

P15

OMANI FIRM INKS PACT WITH ONE MOTO TO LEAD EV TRANSFORMATION



P10

BAGNAIA PIPS MARTIN TO WIN CATALUNYA GRAND PRIX, MARQUEZ



P20

OMANI FILM EXPLORES THE DEPTHS OF HUMAN COMPASSION



■ NIZWA

WORK ON PROJECTS IN AL DAKHILIYAH



The implementation rate of the development and operational projects in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate has reached 66 per cent. The projects come within the Governorate Development Programme and the development budget applied until the end of May of this year. Some of these projects will be completed during the first half of this year. Once completed, the projects will be among the significant tourist destinations that serve the local community and visitors. Shaikh Hilal bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, said: “The implementation of some projects will start shortly while others will be completed including the development of the Nizwa gateway, currently at 85 per cent implementation rate with the basic infrastructure being completed.” **DETAILS ON P3**

■ A NATURAL ESCAPE IN AL AWABI



The Wilayat of Al Awabi in Al Batinah South Governorate is witnessing an increasing turnout of local and Arab tourists, thanks to its unique tourism features - from the diversity of its picturesque natural terrain to the moderation of its climate, and the presence of many historical and archaeological landmarks, in addition to Omani hospitality. Among the most important tourist destinations that attract visitors to the Wilayat of Al Awabi, the Jalb area stands out, which is located about 26 km from the centre of the wilayat. **DETAILS ON P5**

TOURISTS CAN GET A TRULY LOCAL EXPERIENCE IN OMAN

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

The Sultanate of Oman is the best place for tourists to get local experience by interacting with citizens, the Minister of Heritage and Tourism told the Observer in an exclusive interview. Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, said: “Oman offers tourists a slice of history, geography, natural landscape, adventure, culture and heritage, and more. It is the best time to be here in winter while the the southern part of the country is a destination throughout the year. Tourists coming to Oman will find quality, experiences and plenty of choices. Tourists can get in contact with Omanis at different levels and therefore that is an asset by itself. Tourists are looking now for experience and direct contact with local communities, which is possible in Oman.” On unified GCC tourist visa, he said: “The unified tourist visa has been approved and will be implemented soon. We are meeting regularly and authorities responsible for making this possible through a unified mechanism will start implementing it at the earliest. It will be enforced by the beginning of next year.” **TURN TO P5**

Don't fall prey to phishing and fraud

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH @lakshmioman

The Royal Oman Police has warned against falling prey to fraudulent practices by dealing with fake websites that are made to look identical to official government websites, through which victims are lured resulting in extraction of their personal and banking data as well as money by accessing their bank accounts. The ROP has called on everyone to verify the authenticity and reliability of the websites and not to share any personal or banking information. Phishing is a very common threat that net users face all around the world, and Oman, is no exception says a young Tech Entrepreneur. According to Hajid al Kindi, nowadays phishing schemes have become more creative and common. While cyber security as a sector is expected to grow in strength, public awareness is crucial, say the experts. “Almost every month we see a new phishing scheme and the entire concept of phishing is that at least one in 100 people will fall for it and that is enough for online predators,” Al Kindi said. In order to recognise phishing, or the fake websites individuals must verify the source of the information that they receive, for instance a bank will never text the customer on WhatsApp asking for an OTP number. “Also another common scheme is when an individual displays a product for sale on OLX or Opensouq - there are schemes where individuals with non-Omani phone numbers give you a URL and the individual is then asked to enter their bank details,” he pointed out. Al Kindi said many other schemes are conducted via phone calls by individuals who disguise and present themselves as private companies or government entities, so each person should ensure the following in order to protect themselves online. “If you believe a message is suspicious listen to the inner voice telling you not to fall for it; look out for any spelling mistakes in emails you get and also verify whether the email address has a business account.”

Oman condemns Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip

ALGIERS: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Council of Oman, on Sunday participated in tasks of the 36th conference of the Arab Parliamentary Union, being held in the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. The two-day conference discusses the current situation in the Arab region, the challenges facing joint Arab action, and ways to enhance cooperation between the Union's member states. In particular, the conference also discusses developments on the Palestinian issue, notably the brutal aggression staged by Israeli occupation forces against Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, as well as means to extend support to Palestine. Speaking at the conference, Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Majlis Ashshura Chairman, underscored the significance of realising Arab unity as the sole way to restore the status of the Arab nation among other nations. He said “It is necessary to rebuild bridges of trust and brotherhood and end conflicts that only serve the enemies of the nation”. Al Maawali pointed out that the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip “exposed false slogans” and that “calls for peace that need to be heeded should have a solid, unified



Palestinians react after an Israeli strike on a building in Nuseirat on Sunday. – AFP

Arab position backing them”. He added, “An observer of the situation of Palestine would realise that this occupation force only recognises the standards of force and the leverage of confrontation.” Al Maawali praised the position of global media, which he said, showed the whole world the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause, the tragedies Palestinians are undergoing and the aggression of the brutal Israeli occupation. “Resistance against this occupation is nothing but an inherent right to defend an occupied land against the occupier,” said Al Maawali. **SEE ALSO P6**

■ CYCLONE REMAL HITS BANGLADESH

Men push a fishing boat to a sea shore as a preventive measure during rainfall in Kuakata on Sunday, as Cyclone Remal made landfall on Bangladesh's coast. An intense cyclone smashed into the low-lying coast of Bangladesh, with nearly a million people fleeing inland for concrete storm shelters away from howling gales and crashing waves. – AFP





Visiting
1, 2 & 3
June

Burjeel Hospital, Al Khuwair

omanburjeel
www.burjeelhospitaloman.com

Injured on the field?

We'll help you come back stronger, faster, and more resilient.

Dr. Raghunathan Narayanasamy
Consultant - Orthopedics (Sports Medicine & Joint Surgeon)

24399777
92167571

برجيل
burjeel
hospital
a burjeel holdings company

SALE

20% - 60%

Terms & Conditions apply

CR 116377

Clarks

SHOEMAKERS SINCE 1825

Al Khamis Plaza, Qurum - Tel. 24560992 | Muscat Grand Mall - Tel. 24399930 | Al Hail South - Tel. 24558148
Al Khamis Shoes, Sohar - Tel. 26841178 | Al Khamis Shoes, Al Hail - Tel. 24543045 | 93894474

Sayyid Dr Kamil receives ‘Order of the Star of Italy’

MUSCAT: The “Ordine della Stella d’Italia” (Order of the Star of Italy). Knighthood with the rank of Knight (Cavaliere), was conferred on His Highness Sayyid Dr Kamil bin Fahd al Said Secretary-General of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers on Sunday. His Excellency Pierluigi D’Elia, Ambassador of the Republic of Italy to the Sultanate of Oman, officiated at the ceremony.

The Patron of the Order of the prestigious Star of Italy is the President of the Republic of Italy. The order is bestowed on expatriates and foreigners who achieve extraordinary results in the preservation and promotion of Italy’s national prestige and in augmenting bilateral relations between Italy and other countries. This great honour was accorded to His Highness Sayyid Dr Kamil in recognition of his significant contributions in strengthening cultural relations between Republic of Italy and the Sultanate of Oman through



collaboration between Italy and Oman.”

He noted that His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik continues to advance the noble ideals envisioned by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said for the Royal Opera House Muscat, which “has become the flagship of these ideals with its commitment to excellence in programming and in fostering ties of friendship and understanding.”

His Excellency the Ambassador praised the role of His Highness the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. “His Highness Sayyid Dr Kamil has played a vital role in strengthening the cultural relations between Italy and Oman through the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM), specifically in promoting performances, exhibitions and initiatives related to the tradition of Italian Opera and music in the Sultanate of Oman and supporting Omani cultural initiatives such as the participation at the Venice Art Biennale,” he said.

his dedicated work with the Royal Opera House Muscat since 2006.

In a speech during the ceremony, His Highness Sayyid Dr Kamil remarked that the conferral of the Order of the Star of Italy “is more than a reflection of personal achievement as it also signifies the inestimable value of friendship in the international domain and of the fruitful

Transform today, redefine tomorrow

Join us at COMEX to find out how our innovations are shaping industries around the world, hear from experts on key topics and learn how we are set to reshape how you run your business in Oman.

27 – 30 May, Exhibition Hall 2, Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC)

Register for talks via our social media and explore more at vodafone.com

BLACK For Business



Follow us on **facebook**
omanobserver



SAYYID BADR BIDS FAREWELL TO KENYAN AMBASSADOR

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received in his office on Sunday Amina Ali Abdullah, Ambassador of the Republic of Kenya to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty. Sayyid Badr expressed his appreciation for the efforts exerted by the ambassador in enhancing bilateral relations, wishing her success. — ONA

Vocational courses key to development in diverse sectors

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 26

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), through the General Directorate of Vocational Training, recently organised an online seminar to introduce vocational colleges and their specialisations.

This event targeted general education diploma students, their parents, and vocational guidance supervisors, aiming to reach the widest possible audience.

Ahmed bin Salim al Jabri, Head of the Student and Trainee Affairs Department, presented a detailed visual overview of the vocational programs available at vocational colleges throughout the Sultanate of Oman.

These programmes are structured into four levels, with



two levels — Professional Diploma and Proficiency (3) — designed for general education diploma graduates, and Proficiency (1) for tenth and eleventh-grade students.

Al Jabri emphasised that all these levels are integrated within the National Qualifications Framework, which is overseen by the Omani Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education.

Dr Ruqaya bint Humaid al Wahaibiyah delivered a lecture from the Vocational College in

Saham, highlighting various aspects of the educational environment within vocational colleges. She discussed the services provided, and the colleges' role in cultivating a generation of skilled professionals who can contribute significantly to national progress and development in diverse sectors.

The MoHERI, is committed to enhancing the educational and training system to better align with labour market needs. This involves creating educational standards that bridge training with market demands, and achieving strategic vocational training goals by developing diverse training pathways and specialisations. These efforts are aimed at fostering competitiveness, meeting global standards, supporting the knowledge economy, and advancing sustainable development goals.

AL DAKHILIYAH PROJECTS 66 PER CENT COMPLETE

NIZWA: The implementation rate of the development and operational projects in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate has reached 66 per cent.

The projects come within the Governorate Development Programme and the development budget applied until the end of May of this year. Some of these projects will be completed during the first half of this year. Once completed, the projects will be among the significant tourist destinations that serve the local community and visitors.

Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, said: "The implementation of some projects will start shortly while others will be completed including the development of the Nizwa gateway, currently at 85 per cent implementation rate with the basic infrastructure



being completed. We expect it to be completed at the beginning of the second half of this year. It starts from the Firq Bridge all the way to the traffic lights at

the intersection leading to the city centre with a total length of 1.5 km. The project involves creating green areas on both sides of the public road with

a total space of 23,000 square metres." The governor explained that the implementation of the Nizwa Park project, a 150,000-sq metres project, will begin

next month after it has been assigned to the executing company. It will be a recreational park and an integrated site that will benefit all family members. Besides, the project will provide investment opportunities for entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises. It includes a library, an artificial lake with an area of 4,542 square metres, an indoor games hall, 25,000 square metres of green areas, 1,800 square metres of rubber tiles on the children's playground, 4,000 shade trees and flowers in addition to sports facilities, restaurants, among others.

The governor said: "The Al Dakhiliyah Boulevard is one of the development, entertainment, cultural and service projects that will be implemented soon especially after the financial allocations for the project were

provided and the tenders are under process by the Tender Board. It is a partnership between the Governorate Development Programme and the development budget at a cost of RO 7 million. We expect the private sector to contribute RO 1.5 million to boost the project. The project is an extension to the Nizwa gateway project and occupies a total area of 145,000 square metres.

The integrated bus and public transport station in the Wilayat of Nizwa was offered for investment by the private sector in coordination with the Oman National Transport Company (Mwasalat). It will be built on an area of 11,412 square metres and will include a commercial market, a passenger waiting station and car parks, the governor said. — ONA

Bids invited to operate market at Al Baleed Park

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 26

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has invited bids for developing, managing, and operating the Al Baleed Market in Al Baleed Archaeological Park as part of the efforts to empower the local community in the Wilayat of Salalah in the Governorate of Dhofar. A brochure for the project will be available for interested parties who are required to provide a business plan to develop, manage, and

operate the site to ensure the sustainability of the site's operation, submit a copy of the valid commercial register, a preparatory work schedule for the proposed business plan and the start date for developing, operating and managing the site. They should clarify the local added value (ICV), including the number of direct and indirect jobs that the project will provide, and details of previous experiences relevant to the proposed field of work.

The project should provide opportunities to support the

traditional crafts of small and medium enterprise owners and market their products.

The investor will be granted a grace period of up to three years.

Documents will be delivered in sealed envelopes before 1 pm on July 25, 2024, at the headquarters of the General Office of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Al Khuwair, Muscat Governorate, or at the General Directorate of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate.



كلية الدراسات المصرفية والمالية
College of Banking and Financial Studies

٤٠ عامًا من التميز
في التعليم والتدريب
40 Years of Excellence
in Education & Training

Tender Announcement

Tender No.	24/ACC/23539
Name of the Tender	Insurance Services
Tender fees	50.000 OMR
Place of availability of Tender Documents (RFP)	CBFS, Finance Department (Sunday to Thursday 8:00 am to 2:00 pm on working days)
Address to send Prebid queries	"Chairman CSC, CBFS" Email: tc@cbfs.edu.om
Tender bond	2 sealed Envelopes, 1 for Technical and 1 for Financial
Last Date to Collect Document	Sunday 9 th June 2024
Last Date to Submit proposal	Sunday 23 rd June 2024

Empowering Your Future
نمكينكم للمستقبل



BEAT THE HEAT

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

WITH TEMPERATURES hitting over 45 degrees Celsius, experts have urged people on the move to take summer precautions.

Most importantly, one should get hydrated by drinking plenty of water and staying healthy by avoiding dehydrating liquids like alcohol, coffee, tea and caffeinated soft drinks which can be more harmful during summer.

“Cases of dehydration and fatigue are quite common during summer and unless certain precautions are taken to avoid sunstroke and falling prey to heat waves, one wouldn’t be able to stay healthy during the extreme temperatures,” says Dr Mohammed al Rahbi, Head of Emergency Medicine at Al Nahda Hospital.

He said people working under the sun should take good care of themselves as summer approaches and the days get longer, as the dangers of working outside during hot weather are quite hazardous.

“People working outside and blue collar workers need to take sufficient rest in shade during peak hours and confine their work to the earlier part of the day or in the evening and night time. They should also make sure they maintain good hydration,” Dr Al Rahbi adds.

Mini Padikkal, Clinical Dietician at NMC, who advocates wearing caps can protect one from direct sunlight on the face and usage of good sunscreens and frequent sipping of water can protect their complexion, says, “Summer is a testing ground for one’s grit and vigour.

“One needs to drink plenty of water to keep himself hydrated, wear loose and light coloured clothing which is better than wearing dark which will absorb heat,” Mini says.

Summer health issues vary from heat stress, heat stroke, exhaustion, heat cramps or heat rashes. Doctors say that heat can also increase the risk of injuries in workers as heat can result in sweaty palms, fogged-up safety glasses and dizziness.

“Workers who are exposed to extreme heat or work in hot environments may be at risk of heat stress. Exposure to extreme heat can result in occupational illnesses and injuries,” says Dr Viresh Chopra from Oman Dental College.

Additionally, accidental contact with hot surfaces or steam can result in burns. “It is better for the workers outside and people on the move to wear protective clothing and change their clothing if it gets completely drenched, besides wearing wet hats/caps or keeping drenched towels on the head,” Ahmed al Muaini, trainer in HSE.

Medics also advise people to approach a hospital and seek medical care

when symptoms like body aches, dizziness, tiredness, shivering, fever, loose motions, vomiting appear as timely intervention can prevent further loss of water and electrolytes from the body and hasten recovery.

VEHICLE CARE

Summer is even more exhausting for vehicles when the temperatures rise. Incidents of vehicles catching fire is not a rare occurrence these days and precaution is urged to safeguard oneself and others.

Those who are driving in extremely hot weather, should check battery, tyres, cooling systems regularly besides switching the engine off while filling petrol at petrol station. Also, they should pay extra attention not to leave a child alone in a car for longer duration.

Fuel leakage, gas leakage, unauthorised alterations, electrical lines with fuses removed, bulbs that generate excess heat, and even vehicles parked at the parking lots can cause fires.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has warned that the primary thing to do is to avoid elements that are prone to fire or are highly inflammable.

During summer, it is advisable to start the engine, open the windows, get some fresh air, then put on the AC, to cool down the temperature. Also, check if it is in good working condition and tyres are in good condition.



TIPS FOR VEHICLE CARE:

PERFORM MAINTENANCE AT REGULAR INTERVALS

CLEANING NOT ONLY THE EXTERIOR OF THE VEHICLE BUT ALSO THE ENGINE COMPARTMENT

INSPECT GAS LINES AT REGULAR INTERVALS AND CHECK FOR GAS LEAKS FREQUENTLY

USE ORIGINAL PARTS OR PARTS THAT ARE APPROVED AND LEGAL BY THE VEHICLE MANUFACTURERS

DRIVE SAFELY & PRACTICE DEFENSIVE DRIVING PRACTICES AS COLLISIONS CAN LEAD TO FIRE



OMAN CONDEMNS ISRAELI AGGRESSION ON GAZA



ALGIERS: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Council of Oman, on Sunday participated in tasks of the 36th conference of the Arab Parliamentary Union, being held in the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. The two-day conference discusses the current situation in the Arab region, the challenges facing joint Arab action, and ways to enhance cooperation between the Union's member states. – **ONA**

TOURISTS CAN GET A TRULY LOCAL EXPERIENCE IN OMAN

FROM P1

On promoting the Sultanate of Oman and the lack of enough knowledge about the country in some markets, the minister said: "We have not done enough. And therefore a plan is in place to promote Oman in Spain and other countries, and connectivity is an issue. But there are ways to find a solution. Recently, the Brazilian Minister of Tourism was here in Oman, and we spoke about how we can work together. We have plans to approach and open new

markets away from the traditional markets that supply tourists to Oman. We need to focus on the Far East, among others. We need to see many, many tourists coming to Oman as an attraction."

