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20 THE MATCHA MARKET CRACKS UNDER PRESSURE

INBRIEF

KARWA MOTORS
CERTIFIED BUILDER
OF BENZ BUSES



BRUSSELS: In a new milestone that reinforces the Sultanate of Oman's position as an emerging industrial hub in the bus and vehicle manufacturing sector, a strategic partnership agreement was signed between Oman's Karwa Motors and Mercedes-Benz (Daimler Truck Middle East & Africa) during the Busworld Europe 2025 exhibition held in the Belgian capital, Brussels.

The agreement aims to expand regional and global bus manufacturing capabilities by designating Karwa Motors as an officially Certified Builder of Mercedes-Benz buses.

By virtue of this agreement, Karwa Motors will manufacture Mercedes-Benz buses for the Omani market as well as regional and international markets, within an integrated technical and commercial collaboration framework aimed at strengthening its manufacturing capabilities in the region.

The agreement was signed by Dr Ibrahim bin Ali al Balushi, Chief Executive Officer of Karwa Motors, and Michael Dietz, President and CEO of Daimler Truck Middle East Africa.

REPORT ON P15

SCRAMBLE FOR FOOD



Palestinians gather to receive food portions from a charity kitchen in the Nuseirat refugee camp, located in the central Gaza Strip, on Wednesday, two days after a ceasefire came into effect. Israel was expected to allow Gaza's sole border crossing to the outside world to reopen to allow aid into the devastated territory as part of a US-backed ceasefire deal. — AFP

Omani women fundamental pillars of nation

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will celebrate Omani Women's Day on October 17, under the slogan "Women are Partners in Development." This occasion honours Omani women's journey filled with dedication in building the renaissance of this nation under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

His Majesty the Sultan's emphasis on the importance of Omani

women enjoying their full rights, as guaranteed by law, stems from their pivotal and fundamental role in sustainable development.

Furthermore, the affirmation of Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, that Omani women are progressing with steady steps towards advancement and prosperity, represents an

appreciation of their status as active partners in the march of progress and their prominent role in building the family, society and the beloved nation.

The number of Omani women in administrative positions reached 2,223, and in the judicial authority 504, including lawyers and public prosecutors.

The number of Omani women members of the Council of Oman reached

18, reflecting an upward trajectory confirming the active presence and contribution of Omani women in the development and legislative process in Oman. The number of Omani female teachers in government schools reached 41,941, in private schools 7,148, in special education schools 172, in international schools 98 and in other government schools 1,207.

SEE ALSO P4



Today's edition carries 16-page supplement to mark **Omani Women's Day**, which falls on Friday

Oman signs pact to host
new World Bank office

THE Government of the Sultanate of Oman has signed an agreement with the World Bank Group to establish a representative office in the Sultanate of Oman, marking a significant milestone in strengthening Oman's global financial and economic partnerships.

The agreement was signed by Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance; and Ajay Banga, President of the World Bank Group. The new office will represent several World Bank Group institutions, including the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Development Association (IDA), the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA).

The establishment of the office underscores Oman's growing role as a regional hub for international cooperation and reflects global confidence in the country's economic stability and investment climate. The office will provide technical and advisory services to both the public and private sectors, facilitate knowledge transfer and support capacity building for Omani professionals.



The agreement was signed by Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Ajay Banga, President of the World Bank.

The establishment of the office underscores Oman's growing role as a regional hub for international cooperation and reflects global confidence in the country's economic stability and investment climate.

It will also help monitor the implementation of private sector projects financed by World Bank-affiliated institutions, promote foreign investment and encourage greater private sector participation in development projects. Furthermore, it is expected to strengthen the competitiveness of local enterprises and enhance their access to international markets.

In 2025, several agreements were signed between Omani private companies and the IFC to finance major private sector projects and expand financing channels for

small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The World Bank Group has also delivered various training programmes to develop national expertise in finance, economics and statistics, alongside initiatives for experience exchange and best practice adoption.

