinho, Ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

During the meeting, Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation for the efforts made by the Ambassador, which contributed to strengthening relations between Oman and Brazil, wishing him success in his future assignments.

The two meetings were attended by Ambassador Najib bin Yahya al Balushi, Head of the Protocols Department at the Foreign Ministry, along with a number of officials from both sides. — ONA



Sayyid Badr, with the Ambassador of Brazil, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

Islamic finance sector shifts focus to Oman Vision 2040 delivery

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 24

Oman’s Islamic finance sector has evolved beyond being merely a growing segment of the banking system, with increasing focus now on how effectively it can finance the assets, enterprises and infrastructure underpinning Oman Vision 2040.

That was the key message delivered by Hussain al Lawati, CEO of the Development Bank, during the inaugural Islamic Finance Sustainability & ESG Forum held on May 20 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Madinat Al Irfan, Muscat.

Al Lawati participated in Panel 1 titled, ‘The Way Forward: The Role of Islamic Banking & Finance for Sustainable, ESG Finance Under Oman Vision 2040.’

Highlighting the sector’s progress, Al Lawati noted that Islamic finance in Oman has transformed from a late entrant into a substantial component of the Sultanate’s banking system.

By the end of November 2025, Islamic banks and banking windows held assets worth approximately RO 9.3 billion (\$24 billion), accounting for 19.4 per cent of total banking assets. Islamic financing stood at RO 7.5 billion (\$19.4 billion), representing 22 per cent of Oman’s total banking credit and financing.

“The discussion around sustainable Islamic finance can often become too focused on frameworks and reporting,” said Al Lawati.

GCC states consolidate position as global power

THE GULF Cooperation Council (GCC) states will celebrate today the 45th anniversary of the Council’s founding, as they continue to solidify their standing as an influential economic and developmental force at both regional and global levels, driven by performance indicators that reflect the robustness of their economies and the depth of their integration across various sectors.

Data issued by the Gulf Statistical Centre show that the current gross domestic product (GDP) of the GCC states reached approximately %2.4 trillion in 2025, positioning the Council’s economies among the world’s influential economic powers. Meanwhile, the non-oil sector’s contribution exceeded 78%, with non-oil GDP growth reaching 5.3% during the same year—a clear indication of the success of economic diversification pathways in the GCC states.

In the financial sector, the GCC states continued to enhance their financial stability, with commercial bank assets reaching approximately \$3.9 trillion, registering growth of 11.9% between 2024 and 2025. Bank deposits reached \$2.3 trillion, with a growth rate of 10.6%, reflecting strong banking liquidity and growing confidence in the Gulf financial sector.

Indicators also confirm the growing weight of Gulf investments globally, with the assets of Gulf sovereign wealth funds reaching approximately \$5 trillion, representing 30.3% of total sovereign funds worldwide, thereby strengthening the GCC states’ presence in international markets and investments.

In trade, the GCC states recorded a total trade volume of \$1.6 trillion in 2024, a growth of 7.4% compared to 2023, while Gulf merchandise exports reached approximately \$849.6 billion, reflecting the



GCC states continue to adopt unified positions on regional and international issues. — ONA

continued strong Gulf presence in global trade and international supply chains.

In the energy sector, the GCC states maintained their pivotal position in the global energy market, with oil production of 16.6 million barrels per day, accounting for approximately 22.2% of global crude oil production.

Global competitiveness indicators for 2025 also show notable progress by the GCC states. The Council ranked 15th globally in the overall index, 8th globally in the tax policy index, and 11th in the public finance index, in addition to achieving advanced positions in indices for labour market, infrastructure, business efficiency and governance.

At the level of Gulf integration, the Gulf Common Market recorded continuous growth in 2025, with intra-GCC trade reaching approximately \$146 billion, a growth of 85.2% compared to 2012. Meanwhile, the total capital of joint-stock companies rose to \$549 billion, exceptional growth of 237.6% compared to 2007.

The GCC states also witnessed growing social mobility, evidenced by the movement of more than 41.4 million Gulf citizens among member states, an increase in the number of Gulf students studying in government schools of other member states to 43,200 students, in addition to approximately 488,900 Gulf citizens benefiting from cross-border healthcare services—a clear manifestation of the depth of Gulf social cohesion and developmental integration. In the tourism sector, Gulf tourism revenues reached approximately \$132.3 billion, reflecting the growing appeal of Gulf destinations and their capacity to attract global tourist traffic.

On the political front, the GCC states continued to strengthen their regional and international presence by adopting unified positions on regional and international issues, intensifying efforts to support security and stability, and reinforcing the principles of dialogue and joint cooperation. This has contributed to enhancing the Council’s standing as an active and influential partner in shaping political and economic balances regionally and globally, in addition to its role in supporting development and peace pathways and strengthening strategic relations with countries worldwide. — ONA

Oman, European Council review developments



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Sunday Charles Michel, former president of the European Council and former prime minister of the Kingdom of Belgium.

During the meeting, a number of regional and global developments were reviewed and views were exchanged. Both sides emphasised the importance of supporting political efforts aimed at containing tensions and creating favourable conditions to restore security, stability and peace, as well as adhering to uniform standards and respecting the sovereignty of states and the rules of international law.

The guest praised the modern renaissance of the Sultanate of Oman and its balanced and wise foreign policy in dealing with various events and challenges, in addition to its steadfast commitment to a policy of peace and friendship with all. He also expressed his appreciation for the talks and meetings he conducted during his first visit to the Sultanate of Oman and the warm reception and hospitality he received. — ONA

Haj mission completes readiness to receive Omani pilgrims

MAKKAH: Oman Haj Mission for the current year has completed its organisational and service preparations to receive Omani pilgrims arriving in the Holy Lands to perform the rituals of this year’s Haj, amidst an integrated system of services and procedures aimed at providing the highest levels of comfort and care for the pilgrims. The mission handed over the Mina and Arafat camps to the approved Haj companies.

This handover took place following the completion of



The mission handed over the Mina and Arafat camps to the approved Haj companies. — ONA

preparation and rehabilitation works at both camps, and after ensuring the readiness of basic facilities and services, including accommodation sites,

technical equipment, health and catering services, alongside fulfilling safety and comfort requirements for the pilgrims.

Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and Head of Oman Haj Mission, confirmed that the completion of the handover procedures of the Mina and Arafat camps to the Haj companies marks an important phase within the ongoing preparations for the current Hajj season. He explained that the mission was

keen from an early stage to follow up on various field and organisational works related to equipping both camps, ensuring the provision of an appropriate and safe environment for Omani pilgrims during their stay at the Holy Sites.

He added that Oman Haj Mission worked in coordination with the competent authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to complete all preparations related to infrastructure and operational services at both camps. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



Vendors have noted an improvement in foot traffic as compared to last year.

EID SHOPPING PICKS UP AT MUTTRAH SOUQ

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MAY 24

Foot traffic at the traditional Muttrah Souq leading up to Eid had been slow until the weekend, but since Thursday, the market has been vibrant with neon lights and colourful displays as families from across Oman gather to prepare for the upcoming Eid Al Adha celebrations.

Citizens and expatriates are browsing for a variety of items, from incense burners and frankincense to clothing, footwear and household essentials. Vendors have noted an improvement in foot traffic compared to last year, although it has not reached pre-holiday levels.

“Business has been decent, thanks to Allah. There has been a gradual increase in activity since last week, but there is still a sense of caution in the air,” said Mohammed Navas Chengala, a businessman and social worker in Muttrah.

Demand is highest for men’s and women’s clothing, followed by children’s wear, fragrances like oud and attar, and traditional goods. Food, fruits, oils and vegetables are also selling steadily. While malls and larger stores are busy in the evenings, traders in Ruwi and traditional souqs in Salalah, Suhar, Barka, Nizwa and Sur are welcoming visitors throughout the day.

Despite flight cancellations affecting foreign shoppers, vendors have stocked up from overseas and local markets. Local customers from Muscat and surrounding villages are still coming, but the lack of foreign business has been noticeable. Tailors, however, are working tirelessly to meet the demands of repeat customers during this busy season.

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has increased market monitoring and is cracking down on price gouging. Several establishments have been penalised for violations, and suppliers are being urged to maintain transparency. Consumers are encouraged to report any breaches through official channels and to verify information before sharing.

AL NAHDHA HOSPITAL REMOVES CANCER TUMOUR VIA LAPAROSCOPY

MUSCAT: A multi-specialty medical team at Al Nahdha Hospital successfully performed a complex surgical procedure to remove an advanced cancerous tumour from a patient’s nose and sinuses. The surgery put an end to the malignant tissue growth that had extended to the patient’s eye socket, skull base and pituitary gland.

The surgical team used an endoscopic technique that was applied via the nose, thus avoiding any external surgical incisions.

The surgery, which lasted about



The multi-specialty medical team at Al Nahdha Hospital.

4 hours, saw the participation of an integrated medical team from Al Nahdha Hospital’s ENT and

Ophthalmology Department that joined hands with a neurosurgery team from Khoula Hospital. This multidisciplinary collaboration reflects the lofty level of professional medical integration among Oman’s health institutions.

The medical accomplishment caps up ongoing efforts to develop specialised medical services and promote the use of modern surgical techniques in dealing with complex cases. It also contributes to raising the quality of healthcare extended to patients in Oman.

The achievement affirms the great potential of Oman’s national medical personnel and underlines their ability to handle complex cases using the latest medical and surgical technologies.

The surgical operation highlights the constant progress being made in the sphere of health services in Oman.

It paves the way for the country to become a trusted hub for specialised treatments, including endoscopic nose, sinus and skull base surgeries. — ONA

Roads to Salalah ready for Khareef travel surge

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

AS THE Khareef Dhofar season approaches, attention is once again turning to the roads leading to Dhofar Governorate, which serve as a vital artery for the movement of thousands of visitors arriving from across the Sultanate of Oman and neighbouring GCC countries.

Every year, these routes witness early preparations and continuous efforts aimed at ensuring smooth traffic flow and enhancing road safety amid expectations of increased travel activity during the upcoming tourism season.

The overland journey to Salalah has become an annual tradition cherished by many families and travellers, offering diverse landscapes that stretch from vast desert plains and rolling dunes to mountain ranges and the mist-covered scenery that characterises Dhofar during the Khareef season. However, the long-distance journey also requires integrated infrastructure readiness, supporting services, and heightened traffic awareness to ensure the safety of road users.

Over recent months, the relevant authorities have intensified maintenance and rehabilitation works on several major roads leading to Dhofar, particularly the Adam-Thumrait Road, considered the primary route for travellers coming from northern Oman.

The works included repairing surface cracks, repainting lane markings,



Roads leading to Dhofar have also witnessed gradual improvements in digital travel services.

maintaining barriers and road reflectors, and strengthening directional and warning signage in areas prone to heavy traffic or sudden weather changes.

In this regard, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology stated that preparations for the Khareef season began early through the implementation of preventive maintenance and rehabilitation programmes on vital roads leading to Dhofar Governorate. The ministry noted that technical teams continue to monitor road readiness and ensure the safety of infrastructure components and related services.

The ministry added that current efforts are also focused on enhancing traffic safety through updating road signs and surface

markings, maintaining safety barriers and coordinating with relevant authorities to ensure rapid response to any emergencies during the season, especially with expectations of increased vehicle movement and visitor numbers compared to normal months. Efforts are also ongoing to improve the readiness of rest stops and fuel stations located along the route, particularly in desert areas where travellers frequently stop to refuel or rest.

Abdullah bin Naser al Maamari, a frequent traveller on the route, said the journey to Salalah has become more comfortable in recent years due to continuous improvements in road quality and the expansion of services.

He stressed the importance of adhering to speed limits and taking adequate rest breaks during the journey to ensure traveller safety.

Meanwhile, Al Qasim bin Hamad noted that the noticeable development in infrastructure and roadside services has encouraged more families to travel by road to Dhofar. He added that the journey has become safer and more organised, particularly with the spread of fuel stations, rest areas, and emergency services along the route.

Authorities continue to launch traffic awareness campaigns ahead of the season, focusing on the importance of vehicle inspections and ensuring the safety of tyres, brakes and cooling systems, particularly due to the high temperatures experienced in some areas along the road.

Ongoing projects improve healthcare in Al Wusta

HAIMA: The health system in Al Wusta Governorate is witnessing ongoing projects aimed at enhancing efficiency through infrastructure development and the expansion of preventive, curative and rehabilitative services across all wilayats and villages.

These efforts strengthen primary healthcare and link it with specialised services through 18 facilities, including 4 hospitals and 14 health centres, located in the wilayats of Haima, Mahout, Al Duqm and Al Jazir. These facilities serve over 64,000 Omani citizens and residents, providing comprehensive, sustainable, high-quality health coverage utilising advanced medical equipment and a skilled medical workforce.

Dr Ibrahim bin Hilal al Mahrooqi, Director-General of Health Services in Al Wusta Governorate, affirmed that health services in the governorate have achieved remarkable progress over the past three years, becoming increasingly accessible to citizens in their places of residence. Previously, patients had to visit hospitals in other governorates for certain medical specialities; now, many of those services have been brought closer to them, meeting the highest quality standards and aligning with the



DR IBRAHIM BIN HILAL AL MAHROOQI

Director-General of Health Services

ministry’s goal of decentralising health services, he added.

In a statement to ONA, he pointed out that among the health services provided by the Ministry of Health in Al Wusta is dialysis, which is now available in Haima, Mahout and Al Jazir, and will soon be available in Al Duqm, enabling citizens to receive treatment within their own governorate. He explained that Mahout Hospital, which opened on April 29 of this year, stands as an icon among Al Wusta’s hospitals due to its wide range of medical specialities, advanced equipment in the emergency department and other units, and its capacity to perform various surgical procedures.

