

OMAN
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DAILY

Observer

SUNRISE 05:24 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:00 AM

DHUHR 12:08 PM

ASR 03:31 PM

MAGHRIB 06:48 PM

ISHA 08:07 PM

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CALL FOR CAUTION AS ONLINE SHOPPING GAINS PACE

INBRIEF

ARAB ECONOMIC SUMMIT DISCUSSES FOOD SECURITY

BAGHDAD: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, headed the Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the Fifth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, which began on Saturday in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad with the participation of a number of heads of states and governments.

The summit discussed the Arab food security file, developments in the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) and the completion of requirements for establishing the Arab Customs Union.

The summit also discussed the executive plan for the Arab Water Security Strategy in the Arab region to address future challenges and requirements for sustainable development. The summit also reviewed the strategic framework and executive action plan for the Regional Programme for the Economic and Social Empowerment of Arab Women, among other issues.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation accompanying HH Sayyid Shihab comprises: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs; Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy; Abdullah bin Nassir al Rahbi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League and the Charge D'affaires of Oman's Embassy in Iraq. — ONA

RO 920M ROAD PROJECTS UNDERWAY



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has invested more than RO 920 million in road development projects across the Sultanate of Oman since the beginning of the Tenth Five-Year Plan in 2021. These efforts reflect the government's commitment to enhancing connectivity, supporting regional development and improving infrastructure throughout the country.

According to Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, the Ministry is currently implementing a number of dual carriageway and other road projects in various stages — some under execution, others in the bidding phase or under design. One of the most significant recent completions is the Sultan Said bin Taimur Road, a 400-kilometre-long dual carriageway, now the longest in the Sultanate of Oman.

— DETAILS ON P15

Arab Summit presses for end to Gaza ‘bloodshed’



Sayyid Shihab heads Oman’s delegation

BAGHDAD: On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs chaired the Sultanate of Oman's delegation at the 34th Arab Summit and the Fifth Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, held on Saturday in Bagdad, the Republic of Iraq.

President Dr Abdul Latif Rashid of the Republic of Iraq, delivered a speech in which he warned that the specter of war threatens security and stability in the region. He noted that Baghdad Summit is being held amidst serious challenges endangering the region, the security of Arab nations and the fate of their peoples.

He emphasised Iraq's rejection of the forced displacement of Gaza's population under any pretext and stressed the necessity of unified Arab action in the current phase. He called for serious and responsible Arab efforts to save Gaza, reactivate UNRWA's role and ensure the delivery of aid to the Strip.

On his turn, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez stated that the death toll in Gaza is staggering and unacceptable, accusing Israel of violating international law. He stressed that what is happening in Gaza and the West Bank cannot be ignored.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed Oman's mediation in announcing a halt to attacks in the Red Sea, expressing hope for a political solution in Yemen. He also called for an end to the ongoing war in Gaza and rejected the forced displacement of its residents.

During his speech, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas asserted that Israel's killings and forced displacement are part of a broader plan to sabotage the two-state solution. He urged the adoption of an Arab-led initiative to achieve peace.

HH Sayyid Shihab was accompanied by an official delegation that comprised Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, Abdullah bin Nassir al Rahbi, Ambassador of Oman to Egypt and its Permanent Representative to the Arab League and the Charge D'affaires of Oman's Embassy in Iraq. — ONA

ARAB LEADERS MEETING on Saturday at a summit in Baghdad urged the international community to press for a Gaza ceasefire, as Israel launched an expanded military offensive in the Palestinian territory.

In a joint final statement, Arab League members also called for funding to back their Gaza reconstruction plan, after US President Donald Trump reiterated a proposal to take over the strip.

The Arab leaders called “on the international community... to exert pressure to end the bloodshed and ensure that urgent humanitarian aid can enter without obstacles all areas in need in Gaza.” They added that they “firmly” rejected any plans to displace Palestinians. It came hours after Israel's military launched a new

Gaza offensive, saying it was part of “the expansion of the battle in the Gaza Strip” aimed at defeating Palestinian militant group Hamas. Appearing at the summit as a guest, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez appealed for increased pressure “to halt the massacre in Gaza”.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al Sisi urged his US counterpart Donald Trump to “apply all necessary efforts... for a ceasefire”.

United Nations chief Antonio Guterres told the summit that “we need a permanent ceasefire, now”. Guterres said he was “alarmed by reported plans by Israel to expand ground operations and more”.

“We reject the repeated displacement of the Gaza population, along with any question of forced displacement outside of Gaza.” During a press conference, he urged an end to Israel's aid blockade on Gaza.

“A policy of siege and starvation makes a mockery of international law,” Guterres said.

The summit came days after a tour of the Gulf by Trump, who has sparked uproar by declaring the United States could take over Gaza and turn it into the “Riviera of the Middle East”.

The scheme that included the proposed displacement of Palestinians was widely condemned and prompted Arab leaders to come up with an alternative plan to rebuild the territory at a March summit in Cairo.

During his visit to the region, Trump reiterated that he wanted the United States to “take” Gaza and turn it into a “freedom zone”. Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani told the summit his country backed the creation of an “Arab fund to support reconstruction efforts” after crises in the region. — AFP

Israel launches expanded Gaza offensive aimed at defeating Hamas

GAZA: Israel's military launched intensified Gaza operations on Saturday aimed at “the defeat of Hamas”, with rescuers in the besieged Palestinian territory reporting at least 10 killed by new Israeli strikes.

The stepped-up campaign came amidst increasing international concern about the humanitarian situation in Gaza which continues to worsen amidst an Israeli aid blockade. One of the territory's last functioning hospitals warned it could

no longer treat seriously wounded patients because of shortages and damage from a nearby attack.

It also came as Hamas said a new round of indirect negotiations with Israel “without any preconditions” aimed at ending the war had started in Doha.

Israel's military called the new operation part of “the expansion of the battle in the Gaza Strip, with the goal of achieving all the war's objectives, including the release of the abducted and



Palestinians make their way with belongings as they flee their homes, after Israeli air strikes, in the northern Gaza Strip. — Reuters

the defeat of Hamas”.

It said it had “launched extensive strikes and transferred forces to seize control of areas within the Gaza Strip”.

Addressing an Arab League summit in Baghdad, United Nations chief Antonio Guterres said he was “alarmed” at the expansion, adding: “We need a permanent ceasefire, now.”

The summit's final statement urged the international community “to exert pressure to end the

bloodshed and ensure that urgent humanitarian aid can enter without obstacles”.

Italy urged Israel to stop its military strikes, with Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani saying: “Enough with the attacks.” The German government said it was “deeply concerned” about the Israeli offensive. Gaza civil defence agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said 10 bodies were brought to hospitals on Saturday morning a day after Israeli strikes killed at least 100 people. — AFP

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



RISING DUST, HIGH TEMPERATURES REPORTED

MUSCAT: Northwesterly winds continue to blow across most governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, leading to rising dust in the desert and open areas; and causing reduced horizontal visibility at times.

According to the Directorate General of Meteorology, rising sea waves are reported on the coasts of Musandam Governorate and parts of the coasts of the Sea of Oman, leading to increased temperatures in some areas.

Drivers have been urged to exercise caution while driving, especially in areas affected by dust and follow weather bulletins. Highest temperatures in the last 24 hours: Suhar: 47.1 degrees Celsius; Shinas: 46 degrees Celsius; Nizwa: 43.8 degrees Celsius; Bausher: 43.9 degrees Celsius; Muscat Airport: 43.1 degrees Celsius; Sur: 43.8 degrees Celsius.

SAYYID SHIHAB MEETS IRAQI PRIME MINISTER

BAGHDAD: HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs and the head of the Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the 34th Arab Summit, met with Mohammed Shia al Sudani, Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq on the sidelines of the summit in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, on Saturday.

They reviewed the existing fraternal relations between the two brotherly countries and discussed ways to enhance bilateral cooperation in various fields.

They also exchanged views on a number of current issues of common interest. The meeting was attended by members of the official delegation accompanying HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs. — ONA



The meeting reviewed the existing fraternal relations between the two brotherly countries. — ONA

Oman, Palestine discuss developments in Gaza

SAYYID BADR BIN HAMAD AL BUSAIDY, Foreign Minister met with Hussein al Sheikh, Vice President of the State of Palestine and Deputy Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

The meeting took place on the sidelines of the 34th session of the Arab League Summit and the 5th Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, being held in the Republic of Iraq.

The meeting addressed developments in the Palestinian cause in light of the



The meeting addressed developments in the Palestinian cause in light of the ongoing escalation. — ONA

ongoing escalation, emphasising the necessity of halting the aggression on the Gaza Strip and ensuring the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid.

It also highlighted the importance of reaching a comprehensive settlement that leads to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions.

Both sides stressed the importance of Palestinian national unity and enhancing joint Arab coordination to reinforce the resilience of the Palestinian peoples and support their legitimate aspirations. — ONA

Mubashir partners with Al Mouj Muscat to expand outdoor advertising opportunities



Mubashir, Oman's leading digital out-of-home (DOOH) company, has announced a strategic partnership with Al Mouj Muscat, one of the country's premier lifestyle destinations, introducing its smart outdoor advertising network across key locations within the community.

Through this collaboration, Mubashir will offer advertisers the opportunity to connect with a high-value audience made up of families, local residents, expat residents,

business travellers, and tourists. With over 8,000 residents representing 85 nationalities and more than 4 million visitors annually, Al Mouj Muscat presents an ideal environment for brands aiming to strengthen their presence in a lifestyle-driven setting.

Mubashir currently operates a growing network of over 300 digital screens across Oman, spanning key regions from Muscat to Salalah. The network will provide brands with measurable exposure through post-

campaign reporting, offering insights into traffic, impressions, and ad plays. Strategically placed screens in areas with high dwell time ensure that brand messages are effectively absorbed by audiences. Additionally, advertisers benefit from easy access to Mubashir's nationwide platform, allowing for greater campaign management flexibility and responsiveness.

As part of this rollout, Mubashir will also introduce innovative ad tech solutions

designed to enhance campaign performance and audience engagement. These advancements will support more interactive and data-driven advertising experiences, helping brands create greater impact.

This expansion at Al Mouj Muscat is part of Mubashir's broader growth strategy to strengthen its footprint in Oman and expand across the MENA region, offering businesses new opportunities to reach engaged audiences in prime destinations.



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Their future starts today!

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**Unlimited data**
for all plans





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SHORT TAKES

Renowned Italian jazz artists captivated the audience with a sophisticated performance.

OMAN JOINS EU IN CELEBRATING 75TH EUROPE DAY

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

The Sultanate of Oman joined the European Union (EU) in celebrating the 75th Europe Day with a landmark jazz concert, showcasing cultural diplomacy and international friendship.

Hosted by a delegation of the European Union to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman in collaboration with the Embassy of Italy in Oman, the evening featured a mesmerising jazz performance by Luca Velotti and Silvia Manco Duo at Bait Al Zubair recently in honour of the 75th anniversary of Europe Day.

The evening symbolised unity, cooperation and a shared commitment to peace and dialogue between Europe and Oman.

This year’s celebration marked a historic milestone — 75 years since the Schuman Declaration of May 9, 1950, which laid the foundation for the European Union and its enduring mission to transform a war-torn continent into a peaceful, prosperous and united Europe.

Europe Day serves as a reminder of Europe’s shared past and future rooted in cooperation, openness and the belief that unity and diversity can coexist.

“On Europe Day, it is important to remember the value of peace and dialogue, the importance of partnerships for building a more prosperous and secure future,” said Christophe Farnaud, Ambassador of the European Union to the Sultanate of Oman, emphasising the significance of Europe Day.

“The European Union values the partnership with the Sultanate of Oman and applauds its role in advancing peace and security in the region,” he added.

Renowned Italian jazz artists Luca Velotti, known for his collaborations with Paolo Conte and Silvia Manco, a distinguished pianist and vocalist, captivated the audience with a sophisticated performance that merged classic jazz with European soul, serving as a bridge between cultures and embodying the spirit of Europe Day.

GAS CYLINDER BLAST IN BAUSHER KILLS COUPLE

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

A couple was killed in a gas cylinder blast that occurred in a residential industrial building in the Wilayat of Bausher, in the wee hours of Saturday, according to the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA).

The victims were identified as two expatriates from Kerala district of Kannur, Thalassery, named Ambujakshan and Sajitha, who have been working in private companies as accountants.

The commercial and residential building partially collapsed following the explosion. Preliminary reports indicate that the explosion was caused by a cooking gas leak. However, the

The victims were identified as Ambujakshan and Sajitha.

actual cause of the accident is yet to be identified, according to the CDAA.

The CDAA further emphasised the safe use of gas cylinders, especially in hot climates.

“Safer use of gas cylinders and fire should be observed at all times. It starts with always keeping the cylinder in an upright position and

keeping the gas stove at least 15 cm above the cylinder on a stable surface. Also, one should always stand while cooking,” a CDAA official said.

The gas stove shouldn’t be placed where there is a strong wind flow and inflammable items should not be used in the kitchen other than the gas cylinder. Also, one should light the lighter before turning on the gas stove.

“Multitasking while cooking should be avoided and one should always be present near the stove. Always use a cotton apron while cooking. And, last but not least, make sure that the regulator is switched off when the cylinder is not in use or when leaving the area,” he added in a set of precautions for gas cylinder usage.

Apply for Schengen visa three months in advance

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MAY 17

THE summer peak outbound travel is about to start within a few weeks, making it nearly impossible for someone to change their mind about travelling to Europe with a Schengen visa at the last minute.

Marita Bachhav, regional head of VFS Global, which processes visa documents and collects applications for most countries, told the Observer that Europe remains a popular destination for travellers from Oman and demand for visas, especially during peak travel seasons like summer holidays, is higher than other times of the year.

“Travellers can apply for Schengen visas up to six months before the intended date of travel; and we urge applicants to plan and apply for their visas well in advance to avoid any delays,” she said.

“The availability of visa appointments, mandatory documentation, processing timelines and visa application decisions are entirely at the discretion of the respective governments. Last-minute plans run the risk of appointment slots being unavailable or delays in getting a visa decision due to the high volumes of applications in process

“Travellers can apply for Schengen visas up to six months before the intended date of travel; and we urge applicants to plan and apply for their visas well in advance to avoid any delays

MARITA BACHHAV
Regional head of VFS Global

at the Embassy/Consulate,” she added.

It is recommended that travellers apply for visas as early as booking flights and accommodations. Most countries accept visa applications up to 90 days (three months) before the travel date. According to the revised Schengen Visa Code effective February 9, 2020, travellers can apply for a Schengen visa up to six months before the travel date. Especially this year, with higher demand and limited appointment slots available, applicants must apply for their visa as early as possible.

FRAUDULENT ENTITIES

Visa applicants are also advised to be aware of fraudulent entities that charge fees from customers for scheduling appointments or providing other services using VFS Global’s name or independently.

VFS Global does not charge any fee for booking appointments on [www.vfsglobal.com](#), the official website for visa applications. However, some governments require pre-payment of the service fee at the time of booking the appointment.

This payment will be reimbursed or deducted during the application process. This step is only to ensure genuine travellers use appointment booking and the system is kept safe

from misuse by fraudulent entities.

Unlike Omani nationals, residents/expats residing in Oman must ensure they have a valid Omani residency permit that extends beyond the intended return date from the Schengen area. Short-term visit visas or expired cards are not acceptable.

FINANCIAL DOCUMENTATION

Non-Omani residents may need to provide more comprehensive proof of financial means, including recent bank statements, salary slips and sponsorship letters if applicable. Additional supporting documents depend on nationality and embassy-specific requirements. Some residents may be asked to submit additional supporting documents, such as a no-objection letter from their employer or landlord.

“If you are travelling to Europe on a Schengen Visa, you must apply for a Schengen visa at the Embassy/Consulate of the country that you intend to visit. If you are planning to visit more than one Schengen country, you must apply for a Schengen visa at the Consulate of the country where you will spend the longest period. If you are staying in more than one location for an equal duration of time, you must apply to the country that is your first port of entry,” Marita said.

Construction waste — from a burden to an economic resource

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, MAY 17

Using recycled construction waste could become a norm that also provides opportunities for SMEs. This was stated during the two-day conference organised by the Environment Authority (EA) in coordination with be’ah where various aspects of recycling construction waste were discussed.

The two-day workshop titled “Environmental Sustainability of Construction and Demolition Waste Management: Challenges and Opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman” had experts and decision-makers from government

agencies, the private sector, academic institutions and research centres participating in strategic discussions, reviewing the current state of demolition and construction waste. This waste is one of the most prominent environmental challenges facing the Sultanate of Oman due to the rapid urban growth witnessed.

The workshop focused on exploring potential opportunities to transform this waste from an environmental burden into a promising economic resource that can be leveraged within the circular economy system. This aligns with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which aims to achieve

The two-day workshop had experts and decision-makers participating in strategic discussions, reviewing the current state of demolition and construction waste.

the sustainable use of natural resources and promote a circular economy, ultimately creating new job opportunities.

Speaking to the Observer, Shadia

bint Saleh al Hashmiyah, Senior Manager for Special Waste Stream Operations at be’ah, stated that they are currently operating a good number of sites, nine in total, from which they are obtaining valuable products being utilised in the market. They produce different products such as sand and aggregates.

“We do face challenges. There are entities that are aware that instead of depleting natural resources, we can use recycled materials to enhance our sustainability,” Shadia said.