Oman, which joined the World Bank Group in 1971, continues to benefit from its wide range of advisory, technical, and financial services aimed at fostering sustainable economic growth.

— ONA

Medical City launches bone marrow transplant

MUSCAT: The University Medical City (UMC) launched the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit as part of the National Haematology and Bone Marrow Transplant Centre.

The project is one of the most important strategic health initiatives that provide integrated care for blood and oncology patients utilising the latest global technologies in bone marrow transplantation, cellular therapy and applied scientific research.

It consolidates Oman's position as a regional centre for medical excellence and health innovation. The Bone Marrow Transplant Unit represents a qualitative leap in the field of specialised micro-care, increasing its capacity from four rooms to 21 sterile treatment isolation rooms equipped with the highest international technology for



The unit offers all types of stem cell transplantation

bone marrow transplant units. The unit has air pressure control systems and high-efficiency air filters, ensuring a clean and safe environment for

immunocompromised patients. This is in addition to a dedicated ventilation system for sterile rooms that prevents contaminants from the outside. The unit offers a

comprehensive treatment system that goes beyond traditional bone marrow transplantation to treatment of a wide range of malignant and hereditary blood diseases, including leukaemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma, as well as benign blood diseases such as thalassaemia major, sickle cell anaemia, aplastic anaemia and primary immunodeficiency.

The unit offers all types of stem cell transplantation, including autologous, allogeneic, and semi-allogeneic stem cell transplantation, providing advanced treatment solutions for patients who lack a fully compatible donor. The unit also has the capability to perform genetically modified T-cell therapy and allogeneic lymphocyte therapy, which are among the latest global technologies — ONA



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SHORT TAKES



The two ministers discussed relations and the historical and cultural ties between the two countries. — ONA

FOREIGN MINISTER RECEIVES ERITREAN MINISTER OF TRADE

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received on Wednesday Nesredin Ali Bekhit, Eritrean Minister of Trade and Industry, who is paying a several-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The two ministers discussed relations and the historical and cultural ties between the two countries. They expressed their mutual interest in developing trade and economic relations and exploring further partnership opportunities, particularly in the fields of mining, agriculture and fisheries, transport, communications, tourism and labour. This cooperation aims to yield benefits for both nations and their peoples.

The meeting was attended by members of the delegation accompanying the guest, as well as some officials concerned with Omani-Eritrean relations at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN WHO MEETINGS IN CAIRO

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman is currently taking part in the 72nd session of the World Health Organization Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean (RC72) in Cairo, Egypt.

The event, which runs till October 17, is being held under the theme ‘Together for a Healthier Future: Action, Access and Equity’, bringing together health ministers, policy-makers and regional leaders to address shared public health challenges and align regional efforts for a healthier future.

Oman is participating in the meetings with an official delegation headed by Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Regulation.

He emphasised that Oman has made these priorities central to its national health strategy by strengthening pharmaceutical security, enhancing local manufacturing, and improving medicine supply chains in line with regional efforts for fair access to medical products.

On mental health and substance abuse, he noted that Oman is integrating community-based mental healthcare into primary health services, alongside awareness and early prevention programmes — aligning with the region’s broader push to promote mental health and well-being.

— ONA



The event is being held under the theme ‘Together for a Healthier Future: Action, Access and Equity’. — ONA

Meeting reviews higher education cooperation

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and the University of Al Ain in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) reviewed ways to enhance joint cooperation in the fields of higher education, research and innovation.

They also discussed opportunities for collaboration in programmatic and institutional accreditation, enhancing the quality of higher education, exchanging academic and research expertise between



The two sides also discussed means of exchanging expertise to enhance academic cooperation. — ONA

institutions, opportunities for jointly funded research, and cooperation in innovation and entrepreneurship.