The Middle East region is witnessing huge growth in the tourism sector, and therefore it requires huge investment, he said.

He added, "We want to ensure that we'll have sustainable means and provide accessibility to investors to participate and build the sector that will benefit the countries and their national

economies through social benefits and job opportunities. Challenges we face in the sector are opportunities in disguise."

The regional meeting assessed and set a new direction towards achieving common objectives. There are many challenges, but with challenges come opportunities. Therefore, we're here to create a framework of understanding between us, how we can augment our resources, knowledge and experience, leading towards a common objective.

JALB — A NATURAL ESCAPE IN AL AWABI

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 26

The Wilayat of Al Awabi in the Al Batinah South Governorate is witnessing an increasing turnout from local and Arab tourists alike, thanks to its unique tourist features, from the diversity of its picturesque natural terrain to the moderation of its climate, and the presence of many historical and archaeological landmarks, in addition to Omani hospitality.

Among the most important tourist destinations that attract visitors to the Wilayat of Al Awabi, the Jalb area stands out, which is located about 26 kilometres from the centre of the wilayat.

Jalb is distinguished by its picturesque natural scenery, as it is surrounded by towering mountains from all sides, and green farms and orchards are spread in it, characterised by their geometric shape, which comes from the name of the region (Jabal).



Jalb is distinguished by its picturesque natural scenery, as it is surrounded by towering mountains from all sides. – **Photos by Nasser al Harrasi**

Jalb is an ideal destination for adventure and mountain sports lovers, where they can enjoy climbing mountains, hiking, and camping in the lap of nature. There are also many hiking trails in the area, which are suitable for all fitness levels. Jalb is also characterised by the moderation of its atmosphere due to its proximity to the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, which is

only about two kilometres away from the village of Al Suwgra on foot.

Mahmoud al Bahri, a resident of the area, said: "The agricultural terraces in Jalb are characterised by diverse seasonal crops. In the summer, it is famous for onions and grapes.

In the winter, Jalb Farm is rich in a unique variety of winter crops, where



garlic, cabbage, cauliflower, zucchini, cucumber, potatoes, eggplant, pepper, and tomatoes are planted. These crops are distinguished by their high quality, thanks to the fertility of the soil and the great care that the people of the region give them.

Al Bahri added that in addition to vegetables, some winter grains such as wheat, barley, and corn are also

grown in Jalb Farm. These grains are one of the basic components of the Omani diet, as they are used in preparing many popular dishes.

He also pointed out that Jalb Farm is irrigated traditionally, using water channels that pass through the farms. This method of irrigation is a symbol of Oman's rich heritage, and it also contributes to preserving the

environment and consuming less water.

Al Bahri added that there is a custom of not planting permanent crops in Jalb terraces for several reasons, where the needs of seasonal crops are limited to intensive care for a specific period, usually during the growing season. While permanent crops require regular care throughout the year, including irrigation, fertilisation, and pest control.

He pointed out that planting seasonal crops does not require as much labour as planting permanent crops. Fruit trees, for example, need periodic care such as pruning and fertilisation, while seasonal crops only require intensive care during their planting and harvesting. He also added that planting seasonal crops consumes fewer resources, such as water and fertilisers, compared to permanent crops. Fruit trees require regular irrigation and intensive fertilisation, while seasonal crops can grow well with less of these resources.

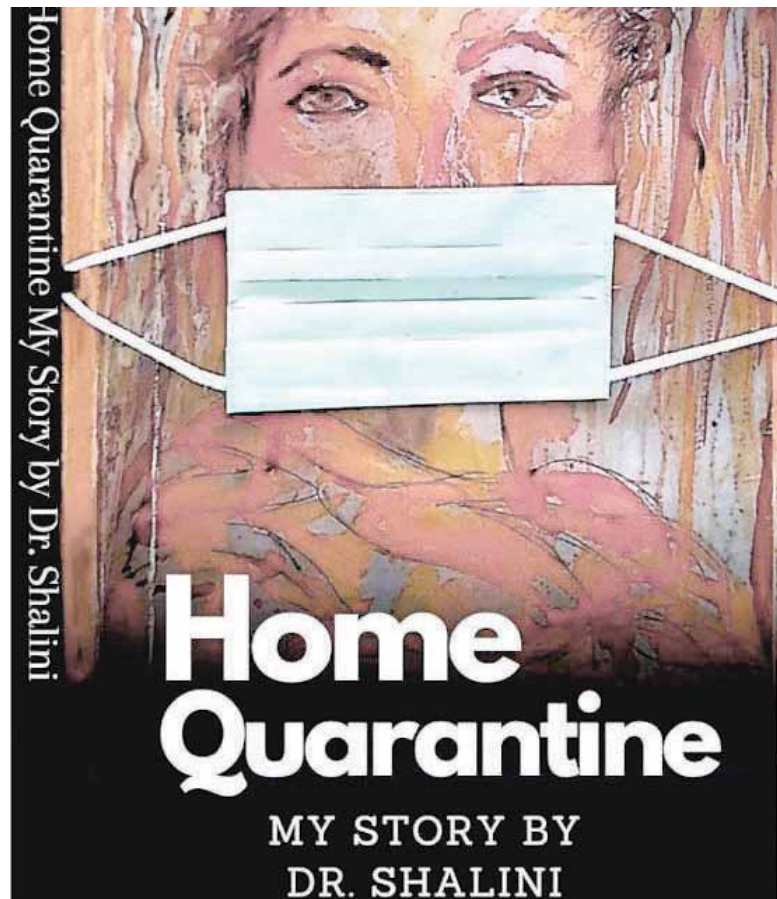
Resident artist launches book on captive creativity

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The emotional transactions and fear of the unknown during the pandemic are aptly portrayed in a one of its kind book of Dr Shalini Gupta Kumar, a renowned Indian poet and artist residing in Muscat who debuted a book documenting her experiences during the quarantine days.

The book which was launched recently with watercolour illustrations consists of 39 poems with corresponding paintings across 80 pages. Each piece reflects her observation of the world around her, from the minute details of people and things in her daily life to profound reflections on human emotions and experiences.

Mohammed bin Issa al Rawahy, an acclaimed curator and artist, translated her emotions in Hindi to Arabic while her friends, wellwishers and others celebrated her artistic journey, which was



The book with watercolour illustrations consists of 39 poems with corresponding paintings across 80 pages

attended by art enthusiasts and media.

She remembered that many, including her son, have supported her in the long journey by contributing to the collection of poetry.

According to Dr Shalini, she delved into her creative process during quarantine, which was her antidote for the virus, and emphasising the importance of taking the time to truly observe and reflect. Her vision extends beyond mere publication, she aspires for her book to reach libraries worldwide, in schools and colleges, due to its relatable theme and message that everyone can easily connect with.

Dr Shalini touched upon the humanity side of it by softly touching on the human experience which is evident as she invited readers to order through email, whatsapp or platforms like Amazon, and embrace moments of solitude, find beauty in the ordinary, and discover new perspectives that resonate.

Moral and legal obligations for 'lost and found' properties

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MAY 26

Finding lost money or property can bring joy to some, leading them to neglect the search for its rightful owner. However, moral principles and legal rules firmly assert that if a person finds lost money, they must make a genuine effort to locate the owner and return it.

If this effort proves unsuccessful, the finder is obligated to hand the item over to the police or a competent authority.

The Oman Legal Network highlighted the legal repercussions for failing to return found property as per Article 361 of the new Omani Penal Code. This article states that anyone who finds lost money and refuses to return it to its owner will face imprisonment for no less than a month and no more than a year, or a fine ranging from RO100 to RO300, or both penalties.

Importantly, the crime of unlawfully retaining found property does not require the intent to possess it at the time of finding it.

The law suffices if the intention to keep the item develops afterward.

Thus, anyone who finds money or property belonging to others must promptly return it to the owner or deliver it to the nearest police station or administrative body to avoid facing potential imprisonment or fines.

CPA recalls BlendJet portable electric blender

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 26

The Consumer Protection Authority, in collaboration with Virgin Megastore, has initiated a recall of 494 BlendJet portable electric blenders, version 2.

Consumers can verify the serial numbers of the affected blenders on the Consumer Protection

Authority's electronic portal at <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>.

The recall is due to the blenders overheating, which can cause them to catch fire and the blades to break, posing a significant safety risk. The manufacturer will replace the recalled blenders. Earlier, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) issued a warning about

a specific electric mixer brand.

The BlendJet 2 electric mixer has manufacturing defects and does not comply with Gulf technical regulations for low-voltage electrical devices, posing a risk to consumer safety. In a separate action, the Consumer Protection Department in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate seized several commercial establishments selling



expired goods and prohibited gelatinous children's toys, violating the Consumer Protection Law, its executive regulations, and Resolution No. (301/2021).

A total of 1,019 items were seized, violations were issued, and the necessary legal actions were taken. The Authority urges all merchants to stay informed about legal, legislative,

and regulatory requirements, maintain communication with the Authority, and ensure their products meet all specifications and standards.

Merchants should also be aware of decisions to withdraw or prohibit certain goods to protect consumer health and safety and avoid legal consequences.



Hamas movement says it captured soldiers in Gaza

CAIRO: A spokesman for Hamas' armed wing said on Sunday its fighters had captured Israeli soldiers during fighting in Jabalia in northern Gaza on Saturday, though the Israeli military denied the claim. The Hamas armed wing spokesman did not say how many soldiers had been abducted and showed no proof of the claim.

"Our fighters lured a Zionist force into an ambush inside a tunnel ... The fighters withdrew after they left all members of the force dead, wounded, and captured," Abu Ubaida, the spokesman for Al Qassam Brigades, said in a recorded message broadcast by Al Jazeera early on Sunday. The Israeli military on Sunday denied the claim by Hamas' armed wing.

"The IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) clarifies that there is no incident in which a soldier was abducted," the military said in a statement.

The Palestinian group released a video that appeared to show a bloodied person being dragged along the ground in a tunnel and photos of military fatigue and rifle.

The comments by Abu Ubaida came hours after prospects for a resumption of mediated Gaza ceasefire talks grew on Saturday.

An official with knowledge of the matter said a decision had been taken to resume the talks next week after the chief of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency met the head of the CIA and the prime minister of Qatar.

The source said that it had been decided that "in the coming week negotiations will open based on new proposals led by the mediators, Egypt and Qatar and with active US involvement."

A Palestinian official later denied Israeli media reports the talks would resume in Cairo on Tuesday, adding that: "There is no date."

— Reuters

ISRAEL INTENSIFIES STRIKES IN THE PALESTINIAN ENCLAVE



Palestinians inspect the aftermath of an Israeli strike on a building in Nuseirat. – AFP

RAFAH: Israel's armed forces heavily bombarded Gaza on Sunday as diplomatic efforts were expected to resume in coming days towards a truce and captives release deal.

Air strikes and artillery shelling rained down again overnight on northern, central and southern area of Gaza in the more than seven-months-old war sparked by October 7 attack.

Fighting has centred on the far-southern city of Rafah despite a chorus of international opposition to a ground invasion of the city.

The UN has warned of looming famine in the besieged territory, where most hospitals are no longer functioning.

In the latest fighting, Gaza's civil defence agency said on Sunday it had retrieved six bodies after a house was targeted in a

Fighting has centred on the far-southern city of Rafah despite a chorus of international opposition to a ground invasion of the city.

strike on Rafah's eastern Khirbet al-Adas neighbourhood.

Witnesses said Israeli artillery had also targeted central Rafah's Yibna camp, and that heavy artillery shelling hit the city's Sooq al-Halal and Qishta neighbourhoods.

Elsewhere in Gaza, Israeli air strikes targeted the Nuseirat camp, and witnesses said heavy artillery shelling hit northern Gaza. Israeli tanks in Gaza City rained heavy gunfire on targets in the Zeitun and Netzarim area, a reporter said.

The Kuwaiti Hospital in Rafah pleaded for fuel deliveries to ensure the "continued operation" of the only medical facility in the area still receiving patients.

Telecommunications operator Paltel said internet access in northern Gaza was disrupted on Saturday "due to the ongoing aggression".

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 35,903 people in Gaza, mostly civilians, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry.

As the bloodiest ever Gaza war grinds on, Israel has faced heavy global pushback over the surging civilian death toll and the destruction of vast swathes of Gaza. Meanwhile, The armed wing of Palestinian group Hamas said on Sunday it had fired a "large rocket barrage" at Israel's commercial hub of Tel Aviv, with

the military reporting it had intercepted several. The Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades said in a post on Telegram that they had targeted Tel Aviv "with a large rocket barrage in response to the Zionist (Israeli) massacres against civilians".

Israel's army said at least eight rockets were fired towards central areas of the country from Gaza's far-southern city of Rafah, where its forces have been battling Palestinian groups.

The military said that "a number of the projectiles were intercepted " by Israeli air defences.

A correspondent in the Gaza Strip reported seeing rockets being fired from Rafah. Rocket sirens blared in Tel Aviv for the first time in months, with an AFP correspondent reported hearing at least three blasts. — AFP

Recognising Palestinian state is 'justice': Spain

BRUSSELS: Recognising the State of Palestine "is justice for the Palestinian people (and) the best guarantee of security for Israel," Spain's foreign minister Jose Manuel Albares said on Sunday alongside Palestinian prime minister Mohammed Mustafa.

Welcoming Spain's move, with Norway and Ireland, to recognise the Palestinian state on Tuesday, Mustafa said, "We want to have every country in Europe to do the same."

Albares and Mustafa spoke side-by-side in Brussels, where the Palestinian leader was also meeting EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide.

Later on Sunday, Mustafa was to have further talks with Borrell, Barth Eide and Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan.

On Monday he will have another meeting in Brussels with the Spanish, Norwegian and Irish ministers. And on Wednesday he will be in Spain.

Israel has warned Spain, Norway and Ireland that ties with them will face "serious consequences" for their announced recognition of a Palestinian state. Israel's devastating war in Gaza in retaliation for October 7 attack has given impetus to countries wanting recognition of the State of Palestine.

They hope that the steps towards a long-elusive two-state solution, with Israel and a Palestinian state, will build foundations for Middle East peace. A majority of UN member countries recognise Palestinian statehood. European countries are split on the issue.

Spain, Norway and Italy will join EU nations Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Sweden in recognising the State of Palestine. Mustafa said recognition of a Palestinian state addresses "the injustice that has been inflicted on the Palestinian people for decades".

— AFP

Aid trucks from Egypt expected to start entering Gaza

CAIRO: Israel prepared on Sunday to allow around 200 aid trucks into Gaza through Kerem Shalom at the southeastern edge of the Palestinian enclave, bypassing the main Rafah crossing that has been blocked for weeks.

The aid shipments follow an agreement between US President Joe Biden and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Friday to temporarily send aid via the crossing.

Khaled Zayed, an official from the Egyptian Red Crescent, said that 200 trucks of aid, including four fuel trucks, were expected to enter on Sunday through the Kerem Shalom crossing.

Egypt's state-affiliated Al Qahera News TV shared a video on social media platform X, showing what it said were aid trucks as they entered Kerem Shalom, which before the current conflict was the main commercial crossing station between Israel, Egypt and Gaza.



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a school sheltering displaced people, in Gaza. – Reuters

The aid shipments follow an agreement between US President Joe Biden and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on Friday to temporarily send aid via the crossing

Israel is under growing pressure to get more aid into Gaza after more than seven months of a war that has caused widespread destruction and hunger in the enclave.

The Rafah crossing, which during the war has been the main entry point into Gaza for humanitarian aid and commercial supplies, has been shut for almost three weeks, since Israel took control of the Palestinian side of the crossing as it stepped up its military offensive in the area on May 6.

Egypt has been increasingly alarmed at the prospect of large numbers of Palestinian refugees

entering its territory from Gaza and has refused to open its side of the Rafah crossing.

Israel has said it is not restricting aid flows and has opened up new crossing points in the north as well as cooperating with the United States, which built a temporary floating pier off the central coast of Gaza to help speed up distribution of supplies.

Israel has meanwhile kept up operations in Rafah despite an order on Friday by the top United Nations court, the International Court of Justice, to stop attacking the city.

On Sunday, Israeli strikes killed at least five Palestinians in Rafah. Israeli tanks have probed around the edges of the city, close to the main southern crossing point into Egypt.

Fighting also continued on Sunday in the northern Gaza area of Jabaliya, a heavily built up area which saw weeks of intense combat earlier in the war. — AFP



omanobserver.com/podcast

world

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

MONDAY | MAY 27 | 2024

7

In brief

■ DHAKA



800,000 SEEK SHELTER AS BANGLADESH BRACES FOR CYCLONE

At least 800,000 Bangladeshis fled their coastal villages on Sunday for concrete storm shelters further inland as the nation prepared for crashing waves when a cyclone makes landfall. Cyclone Remal is set to hit the southern coast and parts of neighbouring India, with Bangladesh's weather department predicting howling gales and gusts of up to 130 kilometres per hour.

"The cyclone could unleash a storm surge of up to four metres above normal astronomical tide, which can be dangerous," official Muhammad Abul Kalam said. Coastal areas are a metre or two above sea level and storm surges can devastate villages. — **AFP**

■ PORT MORESBY



OVER 670 ESTIMATED DEAD IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA LANDSLIDE

More than 670 people are believed to have died after a massive landslide in Papua New Guinea, a UN official said as aid workers and villagers braved perilous conditions in their search for survivors.