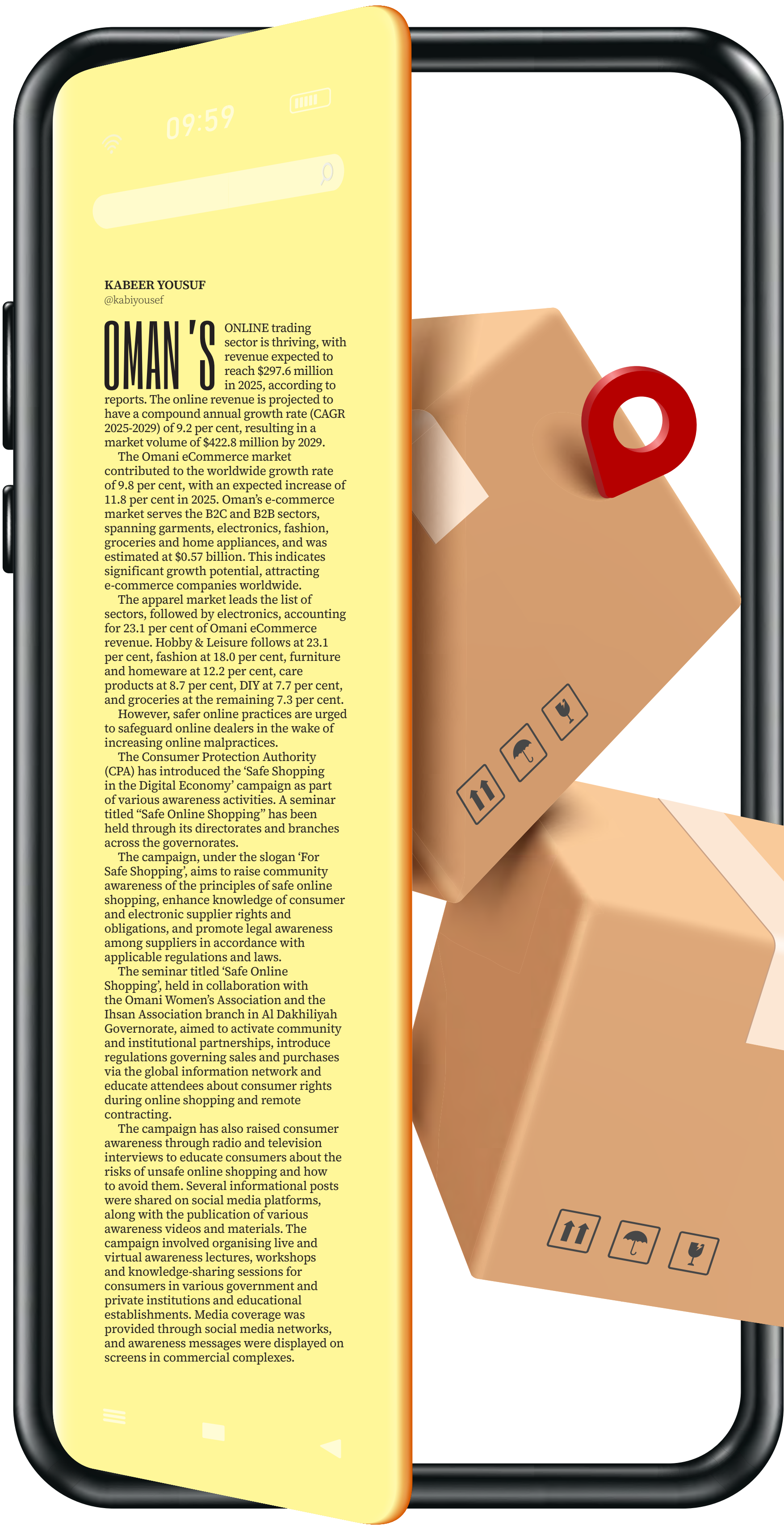
The main challenge is the lack of awareness among people.

“I think this is one of the biggest challenges. This is why bringing

everyone together here is important; and we hope to align on the challenges and utilise this waste to preserve natural resources,” she noted. Out of 32 construction/ demolition sites, nine are processing the waste and producing valuable products. These nine sites are distributed around the country including Al Batinah South, Al Batinah North, Dhofar, Al Duqm, etc. The recycled products are seen as a great opportunity for SMEs.

“We are currently working with SMEs and incubators; and they are doing very well. The challenge is that SMEs need to have the technical know-how of processing waste,” she emphasised.

SPOTLIGHT



CALL
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AS ONLINE
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Shopping should be limited to popular or familiar websites

Conduct research about the seller before buying

Make sure you have strong passwords and keep updating your software

Avoid using debit card to shop online; instead, use a credit card

Avoid doing online shopping on public Wi-Fi networks

Use a VPN to shop online securely for a secured transaction

Lastly, use a good antivirus for the system

SHORT TAKES



The forum aimed to inform primary healthcare physicians about common skin conditions. — ONA

MoH ORGANISES DERMATOLOGY FORUM

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health, in cooperation with Oman Dermatology Society (ODS), organised the second Muscat Dermatology Forum at the W Hotel Muscat, on Saturday.

The forum aimed to inform primary healthcare physicians about common skin conditions, how to diagnose and treat them early in primary care and when to refer patients to a dermatologist. The forum also aimed to improve patient care in primary healthcare centres, reduce inappropriate referrals and shorten long waiting lists.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs.

The forum brought together 200 participants primary healthcare physicians as well as dermatologists from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman who participated in person and via videoconference.

In her opening remarks, Dr Aisha al Ali, Consultant Dermatologist, Head of Al Khuwair Dermatology Centre, and Chairperson of Oman Dermatology Association, said: “The forum focuses primarily on the importance of building constructive and effective communication channels between specialised dermatology care and primary care based on the principle that the integration of roles is the foundation for providing comprehensive and sustainable healthcare to patients.” She noted that many skin diseases begin with minor symptoms that can be efficiently treated in primary healthcare institutions provided that physicians in health centres possess appropriate training and knowledge in early diagnosis and are familiar with available treatment options.

The forum discussed several topics related to dermatology diseases encountered by doctors in health centres, training on early diagnosis and appropriate treatment, dermatological emergencies including psoriasis, atopic dermatitis (atopic eczema), rashes during pregnancy, hair disorders and psoriatic arthritis.

The forum displayed dermatological products including therapeutic and cosmetic preparations in addition to modern medical devices used in the treatment of dermatological diseases with the participation of several pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies.

Attendees watched a visual presentation of the forum’s initial outcomes and results. The chief guest honoured the speakers and chairpersons of the dialogue and discussion sessions from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman and honoured the forum’s sponsors from government agencies and private sector institutions. — ONA

FIVE ARRESTED FOR DIESEL THEFT



MUSCAT: Police Command in Al Dhakhilyah Governorate have arrested five individuals accused of a diesel theft operation in the industrial area of the Wilayat of Manah.

According to Royal Oman Police, the suspects were allegedly working in coordination with truck drivers to siphon diesel from multiple vehicles and transfer it into tankers designated for transporting petroleum derivatives.

“Legal proceedings are currently underway as officials investigate the full extent of the operation,” ROP added.

KHAREEF DHOFAR PROMOTION HELD IN KUWAIT



The Khareef Dhofar season, which extends from June to September, represents a unique opportunity for tourists to enjoy Dhofar.

KUWAIT: To strengthen the tourism sector and attract more visitors from Gulf markets, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in cooperation with the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Kuwait and the Dhofar Municipality, organised a press conference to highlight the tourism potential of the Sultanate of Oman, with a focus on the Khareef Dhofar season.

The conference was attended by more than 100 prominent media professionals and representatives, as well as social media influencers and leading Kuwaiti tourism companies.

This event is expected to contribute to strengthening ties between the Omani tourism sector and its counterparts in

Kuwait. The conference is part of the promotional activities to promote tourism in the Kuwaiti market, which aims to enhance the Sultanate of Oman’s position as a unique tourist destination for Kuwaiti tourists.

The Khareef Dhofar season, which extends from June to September, represents a unique opportunity for tourists to enjoy Dhofar’s stunning nature and moderate climate, making it an ideal destination to escape the summer heat.

The Sultanate of Oman is expected to witness a significant increase in visitor numbers in the coming years, supported by similar events targeting regional and international markets.

155 youngsters complete Ruwaad programme

KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

155 young Omanis celebrated the graduation of the 2024 group from the Oman Scholars Enrichment Programme, Ruwaad under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance. This extensive initiative under Takatuf Oman lasted 14 months, starting the previous summer.

During this time, these participants successfully went through several phases, including a summer residency, a self-guided learning period, a winter workshop problem-solving and skill development as part of Oman Vision 2040 which enables moulding future workforce.

More than 1,000 people applied for the programme and nearly 800 were selected and out of these, 45 graduates were selected for an international scholarship lasting six years — beginning with two years at a boarding school and continuing with four years at a prestigious global university.

The ceremony kicked off with a video displaying the winter workshop, where students reflected on their experiences in the enrichment programme. Furthermore, parents shared their views on how the programme influenced their children. The event wrapped up with presentations



The Oman Scholars Programme aims to prepare young Omanis for leadership and professional roles in both public and private sectors.

The future of Oman is shaped by its people, and initiatives like Ruwaad, the Oman Scholars Programme are crucial in realising this vision

from alumni of Oman Scholars Programme cohorts, who conveyed their journeys and shared messages with the 2024 group.

Speaking to the Observer, Mahmoud bin Abdullah al Owaini, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, stressed that the Ruwaad programme goes beyond academic achievement; it is an investment in human capital, forming the bedrock of sustainable development in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

He pointed out the students’ ability to overcome challenges throughout the programme,

showcasing their potential to thrive at top universities worldwide and return to Oman with invaluable expertise and insights.

“The future of Oman is shaped by its people, and initiatives like Ruwaad, the Oman Scholars Programme are crucial in realising this vision, as they come back with state-of-the-art knowledge, leadership skills and innovative ideas that contribute to the growth of the national economy,” he added.

The Oman Scholars Programme aims to prepare young Omanis for leadership and professional roles in both public and private sectors.



جمعية الرحمة
ALRAHMA ASSOCIATION
For Motherhood & Childhood Care (للمرأة والطفل)

Tender Announcement

Al-Rahma Association for Motherhood and Childhood Care is pleased to announce its intention to contract with construction companies for the construction of the “Al-Khair Waafi” building in Al Mawaleh South, Seeb, with a total built-up area of 5,492 square meters.

Interested companies are invited to visit the Association’s headquarters in Al-Khouth to obtain the tender documents upon payment of the applicable fee.

The deadline for bid submission is: **June 15, 2025**

For inquiries and communication, please contact us via email at: (younis.alzadjali@alahma.om) or (933551876)

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Ministry of Health
Royal Hospital

Annoucement for Auction

The Directorate General of Royal Hospital invite specialized companies to submit bids

Auction No.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Document	Closing Time/ Day/Date	Auction Fee (Non-Refundable)	Office where Auction are to be Deposited (RH)
1/2025	FOR RENT THE ENTERTAINMENT CENTER CAFÉ AT ROYAL HOSPITAL	10/June/2025	Monday 30/June/2025 Before 10 AM	25 RIALS	Office of the Director of Finance - Royal Hospital

Notes:-

- Companies, institutions and individuals willing to participate can purchase Auction Documents from the Financial Affairs Department (Non-Medical Purchase Section) between 8.00 am and 12.30 pm on working days till date of 10/JUNE/2025, on payment of Auction fee mentioned above.
- Auction should be submitted in plain, sealed envelope, Enclosing A Bank Guarantee issued by a Local bank for not less then (1%) of the value of the bid, addressed to the Ministry of Finance and it will be refunded if the bid is not awarded and valid for (90) days from the date of submission of offers.
- Auction should be submitted in plain, sealed envelope with wax, on which the number and name of the auction should be written on the outside on the envelope, avoid writing the bidder name.
- Requested to Deposit their Auction Documents at the Office of Director of Finance Directorate of The Royal Hospital (RH), Before 10.00 am on Monday, 30/JUNE/2025, and bids submitted after this date shall not be considered, whatever the reasons for the delay.
- Copy of Commercial Registration Certificate is to be Submitted for the collection of Auction Documents.
- Auction(s) Submitted without Bank Guarantee will not be considered.
- The Directorate General of Royal Hospital is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offer.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Britain's PM Keir Starmer (L) and North Macedonia's PM Hristijan Mickoski take part in a meeting, in Tirana. — AFP

NORTH MACEDONIA, BRITAIN AGREE ON BOOSTING TIES

SKOPJE: North Macedonia and Britain have agreed on a major partnership deal that would boost trade and investment between the two countries, North Macedonia's prime minister said on Saturday. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and his North Macedonian counterpart Hristijan Mickoski finalised the strategic partnership agreement, the first of its kind between Skopje and London, on the sidelines of a summit of European leaders in Tirana. "This partnership means much more than a bilateral engagement," Mickoski told a press conference in Skopje on Saturday.

Serving as a base for a six-billion-euro investment cycle, "it will enable the strongest possible economic cooperation... including capital investments, infrastructure, health and energy," he added. It also provides for cooperation in defence, fighting organised crime and human trafficking, education, healthcare, culture and youth policy, Mickoski said. Matthew Lawson, British ambassador to North Macedonia, a Nato member country that hopes to join the EU, hailed the deal as a "highlight in our bilateral relations... built on common values and membership in Nato as well as very rich trade connection". — AFP

PUTIN-ZELENSKY MEETING POSSIBLE AFTER AGREEMENT



People take part in a public honouring memorial, at Independence Square in Kyiv. — AFP

KYIV: The Kremlin on Saturday said a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky would be possible only after both sides reach an agreement, a day after Moscow and Kyiv held their first direct talks in more than three years, which did not result in a truce. The first direct talks since the spring of 2022 between Ukraine and Russia in Istanbul resulted in a concrete agreement to exchange 1,000 prisoners each.

Ukraine's top negotiator, Defence Minister Rustem Umerov, said the "next step" would be a meeting between Zelensky and Putin. Russia said it took note of the request. "We consider it possible, but only as a result of the work and upon achieving certain results in the form of an agreement between the two sides," the Kremlin's spokesman said.

Russia's top negotiator, Vladimir Medinsky said that Moscow and Kyiv would "present their vision of a possible future ceasefire", without saying when. The Kremlin said that first the POW swap must be completed and both sides need to present their visions for a ceasefire before fixing the next round of talks. — AFP

HORRIFIC STORMS

Tornadoes kill over 20 in south-central US



More than 20 people have died after severe storms swept through the US states of Missouri and Kentucky, laying waste to local communities and cutting off electricity to nearly 200,000 people. Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear said that at least 14 people had died in the storms on Friday night and another seven were dead in Missouri. Over 100,000 people have been left without power and counties have declared a state of emergency. — AFP

SYRIAN GOVERNMENT FORCES RAID IS GROUP HIDEOUTS IN ALEPPO

DAMASCUS: Syrian security forces raided IS group hideouts in Aleppo on Saturday, killing at least one militant and arresting others, authorities said, the first time the government has announced such an operation in Syria's second city. A member of the security forces was also killed, a statement issued by interior ministry spokesperson said. The security forces seized weapons, bombs and uniforms with the security forces' insignia. A security source said the raids had targeted

sleepers in four locations, and 10 people had been arrested. One IS gunman had blown himself up, and another had been killed in clashes, the source said.

US President Donald Trump met Syria's interim President Ahmed al Sharaa earlier this week, and praised him as an "attractive guy with a very strong past" after the encounter in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday. Trump also declared the United States would lift sanctions, a major US policy shift that should

help revive the shattered economy and marked a major boost for Sharaa. Sharaa seized power in Damascus in December after the ousting of Bashar al Assad.

IS controlled swathes of Syria and Iraq at the height of its power, before being beaten out of the territory by enemies including a US-led military alliance. In January, the Syrian authorities announced they had foiled an attack by the group on the Sayeda Zeinab shrine in a Damascus suburb. — Reuters

Gaza truce talks resume as Israel kills hundreds

ISRAEL and Hamas resumed ceasefire talks on Saturday in Qatar, both sides said, even as Israeli forces ramped up a bombing campaign that has killed hundreds of people over 72 hours, and mobilised for a massive new ground assault. Palestinian health authorities said at least 146 people had been confirmed killed in the third day of Israel's latest bombing campaign, one of the deadliest waves of strikes since a ceasefire collapsed in March. Many hundreds more wounded were being treated in hospital, and countless others were still buried under rubble.

Israel says it is mobilising to seize more ground in Gaza in a new campaign dubbed "Operation Gideon's Chariots", which follows a visit this week to the Middle East by US President Donald Trump. It has halted all supplies entering Gaza since the start of March, leading to rising international concern over the plight of the enclave's 2.3 million residents. Taher Al Nono, the media adviser for the Hamas leadership, said that a new round of indirect talks with the Israeli delegation in Doha began on Saturday, discussing all issues "without pre-conditions". "The Hamas delegation outlined the position of the group and the necessity to end the war, swap prisoners, the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, and allowing humanitarian aid and all the needs of the people of Gaza back into the strip," he added.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz also said in a statement that



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli air strike on a tent sheltering displaced people, in Deir Al Balah. — Reuters

Gaza health authorities said most of those killed on Saturday were in towns on the northern edge of the enclave, including Beit Lahiya and the Jabalia refugee camp, as well as in the southern city of Khan Younis. They said 459 people had been injured.

negotiations on a deal to release Israeli hostages held by Hamas had resumed in Doha. He noted that the talks had started without Israel first agreeing to a ceasefire or to lift its blockade. Israel's military said it was conducting extensive strikes and mobilising troops with the aim of achieving "operational control" in parts of Gaza.