This took place during a meeting between Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and an official delegation from the University of Al Ain in the UAE, headed by Dr Nooreddine Sobhi Atatreh, Deputy Chairman of the University’s Board of Trustees. — ONA

Efforts to support persons with disabilities lauded

THE Sultanate of Oman is making diligent efforts to provide support and rehabilitation for persons with disabilities through enacting laws and legislation that ensure their active participation and inclusion in society. Oman has also joined numerous international conventions concerning this segment of the population, aiming to achieve a dignified lifestyle for persons with disabilities.

This segment has been accorded a Royal interest, as His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, while presiding over a meeting of the Council of Ministers last September, directed the establishment of a new sector at the level of an Undersecretary within the structure of the Ministry of Social Development. This sector will be responsible for supervising this field, addressing its challenges, and working to ensure their empowerment and more effective inclusion to enhance their role in building society.

In this context, Gopal Mitra, Global Lead on Disability and Development at the Unicef, described His Majesty’s directives to establish a new sector at the Undersecretary level to oversee the affairs of persons with disabilities as a highly positive step that reflects Oman’s commitment and its wise leadership to this segment of society. He affirmed that this step comes in the context of recognising and valuing persons with disabilities, which will contribute to raising



Oman has also joined numerous international conventions aiming to achieve a dignified lifestyle for persons with disabilities. — ONA

the level of attention to their issues, better highlighting their needs and challenges, and coordinating related procedures more swiftly across relevant government entities.

He also valued the social protection system adopted by Oman, which includes a set of benefits, such as the child benefit and the disability benefit for those whose conditions require care and support. He pointed out that this step is part of commendable efforts made by the

government to improve the lives of children and adults with disabilities.

He said: “I am very impressed with what Oman has done in the field of supporting persons with disabilities. The steps taken in the past few years deserve praise and acclaim. Tangible progress has been made, reflecting political will and a commitment to supporting this segment through concrete actions and investments. The adoption of the disability benefit confirms this commitment.”

He highlighted the efforts of civil society institutions and private centres concerned with persons with disabilities in Oman, appreciating their prominent role in providing care and services to this community segment. Among the most notable is the “Children First Association”, which is currently organising the second edition of the Oman Childhood Conference and Exhibition, aiming to rehabilitate and empower children with disabilities through modern technologies and means of integrating them into society.

Regarding prospects for cooperation between Oman and the Unicef, he explained that the two sides have been working diligently for decades to develop programmes related to childhood, indicating that the current focus revolves around ways to boost inclusion of children with disabilities into society. — ONA

Children conference explores rehabilitation tech

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 15

The ongoing International Childhood Conference and Exhibition, themed ‘Prospects of Rehabilitation and Empowerment in the Care of Children with Disabilities in Light of Emerging Technologies’, highlighted national efforts to raise awareness of childhood issues, especially the challenges faced by children with disabilities, while promoting their integration into society.

Throughout the conference, discussions will cover children’s rights, social inclusion, and policies supporting families and caregivers. Experts will explore how new technologies and innovations can contribute to rehabilitation and empowerment, enabling children with disabilities to live more independently and confidently.

The programme includes scientific sessions, workshops, and panel discussions with academics, researchers, and specialists from Oman and abroad. Representatives from Unicef, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, Sultan Qaboos University, and the National Human Rights Commission are among the participants.



Throughout the conference, discussions will cover children’s rights, social inclusion, and policies supporting families and caregivers.

The exhibition features local and international organisations providing services and products for children. It showcases educational, healthcare and rehabilitation solutions, along with interactive activities, training workshops and stage performances designed for young audiences.

Nada al Alawi, a conference participant and Director of the Omani Centre for Rehabilitation and Care, expressed her delight at participating in the 2nd International Childhood Conference and Exhibition.

“This is our first time taking part in the event. It was a successful participation, with strong attendance, and it left a truly good impact on us. This opportunity provided us with the chance to share our work and connect with the wider community,” she told the Observer.

Asaad bin Khamis al Yarubi, another participant and Chief Executive Officer of Wisam Al Wadi Events Management, praised the International Childhood Conference and Exhibition as a wonderful initiative that emphasises the importance of children. He emphasised the significance of early care for children to help them shine and excel in the future.