"There are an estimated 150-plus houses now buried," said UN migration agency representative Serhan Aktoprak, adding that "670-plus people are assumed dead". "The situation is terrible with the land still sliding. The water is creating a massive risk for everyone involved," added Aktoprak.

An outbreak of tribal violence nearby have seriously hamstrung efforts to get help into the disaster zone. — **AFP**

■ NEW DELHI



6 NEWBORNS KILLED IN FIRE AT INDIA BABY HOSPITAL

Six newborn babies have died after a fire tore through a children's hospital in the Indian capital, with people charging into the flames to rescue the infants, police said on Sunday. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the fire and deaths "heart-rending".

The fire department was called after flames tore through the hospital in Delhi. It was bystanders who spotted the fire and braved the blaze to rescue the newborns.

"All the 12 newborn babies were rescued from the hospital with the help of other people," senior police officer Surendra Choudhary said. — **AFP**

Russian attack on Kharkiv kills 14

KHARKIV: A Russian strike on a crowded DIY hardware store in Kharkiv killed 14 people and wounded dozens more, Ukrainian officials said on Sunday morning, the death toll rising as the country's second-largest city reeled from two attacks a day earlier.

Two guided bombs hit the Epicentr DIY hypermarket in a residential area of the city on Saturday afternoon, Regional Governor Oleh Syniehubov said on national television.

The strikes caused a massive fire which sent a column of thick, black smoke billowing hundreds of metres into the air.

Forty-three people were injured, the local prosecutors' office said, adding that ten of the twelve dead had still not been identified.

Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov said about 120 people had been in the hardware store when the bombs struck.

"The attack targeted the shopping centre, where there were many people," Terekhov said.

In a post on the Telegram app, Ukraine's Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said 16 people were still missing after the strike.

The past week has seen an uptick in strikes on the city after Russian troops stormed across the border, opening a new front north of the city. Russia has bombarded Kharkiv, which lies less than

30 kilometres from its border, throughout the war.

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy issued a plea to Ukraine's Western allies to help boost air defences to keep the country's cities safe. French President Emmanuel Macron, writing on social media platform X, denounced the attack on the store as "unacceptable."

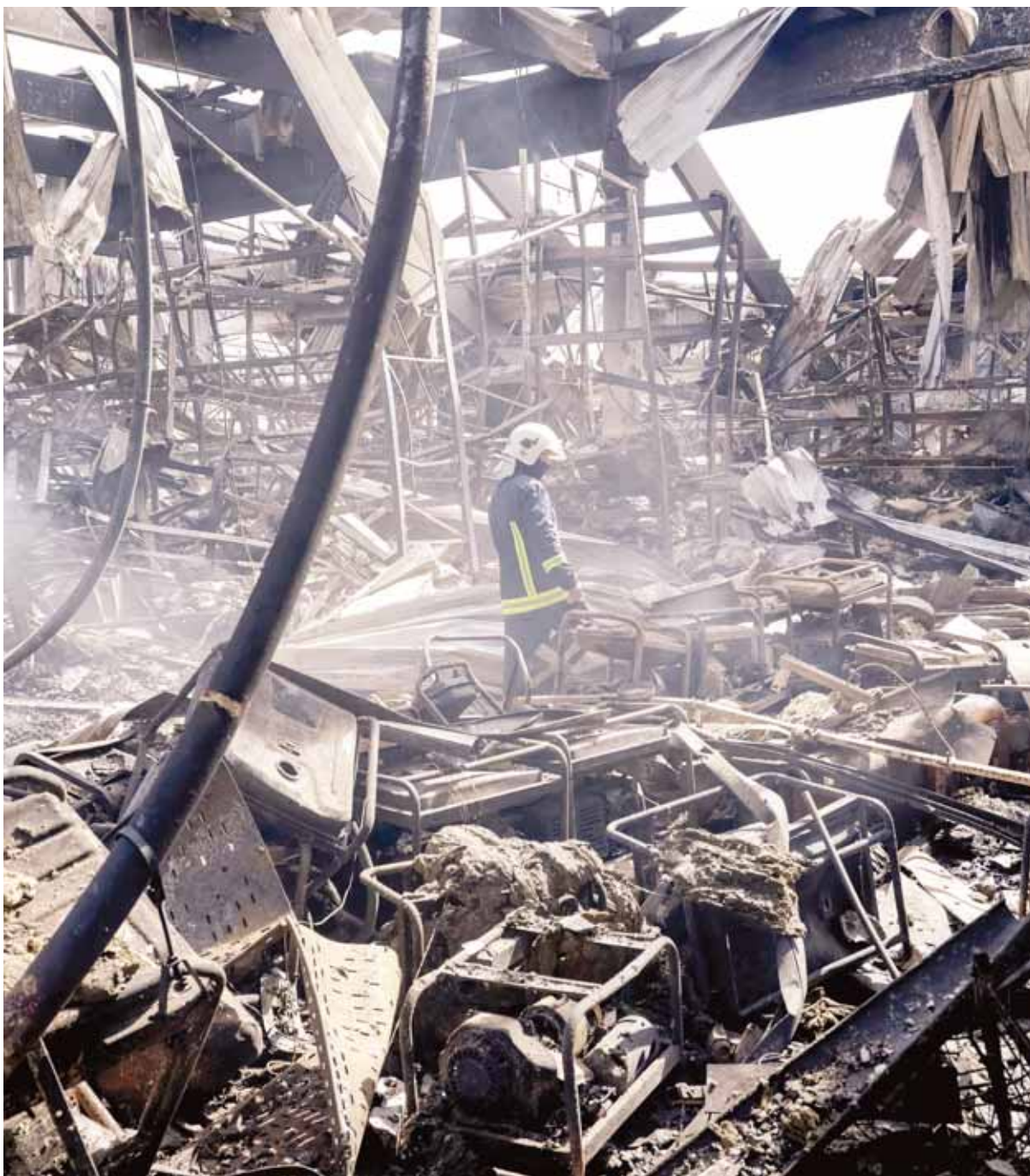
A separate early evening missile strike hit a residential building in the centre of the city of 1.3 million. The number of people wounded by that strike had climbed to 25 by Sunday morning.

The missile left a crater several metres deep in the pavement at the foot of the building, which also housed a post office, a beauty salon and a cafe.

Zelenskiy, in his nightly video address, denounced the strike as "yet another example of Russian madness. There is no other way to describe it."

"When we tell world leaders that Ukraine needs sufficient air defences, when we say we need real decisive measures to enable us to protect our people, so that Russian terrorists cannot even approach our border, we are talking about not allowing strikes like this to happen," he said.

Zelenskiy noted air raid alerts had been in effect in Kharkiv for more than 12 hours and 200 emergency workers and 400 policemen remained aftermath of the attacks. — **Reuters**



Firefighters work at a site of a household items shopping mall hit by Russian airstrike, in Kharkiv. — **Reuters**

China talks security and business with S Korea, Japan



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Chinese Premier Li Qiang attend a meeting in Seoul. — **Reuters**

SEOUL: Chinese Premier Li Qiang agreed with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on Sunday to launch a diplomatic and security dialogue and resume free trade talks, and discussed regional tensions with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

The leaders held bilateral meetings in Seoul a day before the first summit by the three Asian neighbours in more than four years.

Yoon told Li that South Korea and China should work together not only to promote shared interests based on mutual respect but also on regional and global issues to tackle common challenges. "I hope to continue to strengthen bilateral cooperation even in the face of today's global complex crises," Yoon said at the start of the meeting, according to his office.

Yoon asked China to play a greater role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, especially as North Korea

continues to develop nuclear missiles and boost military cooperation with Russia, saying another spy satellite launch using intercontinental ballistic-missile technology is imminent.

Li told Yoon their countries should oppose turning economic and trade issues into political or security ones, and should work to maintain stable supply chains, Chinese state news agency Xinhua reported.

Li said China was ready to strengthen cooperation in high-end manufacturing, new energy, artificial intelligence, biomedicine and other fields.

China will further expand market access, strengthen guarantees for foreign investment and welcomes more South Korean companies do business in the country, he said.

The three leaders attended a banquet where multicultural choirs and bands performed traditional and modern songs, while the menu

included tofu, dumplings and bean pastes - cuisine staples in all three countries.

At a separate meeting with Kishida, Yoon lauded progress on diplomatic, economic and cultural exchanges with Japan, and they agreed to deepen ties next year when the two countries celebrate the 60th anniversary of normalising relations, Yoon's office said.

China and Japan agreed to hold a new round of bilateral high-level economic dialogue at an appropriate time, according to CCTV.

Yoon, Li and Kishida will adopt a joint statement on six areas including the economy and trade, science and technology, people-to-people exchanges and health and the aging population, Seoul officials said. The summit comes as South Korea and Japan have been working to mend ties frayed by historical disputes while deepening a trilateral security partnership with the United States. — **Reuters**

Macron in Germany to soothe ties on state visit

BERLIN: Emmanuel Macron on Sunday arrived in Berlin on the first state visit to Germany by a French president in a quarter century, seeking to ease recent tensions and warn of the dangers of the far right ahead of European Union elections.

Macron's plane landed at a Berlin airport at the start of his three-day, four-stop visit that will seek to emphasise the historic importance of the post-war relationship between the two key EU states. All has not been smooth in a relationship often seen as the engine of the EU, with Berlin taken aback by Macron's refusal to rule out sending troops to Ukraine and German officials said to be uneasy at times about his often-theatrical style of foreign policy.

In a question-and-answer session on social media with young people this month, Macron enlisted help from German Chancellor Olaf Scholz when asked if the Franco-German "couple" was still working. "Hello dear friends, long live French-German friendship!" Scholz said in French in a video on Macron's X feed. "Thank you Olaf! I very much agree with you," Macron

replied in heavily accented German.

On Sunday afternoon Macron was set to hold talks with German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier, whose role is largely ceremonial.

On Monday afternoon he will travel to Dresden in the former East Germany to deliver a speech on Europe at a European festival. Tuesday sees Macron in the western German city of Munster and later in Meseberg, outside Berlin, for talks with Scholz and a Franco-German joint cabinet meeting.

The trip comes two weeks ahead of European elections where polls show, in a major potential embarrassment for Macron, his coalition is trailing well behind the far right and may struggle to even reach third place.

In a keynote address on foreign policy last month, Macron issued a dire warning about the threats to Europe in a changing world in the wake of Russia's 2022 attack of Ukraine.

"Our Europe, today, is mortal and it can die," Macron said. "It can die and this depends only on our choices." — **AFP**



German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and French President Emmanuel Macron visit Democracy Festival, in Berlin. — **Reuters**

Lifelong learning is no longer a luxury



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

In a fast paced world like ours, what we know and how we use this knowledge keeps changing more quickly than ever before. To stay relevant, basking in the glory of old degrees and certificates is no longer enough. In fact, lifelong learning is not a luxury anymore, but a core necessity to stay in tune with our modern world.

Lifelong learning is an approach to learning — staying informed and keeping one’s interest and knowledge at its peak well beyond the formal learning phase.

More than a learnt skill, lifelong learning is a state of mind that needs to be conditioned and trained because it is mainly self motivated. This learning can be in a formal or informal setting.

The benefits of lifelong learning are many. From offering opportunities for personal growth and development, it opens our world to new ideas, skills, and ways of looking at the world.

Some obvious advantages to having a passion to learn include professional security. One will never be redundant if you have the capacity to re-invent yourself as the need arises.

This will also ensure that you are not stuck in jobs that are unattractive to you — there are many other options out there.

In addition, staying interested also increases one’s motivation to work and engage with the world. It also provides many networking opportunities as you meet people from different sectors and professions.

Often, these networks also lead to friendships and a better quality of life. In fact, it is scientifically proven that those who read, stay curious and engage with the world have a longer, and healthier life.

How does one commit to lifelong learning? One simple way is journaling. Staying focused on specific tasks, outlining a target and the means of achieving it will work wonders in ensuring that commitment to learning is retained.

MORE THAN A LEARNT SKILL, LIFELONG LEARNING IS A STATE OF MIND THAT NEEDS TO BE CONDITIONED AND TRAINED BECAUSE IT IS MAINLY SELF MOTIVATED

It is important to quantify, or write out, the skills, knowledge, or competencies that you want to work on.

Lifelong learning is more than a necessity. In fact, it will work better if it becomes a passion rather than a chore. Picking something that you are interested in, rather than what feels the right thing to do will ensure that you will stick with it. Passing fads tend to be irrelevant in the long run.

The greatest advantage of lifelong learning is that one will always stay relevant. By reading, listening, even writing, all our innate skills develop and stay alert, ready to be used at any time necessary.

In many ways, staying committed to learning today is easier than it has ever been. Thanks to technology, there is an endless amount of information in any form, whether visual or written. There are also many opportunities to share knowledge through social media and multiple platforms.

Parties bus voters across South Africa to pack stadiums

UMBERTO BACCHI AND DAVE CLARK

If there’s one thing the parties competing in this week’s South African general election don’t want to talk about, it’s bussing in supporters to fill out huge stadium rallies.

If there’s one thing they all do, it’s bus in supporters to fill out huge stadium rallies — often handing out snacks, drinks and T-shirts to encourage high turn outs for the cameras.

Party spokespeople play this down, keen to give the impression that their leaders can draw spontaneous adoring crowds, but the vast fleets of buses are hard to miss. And for South African voters, the long road trips, hand-outs and camaraderie have become part and parcel of campaigns. Saturday’s events, just days before Wednesday’s vote, were no exception.

“We mobilise by WhatsApp,” explained 37-year-old African National Congress (ANC) volunteer Mykeleni Mabaso, as crowds began to arrive at the huge 90,000-seat FNB Stadium for President Cyril Ramaphosa’s last giant rally.

The ANC, which has won every South African election since the first post-apartheid contest in 1994, runs a community chat group in Mabaso’s district of Soweto, Ramaphosa’s home town and a party stronghold.

Those who virtually raise their hand are picked up from home before dawn by a mini-cab and taken to an assembly point where they board a bigger bus to the stadium. They are given fruit, water and a yellow ANC T-shirt.

“We fetch them by the house,” Mabaso said, as hawkers stamped party supporters’ hands and faces with green ANC logos for five rand (\$0.27) a time. Ramaphosa’s rally was on home ground but a successful bussing operation was all the more important for one of his rivals, former president Jacob Zuma.

Last week, Zuma’s uMkhonto weSizwe (MK) party found more than 30,000 fans to fill the smaller 36,000-seater Orlando Stadium on the ANC’s Soweto doorstep.

The result was a mini-triumph for his upstart opposition outfit and the party insisted in social media posts they had managed this without resorting to bussing in supporters from across the country. Inside the stadium, however, AFP found supporters were largely from Zuma’s native province, KwaZulu-Natal, many carrying banner from their local party associations, and the musical acts were popular Zulu stars.

Zuma, 82, arrived more than seven hours after the crowd began to slowly gather.

He received a rapturous reception and led the crowd in liberation songs.

But he spoke only in Zulu, betraying the regional limits of his support.

If there was a touch of smoke and mirrors about Zuma’s event, he was only repaying Ramaphosa in kind. — AFP



Karim Easterbrook

The writer is former School Principal Cambridge UK

When a Superpower fails to listen



A Palestinian boy rides a bicycle past a destroyed building in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Sunday. — AFP

In condemning the decision of Karim Khan, the top prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) for seeking arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, his Defence Minister, the US is playing a dangerous game. Its reluctance to acknowledge war crimes impartially whether committed by a friend or foe undermines its credibility when championing human rights and damages its already tarnished reputation on the international stage.

Senator Jim Risch, the US top Republican Senator on the Senate Foreign Relation’s Committee, described prosecutor Khan’s decision as “absurd.” He went on to say “today’s actions (by the the ICC) have hurt the credibility of the court and seriously harmed legitimate accountability efforts where true war crimes are occurring, like Ukraine, Syria and across Africa.” Contrary to this Senator’s view I think that most would agree that the credibility of the ICC would indeed have been “hurt” and seriously undermined if the ICC had failed to seek an arrest warrant for Netanyahu and Gallant.

Equally if not more concerning is the apparent double standards that are at play here. When President Putin was issued with an arrest warrant for actions in the Ukraine war both the US and the UK fell over backwards to rain praise on the ICC’s decision. The then British Foreign Secretary James

Cleverly stated “we welcome the step taken by the independent ICC to hold those at the top of the Russian regime, including Vladimir Putin, to account. Work must continue to investigate the atrocities committed.” President Joe Biden described the Putin arrest decision as “justified” and further stated “He’s (Putin) clearly committed war crimes.”

AMERICA’S RELUCTANCE TO ACKNOWLEDGE WAR CRIMES IMPARTIALLY WHETHER COMMITTED BY A FRIEND OR FOE UNDERMINES ITS CREDIBILITY

All the above politicians were keen to support the ICC’s independence. Yet the ICC is now being condemned exactly because of its independent and impartial decision. It shouldn’t be forgotten that Khan is also seeking arrest warrants for senior members of Hamas but I am not expecting to hear condemnatory statements and threats from US Senators regarding this ICC decision any time soon. Such selective condemnation is so blatant as to be outrageous.

So where does this leave us? Not in a good place. Such politicisation of war crimes and manipulation of justice undermines the efforts of an unaligned and peaceful country like Oman to bring about peaceful solutions. By turning a blind eye to war crimes owing to your country’s strategic interests you create distrust among warring parties who become reluctant to sit opposite each other at a negotiating table.

Israel’s blockade of Gaza and the cruel nature of its bombing campaign — more civilians have died in Gaza in a month than have died over the whole of the Ukraine war — has infuriated the Muslim world, leading to increasing diplomatic isolation for both the Israeli and American governments.