He noted that the hospital serves



The Advanced Emergency Unit project at Al Duqm Hospital will be opened soon.

over 30,000 citizens and residents. It also provides services to the coastal populations of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate near Mahout, including Khawima and surrounding villages, as well as several nearby villages in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. Furthermore, its strategic location in the Al Jawbah area, at the intersection of roads to and from Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South, and Dhofar governorates, qualifies it to offer emergency and ambulance services to road users.

Dr Ibrahim stated that “the next step includes the opening of the Advanced Emergency Unit project at Al Duqm Hospital, one of the largest health projects in Al Wusta Governorate, currently under construction through a community

partnership with OQ, the global integrated energy group.”

He added that the project has reached 90 per cent completion and is expected to open in the second half of this year. The facility includes an operating suite, 10 beds for accident cases, an operating theatre, an emergency unit, an intensive care unit (ICU), inpatient rooms, a blood storage unit and ancillary health facilities.

He indicated that, in four months, the emergency department at Al Jazir Hospital will open, featuring specialised consultation rooms and resuscitation rooms.

He also mentioned that the expansion of specialised outpatient clinics and the Mother and Child Centre at Haima Hospital will open

in the second half of this year. This expansion includes clinics for otorhinolaryngology (ENT), dermatology, internal medicine, surgery, paediatrics and obstetrics and gynaecology, as well as certain subspecialities such as nutrition and ophthalmology. Over 90 per cent of the project has been completed.

Dr Ibrahim clarified that Haima Hospital expansion project serves citizens and residents of Al Wusta Governorate’s wilayats as well as the wilayat of Maqshin in Dhofar Governorate, following coordination with the Directorate-General of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate.

Regarding the Mother and Child Center at Haima Hospital, he stated that the centre is being established through self-efforts and with support from the Ministry of Health. The building has been completed, and training and recruitment of physicians are underway. The centre is expected to open at the end of this year. He added that the centre will include specialised clinics for women’s and children’s health, inpatient rooms and healthcare services to provide a comprehensive reproductive health package and improve community reproductive behaviour to reduce child mortality rates. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

— S A B Y Y A A L G H A R I F A —

A LIVING TRADITION



SAUD AL ANSARI

In the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq, the ‘Sabyya Al Gharifa’ Habta stands out as one of the most prominent seasonal traditional markets, continuing to maintain its social and economic significance despite major transformations in modern shopping patterns across Oman.

The term 'Sabyya' locally refers to the 'seventh,' indicating a traditional Habta held as part of the seasonal sequence of Eid markets across villages.

This market is held in an open-air setting under natural surroundings, where commercial activity blends seamlessly with cultural and heritage dimensions, far removed from the structured environment of modern retail spaces.

'Sabyaya Al Gharifa' serves as a key meeting point for buyers and sellers from various villages, with different areas taking turns hosting the market during a season that typically spans several days. This allows visitors the opportunity to move between multiple Habtas.

Market activity begins at dawn, as sellers arrive early to secure their places. Peak activity is witnessed during the morning hours before gradually slowing towards midday, although on some days the market continues into the afternoon depending on demand. In this context, Mohammad bin Rashid al Afari, one of the sellers at Sabyya Al Garifa, said, “I have been participating for many years in traditional Eid events such as Sabyya Al Garifa and Sabyya Al Maladah. I began around 20 to 25 years ago. At that time, the Habta was very simple,

Modern tools such as electronic scales are now used, and turnout has increased significantly, especially among children who come excited to choose toys and other necessities

MOHAMMAD BIN RASHID
AL AFARI

with limited attendance. People came individually or in small groups, and transportation methods were basic, often using donkeys and traditional means.”

Al Afari added, reflecting on the market's development, "In the past, events were not as vibrant as they are today. Purchases were made in small quantities using traditional scales and old units of measurement. Today, however, the Habtas have become more organised, whether in terms of tents, variety of goods, or number of visitors. Modern tools such as electronic scales are now used, and turnout has increased significantly, especially among children who come excited to choose toys and other necessities."

He further noted, “Even some traditional products such as ‘Al Ayood’ are still available today. It is a traditional recipe passed down through generations, made from water and sugar, with additional ingredients such as beans or coconut, along with food colouring. It is prepared according to demand. With changing

conditions and rising prices, we now sell by the kilogramme instead of sacks, as both pricing methods and market dynamics have evolved." On another note, Nooh al Qanubi, another seller at the Habta, shared his personal experience with this traditional market, saying,

"My early beginnings were in Sabyya Al Gharifa, where I used to accompany my mother since childhood. My first experience in the market was when I was around eight or nine years old. For me, this market is not just a place for selling, but a part of childhood memories and beginnings."

Al Qanubi added, "The nature of the market has changed significantly over the past years compared to about 15 years ago. Earlier, it mainly focused on traditional handmade products, whether food items or occasion-related supplies. Children's toys were simple and limited, whereas today they represent a large portion of the goods on display, with a wide variety of products."

He continued, "In the past, Eid necessities were purchased directly from the market, including barbecue tools, sticks, ropes and other traditional supplies. Today, consumption patterns have changed significantly, and the market has become more diverse, with modern products appearing alongside traditional goods. However, the Habta still retains its heritage spirit and unique identity."

The Sabyya Al Gharifa Habta in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq remains a living example of Oman's traditional markets, combining economic, social, and cultural dimensions, and reflecting the enduring connection between society and heritage despite the evolution of modern lifestyles.



SHORT TAKES



Al Batinah North is characterised by its diverse natural and geographical environments.

AL BATINAH NORTH HONEY PRODUCTION HITS 158,000KG

SUHAR: The total production of local Samar (Acacia) and Sidr (Christ's thorn) honey in Al Batinah North Governorate reached approximately 158,000 kilogrammes, registering positive growth compared to 2024, when total production amounted to around 140,000 kilogrammes.

The governorate is uniquely characterised by its diverse natural and geographical environments, combining fertile plains, valleys and mountainous areas.

This provides vegetation cover and rich natural pastures, which serve as an essential element and key driver for the success of the beekeeping system.

Eng Said bin Mohammed al Adwi, Director of Agriculture Development Department at the Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Batinah North Governorate, stated that Sidr honey production reached 86,433 kilogrammes, while Samar honey production exceeded 71,567 kilogrammes.

He explained that the Directorate continues to intensify its field and extension efforts aimed at supporting beekeepers across the governorate's wilayats.

These efforts include organizing regular and ongoing visits for direct communication with beekeepers to understand their needs, as well as providing immediate and effective solutions to any challenges or obstacles they may encounter in their breeding environments.

He noted that the Directorate places among its top priorities the implementation of a series of awareness programs and continuous training workshops for beekeepers to refine their skills, acquaint them with the latest technologies and scientific methods in apiary management, and enhance the quality of the final product. This contributes to adding value to the Omani honey industry and strengthening its competitiveness in local and regional markets. — ONA

Oman marks Arab Day of Supreme Audit Institutions

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority (SFAAA), joins in celebrating the 'Arab Day of Supreme Audit Institutions,' observed annually on May 24. The event marks the establishment of the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI) in 1976.

This day was designated during the fourteenth General Assembly meeting of the ARABOSAI to celebrate audit and oversight work across the Arab states.



SFAAA celebrates 'Arab Day of Supreme Audit Institutions' on May 24.

On this occasion, Hamood bin Sulaiman al Abri, Director of International Cooperation Department, stated that the Arab Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (ARABOSAI) is an organisation that brings together supreme audit institutions in Arab countries. It aims to strengthen cooperation, develop audit work and enhance the quality of financial audit across the region. All supreme audit institutions in the Arab member states of the Arab League are members of the organisation. — ONA

Decentralisation drives tourism growth in Oman

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

OMAN'S DECENTRALISATION approach is emerging as a key driver in reshaping the tourism landscape across the Sultanate of Oman, with governors affirming that the powers granted under the Governorates System issued by Royal Decree No 36/2022 have enabled local administrations to lead development in line with the unique economic, cultural and environmental characteristics of each governorate.

Officials say the shift has accelerated tourism-related decision-making, strengthened investment opportunities, and empowered local communities to play a more active role in shaping authentic visitor experiences, in alignment with Oman Vision 2040 goals to diversify the national economy and enhance tourism's contribution to GDP.

Eng Masoud bin Said al Hashmi, Governor of Al Batinah South, said decentralisation has transformed the relationship between citizens and development, positioning local communities as active contributors rather than passive recipients of tourism initiatives.

He noted that Al Batinah South has become a practical example of how delegated authority can unlock local potential, allowing the wilayats to adopt development decisions that reflect their environmental and cultural identities.

According to Al Hashmi,



Officials say the shift has accelerated tourism-related decision-making, strengthened investment opportunities.

Community tourism has also created new economic opportunities for families and entrepreneurs, particularly youth

this approach has encouraged community-led tourism initiatives rooted in local knowledge and traditions, expanding offerings beyond conventional attractions to include cultural experiences, handicrafts, and heritage-based activities that showcase Oman's social identity. He added that community tourism has also created new economic opportunities for families and entrepreneurs, particularly youth, through tourism products linked to local traditions and lifestyles while ensuring cultural and environmental sustainability.

Meanwhile, Tahir bin Mabkhout al Junaibi, Governor of Al Dhahirah, stressed that modern tourism development is no longer defined solely by natural or historical assets, but increasingly by the quality and innovation of visitor experiences.

He said the governorate is working on integrated tourism experiences combining heritage, nature, cultural activities, and local products into

interactive visitor journeys that reflect the region's identity.

He highlighted the Al Dhahirah Tourism Festival as a key annual platform stimulating economic activity and promoting the governorate through cultural and entertainment events attracting visitors from within and outside Oman. He also referred to scenic viewpoint projects, the redevelopment of Harat Al Raml as a heritage tourism destination, and plans to transform Ibri Public Park into a comprehensive family leisure space.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, said decentralisation has improved institutional coordination and reduced procedural timelines for investment approvals and project implementation. He noted that the governorate is leveraging its marine, environmental and cultural assets to develop diverse tourism offerings, including eco-tourism, adventure tourism, marine tourism and heritage tourism. He added that stronger partnerships between government entities, the private sector, and local communities have created a more integrated development model focused on sustainability and resource optimisation.

In Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, Shaikh Mahmoud bin Rashid al Saadi, who is overseeing the duties of the governor, said decentralisation has enhanced project management and accelerated implementation.

SOLAR ENERGY BOOSTS SUSTAINABILITY IN AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK SECTOR

MUSCAT: Investing in clean energy is emerging as a practical environmental and economic solution in response to the growing shift towards renewable energy sources, particularly in agricultural and livestock projects located in sun-rich areas.

The application of solar energy across various projects in Oman is beginning to show positive results, reflecting its feasibility in both farming and animal production sectors. The adoption of solar systems has a direct impact on reducing operating costs and improving returns, especially amid rising conventional energy costs.

Eng Mohsen bin Mohammed al Mufarji, a renewable energy specialist at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said the ministry is continuing efforts to promote renewable energy use in agricultural, livestock and fisheries projects by encouraging farmers, breeders and investors to partially shift to solar power. He explained that this approach supports environmental sustainability and improves resource efficiency, taking advantage of Oman's abundant



Transition to solar energy is a flexible economic option.

solar radiation. It also provides opportunities to enhance productive projects by powering irrigation systems, cooling units, and crop-drying facilities, thereby improving production quality and operational continuity.

In the livestock sector, he noted that solar energy can operate ventilation, cooling systems and water pumps, helping maintain a stable and healthy production environment. In aquaculture, it can support water circulation and aeration systems, particularly in remote locations without grid access. He added that the transition to solar energy is a flexible

economic option that can begin with partial system integration and expand gradually, reducing dependence on conventional energy while lowering operational costs. It also contributes to reducing carbon emissions in line with sustainability and food security goals.

He called on farmers, breeders and investors to adopt renewable energy solutions and take practical steps towards gradual solar integration, highlighting its direct role in improving productivity and sustainability.

Al Safa Foods Company's photovoltaic solar project stands as a leading example in this field. According to Badr bin Abdullah al Rashidi, Marketing Manager at the company, the initiative reflects a practical commitment to sustainability and production efficiency.

He said the project at the company's farm in Thumrait spans a farm area of 65 sq km, with a solar energy system covering 91,000 square metres and a production capacity of 7 megawatts, using a smart solar tracking system to maximise efficiency. — ONA

محافظة مسقط

Muscat Governorate

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IRAN, US NEARING DEAL TO END WAR



Iransians wave their national flag as they gather at Imam Khomeini Mosque, in Tehran. — AFP

THE UNITED STATES and Iran could strike a deal to end the Middle East war, Washington's top diplomat said, while Tehran insisted the agreement would do nothing to limit its nuclear programme. Washington and Tehran have observed a ceasefire since April 8 while mediators push for a negotiated settlement, although Iran has imposed controls on Gulf shipping and the US has blockaded Iran's ports.

On Sunday, during a visit to India, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters: "I do think perhaps there is the possibility that in the next few hours the world will get some good news." This came after US President Donald Trump posted on social media that the deal "has been largely negotiated, subject to finalisation between the United States of America, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the various other Countries". Rubio said the agreement would start a "process that can ultimately leave us where the president wants us to be, and that is a world that no longer has to fear or worry about an Iranian nuclear weapon".

Trump said that he had told US negotiators "not to rush into a deal" with



The negotiations are proceeding in an orderly and constructive manner, and I have informed my representatives not to rush into a deal in that time is on our side. The Blockade will remain in full force and effect until an agreement is reached, certified, and signed

DONALD TRUMP

Iran, amid anticipation that an agreement to end the war in the Middle East was close. "The negotiations are proceeding in an orderly and constructive manner, and I have informed my representatives not to rush into a deal in that time is on our side," Trump wrote on his Truth Social account. "The Blockade will remain in full force and effect until an agreement is reached, certified, and signed."