Gaza health authorities said most of those killed on Saturday were in towns on the northern edge of the enclave, including Beit Lahiya and the Jabalia refugee camp, as well as in the southern city of Khan Younis. They said 459 people had been injured. Israeli forces had told people to leave the northern areas on Friday. "Northern Gaza is witnessing a systematic campaign of extermination," Hamas said in a statement, calling on Arab leaders at a summit in Baghdad to take

practical steps to stop the aggression and ensure the delivery of aid.

Talks since March have failed to restore a truce under which Hamas would release remaining hostages captured in the October 2023 assault on Israel that precipitated the war.

United Nations experts say famine now looms in Gaza more than two months after Israel halted all deliveries of supplies. UN aid chief Tom Fletcher asked the Security Council this week if it would act to "prevent genocide".

On Friday, Trump acknowledged Gaza's growing hunger crisis and the need for aid deliveries. A US-backed foundation aims to start distributing aid to Gazans by the end of May using private US security and logistics firms. The UN has said it won't work with the group because it is not impartial, neutral or independent. — Reuters



SOUTH KOREA 'S YOON LEAVES PARTY

SEOUL: South Korea's ex-president Yoon Suk Yeol left his conservative party on Saturday as it gears up for snap elections triggered by his impeachment over a bid to impose martial law. The People Power Party (PPP) had been under pressure to expel Yoon ahead of the June 3 election.

"I am leaving the People Power Party today," Yoon, who is standing trial on criminal charges of insurrection, wrote on Facebook. He urged voters to support his former Labour Minister Kim Moon-soo, the PPP's presidential candidate. Yoon said the upcoming snap election is the "last chance to prevent totalitarian dictatorship and protect liberal democracy and the rule of law." — AFP

HEADING TO ELECTIONS

Bolivia appoints presidential candidate



Bolivia's ruling party on Friday named interior minister Eduardo del Castillo as its presidential candidate in the country's August election, days after the current president said he would not seek re-election. Del Castillo, a 36-year-old lawyer who has led the interior ministry since Arce came to power in 2020, attended a MAS rally on Friday in the main square of the capital La Paz where party leader Grover Garcia announced Del Castillo's candidacy. — AFP

BRUTAL VIOLENCE

Gunmen kill at least 23 in Nigeria attack



At least 23 farmers and fishermen were killed and others abducted by suspected groups in northeastern Nigeria's Borno state, security sources and local residents said. The latest attack happened in the village of Malam Karanti on Thursday morning, the security sources and residents said. Locals said that gunmen had gathered farmers and fishermen near the village and killed 23 people. They spared an elderly man who later alerted the community. — Reuters

The New York Times

Supreme Court retains block on using wartime law



ABBIE VANSICKLE

The writer is covering the US Supreme Court for The New York Times

THE Trump administration will not be allowed to deport a group of Venezuelan detainees accused of being members of a violent gang under a rarely invoked wartime law while the matter is litigated in the courts, the Supreme Court said on Friday. The justices sent the case back to a federal appeals court, directing it to examine claims by the migrants that they could not be legally deported under the Alien Enemies Act, the centuries-old wartime law invoked by the Trump administration. The justices said the appeals court should also examine what kind of notice the government should be required to provide that would allow migrants the opportunity to challenge their deportations. The court said its order would remain in place until the 5th US Circuit Court of Appeals ruled and the Supreme Court considered any appeal from that ruling.

Justice Samuel Alito wrote a dissent, arguing that the justices had no authority to hear the dispute at this stage. He was joined by Justice Clarence Thomas. The ruling deals a sharp blow to the Trump administration's efforts to deploy the wartime law to pursue swift, sweeping deportations of Venezuelan migrants accused of being members of the

gang, Tren de Aragua. It also suggests that a majority of the justices may be skeptical of whether the migrants have been afforded enough due process protections by the administration before being deported, potentially to a prison for terrorists in El Salvador.

In their order, the justices said that the stakes facing the detainees are “particularly weighty,” citing the case of a Maryland man, Kilmar Abrego Garcia, who was “deported in error” to the El Salvador prison in March. So far, the Trump administration has said it is unable to bring him back, despite an order from the justices to “facilitate” his return. Under such circumstances, the justices wrote, “notice roughly 24 hours before removal, devoid of information about how to exercise due process rights to contest that removal, surely does not pass muster.”

President Donald Trump reacted with fury to the ruling. “THE SUPREME COURT WON’T ALLOW US TO GET CRIMINALS OUT OF OUR COUNTRY!” he said on social media. In a subsequent post, he wrote, “The Supreme Court of the United States is not allowing me to do what I was elected to do,” and called it “a bad and dangerous day for America.” Lawyers for the migrants responded with relief. The

The justices said the appeals court should also examine what kind of notice the government should be required to provide that would allow migrants the opportunity to challenge their deportations. The order would remain in place until the 5th US Circuit Court of Appeals ruled and the Supreme Court considered any appeal from that ruling.

decision “means that more individuals will not secretly be sent to a brutal prison in El Salvador,” said Lee Gelernt, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union. He added that the administration's use of the wartime law “during peacetime, without due process, raises issues of far-reaching importance.”

The Trump administration has attempted to use the law as a tool in its signature initiative to speed the deportation of millions of migrants, leading to a clash with a skeptical judiciary.

Several lower court judges have concluded that the administration has exceeded the scope of the law, which can be invoked only when the United States has been subject to “invasion” or “predatory incursion,” and have blocked the deportation of groups of Venezuelans.

The Supreme Court justices have been asked to weigh in on the Trump administration's deportation plans a few times in recent months, and they had already stepped in to temporarily block the deportation of a group of Venezuelans held in northern Texas. Friday's order came after a high-stakes legal fight between the Trump administration and lawyers from the ACLU in one of those challenges.

WHEN A VACCINE SAFETY TRIAL BECOMES UNETHICAL



TEDDY ROSENBLUTH

The author is a health reporter at The New York Times

The Department of Health and Human Services last week announced a new standard for testing the safety of vaccines, a “radical departure from past practices.” All new vaccines will be evaluated against a placebo, an inert look-alike that serves as a point of comparison, the department said. Health Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr, as well as

many anti-vaccine groups, has long argued that placebo-controlled trials were the only way to fully understand vaccine side effects.

To scientists who have spent their careers evaluating vaccines, the plan did not seem so radical. New vaccines are often tested against a placebo in clinical trials. One researcher has created a crowdsourced spreadsheet of more than 100 examples. But it also concerned vaccine experts that Kennedy seemed not to recognize the circumstances when placebo groups are neither ethical nor practical. The idea is widely accepted by scientists and enshrined in ethics frameworks for medical research. “He’s asking for something that’s not ethical,” said Arthur Caplan, a leading bioethicist at the New York University Grossman School of Medicine.

Randomized placebo-controlled trials are often described as the “gold standard” of research: they allow scientists to tease out whether the effects they observe result from the drug itself or some other factor, such as the expectation of treatment. Patients in trials of drugs for depression or pain, for example, often report feeling better even if they haven’t received the treatment — the so-called placebo effect.

In vaccine trials, researchers also use placebos, often shots of a saline mixture, to help quantify behavioral and psychological changes that might arise from participants knowing whether or not they received the real vaccine. Placebo-controlled trials, which may last years and cost tens of millions of dollars, are not always feasible or necessary, especially for vaccines that are updated every year, like the flu shot. “By the time you’re done with that trial, it would be two years later and your vaccine is already outdated,” said Dr. Daniel Salmon, director of the Institute for Vaccine Safety at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

There are also ethical reasons why using a placebo may not be appropriate. Perhaps the clearest example comes from the polio vaccine trial in 1954. Hundreds of thousands of children had volunteered, eager for a chance at protecting themselves against a devastating disease that was sweeping through classrooms and communities, causing irreversible paralysis and death. More than 200,000 of those children were randomly assigned to the placebo group, receiving doses of saline water instead of the vaccine.

Audio adds to renewed debate of Biden’s fitness



President Joe Biden in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, November 2, 2023.

A 2023 audio recording of President Joe Biden speaking haltingly and having memory lapses is the latest in a series of recent disclosures that have reopened a debate over Biden's physical and mental fitness while in office and prompted fresh recriminations among Democrats. The recording, released by the news outlet Axios on Friday night, documents a four-minute portion of Biden's interview with Robert K. Hur, a special counsel who investigated his handling of classified information. Hur had concluded early last year that “no criminal charges” were warranted in the case. But in clearing the president, Hur portrayed Biden as an “elderly man with a poor memory,” based off an hour-long interview with the president, inflaming concerns that Biden's fitness for office had significantly declined.

The audio clip did not reveal new exchanges between Hur and Biden. But it gives a fuller picture of why Hur described Biden as he did, capturing the president's whispery voice and the long pauses in his speech. Trump administration officials have decided to release the fuller audio, according to two people familiar with the matter, speaking on the condition of anonymity to describe the decision, which has yet to be announced.

The audio clip comes as a forthcoming book — written by Jake Tapper of CNN and Alex Thompson of Axios — has provided new details on Biden's mental and physical decline and chronicled how Biden's advisers stamped out discussion of his age-related limitations. Among other issues, the book recounts Biden forgetting the names of longtime aides and allies, and outsiders who had not seen the president in some time being shocked at his appearance.

Top Democrats who closed ranks to defend Biden in his moment of crisis and vouched for his fitness for office have now had to rationalize those statements. In an interview on the “Talk Easy With Sam Fragoso” podcast last month, Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts — who had urged Biden to remain in the race to the end — visibly struggled not to laugh when the host asked if the president had at the time been “as sharp as you.” “I said I had not



CHRIS CAMERON

The writer covers Washington, focusing on breaking news and the Trump administration

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seen decline,” Warren said, adding that Biden “was sharp, he was on his feet.” “Senator, ‘on his feet’ is not praise,” Fragoso said as Warren smiled and chuckled. “‘He can speak in sentences’ is not praise.” Warren replied: “OK, fair enough. Fair enough.”

The new debate recalls one of the Democratic Party's most painful periods, when Biden and his allies struggled to right his reelection campaign amid calls by Democratic officials — both in private and in public — to drop out and name a successor. Those calls erupted after a disastrous debate performance against former President Donald Trump that doomed Biden's campaign. The president ultimately cleared the way for his running mate, Vice President Kamala Harris, to take his place at the top of the ticket. The Biden administration had already released a lightly redacted transcript of the interview, but not the audio, asserting executive privilege. A spokesperson for Biden said the recording did nothing but confirm what was already public.

In the clip of the October 2023 interview with Hur, Biden speaks softly and haltingly as he struggles to recall key dates — such as the

death of his son, Beau, from cancer in May 2015. Hur did not ask specifically about Beau, but Biden told the special counsel that “in 2017, 2018, that area,” Beau, who had served in the Delaware National Guard and had deployed to Iraq in 2008, had “either been deployed or dying.” Minutes later, the president said that “in 2017, Beau had died.”

In one particularly meandering exchange, Biden took the better part of a minute — interspersed with several seconds-long pauses — to say that “Beau had passed and — this is personal — the genesis of the book and the title ‘Promise Me Dad’ was a — I know you’re all close with your sons and daughters, but Beau was like my right arm and Hunt was my left,” referring to his son Hunter.

Concerns about Biden's lapses persisted through the end of Biden's 2024 campaign, growing with each public fumble at a rally or news conference. Even during the news conference denouncing the special prosecutor's assessment of his memory, Biden spoke of “the president of Mexico, el-Sissi,” confusing the presidents of Mexico and Egypt in response to a question about negotiations to release hostages held by Hamas.

OPINION

Not just another case of teen suicide



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“SUICIDE, at any age, is a major issue for the family members and the whole society yet it could be even more devastating when the victim is a child or a teenager”.

Last week, social media platforms in Oman shared an interview with the mother of a young girl who committed suicide at school. The mother appeared well-composed and provided an excellent narrative of the events that led to the tragic incident. She described how, after dropping her daughter at school on what appeared to be a regular day, she later received a call from her ex-husband — the girl’s father — who had been informed by the school of what had happened. That call changed her life forever. The mother was left with a deep void and a haunting question: why didn’t I recognise that my daughter was not well? Suicide, at any age, is a major tragedy for families and society, but it is especially heartbreaking when the victim is a child or teenager.

Grieving parents are often left with intense feelings of guilt, shame, and self-blame. They find themselves questioning every interaction, every missed opportunity, and every silent plea they may have overlooked.

Unfortunately, many in our society hold unhelpful and judgemental attitudes toward those who take their own lives, often questioning their religious commitment or moral strength and, worse, blaming the parents for being inattentive or negligent.

Despite alarming figures from the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding the rise in teenage suicides, and the well-documented links between mental health issues — such as depression, substance abuse, bullying, and the negative effects of social media — and increased suicide risk, there remains a concerning lack of national response. In many countries, suicide prevention programmes are still either underdeveloped or absent. Often, when suicide cases make the news, they become a topic of discussion briefly before fading away without concrete actions.

Discussions around establishing a national suicide helpline, enhancing school-based mental health services, or launching awareness campaigns about the warning signs of depression and anxiety tend to remain just discussions.

The mother who courageously spoke out shared her suspicion that her daughter was suffering from what she called “smiling depression” — known in clinical literature as

Despite alarming figures from the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding the rise in teenage suicides and the well-documented links between mental health issues and increased suicide risk, there remains a concerning lack of national response.

masked depression.

This condition describes individuals who, despite appearing cheerful and functional on the outside, may be battling persistent sadness, fatigue, low motivation, sleep disturbances, and appetite changes. It is a real but often misunderstood presentation of depression that can escape the attention of even close family members.

While masked depression does exist, it is essential to emphasise that many forms of depression present with more visible symptoms. Persistent sadness, irritability, withdrawal from friends and family, changes in school performance, and talk of hopelessness or self-harm should never be ignored.

Schools, parents, and healthcare professionals must work together to spot these red flags early. Mental health must be integrated into our conversations at home and school, and access to care must be normalised, not stigmatised.

This tragic incident must serve as a wake-up call. It is not just a personal loss for one family — it is a societal failure. We to build a system where asking for help is safe, accessible, and encouraged. Let us not wait for another heartbreaking story to remind us of what needs to be done.

ERDOGAN SEES END OF US SANCTIONS ON DEFENCE SECTOR

ISTANBUL: Türkiye has seen an easing of US sanctions on its defence sector since Donald Trump became president, with steps towards ending the measure advancing quickly, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday.

“We can easily say that there is a softening in CAATSA,,” he told reporters while returning from a European summit, referring to US sanctions legislation.

In 2020, Washington imposed sanctions on Ankara over its purchase of an S-400 Russian surface-to-air missile defence system under a 2017 law known as CAATSA, which aims to limit Russia’s military influence.

The move soured ties between the two Nato member countries.

It also booted Türkiye out of its F-35 programme, with Washington saying the presence of the S-400 would allow the Russians to collect information on the stealth jet’s capabilities.

Erdogan said Türkiye had raised the sanctions issue with Trump and his newly-appointed envoy to Ankara, Tom Barrack

“With my friend Trump taking office, we have achieved a more open, more constructive and more sincere communication on these issues,” Erdogan added, saying Türkiye valued “every positive step in this direction”.

“I believe we will overcome the CAATSA process much faster. As two great Nato allies, there should be no restrictions or obstacles in the field of defence between us,” he said.

Türkiye’s partnership with the United States was “of vital importance for the establishment of stability in our region and the world” he said.

In March, Erdogan spoke to Trump about the need to finalise a deal to let Türkiye buy US F-16 fighter planes and be readmitted to the development programme for F-35 warplanes.

Türkiye has been seeking to modernise its air force and has been seeking to buy 40 Eurofighter Typhoons which are built by a four-nation consortium grouping Germany, Britain, Spain and Italy. — AFP



Trump’s strategic approach to peace, trade

IN the first months of his second term, President Donald Trump has taken bold steps to solve long-standing global problems. His work on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Ukraine war, and unfair trade shows a practical plan for a more stable world.

Trump’s approach to Middle East peace is very different from his predecessor’s. Instead of endless talks that go nowhere, he focuses on building economic ties first, then tackling the harder political issues.

During his Gulf visit, Trump has worked on creating partnerships that could bring lasting peace. What makes Trump’s peace efforts truly special is his willingness to talk directly with everyone involved – even groups that previous government wouldn’t speak to. His team has opened talks with Iran, with Trump himself saying, “I think we’re going to make a deal with Iran.” He’s also reached out to Hamas and made a ceasefire deal with Ansar Allah in Yemen. This openness to speak with all sides creates new paths to peace that simply didn’t exist before.

Trump believes that peace and economic growth go hand in hand. He’s working with Gulf nations to secure investments that could transform the region. His focus on American interests while pursuing peace has created new chances for breakthroughs that could help every country in the region, including The State of Palestine.