The US influence in the Middle East and around the world has been greatly reduced owing to its unconditional support for Israel. It’s refusal to give even lip service to the maintenance of international law when it concerns Israel and its refusal to listen to the understandable condemnation of the genocide taking place in Palestine by even friendly nations, demonstrates a lack of judgement.

Pax-Americana and the US Empire are in decline and, as Britain learned to its cost, the failure of an Empire to heed warnings and the inability or unwillingness to acknowledge the winds of change taking place globally will only hasten this decline.

Find yourself in serving others

From owning expensive cars and fancy clothes to having fine dining and happy vacations, there are many ways through which one can spend hard-earned money. There is absolutely nothing wrong with rewarding yourself, but what would happen if you reward someone else instead? You could share the joy of rewarding others; the people in need perhaps! Of course, as serving others gets one rewarded and blessed. Thus, it is always good to recall that making a living comes by what we get, but we make a life by what we give to others.

Here comes the significance of charity as a religious and social obligation. One needs to think of how much support he/she does for it? Nothing or not even enough to serve those people who are less privileged and families in need, for instance! Those who deserve our contribution of giving back to the community though they never ask for it. It is true that charity begins at home, but it should never end there. Many people all over the world are in urgent need of help, donations and support including those who are closer to our reach in this country.

Our deeds of giving should extend beyond just family, relatives and loved ones. We are social creatures by nature; our human purposes could be fulfilled by engaging with the individuals, society, neighbourhood, charities and even the ones we work or live with. We should be all for one and one for all, especially in hard times. In fact, the charitable activities we do return for our own good as they benefit our psychological, spiritual and emotional well-being eventually.

Helping others by sacrificing time or donating money always creates an improved sense of purpose in life or work and inner satisfaction. If a person performs a deed that continues to benefit others in a good way, he/she will keep collecting rewards for this charitable act as long as it benefits the recipients. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) advised, “When



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

a person dies his works end, except for three: ongoing charity, knowledge that is benefited from and a righteous child who prays for him.”

Nowadays, we observe many local charitable associations founded and spread almost in every corner of the country. One can find even more than one charity in the same town or village. Most of these charities are established and managed by young Omani volunteers (male and female) who are devoted to serve the local community and meet the urgent needs and necessities of families in need in different aspects of life.

Undeniably, most of those volunteers if not all are serving this noble cause out of philanthropy. Possibly, all are reflecting on Mahatma Gandhi’s saying, “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others”. As all charitable associations, all over the country, serve a common noble cause, their forces should be joint, so all could deliver their missions and achieve objectives. Therefore, those charitable associations can work together to raise funds for a collective initiative. As a combined endeavour, it could undoubtedly serve a wider segment of society with different interests and needs. Joint charitable initiatives and activities could be organised to serve various occasions and purposes. Possibly, fundraising events, for instance, can be held to a number of target audience or beneficiaries of different associations.

Likewise, to ensure having sustainable financial revenue for those associations, charitable or investment projects might be established with the support of private or public contributions.

To tell the truth, such ideas would probably assist charitable association to run their overall missions and day-to-day activities.

Charity is always intended to serve bringing justice, balance and kindness to individuals and society alike. One should remember that what you do for yourself dies with you, but what you do for others and the world remains and is everlasting.

IT IS TRUE THAT CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME, BUT IT SHOULD NEVER END THERE

A CULTURAL PARADE



A Balinese performer takes part in the Surabaya Vaganza cultural parade in Surabaya, Indonesia’s second largest city, on Sunday. – AFP

Is Europe too big for further enlargement?

Earlier this month, the European Union celebrated the 20th anniversary of its biggest-ever enlargement, which brought ten new members into the bloc. That event remains a potent reminder of the EU’s potential to advance peace and unity across the European continent. But, at a time of deep internal divisions and an increasingly volatile external environment, the giddy idealism of 2004 seems a distant dream, and the prospects of further enlargement appear uncertain.

The promise of EU accession has been long considered a powerful mechanism for strengthening stability, democracy, and prosperity across the continent. The addition of Portugal and Spain in the 1980s — democratic transitions in both countries — exemplified this dynamic.

But by 2004, when eight post-communist countries (and Malta and Cyprus) joined, not to mention the 2007 accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the logic of enlargement had shifted. Expanding the single market and fortifying the foundations of democracy across Europe were still critical objectives.

But by welcoming Central and Eastern European countries into the European “family,” the EU was also demonstrating that it had overcome its past of war and division. The EU’s new members, for their part, welcomed



Ana Palacio

The writer is a former minister of foreign affairs of Spain and former senior vice president and general counsel of the World Bank Group, is a visiting lecturer at Georgetown University

THE EU INSTITUTIONS ARE STRUGGLING TO CHART A COMMON VISION FOR 27 MEMBER STATES, SO HOW CAN THEY POSSIBLY ACCOMMODATE AS MANY AS 36?

the chance to escape centuries of limbo between Russia and the West, even though Russia no longer seemed to pose much of a threat to its neighbours, at least in the eyes of the Union. Today, with a war raging on Europe’s doorstep, there is no question that Russia is dangerous. Just four days after the full-scale war in February 2022, Ukraine applied for EU membership. Driven by a sense of moral responsibility, rather than genuine enthusiasm for further enlargement, the bloc quickly granted it candidate status. There are now nine recognised candidates for EU membership, mainly in Eastern Europe.

But, while the 2004 “Big Bang” was a success, it cannot serve as a model for future enlargement. Each accession brings its own challenges, which demand nuanced solutions. One key challenge today — which has undermined the old EU enlargement narrative — is democratic backsliding in some member countries.

Most notably, Hungary has clashed repeatedly with the EU over the anti-democratic policies pursued by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán since he returned to power in 2010.

In Poland, an Orbán-emulating right-wing government was replaced last year by a three-party

coalition committed to shoring up democracy, but tensions persist. Slovakia’s populist-nationalist prime minister, Robert Fico, was recently the target of an assassination attempt.

This trend has undermined EU-level decision-making, with national interests often trumping the will of the majority. For example, Orbán repeatedly blocked EU support for Ukraine and has cultivated closer trade and investment ties with China at a time when other EU members are seeking to reduce their dependence on the Chinese market.

Budapest was one of only three stops Chinese President Xi Jinping made on his recent trip to Europe,

and he and Orbán announced that their countries will form an “all-weather partnership.”

More broadly, the EU’s vision for the future — from its ambitious European Green Deal to its approach to migration — faces considerable resistance, dampening enthusiasm for further integration and enlargement.

If the EU institutions are struggling to chart a common vision for 27 member states, how can they possibly accommodate as many as 36? After all, this new EU would not only be bigger; it would also be more diverse.

The enlargement debate has never been free of questions of geographical determinism. But,

recognising the geopolitical and economic advantages of wider membership, the EU sought to avoid potential conflicts not by excluding countries on geographical grounds, but rather by updating its accession policy to include conditionality.

If a country wants to join the EU, it must meet certain standards in a range of areas, from minority rights to judicial independence. This helps to explain why Türkiye’s accession process is indefinitely stalled, despite its candidacy being a geopolitical no-brainer.

Can Georgia, which applied for EU membership in 2022, prove more successful at meeting the conditions for EU membership?

That now seems unlikely, judging by the government’s recent effort to enact a Russian-inspired “foreign agent” law requiring civil-society groups and independent media that receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad to register as organisations “bearing the interests of a foreign power.” Though the law was vetoed by President Salome Zourabichvili and, more importantly, sparked massive protests by a population that overwhelmingly supports EU accession, the government appears unmoved and is ramming the bill through.



The prospects of further EU enlargement appear uncertain.

sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports



BAGNAIA PIPS MARTIN TO WIN CATALUNYA GRAND PRIX

BARCELONA: Ducati's reigning champion Francesco Bagnaia won the Catalunya Grand Prix on Sunday to close the gap on championship leader Jorge Martin, who finished second, while Gresini Ducati's Marc Marquez was third despite starting 14th on the grid.

Marquez repeated his heroics from Saturday's sprint when he finished an astonishing second from 14th, keeping polesitter Aleix Espargaro at bay until the chequered flag and finishing five-hundredths of a second ahead to take third.

Bagnaia had crashed on the final lap of the sprint when he was leading but Sunday's victory — his third of the season — was redemption for the Italian who is now 39 points behind Martin.

"Honestly, I was angry about yesterday knowing I had the potential to win," Bagnaia said. "When I saw riders struggling with the front today I started to push more."

Just as in Saturday's sprint, Bagnaia and Pedro Acosta moved up to first and second at the start while sprint winner Espargaro was pushed down to fifth in his final home race.

Martin also had a blistering start to go from seventh on the grid to third, with Red Bull KTM's Brad Binder slotting in behind him.

Acosta attempted to overtake Bagnaia when he could but it was Martin who had the pace and he quietly took second place from the GasGas Tech3 rider before overtaking the factory Ducati rider when he saw a tiny gap on the fourth lap.

But Acosta, on soft tyres, was in no mood to

sit back when he saw Bagnaia slowing him down, overtaking the Ducati to give Martin chase as the duo quickly peeled away from Bagnaia.

ROOKIE MISTAKE

Martin had longer-lasting medium tyres and could afford to bide his time while behind him Acosta looked for every opportunity to move ahead, but the eager rookie made a second mistake in as many races when he crashed with 14 laps left.

Bagnaia continued to reel in Martin and, with six laps to go, he dived in at turn five — the same corner he had crashed at while leading Saturday's sprint — to seize the lead from the Pramac Racing rider.

Behind them Marquez had managed to move up to fourth and he quickly pulled up on Espargaro's rear tyre in the fight for the final podium spot, eventually passing his Spanish compatriot with four laps to go.

But unlike his last lap heroics at Le Mans earlier this month, Marquez was too far behind to give Bagnaia and Martin any cause for worry.

"I took the soft rear tyre and I knew it was risky but it was the only solution to attack from the beginning," Marquez said.

"I didn't make a good start but I made it step by step, I knew the race was long. When I overtook Aleix, I was able to defend the position." With three straight podiums, Marquez is now third in the championship, two points behind Bagnaia.

— Reuters



Francesco Bagnaia kisses a trophy. – REUTERS

Osaka off to winning start at Nadal-dominated French Open

PARIS: Naomi Osaka swept to her first victory at the French Open in three years on Sunday, setting up a potential showdown with world number one Iga Swiatek, as Roland Garros prepared to bid a possible farewell to Rafael Nadal.

Osaka, a four-time major winner who has yet to get past the third round in Paris, needed three sets to defeat Italy's 48th-ranked Lucia Bronzetti on the showpiece Court Philippe Chatrier, 6-1, 4-6, 7-5.

The 26-year-old fired 31 winners, including six aces, and 45 unforced errors in a match where she gave up a 4-0 lead in the decider before finding herself 5-4 down.

However, she rallied strongly to register her first win at a Grand Slam since the 2022 Australian Open.

"It feels really nice to be back and I'm just really grateful to be here in front of everybody," said Osaka.

"I think there were moments when I played really well."

The Japanese star, a former world number one now at 134 in the rankings, has endured a bittersweet relationship with the French capital.

In 2021, she was fined for opting out of mandatory media commitments before withdrawing from the tournament in order to protect her mental health.

A year later, she fell in the first round before leaving the sport in



Osaka reacts during her first round. – REUTERS



Nadal during a practice session. – REUTERS

September 2022 for 16 months to start a family.

Top seed Swiatek, chasing a fourth French Open, will face Osaka if the Pole gets past qualifier

Leolia Jeanjean on Monday.

Later on Sunday, Carlos Alcaraz, the reigning Wimbledon champion, begins his campaign against J.J. Wolf of the United

States, a lucky loser from qualifying.

Andy Murray and his fellow three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka will close proceedings in the night session.

World number three Alcaraz made the semi-finals last year where he was defeated by Novak Djokovic, revealing later that the prospect of facing the world number one had caused so much tension that his body cramped up during the match.

Wolf, ranked at 107, has won just one match on the tour in 2024. His only other main draw appearance at the French Open ended in a first-round exit last year.

Wawrinka, the 39-year-old 2015 champion, and 2016 runner-up Murray meet for the 23rd time, a rivalry which has included two semi-final clashes in Paris.

Murray is playing his final season on tour but whether or not 14-time champion Nadal joins him in retirement later this year remains to be seen.

Uncomfortable position

Meanwhile, Nadal, who will be 38 on June 3, revealed on Saturday that he hasn't committed himself to retiring and wanted to "100 per cent keep the door open".

He missed the tournament in 2023 with injury.

His 2024 appearance may be brief after he was drawn to face fourth-ranked Alexander Zverev on Monday. — Reuters

Nibras al Touqi signs with Saudi Al Hariq Club

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 26

International player and Oman Taekwondo champion, Nibras bin Mohammed al Touqi, has signed a professional contract with Al Hariq Club in Al Hariq Province in Saudi Arabia. With this contract, Omani player joins the first division Taekwondo team, making him the first Omani and Gulf player to go professional in the Saudi Taekwondo First Division League.

Abdulrahman Saad al Eisa, CEO of Al Hariq Sports Club, welcomed the Omani player to the team, wishing him success in representing his country.

Al Touqi is considered one of the best players in Oman, achieved numerous accomplishments over the past ten years. He began practicing Taekwondo at an early age, he won two gold medals in his first international participation in South Korea, he also achieved honourable successes in Thailand and the United Kingdom.

Al Touqi won accomplishments in the Fujairah and Sharjah and the Manchester Championship in the UK. In his youth, he achieved success in the Arab Cup in two consecutive championships in Beirut, the Fujairah International Championship, the Bosnia International Championship, and finally in Qatar International Taekwondo Championship, in addition to local championships.

Hareb al Abdali, head of the Professional Academy and Al Touqi's coach, commented: "The professionalisation of our player in Saudi Arabia is a milestone for Taekwondo in Oman. Nibras is a skilled, dedicated player with fighting skills that qualify him to be the standout player in Oman and the Gulf."

He expressed hope that this professional opportunity would pave the way for Omani players to secure real opportunities in Gulf, Arab and even international clubs.



Crespo's AL AIN beat Yokohama to win Asian Champions League



Al Ain players celebrate after the winning. — REUTERS

AL AIN, UAE: Hernan Crespo's Al Ain steamrolled 10-man Yokohama F-Marinos 5-1 in the Asian Champions League final return leg to lift the trophy for the second time in their history on Saturday.

The hosts trailed 2-1 from the away fixture but two goals from Soufiane Rahimi, a Kaku penalty and Kodjo Laba's late double ensured a 6-3 aggregate victory after Yokohama goalkeeper William Popp saw red just before half-time.

Al Ain, the oil-rich United Arab Emirates' most successful club, won the inaugural Champions League final in 2003 and were runners-up in 2005 and 2016.

"It's really difficult to describe the emotions," said Crespo, who only joined Al Ain in November and was mobbed by jubilant players as he spoke to reporters. "We deserve this title. Every time we were facing the quarterfinals, semifinals and even the finals as underdogs," he said.

"At the beginning nobody believed in us and we did it. These guys, these players did something big."

En route to the final, Al Ain ousted Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr in the quarterfinals and ended the record, 34-match winning streak of Saudi giants Al Hilal in the semis.

However, Yokohama coach Harry Kewell was left fuming over the first-half penalty, criticising the referee and what he called a lack of sportsmanship by Al Ain.

"We play at a level where sportsmanship is supposed to be high. For me, the referee tonight was poor and he allowed certain things to happen. It was never a penalty," said the Australian.

"It's pretty hard to get a structure when you're playing against a referee that was terrible... it hurts, it really hurts," he added.

- Yokohama feel the heat -

Crespo had promised "hell" for Yokohama and thousands of fans in white robes and headdresses let off flares and chanted outside before packing out Hazza bin Zayed Stadium.

With temperatures still hovering above 30 degrees Celsius (97 degrees Fahrenheit) at the 8:00 pm kick-off, Al Ain were ahead after just nine minutes.

Yahia Nader's sweet backheel wrong-footed the defence and tournament top-scorer Rahimi rifled a low shot into the net for his 12th of the competition.

Ken Matsubara had a fizzing shot tipped wide but Al Ain doubled their advantage in the 34th minute after Shinnosuke Hatanaka brought down Rahimi in the box.

After a VAR review, Uzbek referee Ilgiz Tantashev pointed to the spot and Paraguay international Kaku smashed it into the bottom right, sparking delirium in the stands.

Al Ain's joy was doused as Yokohama's Yan Matheus stole a bouncing ball from Kouame Kouadio, then turned the defender inside-out and finished left-footed to make it 2-1 and 3-3 on aggregate.

But the half — which stretched to an extraordinary 62 minutes — finished badly for Yokohama when goalkeeper William Popp felled the on-rushing Rahimi and was sent off deep into injury time.

After the restart, a depleted Yokohama lived dangerously when Hatanaka, under pressure from Rahimi, parried a deep cross onto his own crossbar.

The visitors were creaking and on 67 minutes, Rahimi picked up a rebound, rounded a defender and lashed it past substitute 'keeper Fuma Shirasaka at his near post.

The goal knocked the stuffing out of Yokohama, who also had Hatanaka stretched off, and Togolese substitute Laba pierced their porous defence twice in another long spell of injury time.

With their victory, Al Ain also reach the new-look, 32-team Club World Cup, which will be staged next year in the United States. — AFP

Barca claim women football league title

BILBAO, SPAIN: For years Barcelona have looked up at Lyon, the established elite at the top of the women's game, working intensely to surpass them.

The Catalans finally avenged final defeats by Lyon in 2019 and 2022 on Saturday in Bilbao, beating the French giants 2-0 to lift the Champions League for the third time.