According to an Israeli official, Trump also reassured Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in a call on Saturday, that he would insist that any final settlement with Iran would include an agreement to dismantle its nuclear programme. "President Trump made clear that he will remain steadfast in the negotiations regarding his long-standing demand for the dismantlement of Iran's nuclear programme and the removal of all enriched uranium from Iranian territory, and that he will not sign a final agreement absent these conditions," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

SEIZE THE MOMENT

Trump's post stressed that the Strait of Hormuz would be re-opened, a development that would bring relief to energy markets after a long Iranian

blockade of a crucial waterway that in peacetime carries a fifth of world oil exports. European leaders, keen to see Hormuz open and energy prices fall, welcomed the optimism.

Iranian officials confirmed the existence of a draft agreement, but stressed that — despite the long-standing US demand for an end to its uranium enrichment — talks on the issue of Iran's contested nuclear programme have been deferred for 60 days after any deal. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian told state television Iran was "still prepared to assure the world that we are not seeking nuclear weapons", but it was not clear if this long-standing promise would be enshrined in the text of the deal.

LASTING PEACE

According to Iran's Fars news agency, Washington has agreed to release part of Tehran's funds frozen abroad under international sanctions and to end its naval blockade of ships travelling to and from Iranian ports. In exchange, "according to this draft, passage through the Strait of Hormuz would return to pre-war levels under Iranian management".

And, Fars said, "sanctions on oil, gas, petrochemicals and their derivatives would be temporarily lifted during the

negotiation period so that Iran can freely sell its products".

Prominent Iranian-American academic Vali Nasr, in a social media post, said that the deal on the table appeared like an Iranian victory, but warned that if Washington gave too much ground this would increase Tehran's suspicions. "The deal in play looks like a win for Iran. But Tehran is not convinced that it is not a dress rehearsal for war now or in 30 days," he posted.

"In fact, the more generous the terms for Iran the more the suspicion that the US is not serious about peace and wants to distract Iran ahead of another attack. Iran will be focused on evidence of US military backdown."

Leaders from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan and Bahrain, as well as representatives from Türkiye and Pakistan, joined a call with Trump to discuss the deal on Saturday. Meanwhile, in a rare public appearance at the Grand Mosalla mosque in Tehran that was covered by state media, Ali Abdollahi, the head of Iran's central military command, struck a defiant tone. "We are on a war footing and all our armed forces are fully ready, with all their resources and equipment, to confront any enemy," he said. — AFP



ISRAELI FIRE KILLS PARENTS AND THEIR INFANT IN GAZA

GAZA: An Israeli air strike on an apartment in a refugee camp in central Gaza on Sunday left three people dead, including a six-month-old child, health officials said. Medics named the three who died in the Nuseirat refugee camp as Mohammad Abu Mallouh, the infant's father, Alaa Zaqlan, the mother, and their child, Osama. Later on Sunday, Israeli gunfire killed a Palestinian man in the north of the enclave, near a UN-run medical clinic in Jabalia refugee camp, medics said. The Israeli military did not immediately comment on either of the incidents.

At the morgue in Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir Al Balah, relatives of three dead family members arrived to bid farewell to their white-shrouded bodies. "A man sleeping along with his wife and their 6-month infant son in their bed. The

rocket fell on his bed, and it took him, with his wife and son, leaving behind six young girls," said the infant's grandmother, Umm Hamza Abu Mallouh, with tears in her eyes.

Israel has recently resumed issuing evacuation orders to residents of the enclave - a practice that had largely subsided after an October ceasefire. But, Yehia Abu Mallouh, whose brother was killed in the strike, said they woke up to the sound of an explosion, without any prior warning. "We discovered that my brother's house has been targeted while he was sleeping safely in his home. We found them (the family) cut into pieces without prior warning," he said. "The point of the ceasefire is supposed to be peace, with no farwell to their white-shrouded bodies. "A man sleeping along with his wife and their 6-month infant son in their bed. The

The October ceasefire, brokered by US

President Donald Trump, has failed to halt Israeli attacks in Gaza, with Israel and Hamas deadlocked in indirect talks over the militant group's disarmament. The ceasefire left Israel in control of more than half of Gaza, with Hamas controlling a sliver of territory along the coast. Some 880 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli strikes since the truce came into effect, according to figures from Gaza health officials that do not distinguish between combatants and civilians.

An Israeli air strike targeting a Palestinian police post in northern Gaza on Saturday killed at least five police officers and a 13-year-old boy, and wounded several others, Gaza police said, as Israel intensified attacks on the force. The Gaza police directorate said two missiles had hit a police post in the Tawam area. — Reuters

India, US discuss Middle East as Rubio cites progress

NEW DELHI: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio held talks with Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar on Saturday, as the two sides discussed the Middle East, trade, visas, maritime security and energy supplies, while Washington cited progress on efforts to resolve the Iran conflict. Rubio said progress had been made in the past 48 hours on an outline that could help resolve the situation around the Strait of Hormuz and added there was a possibility of "good news" in the next few hours. He reiterated that Iran could never be allowed to have a nuclear weapon and said attacks on commercial

vessels were "totally illegal". The discussions come amid heightened tensions in the Middle East and concerns over shipping lanes and energy supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, through which a significant share of global oil shipments passes. Jaishankar said India and the United States had common interests and shared challenges, and that India supported safe maritime passage. He said the two sides also discussed efforts to conclude a bilateral trade deal at an early date and visa-related challenges faced by Indian workers. Successive US administrations, including under President Donald



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and India's Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar shake hands after their talks in New Delhi. — Reuters

Trump's first term, have sought to draw historically non-aligned India closer as a counterweight to rising Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific, though ties were strained after Washington imposed steep tariffs on Indian goods last year. More recently, New Delhi has closely watched US efforts to stabilise relations with China and improve engagement with Pakistan, amid concerns in India over Washington's regional priorities. Rubio described India as an important strategic partner and said the two countries were aligned on terrorism and energy. He also said India was among the countries with global

influence. Highlighting the breadth of ties between New Delhi and Washington, Rubio said the range of issues discussed underscored that India was "an important strategic partner of the United States, one of our most important strategic partners in the world." Jaishankar said the United States had emerged as a reliable energy source for India. India and the United States have expanded cooperation in recent years across defence, technology and trade, even as New Delhi maintains ties with countries including Iran and Russia as part of its longstanding policy of strategic autonomy. — Reuters

Israel intensifies attacks on Lebanon villages

BEIRUT: Israeli strikes hit Lebanon on Sunday, both before and after Israel's military issued an evacuation warning for 10 villages in the south and east, state media reported. Israel's military has continued to strike what it says are Hezbollah targets in Lebanon despite a ceasefire that began on April 17 and that was recently extended for several weeks. The Lebanese group has also maintained attacks on Israeli targets in southern Lebanon and across the border, including firing rockets on Sunday at Israeli troops operating on Lebanese territory.

Lebanon's official National News Agency reported Israeli strikes on multiple locations in south and east Lebanon on Sunday, in some cases causing casualties. Some of the raids came before the Israeli military's warning, which covered 10 villages in the south and the eastern Bekaa valley. A correspondent saw large clouds of smoke rising after strikes on the south's Nabatieh and Zawtar al-Sharqiyyah. Lebanon's civil defence agency said early on Sunday that its regional facility in Nabatieh had been destroyed by an overnight Israeli strike.

Lebanon's health ministry said on Sunday that an Israeli strike the previous day in the country's south killed 11 people including six women and a child, despite a ceasefire in the Israel-Hezbollah war. "The Israeli enemy strike on the town of Sir al-Gharbiyyeh in the Nabatieh district resulted in a massacre whose final toll is 11 dead including a child and six women, and nine wounded including four children and a woman," the ministry said in a statement.

A photographer saw civil defence personnel recovering equipment and using a stretcher to remove oxygen bottles from the rubble. The Israeli army did not immediately provide any comment in response to a request on the strike. Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 with rocket fire at Israel in retaliation for the killing of Iran's supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes. Under the terms of the ceasefire published by Washington, Israel reserves the right to act



Smoke rises following an Israeli strike on the southern village of Mazraat Aali et Taher. — AFP

Israeli troops who invaded Lebanon are also operating inside an Israeli-announced "yellow line" running around 10 kilometres deep along Lebanon's southern border. Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah said on Sunday that "major transformations are taking place in the region"

against "planned, imminent or ongoing attacks". Israeli troops who invaded Lebanon are also operating inside an Israeli-announced "yellow line" running around 10 kilometres deep along Lebanon's southern border. Hezbollah lawmaker Hassan Fadlallah, who the US sanctioned this week, said on Sunday that "major transformations are taking place in the region". Iran "has made its agreement with the United States conditional on stopping the war in Lebanon", he said, according to a statement. On Saturday, Hezbollah said its chief Naim Qassem had received a message from Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, saying Iran's latest proposal through Pakistani mediators aimed at ending the regional war emphasised "the demand to include Lebanon" in the broader ceasefire. Fadlallah said that

"the war will not just stop in Iran, but across the whole region, particularly in Lebanon," urging Lebanese authorities to "take advantage of this regional umbrella... which will have repercussions on us". Lebanese authorities recently began landmark direct talks with Israel under US auspices, and have insisted the discussions must be independent from the Iran-US negotiations.

US President Donald Trump has assured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu he will hold firm on his demand for the dismantling of Iran's nuclear programme as a condition in any final agreement with Tehran, a senior Israeli official said on Sunday. "President Trump made clear that he will remain steadfast in the negotiations regarding his longstanding demand for the dismantlement of Iran's nuclear programme. — AFP

UNRESTRICTED NAVIGATION



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer leaves 10 Downing Street in central London. — AFP

STARMER CALLS FOR FULL OPENING OF HORMUZ STRAIT

LONDON: The Strait of Hormuz must be reopened with "unconditional and unrestricted" access for shipping, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said as a US-Iran deal appeared to be drawing closer. US President Donald Trump has said a deal with Iran, which would include opening the strait, a vital oil and gas shipping route, has been "largely negotiated." Trump said "final aspects of the deal" are currently being discussed.

The prime minister said the United Kingdom would work with allies to "seize this moment" to help achieve a long-term solution in the Middle East. Starmer said: "I welcome the progress towards an agreement between the US and Iran. "We need to see an agreement that brings the conflict to an end and reopens the Strait of Hormuz, with unconditional and unrestricted freedom of navigation. "It's vital that Iran must never be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon. "My government will continue to do everything we can to protect British people from the impact of this conflict. "We will work with our international partners to seize this moment and achieve a long-term diplomatic settlement."

The UK has already announced Royal Navy destroyer HMS Dragon has been sent to the Middle East to prepare for a possible international mission to safeguard shipping in the strait if a peace deal is put in place. The UK and France have been leading efforts to pull together an international alliance willing to provide reassurance and assist with mine clearance once the hostilities cease. — dpa

HAILING AGREEMENT

EU chief welcomes signs of progress



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Sunday welcomed signs of progress in talks over a possible peace deal between the United States and Iran. "I welcome the progress towards an agreement between the US and Iran. We need a deal that truly de-escalates the conflict, reopens the Strait of Hormuz and guarantees toll-free full freedom of navigation. Iran must not be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon," von der Leyen wrote on X. — Reuters

PROVIDING RELIEF

Erdogan vows support for potential deal



Türkiye is ready to provide every kind of support during implementation of a potential deal with Iran, President Tayyip Erdogan said in a call with US President Donald Trump and regional leaders. Erdogan's office on Sunday cited him as saying during the call that an agreement to secure free passage through the Strait of Hormuz would support stability in the region, providing relief to the global economy. Trump previously praised call with Erdogan. — Reuters

MEDIATING ROLE

Pakistan hopes to host talks very soon



Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Sunday he hoped his country could soon host the next round of peace talks between Iran and the United States. "Pakistan will continue its peace efforts with utmost sincerity and we hope to host the next round of talks very soon," Sharif, whose country has played a key role in mediating between Washington and Tehran, posted on X. Pakistan has emerged as a central mediator, hosting historic face-to-face talks. — AFP

OPINION

Higher education must evolve to meet Gen Z learning needs



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

AS THE teaching semester comes to a close across universities in Oman, it is an opportune time to take stock of where higher education stands today. While the composition of students has seen unrecognisable changes in terms of their exposure to information and digital media, universities still have a long way to go to make education impactful for them. Studies have shown that Generation Z learners show a very different ability to access information, impacted by changing modes of learning. Their learning styles are characterised by nonlinear processing, effective use of technology, and preference for personalised feedback. Traditional models of education mainly comprised lecture-based instruction and a standardised curriculum across all parent institutions. In some ways, millennials avoided the technology trap and primarily learned through printed textbooks and hand-written notes. Today, learners from the elementary level onwards work in a classroom full of iPads and laptops. Traditional methods are insufficient for a generation accustomed to interactivity and personalised experiences of the kind common to online platforms. Higher education requires structural

and pedagogical shifts that align with contemporary digital realities. One of the central challenges, and even an opportunity, lies in adapting teaching methodologies. Gen Zs and younger students tend to favour active learning environments that incorporate collaboration and the use of multimedia in real time. Passive absorption of information is challenging for learners who are used to more dynamic content available across multiple platforms and a variety of media. Tertiary institutions will benefit from prioritising student-centered approaches, such as implementing flipped classrooms, project-based learning, and the integration of digital tools that facilitate interaction. These methods not only enhance engagement but also encourage a practical application of knowledge. Another important dimension is the role of technology itself. While many universities have incorporated learning management systems, they are often used in ways that replicate traditional teaching rather than transform it. Lectures are in the form of PowerPoint slides at best, or as typed documents available on a platform. A meaningful redefinition of higher education involves using technology to create adaptive learning environments. This

The role of the teacher has changed from being a source of knowledge to being a facilitator and mentor

could include creative personalised learning pathways and using AI to support tutoring and assessment. Such an approach could help a range of learners at different levels. Another important transformation would have to include changes to the curriculum. In a rapidly changing and uncertain global economy, digital natives require skills that extend beyond disciplinary knowledge. Competencies such as digital literacy, collaboration, and adaptability are essential. Independent learning is almost non-negotiable. Higher education institutions will benefit from designing curricula that are interdisciplinary and responsive to emerging trends, including collaboration and opportunities for experiential learning. All this means that the role of the teacher has changed from being a source of knowledge to being a facilitator and mentor. This shift requires a cultural change within institutions, where constant experimentation and application of innovative classroom formats are encouraged. Younger learners already feel alienated and nervous about their future prospects. Institutions would benefit from working towards assuaging these fears by embracing practices that empower students and leverage their learning styles.