Dr Zuhoor al Saleh, Principal at National Nursery Montessori, commended the conference for bringing together many centres and institutions serving children in Oman. She expressed hope for broader participation in the future, particularly with a larger pool of speakers to enrich discussions on key topics.

SHORT TAKES



The signing of the joint statement stems from the importance both governments place on establishing diplomatic relations. — ONA

OMAN, BOTSWANA ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Botswana signed a joint statement in New York on the establishment of diplomatic relations, building upon their existing ties of cooperation and friendship.

The statement was signed on behalf of the government of the Sultanate of Oman by Omar bin Said al Kathiri, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations, and on behalf of the government of the Republic of Botswana by Charles Masole, Permanent Representative of Botswana to the United Nations.

The Permanent Representative of Oman emphasised that the signing of the joint statement stems from the importance both governments place on establishing diplomatic relations, laying the foundation for enhancing mutual dialogue and opening avenues of cooperation that serve the interests of both nations and their peoples.

On his turn, the Permanent Representative of Botswana stated that his government looks forward to elevating the level of bilateral relations between the two countries. — ONA

Oman advances environmental strategy

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is observing Arab Environment Day through a comprehensive national programme led by the Environment Authority, aligning with this year's regional theme 'Eliminating Plastic Pollution'.

The Environment Authority has implemented a multi-faceted approach featuring several strategic initiatives, including the phased implementation of plastic shopping bag

restrictions, stringent environmental policy frameworks, advanced waste management systems and accelerated transition to clean energy sources.

A systematic action plan against plastic pollution incorporates legislative measures, with the plastic shopping bag prohibition scheduled for gradual implementation between July 2024 and July 2027. Scientific research components include ongoing studies

investigating microplastic contamination in marine ecosystems, while public engagement efforts focus on community education and behavioural change. The comprehensive awareness campaign features specialised seminars addressing plastic waste recycling, workshops highlighting health concerns associated with plastic water containers and promoting sustainable alternatives, and annual coastal cleanup operations. — ONA

Oman takes part in Indian Ocean drill

MUSCAT: As part of its efforts to strengthen readiness for emergencies and natural disasters, the Sultanate of Oman participated in the 2025 Indian Ocean Regional Exercise (IOWave25), organised by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of Unesco. The exercise aims to assess the preparedness of Indian Ocean countries.

This year's scenario simulates a hypothetical earthquake with a magnitude of 9.0 on the Richter scale along the Makran Fault off the coast of Pakistan, generating tsunami waves expected to reach Omani shores within just 15 minutes.

The exercise began at 10:00 am, involving several national authorities, including the Civil Aviation Authority, represented by the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre. — ONA

Lecture focuses on cyber blackmail, online bullying

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, OCT 15

AS PART of its cultural activity plan, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque Library organised an awareness lecture titled 'Cyber Blackmail' on Wednesday.

The event was held under the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science and targeted female students from schools. Several teachers and educational supervisors also attended the session.

The lecture was presented by Ammar bin Yasser al Dawoodi, an internationally certified trainer, who discussed key concepts related to the growing risks of cyber blackmail and online harassment. He explained that the goal of the session was to help students understand what cyber blackmail means, its different forms and how to protect themselves online.

“It’s important for students to realise that sharing personal photos or private information can easily become a tool for blackmail,” he said. “Prevention starts with awareness and responsible online behaviour.” He outlined the main types of cyber blackmail, including image-based and verbal threats, highlighting that such acts often target teenagers through social media.

He also discussed the psychological, social, educational and family impacts of online blackmail, noting that it can lead to anxiety, isolation and declining academic performance if not addressed early.

“Our goal through these workshops is not only to raise awareness, but also to build



The event was held under the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science and targeted female students from schools.

a generation that knows how to protect itself and make the right digital choices,” Al Dawoodi said.

During the interactive session, participants took part in practical exercises designed to reinforce the lessons learned

and strengthen their digital safety skills.