They still trail Lyon's all-time record of eight -- that could take years to overhaul -- but there is no doubt that Barcelona are the dominant force in Europe.

With back-to-back Champions League triumphs, three in four years, and five finals in the last six, the Catalans reign supreme.

Aitana Bonmati and Alexia Putellas scored the goals against Lyon at the San Mames stadium.

The pair are the owners of the last three Ballon d'Or wins between them but have a vast array of talent in support.

Their squad includes stars brought in from abroad like Lucy Bronze, formerly of Lyon, and Caroline Graham Hansen, but also significant home grown quality.

Barcelona's youth academy



FC Barcelona's Aitana Bonmati celebrates with the trophy. — REUTER

is creating potential stars in a way made possible by earlier investment in women's football.

Beating Lyon was one of the few challenges left for Barcelona, along with completing the quadruple after last season's treble. They did both in one swoop before 51,000 fans, a record Champions League final attendance.

Barcelona supporters, the vast majority of spectators, whistled Lyon fiercely at the start but

applauded them generously as the French club collected their runner-up medals.

If it was a changing of the guard, Barcelona were reluctant to admit it.

"Eight Champions Leagues is a lot of Champions Leagues," said Barcelona's departing coach Jonatan Giraldez.

"What I like is living in the present moment -- we had some room to improve from last year, we didn't win the Copa de la

Reina (then).

"History will say if we are one of the best teams, or if it's Olympique Lyon. We saw a super interesting game, people enjoyed it, it was a high-level game."

The coach, moving next season to US side Washington Spirit, added: "In years, this Barca will be put into perspective, today is a day to enjoy."

- 'Next year we have to compete again' -

Barcelona playmaker Bonmati said she did not encourage talk of the club dominating.

"We've been showing for years the team that we are, obviously today we are champions of Europe for another year, Lyon are still a great team," Bonmati told reporters.

"Next year we have to compete again, I don't like to talk about a hegemony beginning, we have to prove it every year."

Bonmati was thrilled by Barcelona's vast travelling support, with an estimated 40,000 fans coming to Bilbao. She called on them before the game to be the team's 12th player and they delivered. — AFP

Stellar Starc fires Kolkata to third IPL title

CHENNAI: Mitchell Starc bowled a sensational opening spell to fire Kolkata Knight Riders to their third Indian Premier League title with a eight-wicket thrashing of Sunrisers Hyderabad in the Sunday final.

Kolkata bowled out Hyderabad for IPL's lowest total of 113 in a final as Australia's left-arm quick Starc returned figures of 2-14 to live up to his top billing in the world's most lucrative T20 tournament.

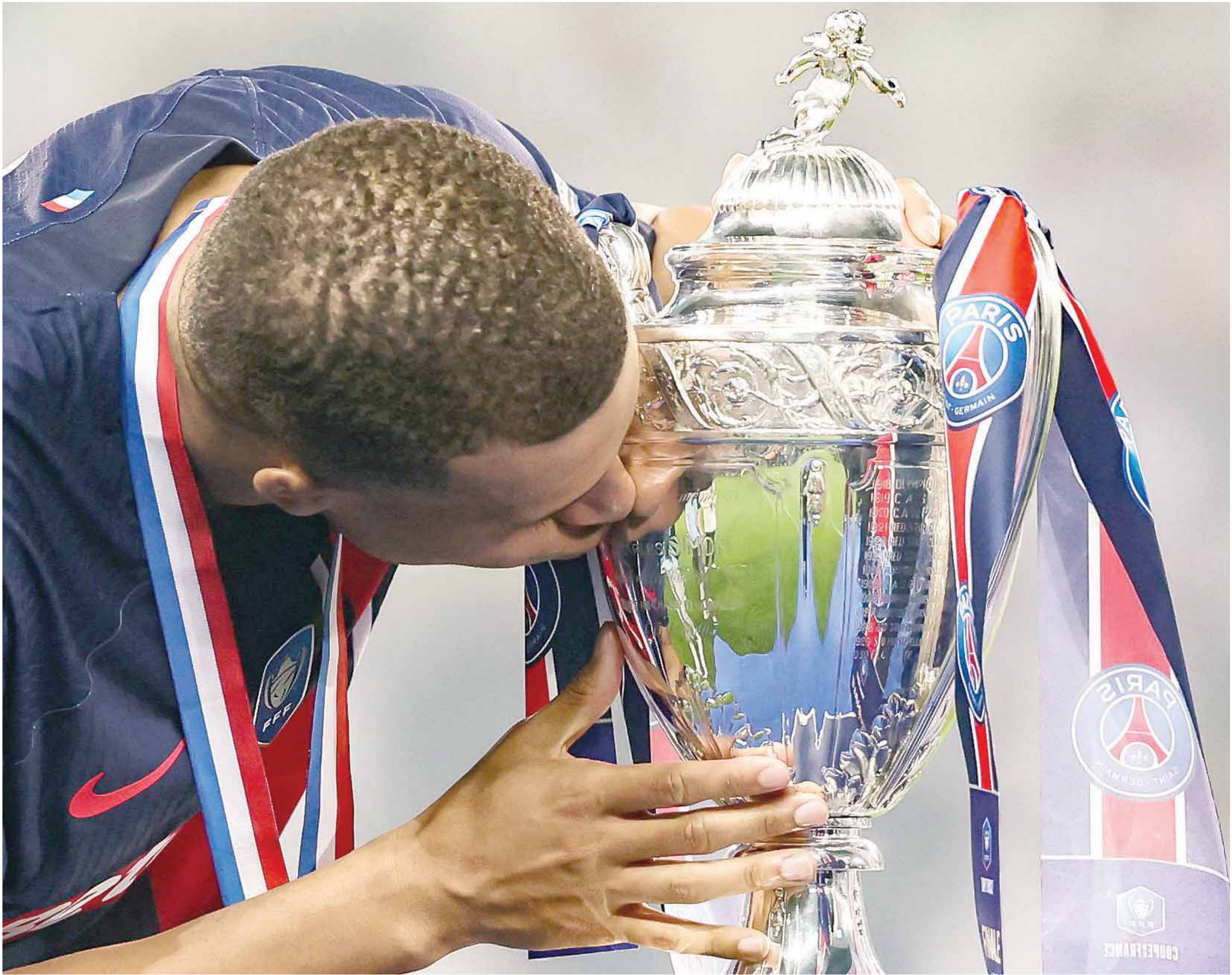
Starc went to Kolkata for

a record \$2.98 million in the December auction and ended the IPL with two stellar performances, including a match-winning 3-34 in the first play-off to hammer the same opponent.

Kolkata's batsmen had it easy and despite Sunil Narine's early departure, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, who made 39, and Venkatesh Iyer, on 52 not out, helped the team home with 9.3 overs to spare after a partnership of 91.

— AFP





Kylian Mbappe holds the trophy. – REUTERS

PSG WIN FRENCH CUP FINAL ON MBAPPE'S FAREWELL APPEARANCE



LILLE, FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said he had been lucky to work with Kylian Mbappe after the superstar forward played his last game for the club in Saturday's 2-1 French Cup final win over Lyon.

Mbappe made his farewell appearance for PSG before an expected move to Real Madrid but he was unable to add to his club-record tally of 256 goals with Ousmane Dembele and Fabian Ruiz scoring on the night.

Dembele and Ruiz netted in the first half and PSG then withstood a Lyon comeback attempt after the break following a Jake O'Brien goal which reduced the deficit.

The most successful side in the history of the French Cup, PSG have now won the trophy 15 times, including seven times in the last decade and four since Mbappe signed from Monaco as a teenager in 2017.

The victory allowed PSG to complete a domestic league and cup double in Luis Enrique's first season as coach, although the campaign remains overshadowed by their exit from the Champions League in the semi-finals against Borussia Dortmund.

"We played the final very well. We played with great intensity and were great on the ball," said Luis Enrique.

"I think we have had a very good season. We would have liked to stay around for another week and not go on holiday yet but that is life," he said, referring to next weekend's Champions League final.

"Nobody said football was fair, but it doesn't matter. Next season we will come back stronger and will look to sign even hungrier players, who have even more desire to win."

Of the departing Mbappe he added: "I think I have been lucky to coach Kylian but it has been a difficult season for him because after seven years and all he has achieved it is always hard to say goodbye.

"But he was always prepared to help the team and tonight was the cherry on the cake even if he didn't score."



CLASHES BETWEEN SUPPORTERS

The game was somewhat overshadowed by incidents earlier in the day, with rival fans clashing at a motorway toll around 50 kilometres south of the northern city of Lille.

The clashes involved about 100 Lyon supporters and about 200 PSG fans, with two coaches ending up on fire, according to a police source.

A source in the regional police authorities said 20 supporters were slightly injured, with French President Emmanuel Macron, who attended the final, condemning the violence.

Mbappe was making his 308th and final

appearance for his hometown club, for whom he signed in August 2017 from Monaco in a 180 million-euro deal.

Victory means he leaves PSG with four French Cup winners' medals to go with six Ligue 1 titles and two victories in the now-defunct League Cup.

Mbappe finished his last season in Paris with 44 goals in all competitions, eight on PSG's run to the Cup final.

He was centimetres away from giving PSG an early lead at Lille's Stade Pierre-Mauroy, which was hosting the game with usual venue the Stade de France being prepared to host the Olympics.

A second-minute corner was headed on by Lucas Beraldo and Mbappe, diving in at the far post, narrowly failed to connect with the ball.

Lyon survived an early onslaught but fell behind midway through the first half when Dembele was left completely unmarked at the back post to head in a cross.

Dembele turned provider as PSG scored again in the 34th minute, when his ball to the back post was converted at the second attempt by Spain midfielder Ruiz.

Lyon, who enjoyed a remarkable revival in Ligue 1 to go from bottom of the table in December to finish sixth and qualify for Europe, appeared down and out.

They did attempt a comeback, with Irish defender O'Brien heading in a corner 10 minutes after the break to give them hope.

But PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma produced a brilliant save to tip a Nicolas Tagliafico header over the bar, and Alexandre Lacazette had a shot deflected wide as Mbappe and PSG held on.

"We have mixed feelings tonight," said Lyon coach Pierre Sage.

"If you had told us at the start of December that we would qualify for Europe through the league and get to the Cup final, I don't think anyone would have believed it." — AFP



Terms and conditions apply



We help your deposits grow for a brighter future!

Higher returns on deposits for customers of the Ladies account at BankDhofar.

Scan to learn more



بنك ظفار
BankDhofar

bankdhofar

2479 1111 | www.bankdhofar.com

Oman among top destinations for FDI in tourism

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MAY 26

The Sultanate of Oman was among the top five regional destinations for foreign direct investment (FDI) in the tourism sector during the period between 2018 and 2023, according to UN Tourism.

Oman followed the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Qatar on the list. Nearly 70 per cent of the capital investment was attracted by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Oman.

The Sultanate of Oman saw 13 greenfield projects announced representing a capital investment of \$1.83 billion, at an average of \$141.1 million per project.

The FDI destinations in the country are Muscat with seven projects and Dhofar with three projects. The main investors in the Sultanate of Oman are the USA with three projects, China, UAE, Cyprus and France.

In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Natalia Bayona, Executive Director, of UN Tourism, said, “When it comes to foreign direct investments, tourism investments in Oman are growing in the last five years.

When it comes to the ranking of the Middle East, Oman is number five. So it’s okay. At the end of the day, it is in the top five. The main investor in Oman was the USA, with \$522 million,



Natalia Bayona, Executive Director of UN Tourism.

China with \$348 million, the UAE \$348 million, France and Cyprus with \$174 million.”

She added that there’s a strong scope for cooperation.

“I love what this region is

doing. That’s why we created a UN tourism regional office in Riyadh to serve all the region that is focussed on education, innovation, investments and rural development.

But as well we are working from there. We are delivering courses, skills management and innovation competitions to help all the members bring the best things that they have and of course to showcase them to the world. So cooperation is really important and key.

Second of all, I see a lot of cooperation, for example, when it comes to investments, I see that there’s a lot of public and private investments in all the region and

sharing knowledge.”

Natalia said that the Fifa World Cup 2022 in Qatar was one of the examples of regional cooperation. Yes, I think it’s not just Qatar, the other countries also benefited.

“That’s a good one. Absolutely. I feel that the World Cup helped a lot to empower this region. And of course the numbers are there, not by mistake.

Qatar has been growing by 90 per cent in tourism. Yeah, that’s part of their good job and attracting good mega events as well to the region helps that when it comes not only to sports but also to business, and science so that the region is connected. So in that way, you can promote a better understanding.”

OCEC commits to sustainability, community engagement: CEO

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 26

Said bin Salim al Shanfari, CEO of Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC), recently outlined a vision for sustainability and community engagement during panels organised by Petroleum Development Oman (FD Ignite Week) and The Business Year (Oman Business Forum).

Al Shanfari’s insights highlighted a strategic shift towards developing impactful, profitable projects that resonate with consumer expectations and contribute to national sustainability goals.

Al Shanfari emphasised that sustainability in Oman is a concrete commitment requiring investment in projects that are both impactful and profitable.

In a post he said, “At this stage, it is utopian to develop projects which will not benefit our organisation or our target audience.”

This pragmatic approach is exemplified by OCEC’s latest venture — a solar panel project aimed at advancing the venue’s Net-Zero ambitions and redefining its market appeal.

The solar panel initiative represents a significant step towards sustainable operations and reflects a broader trend in Oman towards renewable energy adoption.

In March, OCEC signed an agreement with TotalEnergies Renewables DG MEA to develop a 4.6 megawatt-peak solar rooftop, which is expected to produce over 7,000 megawatt-hours annually.

This energy production will significantly cover OCEC’s electricity consumption,



Said bin Salim al Shanfari (centre), Chief Executive Officer of Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, speaks during the Oman Business Forum held recently.

reducing its carbon footprint and enhancing energy efficiency.

Al Shanfari noted, “This project has the capacity to change our venue positioning and make it more attractive while also supporting our Net-Zero goals.”

In addition to sustainability, Al Shanfari proposed innovative solutions to seasonal challenges.

Addressing the perception that Oman’s scorching summer months are unsuitable for events, he suggested repurposing OCEC’s exhibition halls into a summer sports complex. “

They say: ‘there are no events in the summer in Oman, it’s too hot,’” he remarked. “I answer: ‘let’s transform our exhibition halls into a sports complex for the summer, benefiting the local populations and raising awareness about sports, health and well-being.’”

This initiative aims to maximise the utility of OCEC’s facilities and foster community engagement by providing a space for sports and wellness activities during the off-peak season.

Employee well-being and empowerment are also central to

OCEC’s operational essence.

Al Shanfari highlighted the importance of a supportive and empowering work environment as a cornerstone of organisational success.

“Any organisation can thrive by focusing on the well-being of their employees,” he asserted.

To this end, OCEC holds quarterly “pit-stop” meetings designed to empower employees to showcase their achievements. These gatherings celebrate individual and team accomplishments, reinforcing a culture of recognition and motivation.

Moreover, the team spirit that permeates every project at OCEC underscores the Centre’s commitment to a collaborative and inclusive workplace. By ensuring that employees are empowered and supported, OCEC cultivates an environment where innovation and excellence can flourish.

This collaborative culture not only enhances employee satisfaction but also drives the Centre’s overall success and growth.

■ SYMPOSIUM ON SETTLING LABOUR DISPUTES HELD

MUSCAT: A symposium on labour dispute settlement was organised by the Ministry of Labour, with attendees including business owners, labourers, judges, attorneys and specialised staff.

The symposium covered a variety of working papers pertaining to the process of resolving labour disputes, including the function of committees for amicable settlement, the minutes of reconciliation between the involved parties, and the process for resolving disputes in compliance with the ministerial decree governing it.

The topic of arbitration was also brought up as a way to resolve labour issues in line with the Labour Law. The symposium covered the practical aspects of settling labour disputes and the procedures for doing so in accordance with the



provisions of Omani Labour Law No. (53/2023) and the ministerial directives implementing it, according to Hussein bin Ali al Lawati, Director General of Labour Welfare.