BELGIUM WORRIES AS MIGRANT CROSSINGS TO BRITAIN RISE

CAMILLE CAMDESSUS

Unearthing small boats from under the sand at dawn before launching them towards Britain packed with people, migrant smugglers are increasingly operating from Belgium - to the concern of local authorities. The country intercepted more than 400 people attempting to cross the Channel so far this year, up from none in the whole of 2025, according to government figures, in what local officials say is a spillover from neighbouring France, following a crackdown there. “France has become stricter” towards migrants, said Jean-Marie Dedecker, mayor of the seaside town of Middelkerke. For years, migrants hoping to reach Britain in search of a better life have gathered in camps along the coast around the French city of Calais, before attempting to cross over. Belgium has not witnessed the same influx, mainly because its coastline is significantly further away from British shores, which heightens the risk for those making the journey in flimsy, overcrowded boats. At its closest point, about 80 kilometres of water separates Belgium from England, compared to the about 30 kilometres that migrants have to cover when setting off from Calais. But things have started to change as France ramped up law enforcement, partially due to a new deal between Paris and London signed in April to stop undocumented migrants from crossing. Dedecker said for several months now, he has been watching smugglers implement a well-oiled operation from his town’s beaches. “They hide their belongings - jackets, the boat, the motor - in the dunes,” he said. Before sunrise, the vessels are inflated before migrants jump aboard and set off, he added. Boats “follow the coastline to France,” said Christiaan De Ridder, the local deputy police chief. Boats are either “fully packed” with 15 to 20 people on board or sometimes go pick up more passengers in France before heading towards Britain, he added. The trend has frustrated the Belgian government of Flemish nationalist Prime Minister Bart De Wever, which does not want to appear lax on the issue. “It must be clear that the Flemish coast is not an attractive alternative for making the crossing to the United Kingdom,” said Anneloen Van Bossuyt, Belgium’s asylum and migration minister. — AFP

When fate becomes an excuse for inaction

PEOPLE LOVE to blame fate. It has become the easiest escape button in life. A person forgets to do his work, then proudly says that destiny blocked his way. Another person repeats the same mistake every month, then explains with great confidence that fate simply refused to help him. If destiny had a customer service office, the queue would reach the airport. Islam teaches something a bit more serious. Destiny is real. Allah knows everything before it happens. But this does not mean that a person can sit on the sofa and wait for blessings to walk through the door like polite visitors. Allah’s knowledge does not push anyone. A person must still make an effort. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said that we must tie our camel first, then trust in Allah. Many people love the trust part. The camel part becomes a problem. Life contains events that we cannot control. No one chooses their family. No one chooses surprise challenges. These things belong to Allah’s wisdom. But our choices are still our choices. The Quran says that Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves. This is a polite way of saying, ‘Please move.’ Stories throughout time make this clear. In the old Greek plays, the hero tries to run away from a prophecy. The poor man runs in circles, but every decision he makes pushes him toward the very thing he fears. His problem is not destiny. His problem is that he thinks too much and listens too little. Shakespeare adds more examples. Macbeth hears a prophecy, but the real problem is his ambition. Romeo



A person acts from pride or fear, and when the results appear, he says that it was fate.



DR KHALFAN BIN HAMED AL HARRASI

The writer is an academic and researcher

Scholars remind us that belief in destiny is meant to bring calm, not to help us avoid responsibility

and Juliet blame the stars, but their speed is faster than any star in the sky. Fate may open the curtain, but people still perform their own dance. Modern books show the same idea. In The Alchemist, destiny calls to the hero, but he still needs to walk, think, try, fail, and try again. Some characters move forward. Others sit in their comfortable corners, drink tea, and then complain that destiny forgot to knock on their door. Islam would call this ‘creative excuses.’ Scholars remind us that belief in destiny is meant to bring calm, not to help us avoid responsibility. Daily life gives us more examples than we need. A person acts from pride or fear, and when the results appear, he says that it was fate. It sounds deep. It looks wise. But it is nothing more than a polite version of ‘I do not want to admit my part in this.’ A story like The Necklace shows this very clearly. One decision based on pride leads to years of difficulty. People cry and say it is unlucky. But if we follow the story step by step, we see the decision walking in front and

the luck trying to catch up. Even technology tries to join the discussion. Algorithms suggest what we should watch, read and buy. If we follow everything, technology becomes our new destiny. But one different choice sends the whole system into confusion. This simple act reminds us of the Islamic principle. Action first. Trust second. Allah guides the steps, but the person must lift their foot. Islam gives us a balanced view. What comes to us is part of Allah’s wisdom. But what we do next is our job. Some people use the phrase ‘It is written’ whenever they want to escape effort or apology. But the Prophet, peace be upon him, never used destiny to avoid action. He encouraged planning, patience, courage and trust. Destiny is a source of strength, not a secret exit door. Many people say ‘fate’ when they really mean fear. Fear of change. Fear of effort. Fear of taking responsibility. So they place this fear inside a religious word and hope everyone will leave it alone. But Islam calls us to honesty and courage. People often say that the road opens for the one who walks. It is true. The road does not open for the one who waits for fate to build a bridge. Fate may open the door. It does not push anyone through it. Some people step in and find that Allah’s mercy is wide for those who try. Others wait outside and say that destiny did not invite them. But destiny is not the problem. Hesitation is. When we stop using qadar as a hiding place and start using it as a source of courage, life becomes lighter. The path may not be fully ours, but the steps are. And Allah, in His kindness, rewards the one who walks.

The dawn that feels different



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author,
translator and
communications
professional

BEFORE DAWN that day breaks, the world feels different! The streets are quieter, hearts beat with excitement and lights glow softly from kitchen windows. The smell of cardamom, saffron and freshly prepared meals flows through homes. New clothes hang neatly beside the doors, waiting for the early morning. Children can barely sleep, counting the hours until the celebration begins.

And then, as the call to prayer rises into the sky, Eid Al Adha arrives not simply as a holiday, but as a feeling of faith and belonging. Instead, it is a feeling that turns ordinary moments into unforgettable memories. At the heart of Eid Al Adha lives an ancient story that continues to inspire millions across generations.

It is the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham), a man whose faith was stronger than fear. When commanded by the Almighty Allah to sacrifice what he loved most (his son), he chose obedience with complete trust and sincerity. Yet before the sacrifice could happen, Allah replaced his son with a ram, transforming the moment into a symbol of mercy, devotion and divine compassion. That story became more than history. It became a lesson for humanity.

Eid Al Adha reminds people that sacrifice is not always about loss. Sometimes, sacrifice means letting go of pride, selfishness, anger, or greed. It also means choosing kindness

when life becomes difficult. It means giving even when keeping feels easier.

As the sun rises on that day, millions gather for prayer from the Grand Mosque of Mecca to small neighbourhood prayer grounds across the world. Rows of worshippers stand shoulder to shoulder, no titles matter and no wealth divides them. In that sacred moment, everyone is equal. The air fills with smiles and the familiar greeting is “Eid Mubarak.” Two simple words carrying significant meaning: May your life be blessed. May your home know peace. May your heart know happiness.

Eid Al Adha shines brightest through acts of giving. Families share food with neighbours. Doors remain open for guests, plates remain full for visitors, and nobody should feel forgotten during Eid. In Oman and across the Muslim world, generosity becomes a language everyone understands.

Communities gather not only to celebrate themselves, but to ensure others can celebrate too. The true beauty of Eid is not found in decorations or feasts alone, but it is found in hearts willing to share. The warmth of freshly baked bread, the sweetness of dates and desserts and the rich smell of traditional family recipes prepared year after year.

Gatherings become places where stories are retold and generations reconnect. Grandparents speak of old Eids, children laugh while collecting gifts and families gather for photos that will someday become

Eid Al Adha reminds people that sacrifice is not always about loss. Sometimes, sacrifice means letting go of pride, selfishness, anger, or greed. It also means choosing kindness when life becomes difficult

treasured memories. For one beautiful moment, the world slows down enough for people to simply be together.

Eid Al Adha is not measured by how grand the celebration is. It is measured by the hands extended to help others. By prayers whispered with sincerity, by families reunited after long distances and by forgiveness offered where pain once existed.

Eid is a celebration that teaches humanity something timeless that faith without compassion is incomplete, happiness grows when shared and the strongest hearts are often the most generous ones.

So when the crescent moon appears and the words “Eid Mubarak” once again travel across cities, deserts, villages, and homes, the spirit of Eid continues its journey carrying hope, peace, and light from one heart to another.

Eid Al Adha is not simply a day of joy marked by prayer, feasts, or family gatherings. It is a reminder that the human heart is capable of extraordinary faith, limitless generosity and remarkable compassion. Every year, as the crescent moon appears in the sky, millions of people pause their busy lives to reconnect with something greater than themselves.

They gather not only to celebrate, but to remember faith over fear, gratitude over complaint and love over division. There are celebrations that fill calendars, and then there are celebrations that fill souls.

SCREEN-SHUNNING PARENTS TURN TO AUDIO TOYS

TOM BARFIELD

Alone in her bedroom, six-year-old Emilia laughs at jokes told by kids on the other side of the world and listens to stories told by a lively adult voice.

The tales and gags - many baffling to adult ears - are emitted by a Yoto player, one of a growing class of sound-only gadgets for young children. Devices offering entertaining and educational audio content are increasingly sought out by parents keen to keep their offspring from overdosing on screens.

This comes at a time of increasing concern about the impact of electronic devices on children's mental and physical well-being. “We try to avoid screen time. Of course, occasionally half an hour a day is fine, but not more than that,” said Emilia's mother, Vanessa Gunnella, a 41-year-old economist living in Frankfurt, Germany.

Compared to when the young girl is dropped in front of a phone, iPad, or television, “she gets more focused” when listening to programmes like Yoto's daily podcast, Gunnella said.

“It's good for her to focus and listen.”

Belief in the value of kids' audio is proving to be big business. Germany-based market leader Tonies - Yoto's much larger commercial competitor — booked 630 million euros (\$731 million) in revenue in 2025.

Last week, the company reported over 29 per cent year-on-year revenue growth in the first quarter, to almost 126 million euros.

Privately-held Yoto is smaller, reporting 2024 revenue of just under £95 million (\$128 million) to the UK's Companies House.

Device makers are benefitting as “people are becoming very convinced that unlimited screen time is harmful”, Tonies chief executive Tobias Wann said. In 10 years, Tonies has sold close to 12 million audio players and 150 million toy figures that kids can place on the box to unlock new content, he said.

Data show children use their devices for almost 40 minutes a day, he added, while insisting that the company's data collection is “never individualised” and is only used to judge the popularity of different items. Wann tied Tonies' success to a long-standing German culture of children's radio plays, that proved accessible when introduced to other global markets.

“Back in the day, I used to listen to those on long-playing records. Then came cassettes and CDs. And these days just about every child in Germany listens to Tonies figurines,” he said.

With the popularisation of music streaming, the question at Tonies' founding was how to “give kids agency” safely, Wann said.

“You don't just want to give your child a smartphone or iPad and say, ‘Here's Spotify. Good luck. Pick whatever you want.’”

Gunnella said that on a smart device, her daughter Emilia will often “change and skip and get some content which is not really good quality... I don't like that.” — **AFP**

Would-be challenger to UK PM faces uphill battle

MAKERFIELD, A little-known political district in northwest England, has been thrust into the spotlight in the UK ahead of a by-election dubbed one of the most consequential in British history.

Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham, a veteran figure on Labour's left, has stopped short of formally announcing his intention to oust Starmer. But the 56-year-old is widely expected to trigger a contest to become Labour leader - which would mean also becoming prime minister - if he is made an MP.

“A vote for me in this by-election campaign is a vote to change Labour,” he said on Friday, officially launching his campaign in the constituency, which lies between Manchester and Liverpool.

Addressing placard-wielding supporters in a dusty sports club's car park, he argued the party must return to being “solidly on the side of working-class people”.

In a nearby residential street of red-brick terraced houses, the scale of the challenge was apparent.

“I've lost all faith in Labour at the minute, so whether it's Keir Starmer or Andy Burnham, I think they're done,” self-employed joiner Mick Dean, 44, said.

“My dad was a Labour voter. His dad would actually turn over in his grave if he found out we've moved on, but they're just not for the working class anymore.”

Dean will vote for Brexit champion Nigel Farage's anti-immigration Reform UK party, which triumphed in local elections across England this month.

The disastrous results for Labour — which came a distant second and sustained heavy losses in Wales and Scotland — sparked a simmering Labour rebellion against Starmer.

The by-election was triggered when Makerfield's MP resigned after the polls, saying he wanted to give Burnham the chance to win the seat and challenge Starmer.

But Burnham's attempted Westminster return - he was a



Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham speaks at the launch of his by-election campaign in Ashton-in-Makerfield, west of Manchester, in north-west England, on Friday. — **AFP**



JOE
JACKSON

The writer is
General Assignment
Reporter for AFP
based in London

Greater Manchester mayor Andy Burnham is widely expected to trigger a contest to become Labour leader - which would mean also becoming prime minister - if he is made an MP

Labour MP between 2001 and 2017, served in governments and twice stood to be leader - is fraught.

Once a safe Labour seat held since 1983, Makerfield overwhelmingly backed Reform in the May 7 local council vote. A repeat in next month's by-election would leave Burnham's Downing Street ambitions in tatters and Starmer's political future uncertain.

Supporters such as Labour member Tom Hothersall, 22, insisted “there's a lot of love” for Burnham after nine widely praised years as Manchester mayor.