In Ukraine, Trump has taken a fresh approach to end the bloodshed. He appointed Steve Witkoff as his special envoy to help Russia and Ukraine find peace. Trump hasn’t been afraid to put pressure on both Moscow and Kyiv, issuing an ultimatum for them to make progress in peace talks. He’s also signed an agreement with



President Donald Trump, right, as he tours the Shaikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi on Thursday. — The New York Times



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EASTERBROOK

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Ukraine to develop their mineral resources together, showing a long-term commitment to Ukraine’s prosperity. Trump’s trade policies, especially his tariffs, respond to what he sees as years of unfair treatment by America’s trading partners. In April 2025 he declared a national emergency to address “the large and persistent trade deficit” caused by unfair trade practices. He’s particularly concerned about imbalances with the European Union. Trump’s approach is simple: match other countries’ tariffs to create a level playing field. For example, he points out that the EU charges 10% on car imports while the US only charges 2.5%.

He’s shown flexibility by delaying some tariffs for 90 days to allow time for talks. Trump believes these measures are necessary to protect American workers and reduce the trade deficit. And you can be sure that China and the USA will resolve their trade war to the benefit of both

countries. Trump’s foreign policy is built on American strength as the foundation for global stability. By tackling long-standing conflicts and trade problems with clear-eyed practicality, he’s creating conditions for lasting peace and prosperity. His willingness to talk directly with all parties – even those previously off-limits – offers new hope for peace in the Middle East that could benefit everyone in this region. While challenges remain, Trump’s direct approach has created new opportunities where previous efforts failed.

His willingness to tackle tough problems head-on gives reason for hope. A foreign policy based on realism, backed by American strength, and open to talking with all sides offers the best path to a safer world. Trump is not a warmonger.

He’s above all a businessman. And for that reason alone we should all be Trump supporters.

Sometimes... silence speaks much more than words



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

WE talk too much. So many of us seem to need attention, so we speak what is in, or on, our minds, without having thought through, or processed sufficiently, speaking without thinking those thoughts.

Is it narcissism? Is it insecurity? Is it a lack of confidence? Or is it just the awkwardness of a gap in conversation, a quietness, that must be filled? Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote of our predilection for speaking ‘impulsively’ and usually about ourselves, as an obtuse “means to conceal oneself,” not being mysterious, but to conceal the deepest version of our vulnerabilities, complexities and fears. His observations on the integrity of the human condition urge us to more introspective and reflective, to be more prepared for conversation.

Nietzsche believed we were all conceptually capable of ‘doing,’ but more importantly ‘being’ better and as he wrote in 1883, being superhuman in terms of the human ideal, to use his German, ‘Übermensch.’ as being able to relinquish those beliefs, traditions, customs and learnings that we just accept, of our predecessors, the best among us relinquishing all that, its comfort and safety, in the pursuit of a coterie of yet unimagined, limitless in every way values, characteristics and possibilities.

If we look at the most remarkable of achievements and achievers, in our lifetimes,

we would perhaps find it difficult not to see some signs of this, in what we would see as sheer brilliance of thought and deed, think Marie Curie; Einstein; Ibn Sina; Galileo; Hypatia, da Vinci; Mozart; Michaelangelo; Pythagoras; Shakespeare; Turing; and the Wright Brothers, to name just a few, including a couple of ‘super’ women.

Perhaps Nietzsche would reflect with some satisfaction on the diversity of these more recent ‘graduates’ of his posited ideals, being physicist Marie Curie’s cancer research against society’s most malignant presence; shaking his head at the scope of aviation and space travel in the wake of the Wright Brother’s pioneering of manned flight; the possibilities revealed in logician Turing’s ‘Enigma’ discovery, revealing more can be attributed to science and mathematics than ever before and what about Orwell’s 1984? Was he, or was he not, a genuine visionary, ahead of his time in stripping back our greed, our fears and our need for love? All of these ‘greats,’ may have been scientifically, literarily, and even insanely impatient, they rarely spoke without something meaningful to say.

Thanks to ‘progress’ and mobile phones, not only is ill-timed, ill-thought speaking and conversation ubiquitous in society, but more destructively, through Twitter, now X, with its tweets and retweets, SMS text messages, WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Reddit, SnapChat, TikTok, YouTube,

The modern generation see something online and have this irrational urge to respond straight away, immediately, without thinking... either with excessive enthusiasm, or intense indignation and they must do it now!

Twitch, BlueSky, Quora... even MailChimp!

The modern generation see something online and have this irrational urge to respond straight away, immediately, without thinking... either with excessive enthusiasm, or intense indignation and they must do it now! The problem is that so many of these immediate, ill-thought, ill-considered, knee-jerk responses, their need to be heard now, upon reflection, offer only regret at their haste. This generation does have good thoughts and valuable opinions, but must prove wiser and think first, then listen! Deliberation may look like lethargy, but is at the heart of wit, aptitude and intellect; and laughs loudest at the rampant vacuity of the asinine, the daft and the inept.

They are better than this! Even having reconsidered, our youth, maybe any youth at any time, finds it difficult to take a step back, let alone apologise, because being wrong is something many can accept, but few will admit to anyone other than themselves... and we worry that we don’t understand them. We can see that most of today’s youth, most of this generation, have enormous potential and real prospects and it is often only their impatience that is holding them back.

Bernie Taupin’s profound lyrics in the chorus of Sir Elton John’s ‘Sorry Seems to be the Hardest Word,’ are so appropriate for today, yet, with a little more thought, we can avoid sadness, absurdity and... so much sorrow.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS URGE STARMER TO TONE DOWN MIGRATION RHETORIC

LONDON: UK religious leaders on Friday called on Prime Minister Keir Starmer to tone down his language about migration, after comparisons were made to an inflammatory speech in the 1960s.

Labour leader Starmer this week announced tougher new policies to tackle high levels of migration, in an attempt to stem a growing loss of support to the hard right.

In a speech, he said the UK risked becoming “an island of strangers”, prompting comparisons to similar phrasing in the late politician Enoch Powell’s so-called “rivers of blood” speech about the dangers of uncontrolled immigration in 1968.

Downing Street has strongly rejected the claims but the religious leaders, including Church of England bishops, senior Muslim and Jewish clerics, asked him to “reconsider the language the government uses”.

“Our concern is that the current narrative, which presents only one side of the debate, will only drive public anxiety and entrench polarisation,” they wrote.

“When you refer to the ‘incalculable’ damage done by uncontrolled migration, you are in danger of harming migrant members of our communities and strengthening those who would divide us,” they added.

Former human rights lawyer Starmer’s hardening tone has shocked some of his parliamentary colleagues and a YouGov poll published on Friday indicated that half of Labour voters now have a negative opinion of him.

The 25 signatories instead called for a “more compassionate narrative”, pointing out that many migrants had become “part of our national story and fabric”.

“Our country would be so much poorer without them,” they added.

Starmer’s plans include restrictions on recruiting from abroad for the social care sector, doubling the length of time before migrants can qualify for settlement and new powers to deport foreign criminals.

The religious leaders said people who had come to the UK legitimately under rules set by previous governments, working and paying tax.

“Framing this as somehow unfair only feeds the politics of grievance and division,” they added.

The letter was sent to Starmer after his speech on Monday, The Guardian newspaper reported.

It quoted a Downing Street spokesperson as saying: “We are clear that migrants make a massive contribution to the UK and would never denigrate that.

“Britain is an inclusive and tolerant country, but the public expect that people who come here should be expected to learn the language and integrate.” — AFP

Those who supported Biden seek atonement

IN February 2024, when quizzed on President Joe Biden’s ability to communicate his reelection message, Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., quickly vouched for him.

“I know that he is ready for this campaign,” he said. “I have seen how effective he has been up close and personal.” But five months into 2025, Murphy is on the leading edge of top Democrats aiming to Etch A Sketch away their past endorsements of Biden’s acuity. Murphy told Politico this week that he had “no doubt” Biden suffered cognitive decline while in office.

Murphy, who declined to be interviewed for this article, is not alone in trying to reposition himself from a top Biden surrogate who sat on the campaign’s national advisory board to a truth-teller about what really happened in the 2024 campaign. His pivot is illustrative of a wide swath of the party that is hoping to atone for having fallen lockstep behind Biden.

Rep Ro Khanna, D-Calif, another Biden advisory board member who travelled the country as a surrogate to progressives, said this week that it was “obvious now” that Biden “was not in a condition to run for reelection.” Khanna had vouched for Biden up until the president ended his campaign. A speech in Detroit that proved to be Biden’s last as a candidate “broke through” the political noise, Khanna said five days before Biden dropped out.

Khanna on Friday acknowledged, “Our party made a mistake, including the dozens of us who campaigned for him for reelection.” But he said that he “was a surrogate based on information that the president gave” and that he had no reason to apologise for his actions in that role. As the Democratic Party faces record low approval ratings, many party strategists and officials believe it must rebuild trust in its brand. That process, some argue, must begin with confronting how the party handled the 2024 race.

For most of Biden’s term, many Democrats lived a bifurcated political life. In public, they



REID J EPSTEIN



LISA LERER



Joe Biden

remained staunchly behind the president, lauding him as sharp and fit to serve. But in private conversations, they fretted about his shaky gait, rambling speech and tendency to forget key details, such as the names of foreign leaders.

As recently as a year ago, Democrats saw publicly vouching for Biden and dismissing concerns about his age as the best path to holding the White House and safeguarding their own political futures. The power of incumbency, Democratic officials argued, outweighed well-documented concerns from their voters about his fitness for the job.

In a poll from The New York Times and Siena College published in March 2024, for example, a majority of voters who supported him in 2020 said he was too old to lead the country effectively.

Now, as Democrats jostle for influence in a demoralised party, their incentives have changed. And those who were closest to Biden appear to be in the trickiest position.

Pete Buttigieg, who served as the transportation secretary in the Biden administration, told reporters in Iowa this week that “maybe” Democrats could have done better without Biden at the top of the ticket. Few Democrats were more forceful in vouching for Biden than Buttigieg, who four years earlier had run a primary campaign against him arguing the party needed generational change.

And Pennsylvania Gov Josh Shapiro now says that he began warning Biden directly about his standing in his home state shortly after Shapiro was elected as governor in 2022.

“I was very clear with the president privately about some of the risks that I saw in Pennsylvania,” Shapiro said. “I communicated that to him and to his staff. And they made the judgment that they made to continue on with their campaign.” Still, some of the country’s most prominent Democratic governors, many of whom are said to be considering their own presidential runs, refused to engage in the round of second-guessing.

“I was busy working,” Michigan Gov Gretchen Whitmer, who was a co-chair of Biden’s campaign, said on CNN. “I didn’t see the president frequently. I can’t speak to that directly.” Govs JB Pritzker of Illinois, Andy Beshear of Kentucky and Tim Walz of Minnesota have largely dodged questions about the former president’s fitness, saying in interviews only that Biden should have dropped out before the primaries began.

“If we’d have had more time, could we have had a better shot? Yeah, I think probably,” Walz, whom former Vice President Kamala Harris eventually chose as her running mate, said in a recent interview. “I don’t think we’d have been in a worse spot, that’s for sure.” — The New York Times.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Despite the mixed results, individual performances provided clear positives

OMAN U-16S SHOW GRIT AND GROWTH DESPITE RESULTS

MUSCAT: The Oman U-16 cricket team recently wrapped up their campaign in the ACC Men’s U-16 West Zone Cup 2025 with a blend of promise and heartbreak — showcasing potential through victories and spirited performances but undone by narrow losses that kept them from progressing further. Held in Qatar, the tournament saw Oman begin their campaign under skipper Aryan Joshi with a confident seven-wicket win over hosts Saudi Arabia. That early momentum, however, was tested in the following fixtures. Oman’s next two defeats — a four-run loss to Bahrain and a three-run loss to Kuwait — came down to the slimmest of margins, both matches well within Oman’s grasp.

“We lost two games that were very much within our grasp — extremely close finishes decided by just 3–4 runs. These were matches we should have closed in our favour,” said head coach Parviz al Balushi on return from Qatar. He added: “Overall, the team’s performance was promising, though not entirely heartening — largely due to the limited preparation period and the lack of sufficient match exposure.” Between those heartbreaks, Oman claimed a convincing 6-wicket win over Qatar, chasing down a modest target with confidence and control. Their campaign ended with a tough reality check against a dominant UAE side, who posted a mammoth 346/6 before bowling Oman out for 137 — handing them a 209-run defeat.

PARVIZ AL BALUSHI
Head Coach

Despite the mixed results, individual performances provided clear positives. Opener Kavish Shah amassed 194 runs across five innings, finishing as the tournament’s fourth-highest run-scorer. Captain Aryan contributed steadily with 116 runs, offering vital partnerships in the middle order. On the bowling front, Vignesh Karthikeyan was a standout, claiming 14 wickets in five matches — the second-best return in the tournament. Shravan Kurup supported well with 9 wickets, both bowlers displaying excellent rhythm and control throughout the week. Reflecting on the narrow defeats, Al Balushi said: “Chasing targets of 130 or 180 in a 50-over format is absolutely within reach for our boys. But the mental side of the game got the better of them on those occasions. The boys have faced similar situations in domestic cricket, but international pressure, especially for first timers, clearly played a role in those moments.” Looking ahead, the coach stays upbeat about the squad’s future. “The potential in this group is undeniable. With the right structure and continued exposure, many of these boys are well on track to progress to the U-19 level and beyond,” he said. “I remain optimistic about the development of Oman’s youth cricket.” The coach added: “The experience gained from close finishes and high-stakes contests is expected to help the young players build composure and match maturity.”

Royal Cavalry shines at Windsor Horse Show



The participation of Oman in the Royal Windsor Horse Show underscores its commitment to showcasing national heritage on global platforms and strengthening cultural diplomacy



The Royal Windsor Horse Show is hosting world-class competitions in show jumping, endurance and dressage, in addition to carriage driving and pony parades, featuring participants from various countries



Colonel Toby Browne, Commander of the British Royal Cavalry and Director of the Royal Windsor Horse Show



Eng Hilal bin Mohammed al Waeli, Head of Horses, Camels, Farms and Royal Gardens Affairs at the Royal Court Affairs



Dr Sarhan bin Salem al Zeedi, Director General of the Royal Cavalry



The displays have captivated the international audience, with riders and horses showcasing remarkable harmony and skill

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN, represented by the Royal Cavalry of the Royal Court Affairs (RCA), is proudly took part in the prestigious Royal Windsor Horse Show 2025, held at the stunning private grounds of Windsor Castle in the United Kingdom from May 15 to 18. The participation commenced with a captivating multimedia presentation entitled “Oman: Jewel of Arabia”, produced by the Department of Communication and Media at the Royal Court Affairs. The visual showcased the Sultanate of Oman’s unique cultural and natural heritage, reaffirming Oman’s position as a global destination that bridges tradition and modernity. The Royal Cavalry is presenting performances in traditional Omani equestrian arts, including Ardah riding ‘traditional race’, horse sitting and horse whispering. These displays have captivated the international audience, with riders and horses showcasing remarkable harmony and skill. Accompanied by the Royal Cavalry Band, audiences were treated to a medley of

Omani, Arab, and international musical compositions that resonated powerfully throughout the arena. In parallel with the cultural performances, the Royal Windsor Horse Show is hosting world-class competitions in show jumping, endurance, and dressage, in addition to carriage driving and pony parades, featuring participants from various countries. **WARM BRITISH RECEPTION** Colonel Toby Browne, Commander of the British Royal Cavalry and Director of the Royal Windsor Horse Show, expressed admiration for Oman’s long-standing and esteemed participation: “The relationship between the United Kingdom and the Sultanate of Oman is deeply cherished and has endured for centuries. The Royal Cavalry of Oman always brings a unique and graceful presence to the show. This year’s performance, especially the ‘Jewel of Arabia’ presentation, beautifully encapsulates Oman’s splendor. It is a privilege to host such a talented team once again.”

FIFTH PARTICIPATION BY THE ROYAL CAVALRY Eng Hilal bin Mohammed al Waeli, Head of Horses, Camels, Farms and Royal Gardens Affairs at the Royal Court Affairs, noted that “This is the fifth time the Royal Cavalry has participated in the prestigious event. These international engagements highlight Oman’s rich equestrian traditions and cultural heritage, and help promote the nation’s deep-rooted association with horses.” Dr Sarhan bin Salem al Zeedi, Director General of the Royal Cavalry, emphasised the high level of skill and dedication displayed by the riders: “The performances underline the excellence and harmonious bond between our riders and their horses. This rapport has drawn admiration and acclaim from the international audience at Windsor.” “The participation of the Sultanate of Oman in the Royal Windsor Horse Show underscores its commitment to showcasing national heritage on global platforms and strengthening cultural diplomacy through traditional sports and artistry,” he ended.

SHORTTAKES



Chelsea's Marc Cucurella and Romeo Lavia celebrate after the match. — Reuters

CHELSEA BEAT MAN UTD TO KEEP CL HOPES ON TRACK

LONDON: Chelsea ensured that qualification for the Champions League remains in their own hands as Marc Cucurella's winner beat Manchester United 1-0 to climb to fourth in the Premier League.

United are gearing up for next week's Europa League final against Tottenham but ran the Blues close as Ruben Amorim named a stronger line-up than expected.

However, the Red Devils ultimately slipped to an 18th league defeat of the season and remain 16th in the table.

Chelsea and Aston Villa, who beat Spurs 2-0 in Friday's other Premier League match, both leapfrog Manchester City into the top five.

City have a game in hand at home to Bournemouth on Tuesday as they face Crystal Palace in Saturday's FA Cup final.

But Chelsea will be assured of a return to Europe's top competition after a two-year absence should they beat Nottingham Forest on the final day of the season.