The symposium covered alternative methods of resolving labour disputes that some nations may use. He expressed the hope that the symposium would produce recommendations that help resolve labour disputes in a way that protects the rights of workers and business owners alike. – ONA



TENDERS ADVERTISEMENT

Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) announces the following tenders:

SR. NO.	TENDER NO.	TENDER NAME	LAST DATE FOR OBTAINING THE DOCUMENTS	BID SUBMISSION DATE	REQUIREMENTS FROM PARTICIPATORS	TENDER DOCUMENT'S FEES (INCLUDING VAT) (RO)
1	60/2023 (Refloat)	Replace Old Grid Station Gates With Cantilever Slide Gates at Muscat, Al Batinah (South & North) & Al Dhahira Governances.	10/06/2024	09/07/2024	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	\$2/500
2	64/2024	Consultancy Services for OETC Asset Enhancement.	10/06/2024	09/07/2024	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	\$2/500
3	65/2024	Supply and Installation of Overhead Lines Identification Plates at Al Dhakiliya & Al Sharqiah (South & North) Governances.	10/06/2024	09/07/2024	Local Companies with Experience in Same Field, Have A Valid Commercial Registration.	26/250

Participation	Interested Companies may obtain Tender Document with the necessity Apply on E-tendering
Buying the Tender	By E-Tendering System.
Fees	Against non-refundable payment as mentioned above against each set of document. (Payment Through Bank Transfer), SMEs are exempted from tender's fees.
The deadline for clarification	Before (21) Days from bid submission date.
Submission	The submission of hard copy will be only for Bid Bond & other documents by E-Tendering
Terms and conditions	- Specifying the name of the Company or whatever refers to in the Bid Guarantee Envelope. - The bid should be valid for not less than (90) days from bid submission date. - The Tenderer should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the bid value and should be valid for (90) days from bid submission date, addressed to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (SAOC). - Small & Medium Enterprises are exempted from the submission of 1% of the bid bond. - Any bid not comply with the required guarantee, will not be accepted.
Offer	The bid bond should be submitted in Tender Box No. (1) at the company's building before 11:00 am on the assigned date for submission of the Tenders.
Company Address	Muscat - Al Mawaleh Road No: 2153 - Building No. 423 0 Block No: 321 - Contact Details: 93515198 , 99105413 , 91777378
Email Website	tenders@omangrid.com www.omangrid.com / link of E-Tendering System https://www.omangrid.com/en/Pages/Services.aspx



OETCOMAN



MHD ACERE unveils all-new MG 7 luxury sedan in Oman

MUSCAT: MG Motor has announced the launch of its all-new MG 7 sedan in Oman. Representing a significant expansion of the British-born brand's car line-up, the MG 7 exudes sophistication with its striking design, cutting-edge technology, and performance-driven features. Equipped with a choice of 1.5L and 2.0L Turbo petrol engines. The all-new MG 7 promises an exhilarating driving experience and will be available to customers across Oman from May 24, 2024. Prices for the new MG 7 start from RO 8,999, ensuring the new model offers remarkable value for its class while combining economy, style, and performance with innovative features. Additionally, customers will benefit from a generous 6-year/200,000 km manufacturer's warranty, providing exceptional peace of mind. The MG 7 introduces to the MG lineup the first-ever large sedan, meticulously engineered for precision and elegance. It is complemented by a streamlined aerodynamic design that ensures it stands out on the road, while seamlessly merging sophistication with style. Elevating its appearance even further, the top three models feature sporty red calipers and 19-inch wheels, enhancing the vehicle's dynamic look. The eye-catching design elements continue inside the cabin where you are greeted with Storm Eye integrated motorsport seats, meticulously designed for ergonomic support. The top trim model features seats crafted with luxury silk Napa leather, microfibre suede, and European textured piping for added sophistication and an elevated feel. The driver's seat offers convenient 6-way electric adjustment for personalised comfort and ease of manoeuvre. This level of comfort extends to the driving capabilities of the



MG 7, with features that have been designed to elevate the experience behind the wheel. Depending on the trim, drivers can enjoy features including a speed dial and super sport mode button conveniently located on the steering wheel, providing an immersive X-mode racing experience tailored for precision driving. Its 10.25-inch front screen complemented by a 12.3-inch infotainment display caters for an immersive drive. The top-tier model comes equipped with a premium Bose sound system, featuring 9 speakers and central point virtual sound technology allowing for an exceptional listener experience. In addition to its technological features, the MG 7 offers a wide range of active safety features, ensuring peace of mind on the road for all occupants. Among the advanced driver-assistance systems available, depending on the model, are Front Collision Warning, Emergency Lane Keep System, and Adaptive Cruise Control. The 1.5L Turbo MG 7 features a 7-speed dual-clutch transmission,

offering 188 HP. Coming in DEL and STD trims, the STD trim is equipped with a PVC foaming steering wheel and rear cameras, while the DEL boasts a leather steering wheel and a 360-degree camera. The DEL model also offers a panoramic sunroof, which can be adjusted using the smart key. On the other hand, the 2.0L Turbo variant comes with a 9-speed automatic transmission, providing seamless power delivery. Available in COM and G.DEL trims, the 2.0L variant offers 261 HP. The G.DEL trim includes a panoramic sunroof, also operable via the smart key with the added convenience of an electric tailgate function and an active retractable tail fin, enhancing its sporty appearance. The COM trim features a leather steering wheel, while the G.DEL offers a premium Napa Leather wheel. Additionally, the COM model is equipped with a rear-view camera, whereas the highest trim G.DEL model features a 360-degree camera for enhanced visibility. Mohsin Hani Bahrani, CEO MHD ACERE, said: "We are excited to introduce the new MG 7 the first-ever large sedan in the MG lineup,

to the Oman market. This vehicle embodies MG's dedication to innovation and excellence, offering cutting-edge race mode capabilities for an exhilarating drive. Its sleek aerodynamic design and integrated motorsport seats set a new standard for luxury and comfort." He also remarked, "This launch marks a significant milestone for MHD ACERE, reinforcing our commitment to bringing advanced automotive technology and design to our customers in Oman. We believe the MG 7 will redefine the driving experience and exceed our customers' expectations." Tom Lee, Managing Director of MG Motor Middle East, said: "In response to evolving customer preferences, we've expanded our offering with the introduction of the first-ever large sedan from MG Motor equipped with sports features. This reflects our commitment to providing a car that excels on the road and embodies a state-of-the-art look and feel. The MG 7 perfectly blends advanced driving features and a sleek style, making it the ideal choice for customers seeking a dynamic driving experience."

Omantel Innovation Labs partners with COMEX to empower local startups

MUSCAT: Omantel Innovation Labs is proud to announce its participation at COMEX, Oman's leading technology and innovation exhibition. This collaboration aims to bolster the local startup ecosystem by providing crucial support, guidance, and resources to budding entrepreneurs in Oman. During COMEX, Omantel Innovation Labs will host a dedicated hour on the "Tech Startup Stage" from 3-4 pm each day of the event. During this hour, expert mentors will impart valuable knowledge on specialised topics, offering insights crucial for startup success. This initiative will be complemented by dedicated startup clinics at the Omantel Innovation Labs booth (OMANTEL-A3), where mentors and the Omantel Innovation Labs team will provide one-on-one support to local startups. HH Al Sayyida Ghada al Said, Senior Manager at Omantel Innovation Labs, stated, "We're delighted to be working with the COMEX team to provide mentorship and guidance to Oman's startup ecosystem. COMEX provides an excellent platform to reach entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs, raise awareness of what is available to them through Omantel Innovation Labs and equip them with the right information to increase their probability of success." Workshops will be open to all COMEX attendees and will cover a range of topics relevant to today's entrepreneurial landscape. Amr Baabood, CEO of Arabian Research Bureau — the organising company of COMEX; Global Technology Show, added, "Omantel Innovation Labs is one of the most prominent entities supporting local startups in Oman, and we're delighted to partner with them to extend that support through COMEX Tech Startup Pavilion. We look forward to seeing many Omani startups benefit from this engagement and using the knowledge shared to enhance our local startup ecosystem."

Get a fancy number while giving back with Ooredoo's charity vanity number auction

MUSCAT: It's definitely not showing off if you decide to bid for a vanity mobile number through Ooredoo's upcoming auction, because it's all for charity. Ooredoo is running another vanity number auction for which customers can register on Monday, May 27. The online bidding for the available Gold and Diamond numbers will start the following day, Tuesday, May 28, from 9am to 3pm. Giving back, including to local communities in Oman, is a key part of Ooredoo's strategy. The telco donates all proceeds from the online vanity number auction to not-for-profits and good causes. Hence, the auction provides an excellent opportunity to get a mobile number that makes you stand out from the crowd while making a real difference in the lives of others. So, don't miss out and save the registration and bidding dates!



Those interested in bidding for one or more of the Gold or Diamond numbers that are up for grabs can browse the online list on Ooredoo's website. First-time bidders must fill out a quick and easy registration form, while those who have participated in previous vanity number auctions can simply activate their account. For more information on registering for Ooredoo's vanity number auction for charity, please visit: www.ooredoo.om/Personal/Mobile/DigitalServices/Auction.aspx.

BankDhofar expands network to reach 121 branches

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, a leading financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, recently opened 3 branches in Muscat Governorate taking the total network to 121 branches. The first is located in Muscat close to the prestigious National Museum and the second one at Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos while the third branch is in Al Khoud 6th with the aim of providing banking services to all customers across segments, especially entrepreneurs and Al-Riadah account customers. By expanding the branch network in all governorates, BankDhofar seeks to be closer to customers and build a deep



relationship with customers, retain them, and provide the best products at exceptional service, as well as allowing them to complete

their banking transactions all time through the mobile banking application and the digital channels. With the opening of

these branches, BankDhofar has 121 branches distributed throughout the Sultanate of Oman. In addition to 350 ATMs, multi-use cash deposit machines, and multi-service interactive machines. The branch at the National Museum is a testament preserving Omani heritage while providing modern banking solutions. The official opening ceremony of the National Museum branch was held under the patronage of Jamal bin Hassan al Musawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum. Through Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos, the bank is catering to the vibrant community of affluent individuals and families.

Elevating the driving experience with Lincoln Nautilus

MUSCAT: The Nautilus is a wonderful addition to Lincoln's mid-size luxury crossover line-up. With stark sculpted exteriors, premium interior fittings, spaciousness and world-class technology adaptations, the Nautilus redefines the luxury experience. Owning a Lincoln is a premium-power experience. The 5-seater Nautilus is powered by a turbocharged 2.0-litre engine that produces 250 horsepower and 380 Nm torque and mated with an 8-speed automatic transmission. The engine is exceedingly fuel-efficient and delivers optimal

power output. Lincoln has set a benchmark for providing premium luxury driving experiences based on high comfort levels, spaciousness, utility, technological and safety aspects. Consequently, Lincoln was named the best premium brand in the Vehicle Satisfaction Awards, which are conducted by Auto Pacific, a future-oriented automotive marketing research and product consulting business. Lincoln won the accolade by qualifying in 49 different characteristics, ranging from interior, comfort, styling to fuel economy, speed performance and

the owning experience. Experience first-class family travel experience in the Nautilus and create joyous unforgettable memories. Cruise pathways while indulging in the outside world through the panoramic vista sunroof. Fitted with sunshades that keep the outside temperature at bay, the sunroof is an ideal window to view the outside world. Enjoy a stress-free drive with the 48" LCD driver information display screen seamlessly blended into the instrument panel. The four cameras, each attached to the two sides, front



and rear, display a 360-degree perspective of road conditions through the LCD driver's panel to

help assist in parking and gauging the sidewalks. Adding richness to the

interior, the front row boasts comfort and spaciousness, with ultra-comfortable chairs that adjust nicely to your legroom requirements. The exterior comes alive with functionality, featuring a hands-free power liftgate option that opens effortlessly by a foot gesture for you to load your belongings. The full-LED multi-projector headlamps are another power-packed feature of the Nautilus. The automatic light adjustment capability gives a clearer and brighter perspective of the road without blinding the opposite end users.

Strategic implication for Oman in 2024



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The economic outlook for Oman in 2024 is positive, with the country targeting at least 3% economic growth for the year.

Key indicators include a rebound in economic growth, supported by higher hydrocarbon production and more robust non-hydrocarbon growth.

The IMF expects the GDP growth to recover to 2.7% in 2024, following a slowdown in the previous year. Oman forecasts a budget deficit of RO 640 million (\$1.66 billion) in 2024, which is 6% of the total revenue, with total revenues projected at RO 11.01 billion, up 9.5% from 2023 estimates.

The economy is expected to rebound in 2024, supported by higher hydrocarbon production. The petroleum sector is likely to grow, although it may be subject to fluctuations in oil prices and production quotas.

The main sectors expected to drive Oman's economic growth in 2024 include higher hydrocarbon production and more robust non-hydrocarbon growth.

In the first half of 2023, the non-hydrocarbon growth accelerated from 1.2% in 2022 to 2.7%, supported by recovering agricultural and construction activities and robust services.

The services sector is expected to grow, with bank credit and electricity output showing positive trends. The country aims to maintain inflation rates at moderate levels, around 3%.

Various factors influence Oman's economic outlook for 2024. While the government is poised for a rebound in economic growth, it also faces challenges related to oil production and global economic uncertainty.

In 2024, the banking sector will face unique challenges caused by global trends and the macroeconomic environment.

These challenges include the impact of divergent and sporadic economic growth, higher funding costs, slower loan growth, declining loyalty, and increasing customer defections.

However, the outlook also presents opportunities for scale and stability, potentially leading to more M&A within the banking industry.

While the weak economic outlook for 2024 will test banks' business volumes, asset quality, and financing conditions, earnings for most banks are expected to benefit from high interest rates.

In 2024, Oman's economic growth will be influenced by various factors, and the country will face challenges in some sectors while experiencing growth in others.

The economy is highly uncertain due to oil price fluctuations, which can impact the hydrocarbon sector's development and the overall economic outlook.

The global economic environment, including inflation, supply chain disruptions, and geopolitical tensions, can influence Oman's economic growth.

The ongoing implementation of the new social protection law and phasing out untargeted energy subsidies remain priorities for the country's economic growth. The structural reform agenda under Oman's Vision 2040 is also progressing, with many reforms under implementation.

Oman expects economic growth from 1.6% in 2023 to 2.1% in 2024.

However, the Gulf geopolitical developments are creating clouds of doubt. The evolving dynamics of the energy market fluctuations, global market economic slowdown, and changes in US policy rates could impact domestic growth positively or negatively.

Therefore, the developing geopolitical dynamics will be crucial in influencing Oman's economic trajectory in 2024. Oman Vision 2040 is a strategic initiative to transform the country's economy from oil-dependent to diversified and sustainable.

The vision targets various development sectors, including tourism, logistics, manufacturing, and renewable energy, to promote economic diversification, attract investments in non-oil sectors, foster entrepreneurship, and enhance the quality of life for its citizens.

A key strategic initiative is Oman's ambitious strategy to derive 30% of electricity from renewable sources by 2030.

In summary, Oman's economy in 2024 is expected to grow in the hydrocarbon and non-hydrocarbon sectors.

However, the country faces challenges related to weakening economic growth, oil price volatility, global economic uncertainties, increased interest rates, and implementing reforms.

The government aims to emerge as a worldwide energy transition leader, diversifying its exports while reducing its reliance on fossil fuels and lowering its carbon footprint.

(The writer is a national level, award-winning outstanding woman educator and scholar in strategic management. She works as an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat.)

Omani E&P firm wins key gasfield development licence in Tanzania

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, MAY 26

Well-known Omani upstream energy firm ARA Petroleum has announced that its Tanzanian subsidiary has obtained the green-light to proceed with the development of the promising Ntorya gas discovery, an onshore field located in the south-east of East African country.

ARA Petroleum Tanzania (APT) was granted a 25-year development licence by the Tanzanian Ministry of Energy, paving the way for the commercialisation of the potentially prolific gas and condensate field, which is part of the wider Ruvuma JV area.

The licence will help unlock new gas volumes to power Tanzania's energy-deficient economic growth, as well as strengthen the Omani E&P firm's



Ntorya-2 well-testing. © ARA Petroleum

growing importance in the East African oil and gas industry.

Established in 2018 with an eye on the development of the Ntorya gasfield, ARA Petroleum Tanzania is presently the operator of the license with a 75% working interest. The balance 25% is held by Dublin-based Aminex Plc, an upstream oil and gas firm listed

on the London Stock Exchange.

The Ntorya gasfield, when commercialised, can be a game-changer for the Tanzanian economy. APT says the field is to host an unaudited Contingent Resource estimated at 3.45 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of Gas Initially In Place (GIIP), with an mean unrisks GIIP potential of 16.4 tcf

and a risked mean potential of 6.9 tcf for the wider Ruvuma JV area.

According to JV partner Aminex, the Ntorya Development Licence area lies adjacent to a region containing supergiant world-class LNG projects, extending from offshore Tanzania into Mozambique waters to the south.

The JV partners intend to produce Ntorya gas into the growing domestic gas market, helping to alleviate energy poverty and boost the energy transition in Tanzania.

A multi-year gas sales agreement was signed earlier this year with the Tanzania Petroleum Development Corporation, it said in a statement. In the Sultanate of Oman, parent company ARA Petroleum holds interests in three upstream assets: Block 31 and Block 44, and the Qarat Millh Small Fields (QSF) license.

Sizable uptick in Iran and GCC trade volumes

HIBBA AL KINDI

MUSCAT, MAY 26

The volume of trade exchange between the Islamic Republic of Iran and countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council reached \$8.2 billion in 2021, according to a recent report published by the GCC Statistical Centre.

Imports by Iran amounted to \$7.0 billion, representing a 46% increase from the previous year's figure of \$4.8 billion in 2020.

Electrical machinery and equipment made up the majority of imports (57.1%) worth \$4 billion, followed by miscellaneous items worth \$1.5 billion representing 21.4%.

Machinery and mechanical appliances represented 10% of imports (valued at \$7 million, followed by tobacco products (5.7%) worth \$4 million. Fruits and nuts represented 2.9% of exports at \$2 million, while oils and cosmetic



products represented 2.9% as well at \$2 million.

Furthermore, Iranian exports into the GCC amounted to \$12 million, representing a 34.8% increase over the previous year's figure of \$9 million in 2020.

Stones and minerals represented 25% valuing at \$3 million, while miscellaneous items also amounted to 25% at \$3 million.

This was followed by livestock (16.7%) worth \$2 million, and fruits and nuts (16.7%) valued at \$2 million.

Vegetables represented 8.3% of imports amounting to \$1 million, and fish and

crustaceans represented 8.3% worth \$1 million.

In 2021, the Islamic Republic of Iran ranked as the 29th trading partner with member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Last year, on the sidelines of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's visit to Iran, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion and Iran's Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance to boost investment promotion and opportunities in an effort to attract Iranian investors to the Sultanate of Oman, according to an ONA report.

The key areas of focus were industry, tourism, mining, food security, and logistics. According to an *Observer* report, as of May 2023, there are 1,300 wholly-owned Iranian businesses operating in Oman.

European banks in Russia face 'awful lot of risk', says Yellen

STRESA, Italy: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that European banks face growing risks operating in Russia and the US is looking at strengthening its secondary sanctions on banks found to be aiding transactions for Russia's war effort.

"We are looking at potentially a tougher stepping-up of our sanctions on banks that do business in Russia," Yellen said in an interview, declining to provide specifics and not identifying any banks at which they could be aimed.