“He's got a vision for where he wants to take the country and he wants to take Makerfield with him,” he said.

When AFP joined a seven-strong canvassing team on Friday, voters' opinions were divided.

“I know him and I'm obviously going to back him!” said one man.

His neighbour was less enthused. “Definitely not! I don't want him in. I don't want Labour in,” she said.

Burnham is banking on his regional popularity to prevail.

Born in Liverpool, he previously represented a neighbouring parliamentary seat and is eager to

talk up his local roots.

Home to nearly 80,000 people, Makerfield sits in Labour's traditional “red wall”.

Less ethnically diverse than some surrounding constituencies, its heritage in mining - rather than textiles, which helped Manchester boom during the industrial revolution - also sets it apart from the city.

Burnham allies argue that if he can beat Reform here, he will have made his case to replace the universally unpopular Starmer.

In the main town of Ashton-in-Makerfield, Reform placards and English St George's flags compete with the occasional Labour sign.

“Once he's got what he wants to get, to Number 10 (Downing Street)... we'll be forgotten.”

Neighbour Marilyn Hurst, 70, was also minded to back Farage's party.

“He should stay as the mayor of Manchester because I don't think he's got that personality to be a prime minister,” she said of Burnham.

Reform's candidate, local plumber Robert Kenyon, also unsuccessfully stood to be MP in the 2024 elections that swept Labour to power.

SPORTS



Officials of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth during the presentation of key initiatives and strategic projects.

MoCSY unveils sports development and investment plans

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbaluch

THE Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) highlighted major achievements in Oman's sports sector and unveiled future plans aimed at strengthening athlete development, sports investment, and infrastructure during its 2026 annual media briefing, attended by media representatives, sports stakeholders, and officials from across the Sultanate of Oman.

The briefing reviewed the ministry's achievements during 2025, while outlining strategic initiatives aligned with Oman Vision 2040, with a strong focus on sports development, talent identification, investment opportunities, and the long-term sustainability of the country's sporting ecosystem.

At the opening of the event, Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, emphasised that sports represent a key pillar in national development and human capital building, stressing the ministry's commitment to empowering athletes, improving sports infrastructure and expanding opportunities for youth participation.

The minister noted that the ministry continues to implement programmes aimed at strengthening Oman's presence in regional and international sports, while creating an environment that supports athletic excellence and encourages broader community engagement in sporting activities.

According to figures presented during the briefing, the ministry implemented 687 programmes and activities in 2025, benefiting more than 105,000 participants across Oman's governorates. Among these, 298 sports-related



Attendance during the 2026 annual media briefing

activities attracted over 57,000 beneficiaries, reflecting growing participation and increasing public interest in sports nationwide.

The ministry also highlighted progress under the Omani Sports Strategy 2040, which seeks to establish a modern and competitive sports system focused on improving athletic performance, increasing grassroots participation, supporting elite athletes and positioning Oman as a regional destination for sporting events.

Speaking on the ministry's sports priorities, Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, said Oman is continuing efforts to strengthen sports federations, widen participation at grassroots level, and create sustainable pathways for talented athletes to excel internationally.

A key announcement during the briefing was the launch of the National Programme for Discovering and Developing Talented Athletes, introduced as a

comprehensive initiative designed to identify and nurture promising athletes from an early age.

The programme aims to establish an integrated system connecting educational institutions and sports organisations to support talent development and prepare future generations capable of competing successfully at Gulf, Asian and international levels.

The ministry also revealed that Oman has supported and hosted more than 30 regional and international sporting events, alongside initiatives promoting community sports and sports for people with disabilities, reflecting broader efforts to diversify participation and raise sporting standards.

In the area of sports investment, Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, highlighted the transformation of sports in Oman from a purely recreational activity into a sector with increasing economic and investment value.



He explained that sports have evolved into a sector with broader developmental and economic significance, contributing to economic growth through infrastructure projects, investment opportunities and talent development, while also supporting social and community objectives.

Al Busaidy also addressed one of Oman's most anticipated projects, confirming that work on the Sports City project is ongoing, with further details expected to be announced during the ministry's next media briefing.

As part of the event, the ministry showcased several success stories of Omani athletes, including international rally driver Abdullah al Rawahi, whose sporting journey was featured in a special video presentation.

Al Rawahi reflected on his motorsport journey, which began nearly 24 years ago, when he first got behind the wheel of a kart at the age of five, admitting that fear marked his earliest experiences in the sport.

By the age of eight, he competed

in his first karting race and vividly recalled an early accident that resulted in a hospital visit, a memory he said still returns whenever he visits the same venue.

Reflecting on his professional career, Al Rawahi described one of his toughest moments – a major crash during the Lebanon Rally, which many believed would bring an end to his motorsport ambitions. However, he credited determination and self-belief for helping him recover and return stronger.

Despite considering retirement at one stage, Al Rawahi persevered and later made history by becoming the first Omani and youngest driver to win the Middle East Rally Championship, an achievement he described as deeply meaningful.

Al Rawahi also praised the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for its continued support of Omani athletes and youth, emphasising its important role in helping athletes pursue excellence and proudly represent Oman on the international stage.



Scenes from Seeb's title celebrations after finishing top of the Jindal League standings.

SEEB CROWNED J L CHAMPIONS

AL MUSANNAH AND FANJA SECURED PROMOTION

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT MAY 24

SEEB were officially crowned Jindal League champions for the 2025/2026 season after ending the campaign on 67 points, while Al Shabab secured second place on 54 points and Al Nasr completed the podium in third on 53 points. At the other end, Al Rustaq and Al Khabourah were relegated, while Al Musannah and Fanja earned promotion to next season's top flight.

The title celebrations took place after Seeb's final-round match against Ibri at Seeb Stadium, in a closing ceremony organised by the Oman Football Association (OFA) under the auspices of HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU.

Seeb closed their season with a resounding 7-1 win over Ibri. Abdulmajid al Balushi opened the scoring from the penalty spot, Nasser al Rawahi struck five times and Omar al Maliki also found the net, while Bisan scored Ibri's only goal. The result confirmed Seeb in first place with 67 points, while Ibri finished 12th on 23 points and survived.

Reflecting on the title-winning campaign, star forward Nasser al Rawahi said Seeb had wrapped up the league three rounds earlier, but that did not affect the team's mentality. "Winning the title with three rounds to spare did not make us lose our hunger or relax. We approached every match with a winning mentality," he said, while also thanking his team-mates and the supporters for the celebrations. Al Rawahi added that the focus

now turns to the future, saying the title-winning season was "a page we now close as we look ahead."

Seeb captain Eid al Farsi said the club's ambitions remain greater despite ending the season with the league title. Looking ahead to the team's participation in the AFC Champions League Two, he stressed that Seeb are determined to compete strongly on the continental stage as well. He said the management is fully aware that next season will bring even bigger challenges, but insisted



the club will continue to fight for all titles.

AL SHABAB SEAL RUNNERS-UP SPOT
Al Shabab made sure of second place with a 3-2 win over Al Nahda at Al Buraimi Sports Complex. Maliko Kinyan scored all three goals for Al Shabab, while Mohammed al Rawahi and Azzan al Tamimi replied for Al Nahda. The victory took Al Shabab to 54 points in second place, while Al Nahda ended the season fourth with 44 points.

AL NASR FINISH THIRD
Al Nasr wrapped up third place after a 2-0 win over Saham at Sohar Sports Complex. Abdulfadel Sawanina and Awad al Shahri scored the goals that sealed the victory. Al Nasr finished the season third on 53 points, while Saham ended 11th on 26 points.

DHOFAR STAY UP, AL KHABOURAH RELEGATED
Dhofar secured their place in the league with a 2-1 win over Al Khabourah in Salalah. Qasim Said and Moataz Saleh were on target for Dhofar, while John Paul scored for Al Khabourah. Dhofar finished ninth on 27 points, while Al Khabourah were relegated in 13th place with 22 points.

OMAN CLUB BEAT AL RUSTAQ
Oman Club ended the season with a 1-0 victory over Al Rustaq, thanks to a goal from Al Harith al Mukhaini. Oman Club finished sixth on 39 points, while Al Rustaq remained bottom in 14th place with 15 points and had already been relegated.

BAHLA SIGN OFF WITH WIN
Bahla defeated Samayil 1-0, with Abdulsalam al Shukaili scoring the only goal. Bahla ended the campaign fifth on 40 points, while Samayil finished 10th on 26 points.

SOHAR AND SUR SHARE SIX GOALS
Sohar and Sur played out a dramatic 3-3 draw. Sohar's goals came from Abdullah al Balushi and Mohammed Ihab, while Sur replied through Amjad al Oraimi, Abdulrahman al Muqaimi and Bassam al Mukhaini from the penalty spot. Sohar finished seventh on 38 points, while Sur ended eighth on 32 points.

With the season now complete, Seeb lifted the trophy in style, Al Shabab and Al Nasr completed the top three, and the relegation line finally caught up with Al Rustaq and Al Khabourah. In their place, Al Musannah and Fanja will compete in next season's Jindal League.



SPORTS

KANE HAT-TRICK SEALS DOUBLE AS BAYERN CLAIM 21ST GERMAN CUP

DANIEL WIGHTON Harry Kane's hat-trick gave Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich a 3-0 victory over holders Stuttgart to win the German Cup in Berlin on Saturday.

The hat-trick brought Kane's goal tally to a stunning 61 in all competitions this season, while ending a six-year drought in the competition for the Bavarian giants. Victory sealed a 14th league and cup double for Bayern and 21st cup success.

"Going into this final, I felt like it was my responsibility as much as anyone to get us over the line," Kane said on German TV.

"I know I'm going to get chances and I did again today. To score a hat-trick in a final is such a special feeling. It's just memories I'll remember forever."

The England captain's first strike was set up by Michael Olise from the right, who now boasts an incredible 30 assists in all competitions this season.

Left winger Luis Diaz helped create the second and Kane added a penalty in stoppage time to complete a second-half hat-trick.

The double once again highlighted Bayern's incredible dominance of German football.

No other German club has achieved the double more than once.

This was the third time that Stuttgart were forced to watch on as Bayern celebrated this season.

Bayern beat Stuttgart in the season-opening Super Cup and also secured the Bundesliga title with a big win over the Swabians in Munich in April.

Coming into Saturday's match, Bayern had already beaten their opponents three times this season with a combined goal tally of 11-3.

Yet Stuttgart edged the first half, frequently troubling Bayern on the counter.

Stuttgart's Maximilian Mittelstaedt and Chris Fuehrich, both left out of Germany's World Cup squad, were particularly impressive going forwards.

Kane's only chance of the opening half came in the 21st minute when he headed a cross well over the bar.

Early in the second-half, Bayern made Stuttgart pay for their failure to convert their first-half chances when Olise set up Kane's opener.

The France winger tore down the right and delivered a low-flying cross perfectly to Kane, who leapt forward



Manuel Neuer lifts the trophy after the German Cup. — AFP

“Going into this final, I felt like it was my responsibility as much as anyone to get us over the line.”

HARRY KANE



Harry Kane scores the 3-0 goal from the penalty spot during the German Cup. — AFP

and headed in from close range, making sure he had scored in each of Bayern's six games in the competition this season.

Moments later, Bayern scuffed a golden chance to go two up when Konrad Laimer blasted a rebound well over the bar with Stuttgart's Alexander Nuebel on the ground and the goal unguarded.

With 10 minutes remaining, Kane made sure of things, collecting a Diaz pass on the spin and blasting a low shot into the bottom corner.

Stuttgart's Angelo Stiller handled in the box in stoppage time, bringing Kane to the spot. The striker converted nervelessly to complete an incredible season at the club. — AFP

Pajor, Paralluelo star as Barcelona thrash Lyon to win Women's CL

OSLO: Andy SCOTT Ewa Pajor and Salma Paralluelo scored twice each in the second half as Barcelona thrashed a stunned Lyon 4-0 in the Women's Champions League final on Saturday to win the European title for the fourth time.

It took until the 55th minute for the deadlock to be broken by Pajor, but Barcelona ran away with the game after that at the Ullevaal Stadion in the Norwegian capital.

Polish striker Pajor put the pain of five previous final defeats behind her as she also scored her team's second goal on 69 minutes, leaving Lyon with too much to do.

Pajor was on the losing side in four Champions League finals with previous club Wolfsburg before joining Barcelona in 2024 and playing in their 1-0 loss to Arsenal in Lisbon last season.

Spain World Cup winner Paralluelo then added two late goals as Lyon fell apart, exposing a gulf between the two outstanding club sides in women's football over the last decade.

The victory, and manner of it, confirmed that Barcelona have



FC Barcelona players celebrate as they lift the Women's Champions League Trophy. — AFP



Ewa Pajor shoots and scores her team's first goal during the UEFA Women's Champions League.

overtaken Lyon as the dominant force in recent years, as they won their fourth title in the last six seasons — only Lyon, with eight, have won more overall.

Barcelona's European triumph follows a clean sweep of the Spanish domestic honours, and the Catalans brought reigning

Ballon d'Or Aitana Bonmati on as a second-half substitute here following her recent return from a broken leg.

"Finishing the season like this, it's amazing," Bonmati said.

"I'm so happy because it has been a tough one for me, different for me. I have learned a lot also, but

ending the season and having the opportunity to play a little bit and helping the team, for me, I'm so happy."

This was a sixth straight Champions League final appearance for Barcelona, and their seventh in the last eight seasons.

They had already beaten Lyon

2-0 in the 2024 final, when Bonmati and Alexia Putellas scored their goals the latter wore the captain's armband here in what could turn out to be her farewell appearance with her contract up.

This was the fourth meeting of the clubs in the final, with Lyon coming out on top in 2019 during their run of five consecutive titles, and also winning in 2022 but that is now the only time they have lifted the trophy in the last six editions.

"We really wanted to have the first goal of the game. We didn't get that, and in the second half, they are so dangerous in the transitions, so when they get the first goal it makes it difficult, because the dynamic changes," said Ingrid Enge, Lyon's Norwegian ex-Barcelona defender.