And they could also end the campaign with a trophy as they face Real Betis in the Europa Conference League final on May 28.

"Now only two games left to achieve something special," said Cucurella.

"Today is a moment to enjoy because we work all season for these moments so now we have ambitions to achieve these things."

United's miserable season can only be saved by victory in Bilbao in five days' time but Amorim resisted the temptation to rest his key men at Stamford Bridge.

"Today was a really good game to prepare the final," said Amorim. "Almost 10 days without playing for me would be a mistake."

"It was a good thing for them to play, to feel that they can do it. We can control the game, we can have possession, we can push the opponent."

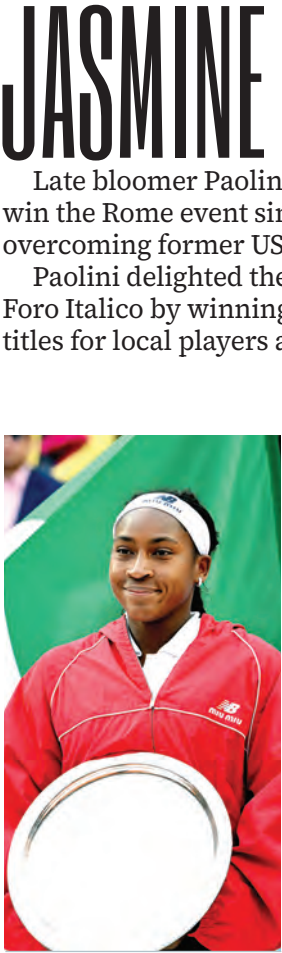
"But in the end, in this club and any club you need to win and we are not winning."

Chelsea were without a recognised striker due to Nicolas Jackson's suspension and the continued absence due to injury of Christopher Nkunku.

Teenager Tyrique George, a natural winger, was forced to lead the line up front and the Blues' lack of a focal point saw them easily snuffed out.

United's bright start was nearly rewarded when Harry Maguire fired in Bruno Fernandes' inviting cross only for a VAR review to show the centre-back had strayed centimetres offside. — AFP

JASMINE PAOLINI BEATS COCO GAUFF TO WIN ITALIAN OPEN



Coco Gauff of the US poses with the runners up trophy after losing her final match against Italy's Jasmine Paolini. — Reuters

PAOLINI won the Italian Open after beating Coco Gauff 6-4, 6-2 in Saturday's final to claim her second 1000 series title ahead of Roland Garros later this month.

Late bloomer Paolini is the first Italian woman to win the Rome event since Raffaella Reggi in 1985 after overcoming former US Open champion Gauff.

Paolini delighted the packed centre court at the Foro Italico by winning the first of a potential three titles for local players at this year's event in the Italian capital.

The 29-year-old is the oldest woman to win her first Rome title during the Open Era, while Gauff, eight years Paolini's junior, missed out on becoming the youngest to take the crown since Serena Williams back in 2002.

Just as in her battling semi-final win over Zheng Qinwen, Gauff made 55 unforced errors to go with seven double faults on serve, making Paolini's life unnecessarily easy.

Paolini could yet win both the singles and women's doubles tournaments, with the world number five and Sara Errani taking on Veronika Kudermetova and Elise Mertens in the final on Sunday.

Monica Seles was the last women to win the singles and doubles tournaments in Rome in 1990, while the only player to do so in a 1000 series tournament was Vera Zvonareva at Indian Wells in 2009.

Paolini's compatriot Jannik Sinner will contend a blockbuster men's singles final against rival Carlos Alcaraz on Sunday. — AFP



Italy's Jasmine Paolini celebrates with the trophy after winning her final match against Coco Gauff of the US. — Reuters

Sinner beats Tommy Paul to battle Alcaraz in the final

ROME: Jannik Sinner set up a blockbuster Italian Open final with Carlos Alcaraz by beating Tommy Paul 1-6, 6-0, 6-3 on Friday.

World number one Sinner fought back from a set down in front of a packed crowd to continue his march towards a first title at the Foro Italico.

After a strangely slow start, Sinner again showed good form on centre court where, since returning to action last week from a three-month doping ban, he has taken his unbeaten run to 26 matches.

And the 23-year-old will face down Alcaraz, the last man to beat Sinner in the final at the China Open in early October, with all eyes on another potential final between the pair at the French Open next month.



If I want to win Sunday I have to play one of my best tennis for sure

JANNIK SINNER



Italy's Jannik Sinner in action during his semifinal match against Tommy Paul of the US. — Reuters

A win for Sinner against his rival would see the men's Rome title go to an Italian for the first time since Adriano Panatta in 1976. "If I want to win Sunday I have to play one of my best tennis for sure," said Sinner.

"Carlos has played incredible tennis today, so let's see what's coming but from my side you know incredible to be here in the final."

Alcaraz booked his place in the showdown by beating Sinner's countryman Lorenzo Musetti 6-3, 7-6 (7/4).

The four-time Grand Slam champion overcame Musetti and the windy conditions in just over two hours to reach his fourth final of the season.

"I'm going to have dinner, but my phone is going to be there watching (Sinner's) match," said Alcaraz after his win. "I have to know against who I'm going to play. I have to watch the match and see how they are going to play."

Musetti was beaten by Alcaraz in the Monte Carlo final last month and fell to his fifth straight defeat to the Spaniard after a frustrating display.

And he believes that Alcaraz will have the better of it against Sinner if he brings his top form on Sunday evening.

"I really rate Carlos. I think on clay that the best version of Carlos is favourite against

anyone... that includes Jannik," he told reporters.

Paul rattled off the first five games in 21 minutes in a near replica of what Sinner did to Casper Ruud on Thursday, closing out the first set in less than half an hour. The last time Sinner lost a set 6-1 was in the quarter-finals of the US Open against Daniil Medvedev, a match he won on his way to his second Grand Slam triumph.

Sinner looked a shadow of the player who dominated tennis throughout 2024 right up to the start of his suspension, which was agreed with the World Anti-Doping Agency in early February. — AFP

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Dean Huijsen

REAL MADRID SIGN BOURNEMOUTH’S HUIJSEN FOR £50 MILLION

MADRID: Real Madrid signed Spain defender Dean Huijsen from Bournemouth on Saturday after agreeing to pay his £50 million (\$59 million) release fee.

The 20-year-old centre-back has impressed in his one season in the Premier League after joining the Cherries from Juventus in 2024 for £12.8 million.

“Real Madrid and Bournemouth have reached a deal for the transfer of player Dean Huijsen, who will be at our club for the next five seasons, from June 1 2025 until June 30, 2030,” said Los Blancos in a statement.

Bournemouth confirmed Madrid had “activated a £50 million release clause”, with reports suggesting Huijsen’s former sides Juventus and Malaga will also benefit from the deal.

Madrid moved quickly to sign the defender amid interest from several Premier League clubs for the Spain international.

Huijsen will be available for Real Madrid at the Club World Cup in the United States this summer, with their first game against Al Hilal on June 18 in Miami.

The defender, born in the Netherlands, moved with his family to Spain aged five and played in Malaga’s youth academy.

Huijsen made his Spain debut against the country of his birth, helping La Roja defeat the Dutch in March to reach the Nations League final four.

Real Madrid have struggled defensively this season, losing 14 games across all competitions and finishing without a major trophy.

Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti is departing to take over the Brazil national team and Bayer Leverkusen’s Xabi Alonso is expected to replace him in a summer of change in the Spanish capital.

Huijsen is set to be joined at the Santiago Bernabeu this summer by England defender Trent Alexander-Arnold at the end of his Liverpool deal.

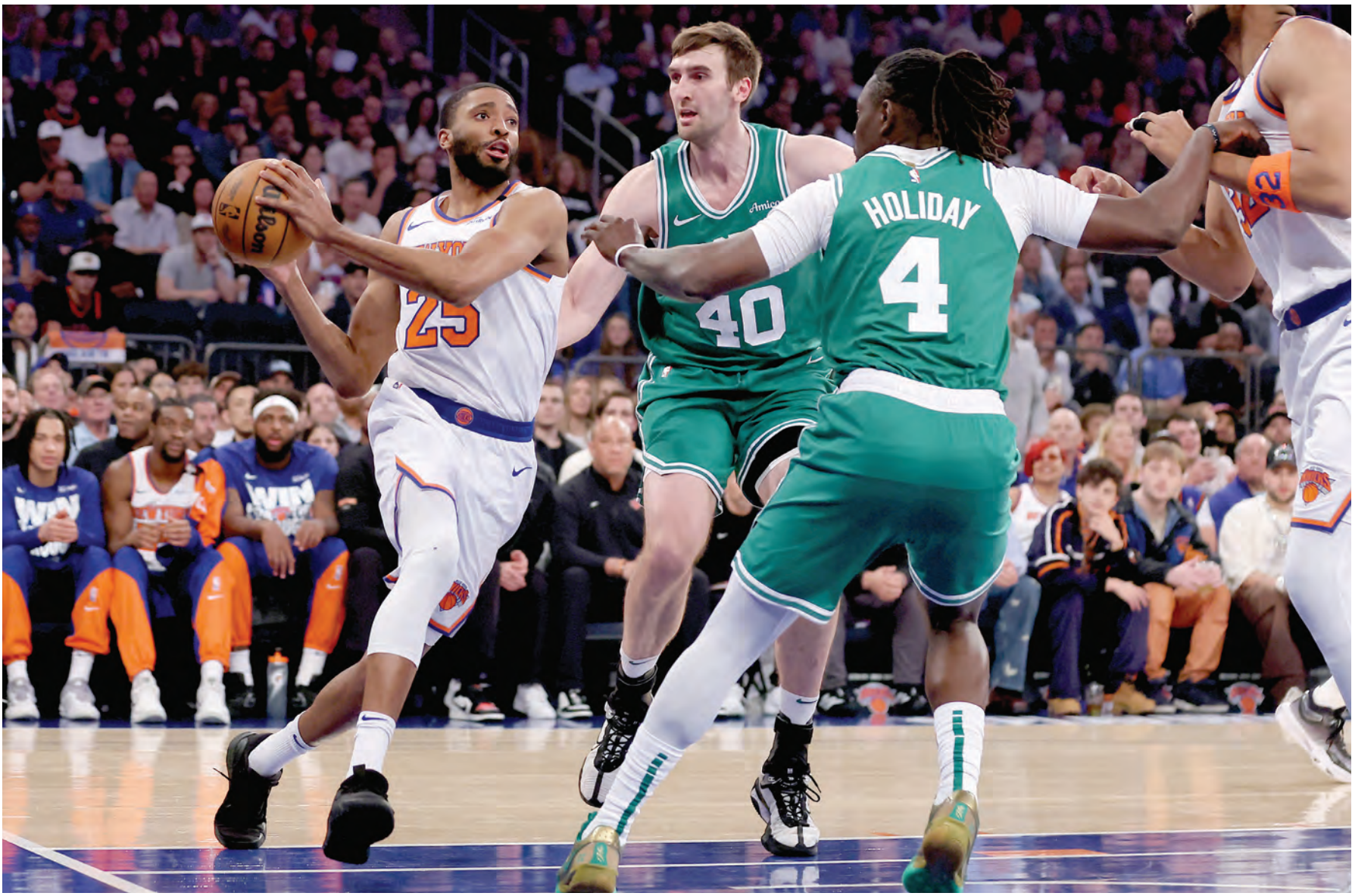
Ancelotti said Huijsen was a good signing for Madrid.

“He’s a great player, young, he has a lot of potential, it’s a very good signing by Real Madrid,” Ancelotti told a news conference, ahead of the visit to face Sevilla on Sunday in La Liga.

“Every player that Real Madrid signs excites me, because Real Madrid always want to be at the top, and they will always be at the top.”

Madrid have suffered various injury problems this season, particularly in defence.

“It was not thinkable (this would happen) last summer, because we had David Alaba back, (Eder) Militao was fit, (Dani) Carvajal was fit, but injuries have hurt us,” added Ancelotti. — AFP



New York Knicks forward Mikal Bridges (25) drives to the basket against Boston Celtics center Luke Kornet (40) and guard Jrue Holiday (4) during the first quarter of game six in the second round of the 2025 NBA Playoffs at Madison Square Garden. — Reuters

Knicks disqualify Celtics from playoffs in Game 6

THE NEW YORK KNICKS thrashed the Boston Celtics 119-81 to send the defending champions crashing out of the NBA playoffs on Friday.

The Knicks booked their first Eastern Conference finals appearance in 25 years with a rampant display to complete a 4-2 series victory.

Six Knicks players finished in double figures, with Jalen Brunson and OG Anunoby leading the way with 23 points apiece.

Mikal Bridges drained four three-pointers on his way to 22 points, while Karl-Anthony Towns added 21. Josh Hart finished with a triple-double of 10 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists. The blowout win sets up a showdown against the Knicks’ arch-rivals the Indiana Pacers next week for a place in the NBA Finals.

New York will head into that best-of-seven series brimming with confidence after an electrifying performance that swept aside a Boston team who had dominated the Knicks in a game five win on Wednesday.

“In game five they got the best of us and we responded tonight,” Brunson said after Friday’s win. “We just found a way to keep making plays on the defensive side, the offense was just rolling.”

Brunson will spearhead the Knicks challenge 25 years after his father Rick was a member of the New York team that last played in the Eastern Conference finals in 2000. “This is great. I mean, the fact that we haven’t been here since my dad was on the team — he’s not gonna like that — but it means a lot to this organization and this city.”

COMPLETE PERFORMANCE

Knicks head coach Tom Thibodeau said his team had delivered a complete performance to oust the reigning champions.

“I thought from start to finish we were terrific,” Thibodeau said. “(The Celtics) are a terrific team on both sides of the ball. They play their style no matter what, and so they’re not going to hand you anything. You have to earn it. And I felt we did that.”

TOM THIBODEAU
Knicks head coach

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“But we can’t get carried away. Obviously it’s a great win and we advance. But you also understand that you have to get ready for the next series. We know that Indiana is a terrific team and we’re going to have to be ready.” A slew of celebrities such as Timothee Chalamet, Lenny Kravitz, Ben Stiller and Spike Lee were courtside at Madison Square Garden to see the Knicks romp to victory.

Boston — who were dealt a crushing blow in game four with a season-ending injury to star Jayson Tatum — had given their fans hope of a miraculous comeback after their game five win. But those hopes were snuffed out in ruthless fashion as the Knicks edged into an early 26-20 first quarter lead before burying Boston in an avalanche of second quarter scoring.

The Knicks outscored the Celtics 38-17 in the second quarter to take a 64-37 lead at halftime, a 27-point cushion that all but extinguished Boston’s challenge. New York kept the points flowing in the third quarter, stretching their lead to as many as 41 points at one stage as they surged to victory.

Jaylen Brown led the Celtics scoring with 20 points with Al Horford adding 10 points and Payton Pritchard finishing with 11.

Derrick White, who scored 34 points in Boston’s game five win on Wednesday, was kept quiet with just eight points.

“At the end of the day, we set a goal out, and we didn’t achieve that goal,” Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said afterwards.

“But that shouldn’t take away from the mindset and effort that the players put in... the approach, the process, you can’t ask for anymore from the guys. I thought they gave everything they had throughout the season.

“You have to take your hats off to the Knicks. They played a great series and they’ve been great all year, and Thibs is a great coach — so you have to take your hat off to them.” — AFP

Norris on top in McLaren 1-2 in final practice

IMOLA, ITALY: Lando Norris outpaced team-mate and championship leader Oscar Piastri to top the times for McLaren in another convincing 1-2 in Saturday’s third and final free practice ahead of this weekend’s Emilia Romagna Grand Prix.

The Briton made the most of Pirelli’s new ‘super-soft’ C6 tyres, designed originally for street circuits, to clock a best lap in one minute and 14.897 seconds and beat Piastri by 0.100 seconds.

For Norris, it was a much-needed riposte to reverse the order of the champion team’s drivers after his Australian partner had reeled off four consecutive victories to establish a 16-points lead in the drivers’ title race and top both

sessions on Friday.

On a day of warm spring sunshine at the Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari, in the Italian team’s heartland, McLaren again overcame the best efforts to beat Red Bull’s four-time champion Max Verstappen, who was 0.181 seconds adrift in third.

Local hero Kimi Antonelli, born 40km away at Bologna, was fourth in his Mercedes ahead of Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc, Carlos Sainz of Williams and rookie Isack Hadjar of Racing Bulls.

George Russell was eighth in the second Mercedes ahead of Alex Albon in the second Williams and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in the second Ferrari. Two-time champion Fernando



McLaren’s Lando Norris arrives ahead of practice. — Reuters

Alonso was an improved 11th for Aston Martin. Hamilton had warned of brake problems on Friday, suggesting each time he tries a new setting it is a lottery.

“We roll the dice,” he said. “We put on one and it works. Another and it doesn’t. We’re working on it!”

His good humour hid his anxiety after six races without a podium finish and he was one of the first men out on Saturday to clock an early time of 1:16.983 ahead of Nico Hulkenberg.

UNPREDICTABLE TYRES

Gasly briefly took control on top of the times, before Hamilton trimmed his lap to 1:15.866 with the usual suspects led by Norris arriving - and moving clear with Verstappen going

top after 23 minutes in 1:15.579 ahead of Piastri.