Speaking on the sidelines of a G7 finance leaders meeting in northern Italy, Yellen said that sanctions related to banks' dealings in Russia would only be imposed "if there was a reason to do so, but operating in Russia creates an awful lot of risk," she added. Asked whether she would like to see Austria's Raiffeisen Bank International and Italian bank UniCredit pull out of Russia, Yellen said: "I believe their supervisors have advised them to be extremely careful about what they do there."

European Central Bank policymaker Fabio Panetta had clear instructions for Italian banks on Saturday telling reporters that lenders must "get out" of Russia because staying in the country brings a "reputational problem."

Omani firm inks pact with One Moto to lead EV transformation

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 26

Egoles, a well-known Omani integrated logistics services provider, has signed an exclusive distribution agreement with UAE-based EV startup One Moto for the supply affordable, best-in-class vehicles to the Omani market.

Muscat-based Egoles welcomed the partnership as a demonstration of its commitment to supporting the goals of Oman's 2040 Vision.

"With One Moto's pioneering electric vehicles at their helm, backed by our unparalleled local knowledge and dedication, the partnership is poised to not only

revolutionize transportation but also leave an indelible mark on Oman's journey towards progress and sustainability," said Nasser al Sharji, CEO & Founder of Egoles.

One Moto, the home-grown UAE start-up, is credited with pioneering change in the high-growth sector of two and four-wheeled electric mobility since 2020. Egoles's extensive network of stakeholders, including government entities, private enterprises, and individual consumers, positions the company to facilitate seamless distribution and foster enduring relationships crucial for sustained market penetration and growth.

The agreement commits

over 10% (2,300 vehicles) to be supplied by One Moto in the first 24 months, including motorcycles and light commercial vans.

"In the Sultanate of Oman, the last-mile delivery sector is undergoing a transformative evolution, driven by technological advancements, shifting consumer preferences, and a growing demand for seamless delivery solutions. The forecasted growth of Oman's last-mile delivery industry is exciting. With the endorsement of the local government, private sector stakeholders, and this deal, we expect to offer an even more progressive stronghold in our GCC presence," stated Stephen Wood, COO of One Moto Technologies.

Adam Ridgway, CEO One Moto added: "This is the twelfth country we've expanded into in just three years, we pioneer change in frontier markets like Oman, with a sea of opportunity in front of us and working very closely with all stakeholders to ensure the delivery network is optimised, structured and considers all stakeholders."

This collaboration is supported by recent attention to the Omani EV landscape, including initiatives from Mays Motors, Vinfast, and the government's announcement of 22,000 EVs on Oman's roads by 2030, as stated by Eng Said Hamood al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Oman 2040: A vision for a diversified and thriving economy

The Sultanate of Oman finds itself at a pivotal juncture. Under the sagacious leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, a spirit of collaboration is blossoming between citizens and residents, propelling a multifaceted renaissance.

This national rejuvenation extends beyond mere economic advancement, encompassing significant strides in education, infrastructure development, and the cultivation of a secure and stable social environment.

Central to this transformation lies Oman Vision 2040, a comprehensive blueprint charting a course for sustainable development across all sectors.

Recognising the inherent limitations of a resource-dependent economy, the vision prioritises economic diversification. The Omani government acknowledges that an over-reliance on oil and gas revenues is unsustainable in the long term.

To achieve this ambitious objective, Oman is strategically investing in a multitude of promising sectors:

Tourism enhancement:



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of Oman Observer's Business section

THIS NATIONAL REJUVENATION EXTENDS BEYOND MERE ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT, ENCOMPASSING SIGNIFICANT STRIDES IN EDUCATION, INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT, AND THE CULTIVATION OF A SECURE AND STABLE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Endowed with breathtaking landscapes — from pristine beaches and imposing mountains to verdant oases and a tapestry of rich history — Oman boasts unparalleled tourism potential.

The government is actively developing infrastructure, catering to a range of preferences, from luxury resorts to budget-friendly accommodations.

Simultaneously, a concerted effort is underway to diversify tourism offerings. This multifaceted approach aims to attract a wider spectrum of visitors, from thrill-seeking adventurers to history buffs and cultural enthusiasts.

Industrial engine:

Recognising the potential for job creation and increased value-added production, Oman is actively fostering investment in manufacturing industries. This focus extends beyond simply attracting foreign capital. The government is diligently crafting an attractive investment climate through targeted incentives, thereby nurturing a vibrant domestic entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Logistics powerhouse:

Strategically positioned on major global trade routes, Oman

possesses the potential to become a premier regional logistics hub.

Leveraging this geographical advantage, the government is investing heavily in upgrading critical infrastructure, including ports and airports. This focus on logistics efficiency aims to streamline the movement of goods, solidifying Oman's position as a vital link in the global supply chain.

Unearthing treasures:

Oman is home to a wealth of mineral resources, including copper, gold and iron. Recognising the potential for economic diversification, the government is committed to developing the mining sector responsibly.

Sustainability remains paramount, with a focus on minimising environmental impact and ensuring social welfare within mining communities.

Innovation hub:

The Omani government understands that fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship is critical for propelling economic development. This commitment translates into concrete action.

The government provides aspiring entrepreneurs with vital

support, offering financing and training programmes.

Additionally, Oman is actively cultivating a supportive environment for innovation, encouraging the development of cutting-edge technologies and groundbreaking business ideas.

The strategic focus on diversification is yielding tangible results. In recent years, Oman has witnessed remarkable growth in non-oil sectors.

Tourism boom: Tourist arrivals have surged, generating significant revenue and creating new employment opportunities within the hospitality sector.

Manufacturing momentum: The establishment of numerous new industrial projects has contributed to a rise in the added value of Omani products and a diversification of export offerings.

Logistics efficiency: Investments in infrastructure upgrades have streamlined cargo movement, making Oman a more attractive proposition for international logistics companies.

Mineral wealth exploration: New mineral discoveries have spurred increased investment in the mining sector, unlocking

additional revenue streams.

Innovation ecosystem:

A burgeoning entrepreneurial spirit is evident, with a notable rise in the number of start-ups across diverse fields, showcasing Oman's potential for innovation.

Oman Vision 2040 recognises that a skilled and educated populace is the cornerstone of a thriving, diversified economy

The government is prioritising advancements in education, ensuring the curriculum equips students with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the demands of the 21st century.

Educational institutions are fostering critical thinking and innovation skills, while simultaneously preparing students for the ever-evolving job market.

The success of Oman Vision 2040 hinges not only on robust government policies, but also on a spirit of collective responsibility.

The government is diligently fostering a collaborative environment, encouraging all stakeholders — citizens, residents, and the private sector — to contribute to the nation's progress. This collective effort is crucial for realising the ambitious goals outlined in the vision.

Opportunity Oman: Partnering with Pakistan for a prosperous future



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

The author is Founder and CEO — Smart Investment Gateway, economist, board adviser & business transformation mentor

Oman and Pakistan share a deep-rooted relationship founded on historical ties and shared ambitions. As the global economy evolves, it is crucial to recognise the immense potential for enhancing the economic partnership between these two nations.

By leveraging their unique strengths and complementary advantages, Oman and Pakistan can forge a strategic alliance that drives mutual growth, prosperity and resilience.

Why Oman is an attractive destination for Pakistani investors

Oman's strategic location at the crossroads of global trade routes, coupled with its advanced infrastructure and business-friendly environment, makes it a prime destination for Pakistani investors.

With five state-of-the-art ports and a stable political climate, Oman provides a robust foundation for Pakistani enterprises looking to establish and expand their operations.

This strategic positioning allows for seamless access to key

markets across the Middle East, Africa, and beyond.

Pakistan: A growing market with vast opportunities

Conversely, Pakistan, with a burgeoning population of over 220 million, offers a vast and growing consumer market for Omani companies. Pakistan's competitive labour force and expertise in sectors such as textiles, leather and agriculture present numerous opportunities for collaboration and mutual benefit.

The close geographic proximity between the two countries further facilitates the development of efficient supply chains and smooth trade flows, enhancing the economic synergy between them.

Current trade dynamics and untapped potential

Despite the strong historical ties, the current trade volume between Oman and Pakistan remains relatively modest.

In 2022, Pakistan's exports to Oman amounted to \$192.33 million, while Oman's imports from Pakistan stood at \$510.61 million. This disparity indicates significant untapped potential for expanding bilateral trade.

To bridge this gap, both nations must work collaboratively to identify and prioritise high-potential export products.

The textile, leather and agricultural sectors are prime areas where Pakistani companies can significantly impact the Omani market. With Oman's increasing demand for diverse food products, Pakistani agricultural exports can play a crucial role in ensuring food security and diversifying traded goods.

Addressing barriers and facilitating seamless economic interactions



Despite the strong historical ties, the current trade volume between Oman and Pakistan remains relatively modest.

To fully capitalise on the trade and investment potential, Oman and Pakistan must address existing barriers and facilitate seamless economic interactions.

Simplifying trade processes, reducing non-tariff barriers, and streamlining visa procedures for businessmen and entrepreneurs are essential steps to unlocking the full potential of this partnership.

Establishing direct flight connections and efficient shipping routes will further enhance connectivity and enable the smooth flow of goods, services and ideas between the two countries.

Investment opportunities for Omani companies in Pakistan

For Omani companies, Pakistan presents a wide array of investment opportunities across various sectors. The fisheries sector, projected to contribute \$5.2 billion to Pakistan's GDP by 2040, offers attractive prospects.

The agriculture sector also holds immense potential, with opportunities for up to 23 new food-related projects in the coming years.

Additionally, Pakistan's healthcare sector, which witnessed spending of \$4.9 billion in 2022, presents further avenues for Omani investment. Other key sectors include logistics, with an expected 11 per cent increase in GDP contribution in 2021, and the rapidly growing information technology and communications industry, backed by a high Internet penetration rate of 95.2 per cent in 2022. The manufacturing sector, which contributed \$8 billion to Pakistan's GDP in 2021, also offers significant investment possibilities.

Strategic initiatives for a long-term partnership

To establish a long-term strategic partnership, Oman

and Pakistan should develop a comprehensive five-year executive plan.

Establishing a Joint Working Group will facilitate ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and problem-solving on critical trade and investment matters.

Conducting a thorough feasibility study will help identify sectors with the highest potential for investment and trade expansion, enabling targeted growth strategies.

Investment promotion tours will play a vital role in showcasing the diverse range of opportunities available in both countries. These tours will foster mutual understanding, trust and engagement among investors.

Developing a joint marketing strategy will further amplify the visibility of bilateral opportunities on the global stage, highlighting the synergies and benefits of collaboration.

Streamlining customs

procedures and visa processes will create an enabling environment for trade and investment.

Hosting regular exhibitions and trade fairs will provide a platform for companies from both countries to showcase their products, services and capabilities, facilitating direct business connections and partnerships.

The Oman-Pakistan business and investment gateway

Establishing a dedicated Oman-Pakistan Business and Investment Gateway will serve as a one-stop shop for companies navigating the complexities of cross-border trade and investment. This gateway will provide comprehensive information, assistance and facilitation, empowering businesses with the necessary tools and knowledge to thrive in the shared economic landscape.

Conclusion: A bright future of shared success

The economic partnership between Oman and Pakistan holds immense potential for mutual growth and prosperity. By harnessing their collective strengths, leveraging complementary advantages and working together, Oman and Pakistan can unlock a new era of shared success.

Through strategic collaboration, targeted investment promotion and a strong commitment to trade facilitation, the two countries can build a partnership that will stand the test of time and serve as a model for economic cooperation in the region and beyond. The time is ripe to seize this opportunity, embrace the vast potential that lies ahead and forge a brighter, more prosperous future for the people of Oman and Pakistan.

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat: 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar: 9731 6218, Salalah: 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
Choose from a wide range of brands & models
PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

URGENT HIRING

LEADING LAB CHEMICAL/CONSUMABLE/EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION COMPANY IN OMAN
URGENT HIRING
TECHNICAL SUPPORT ENGINEER

- More than 2-year work experience in Oman/GCC
- Degree of bachelor of Mechanical Engineering
- Driving license in Oman preferred.

Suitable candidate can send CV to:
recruitment74@gmail.com

MONDAY MAY 27, 2024 | DHUL QA'ADA 19, 1445 AH

Auditors & Accountants

• Audit & Accounting • CFO Services • Secondment
• VAT & Tax Return Filing • VAT Refund Assistance

Contact: 92182750 • Email: contact@umpauditors.com

ROYAL CARGO

ALL OVER INDIA
INDONESIA ► NEPAL
AIR EXPORT (Port to Port)
SEA EXPORT (Container Booking)

SERVICES BY AIR & SEA

FOR MORE INFORMATION JUST DIAL
CUSTOMER CARE 93213207

PICK UP FREE ANYWHERE IN MUSCAT 93213206

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

SIT. WANTED

ACCOUNTANT with over 6 years of experience. Detail-Oriented Financial Professional: Expert in Accounting, Audit Prep, and Expense Management. Ready to join immediately. Contact: +968 78320801

INDIAN male 14 years experience light/heavy driver. Looking for suitable opening currently in Oman. Contact: 77050986/ 91280205, email: kokkadmou@gmail.com

B. COM. 35 years of experience in accounts, sales coordinator, admin, HR, personal assistant, document controller with Oman D/L, looking for a job. Contact: 92558734

INDIAN male 6 years experience in accounts/automobile/admin. Seeking for suitable opening in any field, currently in Oman. Contact: 78988055/ 92850930, email: ullasmon8@gmail.com

PLANNING Engineer, PMP. Indian male 11 years experience in Construction Projects. Well versed with Primavera P6 Software, strong communication skills, Interpersonal skills, EDT Claims, Recovery schedules, project control. Having Omani Driving License. Contact: 78002582, email: engineer4planning@gmail.com

SIT. VACANCY

MECHANICAL/ TECHNICAL
REQUIRED service technician for air compressors with D/L. Send your CV to denny@pumpsoman.com. 79119341

SIT. VACANCY

SALES Executive required for building materials, hardware items and similar items. Driving licence necessary. E: sangita@dhayahilal.com. M: 93559800

Looking for a candidate having minimum 5 years of Oman experience in accounts and administration. Knowledge of Oracle/ Tally accounting & inventory package is must preferable experienced in Trading of Building Materials, Tools etc e-mail CV to jobvacancyoman2023@gmail.com

BACHELOR degree in mechanical or electrical engineering ASNT level 2 (NDT), ASNT level 3 (NDT) additional advantage. LEEA foundation, LEEA lifting accessories diploma (LAC). Contact: pipe2566@yahoo.com

FOR RENT

400M RENTAL space Ghubra 18 Nov Street second line suitable for all commercial use. Tel: 92408308

WAREHOUSE / workshop 2,600 sq metres for rent in Misfa near Oman Cement Factory including accommodation contact: GSM 98286899, email: sales@jetsoman.com

3BKH- Ghubra 18 Nov Street. Tel: 92408308

IN Ruwi, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, hall, kitchen, with car parking. RO 150 monthly only. Tel: 94402003.

SIT. WANTED

29 YEARS old Indian female, MBA holder with 2 years experience. Seeking a suitable position. Currently in Muscat on visit visa. Contact: 78641071, shazashakeel@gmail.com

28 YEARS Experience in Oman in sales, marketing and management, Indian with DL and release.

Looking for a good job change. Contact: 78501743.

A Sudanese resident in Salalah, Bsc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet). Contact: +968 98510880.

Job Vacancy

Candidates with at least 5-10 years of experience are urgently needed for the following positions in a multinational company in Oman

- Electrical Engineer** (O & M experience)
- DCS Engineer** (Honeywell DCS experience)
- Planning Engineer**
- Quantity Surveyor**
- Draftsman**

Interested candidates can send CVs to **recruitment2024n@gmail.com**

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309

pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER, WhatsApp <your name> to **96473232**

FOUR STAR TECHNICAL SUPPLIES LLC
(Formerly OMEIR NASSER AL FALAHY & PARTNERS TRAD. CO. LLC)

"Quality products, exceptional service, guaranteed"

Our products:
Electrical, Building Material, Hardware, Oilfield Industrial Equipment & Tools

OSRAM, Milano, ELORA, DEWALT, DUNGELL, VICTOR, DORMER, BOSCH, METZ CONNECT, CRC, Wera, Clarke, RIDGID, Devcon, Schneider, Beta, ALNITE, MK, PCE

P.O. Box 3897, P.C. 112, Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel.: +968 24837874, Fax: +968 24831341
Mobile: +968 99354944
Email: onasser@omantel.net.om / nelson@onasser.com

HAVE A PROPERTY FOR RENT?

Advertise with us.

Contact us on: 99639264

SIT. WANTED

INDIAN female, completed Masters in Computer Application (MCA), having experience in teaching profession and looking for a prospective job. Also having knowledge in Programming languages. Currently available in Muscat. Email: induchandran01@gmail.com. GSM: 94117967 / 79090343.

ACCOUNTANT & sales Executive, Indian male, 31 years, BA English, specialised in Accounting. 2 years experience in India & 6 years experience in Oman. Seeking position in Accounts/Sales fields (has Oman licence). Mob: 78805951. Gmail: akhilgopinath2017@gmail.com

To advertise on our social media platforms and website

Please Contact our Team

95210257

OMAN OBSERVER
www.omanobserver.om

@omanobserver

we shall overce

BREAKING NEWS

OMAN DAILY **Observer**

FREE* CLASSIFIEDS

SITUATION WANTED

* NOW FREE CLASSIFIED IN OMAN DAILY OBSERVER ON THE ABOVE CATEGORIES ONLY

Send your advertisement (Only one per coupon & no photocopies), either by mail or in person, with your local identity.