Ada Hegerberg scored a hat-trick in the 2019 final and was also on target three years later, but the competition's all-time leading scorer looked a shadow of her former self on this occasion, which was a homecoming for the Norwegian former Ballon d'Or winner. — AFP



BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



The partnership forms part of Oman Airports' wider efforts to strengthen the airport's competitiveness.

OMAN AIRPORTS PARTNERS WITH CHANGI TO ELEVATE MUSCAT AIRPORT

MUSCAT: Oman Airports (OA) has signed a strategic agreement with Changi Airports International (CAI) to support the commercial development of Muscat International Airport and enhance the overall passenger experience.

The partnership forms part of Oman Airports' wider efforts to strengthen the airport's competitiveness, improve operational excellence and diversify revenue streams, while supporting the tourism ambitions outlined under Oman Vision 2040.

The agreement was signed during an official ceremony in Singapore and reflects a shared commitment to adopting international best practices across airport operations and retail development.

Nasser al Sharji, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Airports, said the collaboration would help strengthen every stage of the passenger journey through the exchange of expertise with one of the world's leading aviation hubs.

"I am pleased to announce this collaboration between Changi Airport and OA. As the world's leading airport, Changi brings extensive experience in delivering a world-class guest experience.

Through this partnership, we aim to share best practices and strengthen every touchpoint across the passenger journey. We firmly believe that continuously enhancing the guest experience is fundamental to airport excellence and long-term success", he said.

Oman targets 1,945 MW of wind energy capacity

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 24

NAMA Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP), the sole offtaker of power and water output in the Sultanate of Oman, is rapidly scaling up its wind energy programme as part of Oman's broader clean energy transition strategy, targeting a cumulative wind power capacity of 1,945 MW by 2030.

A roadmap presented recently by Nama PWP highlights a phased expansion of utility-scale wind Independent Power Projects (IPPs) across multiple governorates, positioning wind energy as a central pillar of Oman's drive to diversify its electricity mix, cut carbon emissions and support national Net Zero ambitions.

Oman's operational wind capacity currently stands at 50 MW, represented by the Dhofar I Wind IPP, which has been in commercial operation since 2019.

The project contributes annual carbon dioxide reductions of around 47,510 tonnes.

The next major additions are already under construction and expected online from 2028 onwards. These include the 100 MW JBB Wind IPP and the 125 MW Dhofar II Wind IPP.

Together, these projects are projected to raise cumulative installed wind capacity to 275 MW while significantly increasing annual carbon savings.

Nama PWP's procurement pipeline then accelerates sharply with a new batch of projects currently in the procurement phase.



CO₂ emission reductions attributable to Oman's wind energy programme are projected at 2.56 million tonnes annually by 2030.

A roadmap presented by Nama PWP highlights a phased expansion of utility-scale wind IPPs across multiple governorates, positioning wind energy as a central pillar of Oman's drive to diversify its electricity mix, cut carbon emissions and support Net Zero ambitions.

These comprise the 300 MW Duqm II Wind IPP and the 800 MW Mahout Wind IPP. Once operational, cumulative wind capacity is expected to surge to 1,375 MW by 2028, representing around 70 per cent of the company's 2030 target.

Notably, the above-referenced 300 MW Duqm II Wind IPP and 800 MW Mahout Wind IPP are likely to be an integral part of the landmark Round-The-Clock Renewable Energy Project awarded recently by Nama PWP to O-Green, an Omani state-backed integrated clean energy group.

As part of contract award, O-Green will develop 2.7 GW of generation capacity at Al Duqm and Mahout, combining

solar, wind and battery storage components. The final phase of expansion, according to Nama PWP, will come through projects presently under pre-development.

These include the 220 MW Shaleem Wind IPP, the 100 MW Al Jazir Wind IPP and the 250 MW Duqm III Wind IPP. These projects are expected to push total installed wind generation capacity to 1,945 MW by 2029-2030.

The presentation also showed that annual carbon dioxide emissions reductions from wind generation are projected to climb from just under 48,000 tonnes currently to approximately 2.56 million tonnes annually by 2030, underlining the significant environmental impact of the programme.

Al Najd returns to forefront of Oman's food security strategy

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, MAY 24

As global concerns grow over food security, water scarcity and supply-chain disruptions, the Al Najd region in Dhofar Governorate is returning to the forefront of strategic discussion in the Sultanate of Oman — not simply as an agricultural zone, but as one of the country's most significant long-term food security prospects.

Stretching across vast desert plains beyond the Dhofar mountains, Al Najd has re-emerged in national economic and agricultural discussions amidst broader efforts to strengthen domestic food resilience and reduce exposure to external shocks at a time of geopolitical tensions, climate pressures and rising import costs.

Speaking during a forum on food security, Eng Saleh al Shanfari, widely regarded as one of the pioneering figures in Oman's food and agribusiness sector, said the region represented one of the Sultanate of Oman's most promising agricultural areas capable of supporting the country's long-term food security objectives.

Al Shanfari stressed the need to distinguish between "food



The Al Najd region represents one of Oman's most promising agricultural areas capable of supporting the country's long-term food security objectives.

security" and "self-sufficiency", noting that food security does not necessarily mean producing every commodity locally, but ensuring continuous and reliable access to food through resilient supply chains, strategic reserves and effective resource management.

"Oman, like many Gulf countries, may not achieve full self-sufficiency in certain staples such as wheat or rice, but it can still maintain food security

through diversified sourcing, storage capacity and stable supply systems", he said.

Interest in Al Najd dates back to the late 1980s, when the Japan International Cooperation Agency launched extensive studies assessing the area's agricultural and groundwater potential as part of a long-term development strategy.

According to Japanese technical reports, the studies examined

soil quality, groundwater resources, irrigation systems and the feasibility of large-scale agricultural expansion, while also exploring logistics, storage and agro-industrial opportunities.

Al Shanfari said Japanese teams conducted one of the first comprehensive studies of Al Najd nearly four decades ago, adding that he had personally participated in early phases of agricultural development projects in the area.

Oman-Japan cooperation has recently regained momentum through new agreements and planning initiatives aimed at developing Al Najd as part of a broader long-term food security and agricultural development strategy. Analysts say Al Najd's importance extends beyond farming itself.

Its proximity to the Port of Salalah, the Al Mazyouna border crossing and Al Duqm gives the region significant logistical advantages for storage, distribution and exports to Gulf markets.

The scale of land available for agricultural development also positions Al Najd among Oman's largest underutilised agricultural opportunities at a time when Gulf states are accelerating investments

in food resilience amidst global market volatility.

Al Shanfari said agricultural products from Al Najd are already reaching Gulf markets including Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, with rising demand for crops such as onions, garlic and wheat, alongside newer projects involving sesame and fodder production.

Despite the optimism, water sustainability remains the defining challenge for any future expansion.

Earlier Japanese studies warned that uncontrolled agricultural growth could place increasing pressure on groundwater reserves, making sustainable water management central to the long-term viability of the project.

Observers say the success of Al Najd will ultimately depend not only on agricultural output, but also on Oman's ability to balance food security ambitions with long-term water sustainability in one of the world's most water-stressed regions.

For many analysts, Al Najd is no longer viewed merely as a remote desert farming area, but as a strategic test of whether Oman can build a sustainable food security model in an era of mounting climate and supply-chain risks.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Bank Muscat strongly believes in the importance of engaging SME owners in shaping initiatives.

BANK MUSCAT
AND RIYADA TO
ACCELERATE
SMES GROWTH

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance the role of the SME sector in the national economy and maximise its contribution to the GDP and national workforce development, recognising it as one of the key drivers of economic growth and diversification in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in Oman, recently organised a number of discussion sessions in Muscat, Suhar and Salalah, in collaboration with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority “Riyada”, in the presence of a number of entrepreneurs and representatives of SMEs, with the aim of identifying the key challenges facing the sector.

The discussion sessions come as part of a series of sessions that the bank plans to organise in conjunction with the launch of new initiatives dedicated to the SME sector, through which the bank aims to further develop and strengthen the sector through a range of initiatives and partnerships with relevant entities to support SMEs in achieving growth, sustainability and transformation into large corporates.

Bank Muscat strongly believes in the importance of engaging SME owners in shaping initiatives, alongside building strategic partnerships with various stakeholders involved in the SME sector, stemming from its role as an active partner in supporting the national economy.

The bank continues its collaboration with “Riyada” and relevant public and private sector entities to implement initiatives and programmes that contribute to supporting this vital sector and creating a stimulating business environment that enables SMEs to grow and evolve.

Bank Muscat continues to offer a comprehensive suite of banking services and financial solutions specifically designed to meet the needs of SMEs, including financing facilities, digital banking services and financial advisory solutions, in addition to training programmes and community initiatives aimed at supporting entrepreneurs and enhancing their capabilities in managing and developing their businesses.

The bank places significant importance on the SME sector, driven by its belief in the sector’s vital role in supporting economic and social development.

Accordingly, it remains committed to launching and implementing impactful initiatives that contribute to strengthening the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the Sultanate of Oman and empowering SME owners to achieve sustainable growth, reflecting the bank’s commitment to its national role and corporate social responsibility in supporting various key economic sectors.

WASHINGTON
POST
INTELLIGENCE
COUNCIL
NAMES AI &
TECH LEADER

MUSCAT: Washington Post Intelligence, the intelligence and advisory platform of The Washington Post, has named Adeen Ahamed (pictured), Managing Director of LuLu Financial Holdings, to its Council on AI & Technology.

The council is a global leadership forum focused on advancing policy and industry innovation across artificial intelligence, emerging technologies and digital transformation. Ahamed is among the first Middle East-based business



rapidly emerging as a global centre for AI-driven innovation, digital infrastructure and next-generation financial ecosystems.

His appointment also reflects the growing importance of financial services and cross-border

leaders to join the council, bringing the perspective of a region that is

payment infrastructure in global AI conversations, particularly as emerging technologies increasingly shape the future of commerce, compliance, financial accessibility and real-time global connectivity.

Under Ahamed’s leadership, LuLu Financial Holdings has grown into one of the region’s leading financial services groups, operating across the GCC, Indian subcontinent and Asia Pacific, with a strong focus on cross-border payments, fintech innovation and digital financial inclusion.

MHD launches Majlis
Jetour Oman community

MHD Automobiles LLC, the exclusive dealer of Jetour in Oman, has officially launched the Jetour Oman Owners Club with a new local identity and logo, marking an important step in building a more meaningful, structured and culturally rooted community for Jetour owners across the Sultanate of Oman.

The launch represents the evolution of the Jetour Oman Owners Club into Majlis Jetour Oman, a vibrant community that brings together owners of the Jetour G700, along with the existing Jetour T1 and T2 owners.

The new identity reflects a deeper purpose, going beyond vehicle ownership to create a space for dialogue, friendship, shared experiences and a strong sense of belonging.

The name “Majlis” reflects the traditional Omani spirit of hospitality, connection and togetherness — values that lie at the heart of this owners’ community. Inspired by the traditional Majlis setting, the new logo incorporates rich tones of deep red, burgundy, orange and black geometric patterns that celebrate Arab heritage and culture.

A mountain symbol within the logo represents adventure and discovery while paying tribute to Oman’s iconic mountainous landscape and the journeys enjoyed by Jetour owners. On this occasion, Mohsin bin



The launch represents the evolution of the Jetour Oman Owners Club into Majlis Jetour Oman.

Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE, said: “Majlis Jetour Oman represents much more than an owners’ club; it is a community built around connection, exploration and shared experiences.

The new identity reflects Oman’s culture of hospitality and togetherness, while also capturing Jetour’s adventurous spirit. Through this platform, we aim to bring

Jetour owners closer, creating memorable journeys and meaningful bonds that go beyond the road”. The initiatives of Majlis Jetour Oman are designed to keep the community active and engaged, offering owners continuous opportunities to connect, explore Oman’s landscapes and share memorable moments together.

ICAI Muscat holds AGM, names new committee

MUSCAT: The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India Muscat (Oman) Chapter, under the sponsorship of the College of Banking and Financial Studies, recently concluded its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on May 4, marking another milestone in the Chapter’s journey of professional excellence, governance and member engagement.

The AGM witnessed active participation from members, during which key agenda items including the Chapter’s annual activities, financial matters, committee reports,



member initiatives and strategic roadmap for the upcoming term were discussed and approved.

The newly constituted managing committee for the upcoming term was formally announced as follows:

CA Sangeetha Sureshkumar — Chairperson and Women Members’ Excellence Sub-Committee Lead.

CA Badri Narayan Subudhi — Vice-Chairperson; CA Ashish Subhedar — Secretar; CA

Abhishek R Vaishya — Treasurer and Sponsorship Sub-Committee Lead; CA Unmesh Bhome — Immediate Past Chairperson and IT, PR, Media, Legal & Compliance Sub-Committee Lead.

CA Gaurav Kapoor — Past Chairman, Sports & Cultural Sub-Committee Lead and Salalah Sub-Committee Lead; CA Ajil James Kurian — CPE Sub-Committee Lead and CFO Programme Lead; and CA Jay Duseja — Membership Sub-Committee, Students Affairs Lead and Sohar Sub-Committee Lead.

Sohar International signs MoU with Dhofar Governorate

MUSCAT: Reflecting the strong partnership between the public and private sectors, Sohar International signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Dhofar Governorate to provide financial and strategic advisory services aimed at supporting investment projects and enhancing planning and financing efficiency across the governorate.

The agreement forms part of a strategic partnership supporting economic and investment development pathways in one of the

Sultanate of Oman’s most prominent tourism and economic hubs, in line with Oman Vision 2040’s direction towards building sector-wide partnerships that strengthen the national economic base.

The agreement was signed in the presence of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, by Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Government & Private Banking Officer at Sohar International; and Dr Saud bin Mohammed al Farsi from the Office of the Governor of Dhofar. Under the memorandum, Sohar



The agreement was signed in the presence of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

International, through its Government Investment Advisory unit, will provide a suite of specialised advisory services, including strategic investment advisory, financial advisory, project financing, syndicated loan structuring, market studies, economic policy analysis and business development advisory services.

Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Government & Private Banking Officer at Sohar International, stated: “We take pride in Sohar International in the level of institutional confidence

that the government sector continues to place in the bank, reflecting its position as a financial and strategic partner supporting the nation’s development journey.

This partnership with Dhofar Governorate extends a longstanding relationship built through collaboration across several initiatives and development-driven projects, most notably the strategic sponsorship of Khareef Dhofar Season 2026, one of the Sultanate of Oman’s leading tourism and economic events”.

SHORTTAKES

MSX extends trading hours from June



HAITHAM BIN SALIM AL SALMI
CEO, MSX

MUSCAT: Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) will extend its trading hours from the beginning of June 2026 as part of broader efforts to modernise market operations, improve liquidity and strengthen the competitiveness of Oman's capital market.

Under the revised schedule, the pre-opening session will run from 9:30 am to 10:00 am, followed by continuous trading until 2:45 pm. A pre-closing session will then take place until 2:55 pm, before the closing price session concludes at 3:00 pm.

MSX said the move aligns the exchange more closely with regional and international markets and provides investors with greater flexibility to respond to economic developments and market-moving news.

The exchange noted that the longer trading window is expected to support liquidity, improve price discovery, enhance market stability and deepen trading activity by spreading orders across a longer session.

The initiative also forms part of a broader programme aimed at developing the exchange's operational and regulatory infrastructure, strengthening the role of market makers and liquidity providers and improving the investor experience through digital channels.

Haitham bin Salim al Salmi, Chief Executive Officer of MSX, described the extension as a strategic step in the exchange's development roadmap.

He said: "The exchange aims to build a more flexible and efficient trading environment, capable of responding to economic changes and enhancing the market's attractiveness to investment". Al Salmi added that aligning trading hours with regional and international exchanges would strengthen the integration of the Omani market with the global financial system and support efforts to attract foreign investment.

Oman's food security tested by regional tensions

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, MAY 24

REGIONAL

tensions and disruptions to shipping routes have exposed the fragility of Gulf food supply chains, but Oman has so far maintained stable food availability through strategic reserves, port infrastructure and diversified logistics networks, a food security expert said.

Speaking during a dialogue session at Dhofar University, Eng Saleh bin Mohammed al Shanfari, Chairman of the Food Security Committee at Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said recent geopolitical tensions showed that the region still faces vulnerabilities despite years of investment in food security systems.

He said Oman had been able to maintain the flow of food supplies and avoid shortages due to its strategic ports, reserve systems and government policies aimed at securing essential commodities.

"Today there is no food crisis in Oman", Al Shanfari said, noting that vegetables, fruits and other basic products remained available in local markets despite regional shipping disruptions and rising logistics costs.

He highlighted the role of the Port of Salalah, alongside SOHAR Port and Freezone; and the Port of Duqm, in supporting food supply chains across the Gulf. He described Salalah as a major logistics gateway



Oman had been able to maintain the flow of food supplies and avoid shortages due to its strategic ports, reserve systems and government policies aimed at securing essential commodities.

ENG SALEH BIN MOHAMMED AL SHANFARI
Chairman of the Food Security Committee at OCCI



Salalah is described as a major logistics gateway for food imports and redistribution.

for food imports and redistribution.

Al Shanfari said disruptions affecting shipping routes and fertiliser exports from the Gulf could have wider global consequences, particularly for agricultural production.

He warned that any disruption to urea exports — a key component in fertiliser production — could contribute to higher global prices for wheat, soybeans, barley and animal feed, increasing pressure on international food markets.

Al Shanfari said Oman's strategic grain reserves remained at safe levels, adding that the country had avoided major food supply crises over the past two decades due to precautionary government policies and reserve management systems.

He also pointed to growing investment in local food production, fisheries and aquaculture as part of broader efforts to strengthen long-term food resilience and reduce dependence on imports.

The government, he said, has expanded efforts to facilitate agricultural and food-security investments by accelerating approvals for land allocation, water access, utilities and infrastructure services.

Al Shanfari added that the Sultanate of Oman was attracting local and international investment into agriculture, livestock, fisheries and aquaculture, describing fish farming and seafood processing as among the country's most promising growth areas.

Turmeric project positions Dhofar as Oman's emerging spice hub

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

The 2026 project to localise turmeric and ginger cultivation in Dhofar Governorate represents a qualitative leap in food security and economic diversification in the Sultanate of Oman, enhancing the presence of Omani agriculture in local and regional markets.

The project is financially supported by the Agricultural and Fisheries Development Fund and directly supervised by the Directorate General of Agricultural and Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources in Dhofar Governorate, in line with the government's directives to increase self-sufficiency and strengthen the agricultural sector's contribution to the national economy.

Relevant authorities confirmed that the project contributes to transforming traditional agriculture in mountainous and rural areas into an integrated production system by providing technical and marketing support to farmers and introducing modern agricultural technologies and smart irrigation systems to conserve water and improve



Eighty-seven farmers from various districts within the governorate participated and the products were readily available at the Salalah Central Market.

production efficiency.

During the 2026 season, the project recorded remarkable production results, with approximately 98,447.5 kilogrammes of turmeric received across Dhofar Governorate and approximately 468 kilogrammes of ginger produced.

Eighty-seven farmers from various districts within the

governorate participated and the products were readily available at the Salalah Central Market.

The Wilayat of Dhalkout led in production volume with a total exceeding 52,000 kilogrammes of turmeric and 215 kilogrammes of ginger, followed by the Wilayats of Rakhyout, Salalah and Mirbat. This reflects the gradual expansion

of the project and its success in attracting more farmers.

In this context, the Oman Agriculture Development Company continued purchasing turmeric from local farmers for the third consecutive season through designated collection points.

This step aims to enhance the sustainability of local production and open stable marketing channels for Omani farmers.

The project also witnessed significant development in the processing industries with the establishment of the Dhofar Mountains Turmeric Factory, the first of its kind in the Middle East for processing and packaging turmeric.

This contributes to increasing the added value of the local product and enhancing export opportunities to regional and international markets.

Regarding the ginger project, production in its second phase increased to approximately 2.5 tonnes, with the expansion of modern agricultural technologies and advanced irrigation methods.

This is part of a plan aimed at reducing reliance on imports and encouraging the cultivation of

highly profitable cash crops.

The project is viewed as a promising investment platform linking the agricultural sector with manufacturing industries, offering opportunities in the production of spices, medicinal extracts and nutritional supplements, as well as investments in packaging, greenhouses, specialised nurseries, logistics and cold storage.

These projects align with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which aims to increase self-sufficiency in basic food commodities to over 75%, raise the contribution of the agricultural, fisheries and water resources sector to the GDP to over 2% and attract investments exceeding RO 1.3 billion in the food security sector and related industries.

Experts believe that the success of the project to localise turmeric and ginger cultivation in Dhofar reflects the Omani agricultural sector's ability to transform into a productive economic sector based on innovation and added value, thus enhancing the Sultanate of Oman's position among the leading countries regionally in food security and sustainable agriculture.

ENERGY COSTS

India raises fuel prices again



Indian state-owned fuel retailers increased petrol and diesel prices for the third time this month as higher global crude prices linked to the Iran conflict continued to pressure costs.

Petrol prices rose to 99.51 rupees per litre, while diesel increased to 92.49 rupees. India, the world's third-largest oil importer, had delayed retail price adjustments despite rising international energy prices. — Reuters

AUTO INDUSTRY

Nissan unit drops UK plan



A subsidiary of Nissan Motor has abandoned plans to manufacture electric vehicle powertrains in Sunderland, Britain, amidst weak demand for Nissan electric vehicles in Europe. JATCO had planned to invest £48.7 million in the facility.

Nissan is currently reviewing production operations globally following weaker sales in key markets including the US and China. — Reuters

ECONOMIC PRESSURE

US consumer mood hits low



US consumer sentiment fell to a record low in May as rising fuel prices linked to the Iran conflict intensified concerns over the cost of living.

A survey showed declining confidence among Republicans and independents, reflecting dissatisfaction with economic conditions. Higher gasoline prices tied to Strait of Hormuz tensions have increased costs for energy, goods and industrial materials. — Reuters

OPINION

Ripples of war reach India and China



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an Assistant Professor at the Marketing and Management Department, CBFS

CHINA and India together account for more than one-fifth of global GDP and energy demand. China is the world's second-largest economy, with a GDP of around \$19 trillion. India has overtaken Japan in total GDP, becoming the world's fourth-largest economy in 2026; however, both countries' GDP per capita remain far lower than that of advanced economies.

Hence, these two countries are the world's largest and fastest-growing emerging economies. Inadvertently, the US-Israel-Iran war has caused a historic disruption of tectonic proportions with unprecedented ramifications. The war has created a global shortage of oil and gas, triggering a urea crisis and driving oil prices above \$100 per barrel.

This resulted in simultaneous currency fluctuations and energy transitions. Difficult global situations require country leaders to make swift decisions to protect their citizens, resources and economic growth amidst a global crisis. China's President Xi Jinping and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi have skillfully put plans into place to lessen the effects of the ongoing conflict between the United States, Israel and Iran, especially the interruptions brought on by the blockage of the Strait of Hormuz.

Against the backdrop of record-high fuel prices, heads of state have urged citizens to adopt behavioural changes in

their consumption patterns. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged people to resume working from home, cut non-essential foreign travel, save fuel and pause gold purchases for a year to reduce fuel consumption and the import bill.

Beijing, on the other hand, emphasised state planning & maintaining energy price stability through controls and subsidies. The Indian Government, to shield households from energy price increases, cut excise taxes on petrol and diesel and took further measures to keep pump prices relatively stable by simultaneously providing oil companies with fuel subsidies and imposing windfall taxes on exporters.

China's Xi Jinping has used state contracts and subsidies, expanded long-term contracts with suppliers beyond the conflict area and drawn on significant strategic oil reserves. China and India have taken distinct yet overlapping approaches to reducing the risk of supply chain disruptions. China is working to expand local coal and renewable energy sources to reduce its reliance on seaborne oil amidst disruptions, while India is increasing its imports of fertiliser and LPG from non-Middle Eastern sources.

Recently, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) rightly described India as being in a Goldilocks phase: high growth and low inflation. This balance is now being tested as the ongoing war has driven the Indian currency to a record low. The RBI has

Inadvertently, the US-Israel-Iran war has caused a historic disruption of tectonic proportions with unprecedented ramifications. The war has created a global shortage of oil and gas, triggering a urea crisis and driving oil prices above \$100 per barrel.

intervened in the foreign-exchange market to curb the depreciation of the Indian rupee, while also using its reserves to curb speculation and manage liquidity and interest rates.

China has retained the renminbi within a band using capital flow measures and has kept monetary policies relatively supportive. Fundamentally, while India allows the rupee to move more freely and focuses on inflation and growth, China runs a tightly managed exchange rate, using capital controls and foreign exchange intervention to keep the renminbi within a narrow band.

India has adopted a reactive cushion approach, including subsidies, tax cuts, foreign-exchange defence measures and patriotic appeals to citizens. However, structural changes to energy supply, demand and transport are necessary to reduce vulnerability. China has recalibrated its energy security to align with its growth model, doubling down on reserves, supplier diversification, renewables, grids and EVs to better absorb shocks.

The US-Israel-Iran war and the resulting global crisis or future unexpected geopolitical escalations can be negotiated to cushion people today and systematically reduce exposure tomorrow. Moving forward, other emerging countries can adopt a strategy of short-term cushioning and long-term investment with resilience, rather than firefighting.

SpaceX seals private market's triumph over public

JEFFREY GOLDFARB

SpaceX is the final frontier for corporate governance. Elon Musk's rockets-to-artificial-intelligence venture stands poised to raise some \$75 billion in a record initial public offering. Throngs of eagerly queuing investors, including possibly giant asset manager BlackRock, also appear ready to sacrifice considerable protection for the risky ride. In doing so, they further shrink the distinction between private and public companies.

A big aspect of closely held firms leaping onto bourses is greater accountability to more investors.

Musk sees things differently. He will control more than half of SpaceX, as he does now, with a special class of shares that confers 10 votes apiece, according to excerpts from the IPO prospectus.

The billionaire also is forcing holders of one-vote shares to pursue legal grievances in private arbitration instead of the courts.

A "controlled company" designation under US securities law entrenches Musk even deeper by removing the requirement to populate important board committees with independent members. By moving to Texas, SpaceX also has secured extra insulation from proxy contests and takeover bids. Musk explicitly retains sole power to elect all directors and fire the chairman and CEO, roles he himself holds.

The ability to raise heaps of money before an IPO, like OpenAI's \$122 billion funding round, has curbed the allure of public listings.

Outside investors have responded by allowing the spread of feudal shareholder structures everywhere from Mark Zuckerberg's Meta Platforms to Black Rock Coffee Bar. A Trump administration initiative that would allow public companies to publish financial information twice a year instead of quarterly further blurs the line.

SpaceX stretches these concessions into the stratosphere. A \$1.75 trillion valuation target, though, gives it considerable clout. Money managers can ill-afford to exclude so big and hyped a company from their portfolios. Some are at least squawking.

New York and California public pension funds expressed "serious concerns" last week about SpaceX's structure and Musk's shoddy governance track record at Tesla. They asked him to reconsider, but the choice will be either to genuflect or not buy the stock. Opting out would be risky, too.

When entrepreneurs keep a firmer grip, the company's stock tends to outperform, at least initially, according to one academic study.

— Reuters

The force that stops firms from changing

CHANGE initiatives fail at a rate that should, by now, have prompted a fundamental rethinking of how organisations approach them. Study after study, across industries and geographies, finds that the majority of major organisational transformations do not achieve their intended outcomes.