Hamilton was soon pushed down to fourth as Norris rose to second, just 0.077 seconds off Verstappen’s pace before the times began to tumble again with Leclerc and then Isack Hadjar going top, the Frenchman in 1:15.529. At this stage, everyone was running the mediums, Verstappen demonstrating their potential to take command in 1:15.130 ahead of Norris and Hadjar with Leclerc fourth, Piastri fifth and Hamilton sixth.

The track speed progressed in the sunshine and Norris moved closer as others improved before Liam Lawson lost his Racing Bulls car in a high-speed spin at Tamburello, flat-spotting his tyres severely. — AFP

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NEDC EMERGES AS OMAN’S LARGEST POWER UTILITY



ALA HASSAN MOOSA
CEO - NEDC

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 17

NAMA Electricity Distribution Company (NEDC), the Sultanate of Oman’s national distribution utility with a mandate covering all of Oman except Dhofar Governorate, now manages assets exceeding

RO 2 billion — positioning it as the largest power sector utility in the country. Wholly state-owned NEDC – part of Nama Group – grew out of the merger of multiple distribution companies following a 2022 decision by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) to restructure the sector. Licensed to carry out electricity distribution management and related activities across all governments excluding Dhofar, NEDC has seen its portfolio expand to around 1.35 million customers at the end of 2024.

Overseeing the delivery of services across Dhofar Governorate is Nama Dhofar Services – also part of Nama Group – but structured as an integrated provider of electricity, water and wastewater services in this southern governorate of Oman.

According to NEDC CEO Ala Hassan Moosa, 2024 was a “transformative milestone” for the utility. “NEDC has solidified its position as the nation’s leading electricity distribution company, with assets surpassing RO 2.24 billion.

In alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and the priorities of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), our strategy is founded on key obligations and principles shaped by regulatory priorities, shareholder expectations, and government aspirations for growth and collaboration,” he stated in the company’s newly published 2024 Annual Report.

Significantly, NEDC’s financial performance remained robust in 2024, the CEO noted. Of total revenues of RO 307.36 million, the gross profit amounted to RO 151.732 million, while EBITDA was recorded at RO 193.94 million.

Meanwhile, infrastructure and technology investments continued apace in 2024 in line with NEDC’s goal to ensure a reliable and future-ready network.

Credible energy transition hinges on regulatory agility: MEM official

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 17

THE complexity of policy frameworks — not technology or ambition — is the real bottleneck in accelerating renewable energy deployment, said Dr Firas al Abduwani, Director-General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM), during a high-level panel at the Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES) on Tuesday.

Speaking during the “Innovation in New Energies to Enable the Transition” session hosted by the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE), Dr Al Abduwani emphasised that policymaking — often criticised as slow or outdated — is far more nuanced than commonly assumed.

“Everyone says, ‘Why aren’t we doing more renewables?’ and the answer is always ‘the policy’. But very few understand how deeply layered and technically complex these policies are,” he said. “It’s not just about ambition. It’s about designing policies that reflect economic realities,



It’s not just about ambition. It’s about designing policies that reflect economic realities, legacy infrastructure, and affordability for consumers and industry.

DR FIRAS AL ABDUWANI
Director-General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen

legacy infrastructure, and affordability for consumers and industry.”

HIDDEN COSTS, REAL CONSTRAINTS

Dr Al Abduwani explained that legacy energy systems — particularly natural gas — are heavily subsidised and socially embedded in Oman’s industrial model, which makes sudden shifts toward renewables politically and economically risky.

“Gas in Oman is not treated purely as a commodity — it’s socialised,” he said.

“It underpins electricity prices,



The trial marks a first-of-its-kind initiative in the region, reflecting the company’s drive to pioneer climate-smart solutions.

Camelina sativa was a natural choice—it’s a hardy oilseed crop with a short life cycle and the potential to produce up to 40% oil by weight, making it ideal for renewable diesel and sustainable aviation fuel production.

provided by ARA, which is also supplying water and financial backing to support the project’s implementation.

“ARA stepped forward to turn vision into action,” Al Asmy explained. “They offered not only land and water but also the commitment to co-fund the trial. This partnership is a crucial step in moving beyond MoUs and into real-world impact.”

The Camelina project dovetails with Hema Energy’s

broader strategy, branded as “the greener barrel” — an energy model that emphasises maximum reuse and minimal waste.

Hema’s biofuel facility has been operational since 2021, and the company now aims to integrate Camelina into its portfolio as a local source of bio-based feedstock.

“Everything we do under our X2E unit revolves around converting waste into opportunity,” said Al Asmy.

“We treat produced water from oil fields and are now exploring ways to use this treated water for Camelina cultivation. It’s a win-win: waste reuse and green fuel production.

The environmental potential of the project is significant. In addition to reducing dependency on fossil feedstocks, the trial supports Oman’s national goals for

water reuse.

Hema Energy is also in discussions with Nama Group to explore the use of treated municipal wastewater for future Camelina plantations.

Still, challenges remain. “The main hurdle isn’t the climate—it’s coordination,” Al Asmy emphasised. “We see wastewater reuse as a matter of national security, but aligning various government bodies on this issue remains a critical bottleneck.”

Despite this, the company is optimistic. The trial phase will help assess Camelina’s adaptability to Oman’s arid climate, which, according to Al Asmy, shares similarities with the plant’s native environment.

While the current trial does not involve other stakeholders, the Environmental Authority has been kept in the loop, given the pioneering nature of the project.

If successful, Hema Energy plans to expand the cultivation near oilfields and other wastewater sources—and potentially abroad.

“Assuming the pilot delivers good results, we’re looking at scaling up in Oman and even exploring less climate-challenged environments like parts of Africa,” Al Asmy concluded.

“This is more than a trial—it’s a blueprint for sustainable energy and agriculture in tandem.”

With this initiative, Hema Energy reinforces its role as a regional leader in sustainable innovation, combining technical agility with environmental responsibility.

ADVERTORIALS

OFFICIALSPONSOR



During the event, Abraj signed two significant contracts that reflect its expanding local footprint and trusted operational capabilities.

ABRAJ CONCLUDES HIGH-IMPACT PARTICIPATION AT OPES & OSW 2025

MUSCAT: Abraj Energy Services, Oman’s leading provider of oil and gas services, concluded a high-impact presence at the 13th Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES) and Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) 2025.

As an Official Sponsor, Abraj reinforced its market leadership through operational achievements, sustainability leadership and strategic stakeholder engagement. During the event, Abraj signed two significant contracts that reflect its expanding local footprint and trusted operational capabilities.

These included a drilling unit agreement with bp Oman for Block 61, a rig services contract with ARA Petroleum for Block 44, and the signing of a new contract for a third 3,000 HP rig at the WJO field in Kuwait — a major milestone in Abraj’s international expansion strategy and a testament to its growing presence in key regional markets.

“This year’s participation reflects our unwavering commitment to performance, partnership and progress,” said Eng Saif al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj Energy Services. “From securing landmark contracts to driving dialogue on innovation and sustainability, we continue to lead with purpose and deliver impact aligned with Oman Vision 2040.”

As part of its OPES presence, Abraj hosted the Abraj Knowledge Exchange, a high-impact two-day mini-conference that brought together industry leaders and technical experts to explore critical themes shaping the energy future. Sessions focused on operational excellence, HSE leadership — highlighting Abraj’s outstanding safety performance — drilling automation and sustainability practices aligned with Oman Vision 2040. The event reinforced Abraj’s role as a thought leader and catalyst for industry knowledge exchange.

In line with its commitment to local economic development, Abraj’s Supply Chain Team organised a Business Opportunity Session targeting local suppliers, service providers and SMEs. The session introduced upcoming procurement opportunities and Abraj’s supplier registration process, while also fostering meaningful dialogue to strengthen collaboration and maximise local content.

The initiative drew strong participation and reaffirmed Abraj’s support for national ICV objectives. During OSW 2025, Abraj was honoured with the Majd Award for Best Local Content Programme, recognising its impactful contributions to Oman’s local supply chain ecosystem and SME empowerment.

Lulu Retail reports \$2.1 billion Q1 2025 revenue

LULU Retail Holdings PLC (“Lulu” or the “Company”), the largest and fastest growing pan GCC full line retailer, announced its financial results for the three-month period ended March 31, 2025 (“Q1 2025”).

- KEY HIGHLIGHTS:**
- Q1 2025 revenue of \$2.1 billion, up 7.3% YoY, with like-for-like sales up 3.6% YoY driven by strong sales during Ramadan period and volume growth in certain product categories
 - EBITDA of \$214.1 million, up 6.4% YoY, with EBITDA margin of 10.3%, stable vs Q1 2024
 - Net profit of \$69.7m, up 15.8% YoY, with net profit margin of 3.4%, up 25bps vs. Q1 2024
 - Good strategic progress with five new stores opened in Q1 2025 including in Makkah and Madinah with the target for 20 new stores in 2025 unchanged
 - E-commerce sales grew strongly, up 25.3% YoY to \$93.4 million; now 4.7% of retail revenue
 - Strong growth in revenue from Private Label products, up 9.5% YoY; 29.3% of retail revenue
 - Happiness loyalty program members reached c.6.3 million in Q1 vs. c.5.5 million in FY24; linked to 65% of sales.
- Saifee Rupawala, Chief



The first quarter also saw Lulu make good progress on delivering on the overall growth strategy.

Executive Officer of Lulu, commented: “We are pleased to have demonstrated good growth in the first quarter of this year, with revenue up 7.3% YoY.

This was underpinned by a combination of like-for-like sales growth, supported by strong trading during the Ramadhan period, and our store rollout programme, which remains well on track with five stores opened in the quarter, in line with our plan to rollout a total of 20 stores in 2025.

The first quarter also saw Lulu make good progress on delivering on our overall growth strategy, supported by robust sales in Private Label and

e-commerce, which remain key components of our strategy.”

“Looking ahead, we expect our growth momentum to continue as we remain focused on several initiatives under each of our four key pillars, including driving growth in existing store network, opening new stores, driving operational efficiencies and delivering further upside through our private label and e-commerce offerings.

Overall, we are pleased with the performance in the first quarter, marking a good start to 2025, and we look forward to continuing to deliver on our strategy throughout the rest of the year.”

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Revenue grew a healthy 7.3% YoY to \$2.1 billion in Q1 2025 driven by LFL sales growth of 3.6%, supported by strong trading during the Ramadhan period.

The good revenue performance was also driven by new store openings and high-volume growth across certain product categories, particularly in fresh food and lifestyle products.

- Fresh food category revenue grew 7.9% YoY in the first quarter, driven by the Ramadhan period, improved consumption trends.
- Electrical goods category witnessed revenue growth of 29.0% YoY, mainly due to an increase in sales across higher value items.
- Lifestyle products grew 6.9% YoY despite pressure as customers opted for more value products.
- Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) sales grew steadily at 1.4% YoY, with the sales increase mainly driven by strong volume growth, which was partly offset by some pricing pressure as a result of promotional campaigns.
- E-commerce remains an important component of Lulu’s growth strategy, with sales +25.3% YoY and customer count +26.1% YoY.

NATIONAL FINANCE REINFORCES SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP AT OSW

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its position as a sustainability trailblazer, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, reaffirmed its commitment to driving sustainable practices across sectors through its strategic participation in thought-leadership sessions at Oman Sustainability Week 2025.

Showcasing its dedication to advancing the ESG agenda, National Finance’s inspiring personnel took part in a high-impact panel discussion focused on sustainable finance.

HH Sayyidah Wisam al Said, Assistant General Manager – Marketing, Corporate Communications and Sustainability at National Finance, participated in the high-level panel titled ‘Sustainable Finance: Funding the Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy’, held as part of the International Sustainability Resources and Technology Conference (ISRTC) 2025, organised by Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah) and programmed by Economist Impact.

The session delved into key challenges and opportunities for the financial sector in supporting the transition towards a low-carbon future. The discussion explored key themes such as the growing importance of green bonds, ESG



National Finance’s inspiring personnel took part in a high-impact panel discussion focused on sustainable finance.

investment frameworks, the need for improved corporate disclosure to prevent greenwashing, and the role financial institutions play in accelerating the Middle East’s climate ambitions.

In sharing her insights, HH Sayyidah Wisam al Said highlighted National Finance’s emphasis on integrating ESG principles into its business strategy, aligning closely with the sustainability goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040. She underscored the company’s role in empowering

businesses and communities to take meaningful ownership of environmental stewardship while contributing to the broader goal of sustainable economic and social development. Through her participation, she also championed the importance of cross-sector collaboration as a catalyst for unlocking capital and accelerating the flow of investment into impactful, sustainability-driven projects.

HH Sayyidah Wisam al Said emphasised, “Financial institutions have a crucial responsibility to lead the charge towards a low-carbon future with both ambition and integrity. At National Finance, we are committed to embedding sustainability into the core of our financing strategy, empowering businesses to meet their ESG ambitions while driving systemic change across industries.

“Our sustainable finance solutions are designed not just to support individual projects, but to catalyse a broader movement towards accountability and climate resilience.

“By funding initiatives of national importance through sustainability-linked financing, we are helping shape a future where economic growth and environmental stewardship go hand in hand.”

Saud Bahwan Group introduces the Yangwang brand at OSW 2025

MUSCAT: Participating in Oman’s national event for future energy, waste management and sustainable innovation, World Auto Business LLC showcased Yangwang’s powerful and ultra-high-performance luxury range at Oman Sustainability Week 2025.

Held from May 12-14, 2025, the 3-day exhibit at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), featured the premium SUV U8 and the luxury super sports car U9.

Marking Yangwang’s official entry into the Omani market, the exhibition offered a first-hand brand and product introduction with awe-inspiring product demonstrations.

Immediately following the official opening of Oman Sustainability Week on May 12, 2025, the display inaugural was unveiled in the presence of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport,



Guests viewing the Yangwang vehicle at Oman Sustainability Week 2025.

Communications and Information Technology, A D Huang, General Manager of BYD Middle East and Africa Auto Sales Division, and Abdullah bin Mohammed

Saud Bahwan, CEO, Saud Bahwan Group, alongside other key government officials.

Highlighting Yangwang’s display as a roaring success with an exceptional response from customers, a representative from World Auto Business said, “Partnering with events like these, which align with our values of passion and excellence, enhances consumer recognition and increases brand affinity, attracting like-minded individuals.” He added, “The response at the exhibition has been amazing, helping us capture the attention of those who are ready to embrace change.”

Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the introduction of Yangwang’s product lineup in Oman brings a powerful twist to mobility. The Yangwang range drives us towards a more dynamic future, offering luxurious interiors, intelligent digital interfaces and purposeful design, making every ride

unimaginable.

Positioned as an ultra-luxury off-road SUV, the Yangwang U8 stands apart with its cutting-edge capabilities, including floating on water using Wade Mode, performing a full 360-degree tank turn, and advanced blowout control.

These features demonstrate the full power and vigour of the PHEV 2.0T with a high-power engine built on BYD’s advanced e⁴ platform with fast acceleration from 0-100km/h in 3.6 seconds. Designed for those who crave adventure and test limits, it appeals to off-road enthusiasts with a passion for exploring less-travelled terrains in powerful, reliable vehicles.

Kicking off a new era of pure electric supercars, the Yangwang U9 is a battery-electric super coupe built on the e⁴ platform, a sophisticated high-performance powertrain.

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES

OQBI REPORTS RO 12.8 MILLION Q1 PROFIT ON STRONG REVENUE GROWTH



KHALID BIN KHALFAN AL ASMI
CEO, OQBI

MUSCAT: OQ Base Industries (OQBI) posted a robust 70.6% surge in net profit for the first quarter of 2025, reaching RO 12.8 million, up from RO 7.5 million in the same period last year. According to the company’s unaudited financial results, the impressive performance was driven by a revenue

increase of RO 9.2 million and a RO 3.3 million reduction in financing costs. These gains were partially offset by a rise in natural gas costs (RO 1.5 million), a RO 4.6 million provision for hypothetical gas, a RO 800,000 increase in operating expenses, and a RO 300,000 drop in financing income. CEO Khalid bin Khalfan al Asmi stated that adjusted earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) grew 17.3% to RO 24.7 million, compared to RO 21 million in Q1 2024. The improvement was largely attributed to higher revenues, although partially offset by additional gas and operating expenses. Group revenues reached RO 55.5 million during the quarter, marking a 19.9% rise from RO 46.3 million a year earlier.

This increase was supported by stronger methanol prices, a 60.4% jump in ammonia sales volumes, and higher LPG sales, which added RO 3.1 million to the topline. Al Asmi highlighted the company’s continued excellence in health, safety, security and environmental performance. He noted that the methanol, LPG and ammonia plants all received certifications for their environmental, health, safety and quality management systems – underscoring OQBI’s commitment to risk management and sustainability.