To advertise please contact:
Tel: 71455532/ 71455531/ 71455530
Email: adv@omaninfo.om

To advertise in Information Ministry channels

To contact 71455532- 71455531- 71455530
adv@omaninfo.om
izdiyar_info izdiyar.info

اردھار izdiyar

IZDIYAR_INFO



CULTURE

A general view shows people gathering as Pope Francis presides a mass on World Children's Day at St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation by Colombian La Petite Mort brand during Bogota Fashion Week, in Bogota. — AFP



MUSIC

Puerto Rican singer Bad Bunny performs on stage during his "Most Wanted Tour" at the Kaseya Center in Miami. — AFP



CULTURE

A cosplayer dressed up as Dark elf, a character from Medieval fantasy, poses for a photo as she attends the Argentina Comic Con in Buenos Aires. — AFP



NATURE

A blooming Titan Arum (aka Titan Phallus) giant flower at the Belgian National Botanic Gardens in Meise. — AFP

art & life

MONDAY | MAY 27, 2024 | DHUL QA'ADA 19, 1445 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



OMANI FILM 'FLAMING SOULS' EXPLORES THE DEPTHS OF HUMAN COMPASSION AND CRUELTY

"Flaming Souls" follows Salman, a young man with a mental growth disability, facing hardships and exploitation. Despite village affection, he struggles with his family and is tragically led to his death by supposed friends. The film contrasts Salman's plight with his half-brother Khalid's destructive video game addiction, set against stunning Omani landscapes... **P20**

FILM

Cannes top prize goes to Sean Baker's 'Anora'

"ANORA," A DARKLY funny and touching drama about a young dancer who becomes involved with a Russian oligarch's son, won the Cannes Film Festival's top prize, the Palme d'Or, on Saturday. The film by US director Sean Baker beat the 21 other films in the competition line-up, including entries by established direc-

tors like Francis Ford Coppola and David Cronenberg. This win is dedicated "to all workers past present and future," he said as he accepted the award, while also thanking the film's star, Mikey Madison, as well as Samantha Quan, his wife and producer. "This has been my life's goal, so to reach this place is... I'm going to have to do some thinking tonight about what's next," Baker said after the ceremony. Jury president Greta Gerwig, the director behind the pink-hued hit "Barbie," called "Anora" an "incredibly human and humane film that captured our hearts" when announcing the award that was handed out by George Lucas, of "Star Wars" fame. Lucas was on stage to receive an honorary award during the festival's closing ceremony from his longtime friend Coppola, whose passion project "Megalopolis" was also in competition. "I'm just a kid who grew up in the middle of California, surrounded by vineyards, and made films in San Francisco with my friend Francis Coppola," said Lucas at the ceremony. The Grand Prix, the second-highest prize after the Palme d'Or, was awarded to "All We Imagine As Light," marking the first time an Indian director had won the prize.



Director Payal Kapadia's debut feature about the friendship between three women was the first Indian film in competition in 30 years. "The fact that we could be here is a testament that if you stick to one thing and

don't give up hope, then the film could possibly be made, and we are here," she said. Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof, who was in Cannes about two weeks after announcing he had gone into exile, was given a special award for "The Seed of the

Sacred Fig" about an Iranian court official who grows increasingly controlling and paranoid as protests begin to swell in 2022. **DOUBLE HONOURS** "Emilia Perez," a musical about a Mexican cartel, was doubly honoured. Director Jacques Audiard received the jury prize on stage, while the best actress prize was expanded to include all the film's female stars, with jury member Lily Gladstone saying "Emilia Perez" celebrated the "harmony of sisterhood." Zoe Saldana, Selena Gomez, Karla Sofia Gascon and Adriana Paz all star in the film that Vanity Fair magazine called "a movie unlike any other." Jesse Plemons was named best actor for playing three different parts — a struggling police officer, a cult member and a man whose every action is controlled by his boss — in director Yorgos Lanthimos movie "Kinds of Kindness." Best screenplay went to "The Substance," a Demi Moore-led body horror about the perils of youth and beauty, while Miguel Gomes took best director for "Grand Tour," an eclectic trip through Asia by a British civil servant. The 77th edition of the festival ran from May 14 to 25. — **Reuters**

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE
We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.



FINLAND'S WIZARDS MAKING FOOD OUT OF THIN AIR

AT A FACTORY IN Finland, the "farmers of the future" are making a new food protein by feeding a microbe air and electricity, proving that protein can be produced without traditional agriculture.

Livestock farming is one of the main culprits in greenhouse gas emissions, the primary cause of global warming.

Cellular agriculture, where food or nutrients are grown from cell cultures, is increasingly seen as a green alternative to animal agriculture.

Lab-grown meat, eggs and milk have made headlines in recent years, with scientists using animal cell cultures — a process some have criticised as unnatural, highly processed, energy-consuming and costly.

But at Solar Foods' recently opened factory outside Helsinki, scientists are using new technology to grow protein out of cells using air and electricity.

By feeding a microbe with carbon dioxide, hydrogen and some minerals, and powering the process with electricity from renewable sources, the company has managed to create a protein-rich powder that can be used as a milk and egg substitute.

"We can source our main feedstock for the microbe from the air," Solar Foods chief executive Pasi Vainikka said, as he gave a tour of the company's new facilities near Helsinki.

"We have started the production of the

world's most sustainable protein."

Founded by Vainikka and Juha-Pekka Pitkanen in 2017, Solar Foods launched the "world's first factory growing food out of thin air" in April.

"Much of the animal-like protein of today can actually be produced through cellular agriculture and we can let agricultural land re-wild and thereby build carbon stock," Vainikka said, referring to the process whereby forests and soil absorb and store carbon.

One kilo of the new protein, dubbed "solein", emits 130 times less greenhouse gases than the same amount of protein produced by beef production in the European Union, a 2021 scientific study claimed.

Vainikka navigates his way through the factory's laboratory and into the control room, where a dozen people at computer screens monitor the production process.

"These are our future farmers," Vainikka said.

- PART OF THE SOLUTION -

Transforming food production and consumption is at the heart of combating the climate crisis and preventing biodiversity loss, according to Emilia Nordlund, head of industrial biotechnology and food research at the VTT Technical Research Centre.

Yet current projections show the consumption of meat is expected to increase in coming years.



Industrial food production, especially livestock production, is one of the biggest causes of greenhouse gas emissions (and) the biggest cause of biodiversity loss, eutrophication and freshwater usage," she said.

New food production technologies can help cut emissions and "decentralise and diversify food production", Nordlund said.

"However, at the same time, we must improve the existing food production methods to make them more sustainable and resilient," she added.

Fermentation technology used to produce different nutrients, such as proteins, has been around for decades.

But the field has expanded significantly in recent years with new technological solutions and research projects emerging worldwide.

- SLOW PROGRESS -

Some of the most active start-up hubs focusing on cellular agriculture are in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Israel, Nordlund said.

"We are in a crucial phase as we will see

which start-ups will survive," she said, adding that stalling bureaucracy was slowing cellular agriculture's take-off in the EU.

Dressed in protective gear to prevent bacteria contamination in the factory, Vainikka showed off a giant steel tank in a shiny production hall.

"This is a fermenter holding 20,000 litres," he said, explaining that the microbe multiplies inside the tank as it gets fed the greenhouse gas.

Liquid containing the microbes is continuously extracted from the tank to be processed into the yellowish protein-rich powder with a flavour described as "nutty" and "creamy".

"The fermenter produces the same amount of protein per day as 300 milking cows or 50,000 laying hens," Vainikka said.

That equals "five million meals' worth of protein per year".

For now, the main purpose of the small Finnish plant employing around 40 people is to "prove that the technology scales", so it can attract the necessary investments pending European regulatory approval.

While the protein has been cleared for sale in Singapore where some restaurants have used it to make ice cream, it is still awaiting classification as a food product in the EU and the United States.

To have any real impact, the aim is to "build an industrial plant 100 times the size of this one", Vainikka said. — AFP

DISCOVERY

Swiss returns three confiscated artefacts to Iraq

SWITZERLAND ON FRIDAY returned to Iraq three important Mesopotamian objects seized during a criminal procedure, Bern said. During a ceremony at the culture ministry in Bern, Swiss Interior

Minister Elisabeth Baume-Schneider handed over a partial statue and two Mesopotamian reliefs to Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein.

The three works, which are 1,700 to 2,800 years old, are "of great significance" to Iraq, the ministry said in a statement.

They were confiscated during a criminal procedure in the Geneva canton last year, it said.

The main person accused in that case was handed a prison sentence for document forgery and for violating the Cultural Property Transfer Act, which bans the transfer of stolen or looted cultural goods, the ministry said.

An additional 43 cultural items had been confiscated by Swiss authorities in the case, it added.

The three objects were discovered and documented during official excavations in Iraq in 1846/47, 1959 and 1976. They all originated in Mesopotamia, today's Iraq.

"They were subsequently removed from Iraq at an unknown date and possibly illegally," the ministry said.

They include two large Assyrian reliefs from the 8th century BC that were found at the major archaeological site Nimrud-



Kalhu.

There was also the fragment of a royal bust, wearing a pleated tunic and a royal mantle adorned with pendants, from the ancient city of Hatra in the second to third centuries AD.

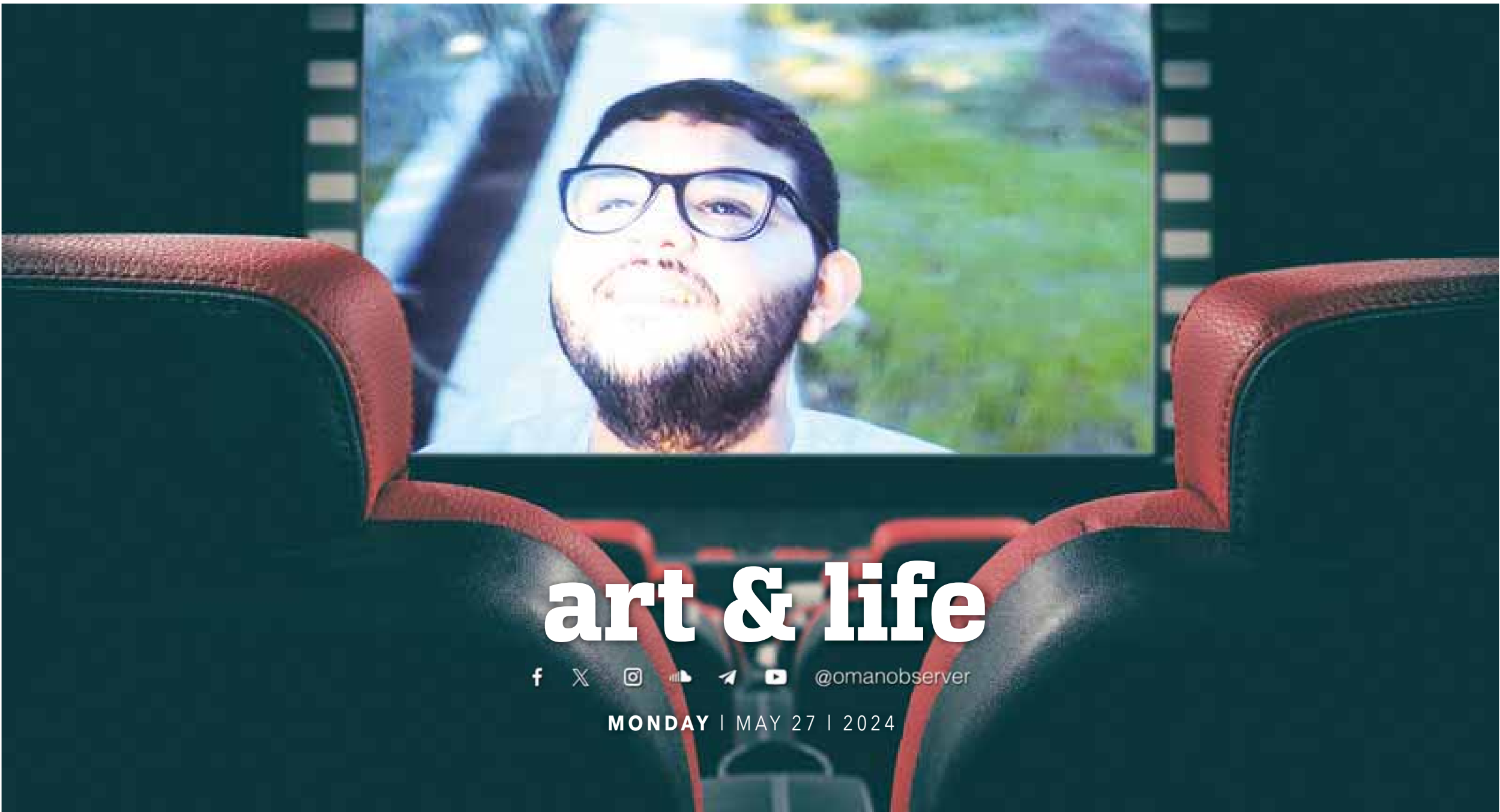
Cultural items from Mesopotamia, known as the cradle of civilisation, are among the most endangered categories of Iraqi cultural goods, the Swiss culture ministry said.

They are particularly affected by illegal excavations, smuggling and illegal trading, leading UNESCO to add three sites in Iraq to its list of World Heritage in Danger, including the Hatra site.

Switzerland and Iraq are parties to a UNESCO convention aimed at protecting cultural heritage by banning and preventing illegal imports, exports and transfers of cultural property.

Friday's restitution was the fifth from Switzerland to Iraq since 2005 and "by far the most significant", the ministry said.

While the objects were officially returned to Iraq on Friday, the ministry said they would remain in Switzerland for now to feature in an exceptional exhibit at the ministry through June 7. — AFP



Omani film ‘Flaming Souls’ explores the depths of human compassion and cruelty

BY KHALID AL BALUSHI

A journey imbued with good and evil, intimacy and compassion, “Flaming Souls” tells a story marked by hardships and unfair challenges. The film centres on Salman, a young man with a mental growth disability, who faces significant difficulties in his life. Despite the villagers’ affection for him, he struggles to get along with his stepfather and half-brother, Khalid. In an effort to escape his burdens, Salman takes Khalid’s guitar, seeking solace in its strings. A group of young men praise him and invite

also with the stunning filming locations shown on the film. It was shot in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, renowned for its agriculture and heritage. Additionally, the water pond scenes were filmed in the Wilayat of Bahla, while the large pond featured in the film’s conclusion was located in Samayil. Director Yaqoub al Khanjari explained, “We chose this idea for several reasons, including scenes inspired by real stories and incidents, and our concern about the dangers of video games. It was important to highlight this issue, as well as the issue of people with intellectual disabilities and growth defi-

including production studios, funding bodies, and professional networks, these challenges haven’t stopped Omani film-makers to create their unique masterpieces. Al Khanjari is one of the few who has ventured into creating scripted film with the hope of putting unique Oman stories on the screen. Sama Issa, an Omani poet and writer who attended the film pre-

Dr Amal al Harmali, a university professor, writer, researcher and trainer, said, “I watched 20-year-old Salman as he gathered flowers in his small palm-frond basket and then released them to the wind in the village. I found it poetic and metaphorical that he wants to spread their fragrance so it reaches the different people in the village.” She added, “Director Yaqoub al Khanjari captivated viewers, making them fall in love with the place. Scenes of Oman’s beauty – the vast green fields, the sunrise, plowing, sheep raising, and the cool water

schools, playgrounds and roads, there are individuals like Salman who face bullying, mockery and exclusion. These children are often not seen as normal by many people.” Among those in attendance, they are of general consensus that the stories of Oman, while confined within the villages, have more global impact. One attendee noted that he is happy to see that “many emerging Omani film-makers are focusing on storytelling that reflects Omani culture, traditions and contemporary issues. This includes exploring



him on a trip, which he hopes will be a chance for relaxation and enjoyment. However, these supposed friends exploit his mental condition, cruelly mocking him, and ultimately leading to his tragic death when he falls from a cliff. Meanwhile, Khalid’s life takes a starkly different direction as he becomes excessively addicted to video games. This addiction gradually results in aggressive behaviour, making him a danger to those around him, including his friends. At an exclusive preview held recently, the film captivated viewers not just with the storyline, but

ciencies addressed in the film. These are very sensitive topics that society continues to grapple with.” He added, “Our experience with this film was wonderful, despite the many challenges we faced and learned from. We travelled to various areas in the Sultanate to find the right climate for filming. The film is now available on the Ayn platform, and we are currently participating in numerous forums and festivals.” Despite film-making being an expensive endeavour and the country still fully to improve and develop the film industry infrastructure



view, remarked, “This experience has consistently attracted the interest of behavioural scientists and filmmakers from various intellectual and artistic backgrounds.” He added that the scenes were characterised by intensity and compassion, highlighted by the mother’s kindness, the father’s hatred, the villagers’ mercy, and the moral weakness of some youths who ultimately led to Salman’s destruction.



ponds that provide refuge on hot summer days – transported us back to when the village was the most beautiful place in the world.” Reflecting on her own experience, she said, “As a child, my village surrounded me from all sides, and I dreamed of seeing the world. I grew up and saw the world and discovered that it’s not the places that make the birds sing in the heart.” Dr Amal described Salman’s village as enchanting but harbouring much poison in its fangs, injecting it into the vulnerable through contempt, belittlement and humiliation of those different from them. She added, “In many houses,

themes such as identity, social change, and the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity.” One industry watcher also added that right now, participating in local and international film festivals and competitions is a popular way for Omani film-makers to gain exposure. Events like the Muscat International Film Festival provide a platform for showcasing local talent. “These talents needed to be honed and supported and with the rich history and tradition, Oman can be the perfect breeding ground for powerful storytelling,” the industry watcher commented.