The explanations offered are familiar: poor communication, insufficient resources, leadership turnover, employee resistance. These factors are real. They are also, in most cases, symptoms rather than causes. The deeper force that stops organisations from changing is rarely the one that appears on the post-mortem report.

That force is identity. Not individual identity, but organisational identity the accumulated sense of what the institution is, what it stands for, what kind of organisation it has always been. This identity is not written in any document.

It lives in the stories people tell about how the organisation works, in the behaviours that are rewarded and the behaviours that are quietly penalised, in the phrases that appear repeatedly in internal conversations and in the assumptions so widely shared that they have ceased to feel like assumptions at all.

It is, in the deepest sense, the organisation's understanding of itself. And it is extraordinarily resistant to change — not because people are stubborn, but because identity is the framework through which every proposed change gets interpreted.

Organisations do not resist change because they cannot change. They resist it because the change threatens something more fundamental than their processes it threatens their story about who they are.

When a change initiative is announced, the formal response in meetings, in communications, in stated commitments is often positive. People understand the logic. They can articulate why



The deeper force that stops organisations from changing is rarely the one that appears on the post-mortem report. For illustration only.



KAMLA AL RAHBI

The writer is a leadership and business strategist

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the change is necessary. They can describe, accurately, the competitive or operational pressures that make the status quo untenable.

And then, in the day-to-day fabric of organisational life, the change encounters something that logic alone cannot overcome: every decision, every conversation, every small behavioural choice gets filtered through the existing identity. What fits the identity moves easily.

What challenges it encounters friction not opposition, but the quiet, persistent, structurally embedded friction of an organisation continuing to be what it has always been.

This is why changes that are technically sound and organisationally well-resourced still fail. It is not that people do not understand what is being asked of them. It is that doing what is being asked requires them to inhabit a version of the organisation and of themselves within it that does not yet feel real.

The change asks them to act from a new identity before that identity has been built. And until the new identity becomes as deeply embedded as the old one, the gravitational pull of the existing self-concept will continue to shape behaviour in ways that work against the stated direction.

The organisations that change successfully are not those that overcome resistance. They are those that build a new identity compelling

enough to make the old one feel insufficient. Understanding this does not make change easier. But it does redirect attention towards what actually needs to happen for change to stick.

The question is not primarily how to reduce resistance; it is how to build the new identity that the change requires.

This is different work from communication planning or stakeholder management, though it includes elements of both. It is the work of making the desired future state feel like a genuine description of what the organisation is becoming, rather than a set of directives about what it should do differently.

This work happens through specific, repeated experiences not through announcements. When the behaviours the change requires are visibly recognised and rewarded, the new identity becomes more real.

When leaders model the new ways of working in their own daily decisions — not just in formal settings but in the informal moments where culture is actually made the organisation begins to develop a new self-concept. When early evidence of success under the new approach is surfaced and shared, people begin to construct a new story about what kind of organisation they belong to.

None of this is fast. Identity change at an organisational level takes time measured in years, not quarters. This creates a genuine tension with the pace at which competitive environments demand adaptation.

The organisations that navigate this tension most effectively are those that have learned to distinguish between the behavioural changes that can be achieved through clear direction and adequate support; and the identity-level changes that require sustained attention to culture, narrative and the lived experience of people within the organisation.

The most important insight about organisational change is not that it is difficult. Most leaders already know that.

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POPHISTORY

BEATLES TO OPEN FIRST LONDON MUSEUM



Singer Paul McCartney and Apple Corps have announced the opening next year of the first official London museum dedicated to The Beatles. — AFP

The Beatles' first official London museum is set to open next year in the Mayfair building where the band recorded its final album and played its last gig, Paul McCartney announced recently.

The attraction — “The Beatles at 3 Savile Row” — will feature seven floors of never-seen-before archive material and a recreated basement studio where the Fab Four recorded their 1970 Let It Be album.

Visitors to the venue on the upmarket central London block, better known globally for its traditional bespoke tailors, will also get access to its rooftop, where the band staged an iconic performance in 1969.

“Tourists come to England and they can go to Abbey Road, but they can’t go inside, so I thought this was a terrific idea”, McCartney said.

The 83-year-old pop legend said it stemmed from efforts by Apple Corps, the company which has overseen the band’s business interests since 1968, to reexamine “what the Beatles mean and what people want these days from us”.

The company previously owned the Savile Row building for eight years from 1968 and it served as the band’s headquarters for two years prior to their 1970 break-up and for business purposes afterwards.

“We’re thrilled to bring Apple Corps back to its spiritual home and give Beatles fans something truly special”, its CEO Tom Greene said in a statement.

“Every single day, fans are taking pictures of the outside of 3 Savile Row”, he added.

“But next year they can go in and explore all seven floors of the iconic building, including the rooftop where even the railings remain the same from that famous day in 1969”.

Footage of the famous January 30, 1969, concert, the last time anyone saw the Fab Four perform publicly, was recently restored and included in Peter Jackson’s Get Back documentary about the band.

Speaking to the BBC, McCartney said visitors will ascend the Savile Row building and see “various things”, including memorabilia, before they can “pretend to be a Beatle” on the roof.

It will also feature rotating exhibitions and a fan store, according to Apple Corps.

“There are so many special memories within the walls, not to mention the rooftop”, McCartney added in the official statement.

Ringo Starr, 85, the only other living Beatle, called the exhibition “like coming home”. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FILM FESTIVAL

Rwandan director and screenwriter Marie-Clementine Dusabejambo with the trophy after winning the Camera d’Or Prize for the film “Ben’Imana” at the 79th edition of the Cannes Film Festival. — AFP



FASHION

A worker sews fabric to make PANAFRICA brand trainers in the first trainers manufacturing factory in Koumassi, a district of Abidjan. — AFP



HISTORY

US singer-songwriter Miley Cyrus’s newly unveiled star is seen during her Walk of Fame Star unveiling ceremony in Hollywood, California. — AFP

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RESCUE DOG YURI STEALS CANNES SPOTLIGHT

Cannes may be best known for its A-list stars, but Yuri the rescue dog stole the spotlight on Friday, winning the most anticipated unofficial award of the festival, the Palm Dog, for her performance in Chilean drama “La Perra”.

Judges praised Yuri’s naturalistic performance and her central contribution to the plot when picking the pooch, whose prize was a red collar emblazoned with “Palm Dog” on it.

Director Dominga Sotomayor Castillo took to the stage overlooking the clear blue waters of the French Riviera with another rescue dog named Apocalypse, who humbly accepted the prize on Yuri’s behalf, to claps and barks of approval.

The Palm Dog, a play on the festival’s top prize, the Palme d’Or, has evolved from a cheeky sideshow event to a genuinely coveted prize since film journalist Toby Rose started it in 2001.

“La Perra”, which premiered in the Directors’ Fortnight independent sidebar, revolves around a woman living on a remote Chilean island who impulsively adopts a puppy named Yuri.

“It’s not a dog doing lots of tricks. But it (the film) really



shows the bond and how this woman’s life improves once Yuri, the dog, comes into it”, said judge and film journalist Wendy Mitchell, wearing a hat decorated with small plush dogs.

Yuri beat six other competitors to take the top prize. “We are very strict in our criteria and what is a Palm Dog winning performance. The dogs over the years have been unbelievable”, organiser Rose said after the award.

Past winners include Messi, the Border collie from Justine Triet’s “Anatomy of a Fall”, who converted his star power into a French TV show, as well as Uggie, a Jack Russell who helped launch a wider craze for the breed with “The Artist” in 2011. — Reuters



Through Jabal Akhdhar’s rugged canyons and cliffs

DR KHALED ABDUL MALAK

LAST WEEK, my friend Rami asked me if I wanted to join him and another three friends to go camping in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and travel from Al Khoof to Al Faraa through Wadi Sleila, a tributary of Wadi Qasheh, a main branch of Wadi Tanuf. The last time I visited Wadi Sleila was a few years ago.

I was happy to join them and on Thursday after lunch, Rami picked me up from home. We drove to Birkat Al Mouz to meet our friend Hamood, who would drive all three of us to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

It was 6 pm when we reached Al Khoof, where Mohamed, a good old friend of mine, had a small farm.

Every time I go there, we camp at Mohamed’s place.

It was the perfect time to be there at that moment of the day because we could admire a magnificent sunset.

Our two other friends, Lina driving from Abu Dhabi and Sultan from Nizwa, arrived around 8:30 pm.

We had a delicious dinner before going to our tents, not too late as we had to wake up at 5 am to start our trip no later than 7 am, as our journey would be quite long.

Everyone set their alarm for 5 am and we were all up to pack our camping gear in the cars and have breakfast before the start of our wadi crossing.

Sultan had arranged for two drivers to bring our cars to the village of Al Faraa at the end of our trip. At 7 sharp, we were all ready with our backpacks filled with ropes, climbing gear, food and water for the day.

Our journey started by following an old trail linking the villages of Al Khoof and Al Faraa. The path goes on a superb plateau between two canyons, Wadi Qasheh and Wadi Sleila. After progressing on the flat terrain, we had to climb down into Wadi Sleila to reach a place where I had set an anchor to abseil down a first drop around 10 years ago. This descent is around 25 metres.

I was the first one to go down, followed by the others.

Then we travelled in the wadi bed to reach the second drop of 40 metres. The view from this point is breathtaking. We could see Wadi Qasheh crack hundreds of metres below.

Once we all abseiled this pendular drop, we had to avoid a massive cliff of around 350m and abseil another 3 drops, measuring approximately 200 metres divided into three sections from the left bank of the canyon. It was already very hot at this moment of the day and we were exposed to the sun while we were descending this massive cliff, but we were very happy to see the fresh pools in the wadi bed where we would cool down once we got there.

It was already 1:30 pm when we reached the ‘promised’ fresh ponds where we had a snack and a long



break to enjoy this small ‘paradise’. From there, we had to do six more drops to reach Wadi Qasheh.

It was already 5:30 pm when we arrived at Wadi Qasheh. Once again, we stopped for a short break to savour some dried fruits and crackers that Lina had hidden in her bag! From that place, it would take us approximately an hour to reach the village of Al Faraa, where the drivers were supposed to bring our cars.

Walking in the wadi bed was very pleasant. It consisted of traveling

between boulders, swimming in a few pools, which was very much welcomed as temperatures at this time of the year were approaching 40 degrees, even late in the afternoon!

We reached Al Faraa around 7:30 pm and it took us more than 12 hours to finish our journey.

For me, canyoning is not a race; one must spend time to ‘savour’ every place and take lots of pictures to share them later with the world and show how beautiful and unique our beloved Oman is!

FEATURES



BRINGING HAJ TO LIFE THROUGH PLAY

TEACHING VALUES THROUGH PLAY AND CONNECTION

RUQAYA AL KINDI

EVERY YEAR, as the Haj season approaches, millions of Muslims travel towards Mecca. While this journey may seem distant from children's daily lives, its meanings can be introduced through simple experiences shaped by play, repetition and emotional connection.

At Shamsa al Tenaji's home, Haj becomes a hands-on learning activity. Her children build a cardboard model of the Kaaba, create a sand path symbolising the pilgrimage route and perform tawaf using dolls dressed in white cloth representing ihram. Through these activities, abstract ideas become visible, tangible and easier to understand.

Shamsa, a Montessori teacher and certified positive parenting trainer, explains that children learn more effectively through experience than explanation. "They learn by seeing, touching and doing", she says. Instead of focusing on complex details, she presents Haj as a journey of unity, patience and connection with God and others. She links it to familiar experiences such as travel or gathering in large crowds, helping children emotionally relate to the concept.

She adds that children understand emotions before details. When they learn that millions of people take part in Haj, they begin to sense belonging to something larger than themselves. This emotional approach helps build early awareness of shared human experience.

Educational specialists also recommend presenting Haj not as abstract information, but as a meaningful journey any child can understand –



While this journey may seem distant from children's daily lives, its meanings can be introduced through simple experiences shaped by play, repetition and emotional connection.

one that teaches patience, effort, cooperation and the feeling of being part of a greater whole. Family counselor Fatima Abbas, specialising in early childhood education, explains that Haj rituals carry powerful symbolic lessons when presented in simple terms. The sa'i between

Safa and Marwa reflects perseverance and hope, inspired by Hajar's search for water for her son Ismail. Tawaf represents unity and collective purpose, while ihram symbolises equality, as all pilgrims stand alike regardless of wealth or status. She emphasises that learning through play strengthens

emotional memory and helps children retain values long-term. Fatima also highlights the importance of connecting these meanings to daily life. Children experience perseverance when learning to ride a bicycle, swimming, or solving difficult problems without giving up. These

moments mirror the meaning of sa'i as continuous effort and hope. Even observing animals, such as birds learning to fly, can reinforce ideas of growth and persistence. She adds that everyday social behaviours also reflect Haj's values. Waiting for one's turn, sharing food or toys, or

helping younger siblings all teach patience, generosity and equality. These repeated actions allow children to internalise values naturally through lived experience.

According to Fatima, children do not learn only through reasoning but through emotional repetition. "These small moments stay with them for years", she explains. When values are consistently practiced at home or in daily interactions, they become part of a child's character rather than abstract ideas.

Shamsa observes this learning in her own children. During play, they sometimes say, "We are doing Haj", or move together saying, "All together". These expressions show that they have absorbed meaning, not just information. For children, understanding appears in behaviour, imagination and repeated action rather than verbal explanation.

In this way, Haj becomes more than a yearly religious event. It turns into a lasting emotional memory shaped in childhood, growing quietly alongside the child and reinforcing values such as unity, patience and belonging.

Through play-based learning and value-linked routines, children understand that Haj is not simply a journey to a distant place, but an inner journey towards meaning and purpose that can be reflected in everyday life.

Although Haj is an Islamic act of worship, its values extend beyond religion. As Fatima Abbas notes, it reflects a broader human message: the gathering of people from diverse languages, cultures and backgrounds, united in shared purpose. It emphasises hope, discipline, patience, equality and belonging to a community larger than oneself.