OMAN’S ELECTRICITY OUTPUT GROWS BY 4.3 PER CENT

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman recorded a 4.3-per cent increase in total electricity production, reaching 5,682.1 gigawatt-hours (GWh) by the end of February 2025, compared to 5,446.2 GWh during the same period in 2024, according to preliminary figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Production in Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South along with Al Dhahirah totalled 3,137.9 GWh – a 5.8-per cent decline. In contrast, Muscat saw a substantial rise in output, increasing by 3,160.9 per cent to 35.5 GWh. Dhofar’s production also grew by 8.5 per cent to 786.6 GWh. Electricity generation in Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South dropped by 3.1 per cent to 1,256 GWh, while Al Wusta saw a sharp decline of 17.2 per cent to 14.4 GWh. Musandam Governorate, however, recorded a 3.2-per cent increase, producing 49.9 GWh. Net electricity production – including purchases by the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company and the Rural Areas Electricity Company – rose by 5.1 per cent to 5,522.8 GWh by February 2025. In terms of water production, output reached 79.16 million cubic metres, a decrease from 81.22 million cubic metres during the same period in 2024. — ONA

NOT PRISTINE

Moody’s cuts US sovereign credit rating



Moody’s downgraded the US sovereign credit rating on Friday due to concerns about the nation’s growing, \$36 trillion debt pile, in a move that could complicate President Donald Trump’s efforts to cut taxes and send ripples through global markets. Moody’s first gave the United States its pristine “Aaa” rating in 1919 and is the last of the three major credit agencies to downgrade it. — Reuters

HOTEL REVENUES CLIMB TO RO 79.4 MILLION BY MARCH

RO 920m road projects underway across Oman

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has invested more than RO 920 million in road development projects across the Sultanate of Oman since the beginning of the Tenth Five-Year Plan in 2021.

These efforts reflect the government’s commitment to enhancing connectivity, supporting regional development and improving infrastructure throughout the country. According to Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, the ministry is currently implementing a number of dual carriageway and other road projects in various stages – some under execution, others in the bidding phase or under design. One of the most significant recent completions is the Sultan Said bin Taimour Road, a 400-kilometre-long dual carriageway, now the longest in the Sultanate of Oman. Following the completion of national roads linking major governorates, the ministry is now focusing on regional projects and urban connections.

MUSCAT: Revenues from three to five-star hotels in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 10.6 per cent, reaching RO 79.43 million by the end of March 2025, compared to RO 71.80 million during the same period in 2024. Data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that this growth was driven by a 2.3-per cent increase in hotel guests, totalling 610,176 by

March 2025 compared to 596,366 a year earlier. Occupancy rates improved significantly, rising from 54.9 per cent in March 2024 to 59.5 per cent in March 2025 – an increase of 8.3 percentage points. Guest numbers from the Americas climbed by 11.6 per cent to 21,781, while African guests surged by 70.7 per cent to 4,633. Asian guests grew by 10.1 per cent

to 87,210, and visitors from Oceania jumped by 50.9 per cent to 13,098. Despite the overall rise in foreign guests, the number of Omani guests declined by 9.1 per cent to 171,809. Guests from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries increased by 18.2 per cent to 37,646, while other Arab nationalities decreased by 7.7 per cent to 22,533. European guests rose by 7.5 per cent to 232,986. — ONA



The ministry is simultaneously supervising maintenance work on asphalt roads in various governorates.

Among the most prominent projects in progress is the dual carriageway in the Wilayat of Ibra in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, which is currently in the design phase. This road will link Sultan Turki bin Said Road, pass through Al Mudhaibi and extend to Sinaw. In Al Dhahirah Governorate, the ministry is working on the first phase of the Rub al Khali Road, which involves dualising an 11-kilometre section from Al Buraimi to Mahadha. Additionally, the remaining segment of the Sultan Said bin Taimour Road from Adam to

Haima is being completed. In Dhofar Governorate, several road infrastructure projects are underway. These include the dual carriageway from Raysut to Al Mughsail, the construction of the Mughsail Bridge and Itin Tunnel, the dualisation of Al Farouq and Sultan Taimour Streets, and the development of an asphalt road network in the Wilayat of Maqshan. The ministry is also advancing the Jabal Shams Road and the dual carriageway connecting Izki and Nizwa via Qarut South, Birkat Al Mouz and Farq in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

In Al Sharqiyah South, the dual carriageway linking Al Kamil W’al Wafi, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali is under evaluation, based on a final scope agreed upon with relevant authorities. Meanwhile, the Al Kamil W’al Wafi–Sur Road project has reached more than 46 per cent completion, and the Sultan Faisal bin Turki Road project has surpassed 44 per cent completion. Al Shammakhi revealed that road projects awarded in 2024 are valued at over RO 450 million, and the total value of projects this year is expected to exceed RO 600 million. Since the start of the Tenth Five-Year Plan, the cumulative value of road projects awarded by the ministry has surpassed RO 920 million. He also noted that the ministry is working to implement key internal highway connections based on annual priorities and approvals from relevant authorities. These include a connection from Al Musannah (Shuaiba) Roundabout to the Batinah Expressway, which is expected to be tendered this year. Additional connections and works are also underway along Sultan Turki bin Said Road and the Batinah Expressway. — ONA

OMAN’S LABOUR BODY SECURES 87 JOB REINSTATEMENTS IN APRIL

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 17

THE General Federation of Oman Workers (GFWO) reported a rise in labour-related disputes and collective job termination notices in April 2025, reinforcing its active role in safeguarding employment stability and promoting fair labour practices across the Sultanate of Oman. According to the Federation’s latest bulletin, four private sector companies submitted notifications involving the collective termination of 974 employees due to economic conditions. The GFWO’s relevant committee approved the termination of 16 non-Omani workers, while also securing the reinstatement of 87 Omani employees through formal mediation processes. During the same period, the GFWO supported workers in 14 cases of individual and collective complaints, which were addressed through dialogue and negotiation sessions. Of these, eight cases were resolved, while six remain ongoing. Legal awareness among the workforce also



Two new trade unions were formed in April, according to GFWO.

increased, as the Federation responded to 76 legal inquiries and consultations covering issues such as wages, leave entitlements, contract terms and working hours. In terms of union organisation, two new trade unions were formed in April. Additionally, three existing trade unions completed alignment

procedures to meet national legal requirements. Committees under the GFWO held structured meetings to evaluate employer requests for workforce reduction and to assess complaints related to deteriorating working conditions. The Federation stressed that all measures taken were based on legal due diligence and guided by the principle of prioritising Omani job retention. The GFWO stated that key employment issues addressed during the month included wage disputes, leave entitlements, contract terminations, project completion concerns and demands for improved working conditions. These issues remain central to the Federation’s mandate under the goals of Oman Vision 2040, which promotes labour market resilience, fair governance and economic participation. In a statement, the Federation reaffirmed its commitment to facilitating social dialogue and protecting the rights of workers through institutional mechanisms and union support. It also urged employers to enhance transparency and engage proactively in resolving disputes.

GROWTH IMPACT

Vietnam steps up talks to reduce tariff



Vietnam and the United States held their first direct ministerial-level negotiations on Friday against the backdrop of an impending US tariff of 46% on imports from the Southeast Asian nation, which could significantly impact its growth. The Vietnamese trade ministry said on Saturday that the meeting symbolised both nations’ commitment to fostering a stable economic, trade and investment relationship. — Reuters

NEW DISCOVERY

Türkiye finds new natural gas reserve



Türkiye has discovered a new reserve of 75 billion cubic metres (bcm) of natural gas during drilling works in the Black Sea, President Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday. “With this discovery, we will meet the natural gas needs of homes in Türkiye for 3.5 years,” Erdogan said. The discovery, with an economic value of around \$30 billion, was found in the Goktepe-3 well at a depth of 3,500 metres, Erdogan said. — Reuters

OPINION

Transition trap: Why clean energy needs more than technology



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The writer is the head of business and politics section at Oman Observer

THERE was a time when the biggest question in climate conversations was “what technology will save us?” That era is ending. The technologies exist. Solar and wind are affordable. Green hydrogen is real. Carbon capture is proven. Yet the energy transition — especially in the Gulf — is moving slower than ambition suggests. Why? Because we have built tools but not systems. The trap is not technological. It is structural. At this year’s Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES), voices from government, industry, and finance agreed: it is not the lack of solutions that hinders progress — it is the absence of the enabling conditions that allow those solutions to scale. This is the great paradox of our time: we have what we need, yet we struggle to use it at speed.

WHEN READINESS MEETS RESISTANCE
Across the Gulf, the ambition is undeniable. Oman has awarded land for eight green hydrogen mega-projects in Al Wusta and Dhofar, aiming to produce one million tonnes annually by 2030. Saudi Arabia is building one of the world’s largest carbon capture hubs in Jubail. The UAE has reached over 50 GW of clean energy capacity through Masdar and is pushing hard into green fuels and advanced solar. Qatar has deployed its first large-scale solar plant and committed to capture nine million tonnes of CO₂ annually by 2035. These are real, capital-intensive projects.

But when you speak to the people behind them, the message is sobering: deals are signed, infrastructure is planned, but execution is slow. Permitting is unclear. Offtake agreements are missing. Risk-sharing mechanisms are weak. The projects are world-class. The frameworks are not.

THE GLOBAL BLUEPRINT
Elsewhere in the world, the difference lies not in technology, but in policy. In the United States, the Inflation Reduction Act has triggered more than \$280 billion in private clean energy investments in under two years — fuelled by tax credits, domestic content rules and production-based incentives. In Europe, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is not only reshaping global trade flows — it is compelling industries from Türkiye to China to measure and reduce their emissions. In Germany, power market reform is underway to reward grid flexibility and build hydrogen-ready capacity. These moves show how political clarity translates into market activity. Investors don’t respond to slogans — they respond to structure. The countries moving fastest are those building architecture around ambition. What is most encouraging — and urgent — is that private industrial players are already leaning forward. In steel, cement, chemicals, aviation — firms are no longer waiting for regulation to arrive. They are investing in carbon capture,

The region has three unmatched assets: patient capital, integrated infrastructure and strong project delivery capability. No one builds faster than the Gulf when the incentives align. But clean energy requires a different mindset

electrification and sustainable fuels. In Sweden, a new generation of green steelmakers is emerging. In Canada, global firms are retrofitting old plants with clean hydrogen technology. In France and the Netherlands, companies are scaling carbon capture linked to port clusters and industrial zones. But these pioneers also face a dilemma. Their projects cost more — at least for now. Their products are greener — but the markets do not yet reward them. This is where Gulf policymakers must act. Not just to fund innovation, but to build the rules, rewards and risk buffers that allow these technologies to be commercially viable.

THE GULF’S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE
The region has three unmatched assets: patient capital, integrated infrastructure and strong project delivery capability. No one builds faster than the Gulf when the incentives align. But clean energy requires a different mindset. It’s not about building a single refinery or solar plant. It’s about orchestrating entire systems — from permitting and certification to financing and export policy. The Gulf doesn’t need to copy Europe’s carbon pricing or America’s tax credits. It needs its own model. A model that reflects its resource base, fiscal tools and long-term investment horizon. But it also needs to be clear, bankable, and fast. If Oman, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar want to lead the clean energy economy — not just participate in it — they must treat policy and market design as national infrastructure.

RIDING THE WIND: HOW KITE POWER IS SOARING ABOVE TRADITIONAL ENERGY SOLUTIONS



NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The writer is a Media and Communication Master’s graduate

IN A remote field or windswept coast, it’s not a turbine towering on the horizon that’s generating power, but a kite, dancing high in the sky. This is the quiet revolution of Kitepower, a Dutch airborne wind energy (AWE) pioneer that’s reimagining how we harness one of the Earth’s most ancient forces: the wind.

The company was founded in January 2016 by Johannes Peschel and Dr Roland Schmehl as a spin-off from Delft University of Technology’s pioneering kite power research group. The company’s technology builds upon over a decade of academic research, including the development of the Laddermill concept in 1997 — an early airborne wind energy design using multiple kites on a looped cable — and the successful demonstration of a 20kW kite power system in 2007. This academic foundation paved the way for Kitepower’s streamlined, high-efficiency systems that use a single kite and advanced flight control to harvest stronger, more consistent high-altitude winds. Kitepower’s system replaces the rigid infrastructure of wind turbines with a large inflatable kite tethered to a ground station. As the kite flies in figure-eight loops up to 500 metres above ground, it catches stronger, more consistent high-altitude winds. The tension generated pulls a cable from a drum on the ground, converting motion into electricity. Once the cable is fully extended, the kite glides back with minimal energy use, and the cycle begins again. “We use up to 90% less material with the potential of being twice as efficient as conventional wind turbines with the same power output,” says Johannes Peschel, CEO and co-founder of Kitepower. Two models currently lead Kitepower’s portfolio. The Falcon system delivers 100 kW of power and can generate approximately 450 megawatt-hours annually, enough to power around 150 homes. The smaller Hawk model provides 30 kW and is optimised for mobile and off-grid energy needs.

Sustainability at the core of national progress

OMAN is strategically located next to the United Arab Emirates, KSA and Yemen. Combating environmental challenges while meeting expectations from all over the globe presents a bold but necessary path towards sustainability for the Sultanate of Oman. With the Oman Vision 2040, policies, projects and milestones are being met and put into practice which highlight Oman’s commitment to fostering eco-friendly sustainable business and social policies. Oman used to depend primarily on oil and gas for economic growth, but is now focusing towards investments in renewable resources, green urban growth and sustainable farming, along with aggressive climate action. The investments are not limited to local business; investment are also coming from government ministries, private businesses, local communities and foreign partners. Sustainability is no longer an advisory agenda; it is becoming increasingly integral towards international social policy.

VISION 2040: ROADMAP TO SUSTAINABILITY
The strategic framework that serves Oman as the national agenda backbone is called Vision 2040, which aims to shift focus to sustaining all sectors while still maintaining economic growth. The document will be used to align what is being documented and worked on to meet the United Nations sustainable development goals. In concert with the Environment Authority, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources are working to make Oman a benchmark in sustainable living. The country is undertaking the construction of green cities, eco-tourism zones, reforms for efficient waste management, and other



New cities are being constructed incorporating sustainable features, smart facilities, green buildings, efficient energy and transportation systems.



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

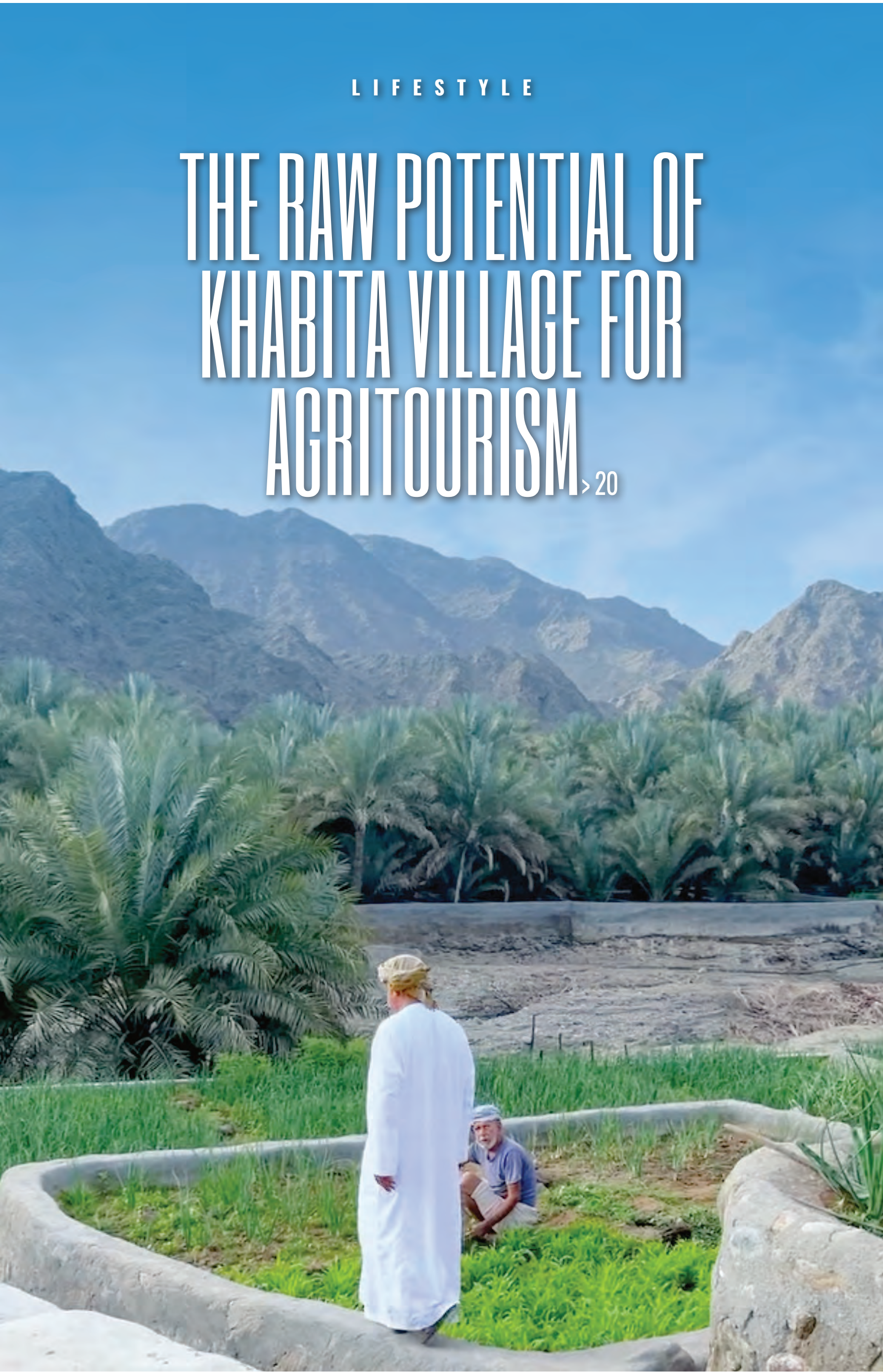
A specialist in local content/ In-country value, the writer is the Acting Director-General of Local Content, previously assigned to the General Secretariat of the Tender Board.

vision integrated undertakings that encompass the nurturing of environmental issues alongside governance and economic development planning. The key issues under Vision 2040 are to: Strengthen renewable energy to lessen oil dependency; Encourage sustainable cities and infrastructure; Safeguard Oman’s diverse living resources; and Sustainably secure food and water resources for Oman’s future generations. **THE SHIFT TO GREEN ENERGY** Oman possesses limitless vast deserts and receives abundant sunlight needed for solar energy. With the recent application towards the years, Oman is now a significant player in the race for renewable energy resources in the Middle East. Initiated in 2021, the Ibri II Solar Project capsulises the long term vision by generating a currency equivalent of 500 megawatts of electricity. This is effectively clean energy for over 50,000 houses. On the other hand, the Dhofar Wind Farm, supported by Masdar,

is providing 50 MW of wind energy in Dhofar Governorate aggregately powering thousands of homes and reducing carbon emissions. More importantly, Oman is investing significantly into green hydrogen, which many consider as the fuel of the future. Multiple hydrogen projects are in the works in Duqm and Salalah, enabling Oman to become a global exporter of clean fuels.

OVERCOME WATER SCARCITY
Being one of the most arid countries in the world, water availability is a critical life-and-death issue for Oman. Oman is reinventing the management of its water resources through its modern engineering and age-old strategies. The aflaj irrigation system is centuries old and directs groundwater to farms and villages through gravity-fed tunnels. Unesco recognises these systems as essential for rural populations. Further positive developments by the government include desalination facilities in Barka, Suhar and Duqm which transform seawater into potable water. Combined with wastewater treatment systems, which allow greywater to be reused for irrigation and beautification landscaping, ensures a reliable supply of clean water. Under Oman Vision 2040, the government intends to enhance the efficiency of waters used in the various programmes, protect groundwater aquifers and improve the public’s understanding of conservation. Oman’s rich southern coastline offers pristine natural beauty that is often overlooked. An example of its richness is the Oman’s biodiversity, which includes the Arabian leopard, green turtles and the Arabian oryx. In a proactive move to conserve the biodiversity further, the government has established over 20 protected natural reserves, eco-tourism locations like Ras Al Jinz, Al Wusta Wildlife Sanctuary and Daymaniyat Islands.

ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

THE RAW POTENTIAL OF Khabita Village for Agritourism > 20

COMMUNITY

Spectacular Cultural Performances at Russia’s 80th Victory Day



THE GRAND celebration at the Diplomatic Club in Muscat marked the 80th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War with a spectacular array of performances and cultural events. The evening was headlined by a riveting Cossack show performed by the renowned ensemble “Lyubo-Milo” from Russia, captivating audiences with energetic dance and traditional music. The event also featured a vibrant concert showcasing songs from the war years, stirring memories and patriotic pride among attendees.

Supporting these performances, guests enjoyed a buffet of Russian and Soviet cuisine, along with specially designed photo zones reminiscent of wartime days, allowing families and guests to capture memorable moments amid a historical setting.

The celebration was organised by Russian House Oman, with the backing of the Board of Russian Compatriots in Oman. The event drew a distinguished assembly of diplomats, business leaders and dignitaries, including Oleg Levin, Russian Ambassador to Oman; ambassadors from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan; as well as prominent officials such as the Prime Minister of the Republic of Dagestan, Abdulmuslim Mukhudinovich Abdulmuslimov.

Oleg Levin underscored the enduring importance of Victory Day: “The Great Victory of 1945 is a testament to courage and unity. It is crucial that we remember the sacrifices made and ensure that the history remains truthful, unaltered and shared globally. Victory Day is a reminder of hope and resilience, linking generations past and present.”

Similarly, Igor Egorov, head of the Board of Russian Compatriots in Oman, expressed the event’s significance: “Victory Day is not only commemorative but also educational. It reflects our commitment to reinforce the values of peace and justice, fostering a mutual understanding between our nations.”

Special attention was given to engaging the younger generation, with activities designed to teach children about the importance of the victory and the sacrifices made by their ancestors. Anna Popova, director of Russian House Oman, highlighted these efforts: “By educating children about Victory Day, we nurture qualities of fortitude, unity and loyalty to peace — principles deeply rooted in both Russian and Omani cultures.”

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



FILM

Bollywood actor Ajay Devgn (L) and his son Yug Devgn attend the trailer launch of the upcoming Hindi-language American martial arts drama film ‘Karate Kid: Legends’ in Mumbai. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

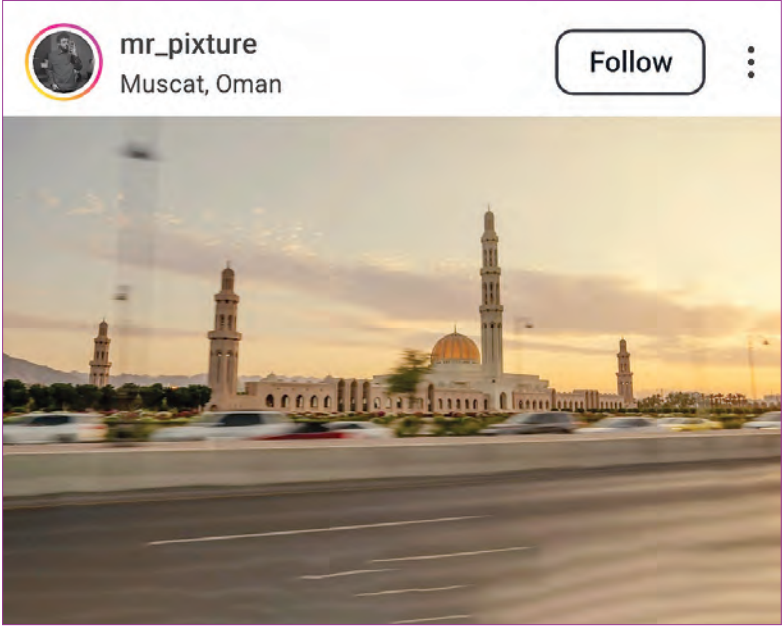
Britain’s Catherine, Princess of Wales, smiles during a visit to present “The Queen Elizabeth II Award for British Design” at The British Design Council, 180 Studios in central London. — AFP



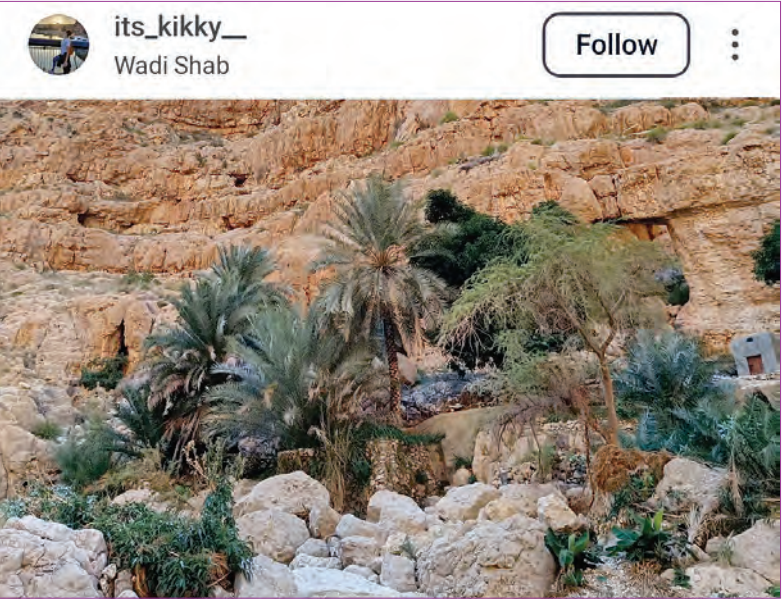
HERITAGE

A museum employee wearing ‘Vyshyvankas’, traditional Ukrainian embroidered blouse, stands close to a sculpture of a girl dressed in a Vyshyvanka during “Vyshyvanka Day”, outside The Holodomor Genocide Museum in Kyiv. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



City Drive



Beauty of Remote Places

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Ancient footprints from Australia reveal earliest-known reptile



SEVENTEEN fossilised footprints in sandstone, discovered in southeastern Australia and dated approximately 355 million years ago, are revolutionising our understanding of land vertebrate evolution. Likely made on a muddy riverbank, the footprints include two trackways and one isolated print, all displaying typical reptilian features such as shape, toe length and claw marks. Researchers believe they were created by a reptile similar in size to a modern lizard. The find indicates reptiles existed around 35 million years earlier than previously known, suggesting a faster evolution of land-dwelling vertebrates. Paleontologist Per Ahlberg, leading the study published in Nature, described the discovery as “quite radical”. The sandstone slab measures 35 centimetres across and was

found near the Broken River in Victoria. Historically, the story of land vertebrates begins when fish transitioned to land, giving rise to early tetrapods which lived amphibiously. These creatures, ancestors of amphibians, reptiles, mammals and birds, first appeared in Poland around 390 million years ago. The footprints, roughly 3-4 centimetres long, likely belonged to three individuals of the same species, with no signs of tail drag. The footprints’ size and shape imply a lizard-like predator, probably 60-80 centimetres long. Unlike larger later reptiles, these early forms were modest and carnivorous. Similar footprints from Poland, dating to 327 million years ago, suggest reptiles originated during the Carboniferous Period, thriving near ancient rivers and forests. — Reuters



Top chef Georgiana Viou: blending cuisine across continents

GEORGIANA Viou calls herself a “UFO”, championing free and daring cuisine straddling two continents, from Cotonou’s lively street markets to the kitchens of her Michelin-starred restaurant in Nîmes, southern France. In the alleys of the historic Saint-Michel market in Benin’s bustling economic capital, unchanged since her childhood, Viou goes from stallholder to stallholder. At one she buys bright purple aubergines “like in the south of France”, at another four spices and smoked long peppers — which are often used in traditional medicine. “I’m sure that apart from the preparations they make to treat themselves, the people here have never thought of putting that in food,” said Viou, 47, who runs L’Ami restaurant at Cotonou’s luxury Sofitel hotel. “I try to look at these products differently.” L’Ami opened its doors this year, offering “French bistronomy with a local touch” such as pesto risotto with tchayo (African basil), red mullet with local nere mustard and hibiscus pavlova. Viou, in her trademark felt fedora hat, is keen to push boundaries and blend her two worlds.

“It’s also interesting for me to win over my public. Little by little, we’ll move towards things that get a bit closer to our culinary heritage, while keeping French cuisine as the technical foundation,” she said. “I once made a shrimp tartare with raw okra. I know Beninese people called it a scandal,” she added. “People don’t necessarily get me, they don’t necessarily understand. But that’s OK... that’s my personality, this thirst for freedom but freedom in every sense of the word.”

- INSPIRATION - Born in Benin in 1977, “Gigi” as her friends call her, was inspired by her mother, who ran a small “maquis” or popular restaurant in Cotonou. She described her as “my foundation, my origin” in her recent

book “Oui, Cheffe ! Du Benin a l’étoile Michelin, itinéraire d’une battante” (“Yes, chef! From Benin to Michelin Star: Journey of a Fighter”). In the book, which came out in March, she also recounts difficult moments in her life. When she arrived in France in the early 2000s, she first enrolled in applied foreign languages at the Sorbonne university in Paris. But it was in the southern city of Marseille, where she arrived in 2004, that her passion for cooking gradually became her vocation. Viou, who has three children, entered several amateur contests before taking part in the “Masterchef” competition on French

to strongly flavour your dish,” said Viou. She then took a blowtorch to add a “smoky” touch, which she describes as being in her “DNA” as she grew up “with the smell of charcoal and smoked fish”. As a side, she offers fonio, a popular grain in west Africa which she takes out of a plastic bag roughly closed with sticky tape, brought straight from her last trip to Cotonou. For the sauce she added onion, garlic, pastis and fish guts. “That’s Marseille!” she said of the city that has inspired her for the last two decades. “I grew up for 20 years with flavours, aromas, ways of cooking



television in 2010, then opened a cooking workshop. Recognition from the industry came at Rouge, her restaurant in Nîmes, which was awarded a Michelin star in 2023. **- PASS IT ON -** In the kitchen, she replaced the usual meat dish on the menu with red mullet stuffed with black pudding topped with afiti — fermented nere seeds. Once crushed, the beans give off a strong smell similar to Maroilles, a cow’s milk cheese from northern France. “It’s a sort of umami. Once you have that, of course you can add fish or meat. But if you don’t, it doesn’t matter because it’s already going

that are etched into me. Coming here to Nîmes, I felt that it was time to bring those things back and put them into what I’m doing,” she added. The Michelin star isn’t the be-all and end-all for her, though. “If this star is just for me to put there and brag about saying, ‘Ah, I’m so great, I’m a star’, I’m not interested,” she said. “I now want to pass on to other people what I’ve learned.” That transfer of knowledge is what she intends to do in her home country. “We don’t have a... proper hospitality school, we can’t buy tickets to leave. That’s OK, I’ll come to you. I’ll show you a bit of what I know how to do,” she said. — AFP

FEATURES



THE RAW POTENTIAL OF KHABITA VILLAGE FOR AGRITOURISM



BY ZUWAINA AL SULIEMANI

ACROSS THE verdant valleys and rugged mountains of Oman, a quiet revolution is unfolding. Traditionally reliant on agriculture, many small villages are now beginning to explore a new path — embracing agritourism to diversify their income streams and bring fresh vitality to their communities. This shift offers a promising way for local farmers and villagers to not only sustain their livelihoods, but also showcase their cultural and natural heritage to international and domestic visitors alike.

In a world where globalisation and modernisation often threaten the survival of rural communities, these villages are recognising the potential of opening their doors to tourists. Agritourism — where visitors are welcomed onto farms to experience local traditions, partake in harvests, or simply enjoy the scenic beauty — presents a unique opportunity to foster sustainable development. For many small-scale farmers with modest lands and limited market access, this can be the difference between stagnation and revival.

One such village leading this movement is Khabita, nestled in the heart of Al Batinah North Governorate, about 48 kilometres from the centre of Suhar. Known locally as “the blossom of the valley”, Khabita offers a picturesque landscape framed by the sweeping Western Hajar Mountains. Its geographical charm is complemented by fertile plains, lush orchards and a thriving agricultural community — a true oasis of green amid stark mountain terrain.

The village’s lush farmlands extend up to five kilometres along the banks of Wadi Ahin to the south and Wadi Sadm to the north, creating a fertile corridor that has sustained generations of farmers. The local community cultivates an array of crops, from date palms, limes and mangoes to barley, wheat, onions, garlic, tomatoes and cabbages. These are irrigated by a meticulously maintained traditional falaj system — an ancient underground irrigation channel — coupled with a modern well that ensures water supplies during dry seasons.

Modern infrastructure, including roads, electricity, water and telecommunication services, has been developed to serve the residents. A new bridge now links the village with surrounding communities, including Al Atheel, Al Sumaym and Sadm, improving access to education, healthcare and markets. This infrastructure has made it feasible for villagers to welcome visitors and promote agritourism initiatives.

The visual appeal of Khabita has caught the attention of photographers and cultural enthusiasts alike. Mani al Rubaie, a prominent photographer, recently visited the village and shared his impressions. “Khabita is a place with pure and authentic nature,” he said, recalling the serenity and agricultural diversity he witnessed. During his visit, he was particularly captivated by a mango tree over 300 years old — an enduring symbol of the village’s deep-rooted connection to the land.

Al Rubaie explained that photography played a crucial role in his experience. “Documenting Khabita was about capturing its essence — its colours, traditions and resilience,” he said. “It felt like the place was alive, pulsating with stories and history, waiting to be told.” His images aim not just to promote tourism but to preserve Oman’s rural heritage by shining a light on its natural beauty and cultural richness.

This narrative of rural resilience is mirrored elsewhere in Oman, particularly in the villages of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. Al Aqar, and Wakan have long attracted tourists during harvest seasons. During the pomegranate and rose harvests in Al Aqar, and the apricot blossom season in Wakan, these villages welcome hundreds of visitors seeking the picturesque landscapes and fresh produce.

Al Aqar, for instance, has earned a reputation as a tourist hotspot during peak harvest periods. Visitors are drawn to the fragrant rose fields and vibrant pomegranate orchards, often participating in traditional harvesting and processing activities. Yet, despite the influx of tourists, there remains limited structured infrastructure to ensure local villagers benefit economically.

Similarly, Wakan is renowned for its stunning foliage during apricot blossom season, offering a breathtaking spectacle that pulls in large crowds annually. Many visitors come to wander through the orchards, photograph the vibrant blossoms and experience the tranquillity of mountain village life.

The potential for growth in these rural communities is substantial. With strategic investment — such as developing local accommodation options, improving signage, offering guided tours, and promoting village crafts and cuisine — these villages could significantly boost their economies. Moreover, by establishing collaborations between local farmers, artisans and tourism operators, they can create a comprehensive visitor experience that benefits everyone.

In Khabita, for instance, initiatives such as organising farm stays, cultural workshops and guided nature walks could transform it into a year-round destination. Similarly, Wakan’s stunning orchards and natural beauty could serve as a hub for eco-tourism and cultural experiences.

The key lies in balancing growth with conservation — ensuring that villagers are not only beneficiaries of these new opportunities, but also stewards of their environment and heritage. With supportive policies, community-driven development and targeted investment, Oman’s rural villages can rewrite their stories, becoming vibrant centres of sustainable tourism and local enterprise.