The event is part of the library's ongoing efforts to promote digital literacy and safe online practices, supporting the creation of a secure and responsible digital environment for students and the wider community.

Tender



The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Mada'ayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
7/2025/ PEIE/ HQ-7	MADAYN GENERAL INSURANCE FOR 2026-2027	29-10-2025	16-11-2025	Insurance Services	First and Above	200

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

- 1. Tender Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.
- 2. eTendering System Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@ita.gov.om and **+968 24166670, 24166409**

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

Mada'ayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.



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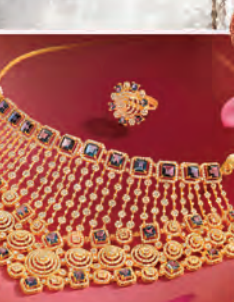


















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OMANI WOMEN’S DAY

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN will celebrate Omani Women's Day this Friday, 17 October, under the slogan 'Women are Partners in Development'. This occasion honours her journey filled with dedication in building the renaissance of this nation under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

His Majesty the Sultan's emphasis on the importance of Omani women enjoying their full rights guaranteed by law stems from her pivotal and fundamental role in sustainable development. This has been translated into her presence across all development paths in the country.

Furthermore, the affirmation of Her Highness The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, that Omani women are progressing with steady steps towards advancement and prosperity, represents an appreciation of her status as an active partner in the march of progress and her prominent role in building the family, society and the beloved nation.

The National Centre for Statistics and Information points out that the number of Omani women in administrative positions reached 2,223, and in the judicial authority 504, including lawyers and public prosecutors.

The number of Omani women members of the Council of Oman reached 18, reflecting an upward trajectory confirming the active presence and contribution of Omani women in the development and legislative process in Oman. The number of Omani female teachers in government schools reached 41,941, in private schools 7,148, in special education schools 172, in international schools 98, and in other government schools 1,207.

Dr Ahoud al Balushi, Member of the State Council, stated that the Omani woman has become an active partner in parliamentary work, having covered significant ground in representing the citizen's voice within the halls of the Majlis Ash'shura and State Councils.

She added that this role was not merely symbolic representation, but has seen Omani women handling legislative files and vital discussions concerning the nation's future, such



His Majesty the Sultan's emphasis on the importance of Omani women enjoying their full rights guaranteed by law stems from her pivotal and fundamental role in sustainable development. This has been translated into her presence across all development paths in the country.

OMANI WOMEN ENJOY THEIR FULL RIGHTS

as economic policies, labour laws, education, health and even topics related to sustainable development.

Maryam al Saeedi, Principal of Sayh Al Mahamid School in Al Batinah South Governorate, affirmed that the celebration of Omani Women's Day underscores the important role women play in building society and the continuous confidence in them to achieve their goals.

She said that women's participation in various national fields is clearly reflected in their management of their families and their ability to contribute to society. She did not stop at learning but became a teacher, educator, principal, educational supervisor, academic, contributed to scientific research, in addition to leadership positions in the public and private sectors, she added.

Liqaa al Maawali, Chairperson of Omani Women's Association in Muscat, stated that the Omani woman is a partner in social construction. She confirmed that Omani Women's Associations contribute, through their events and activities, to raising awareness and encouraging women to engage in various fields to participate in building the nation.

Eng Nashia al Kharusi said that the Omani woman has contributed significantly to the field of engineering and made a clear difference through her achievements and contributions. She indicated that achievement is not linked to the number of enrollees in specialities but is linked to the profound impact of each woman through the innovative ideas and practical solutions she provides.

For her part, Dr Wafa al Maamari, Head of the Sociology and Social Work Department at Sultan Qaboos University, pointed out that the support and confidence achieved for Omani women, whose roots extend deep into Omani history, have made her an active partner in building the nation and its renewed renaissance. This is through her presence in the academic sphere; statistics from Sultan Qaboos University indicate that the number of female academics holding PhD degrees reached 193 women, of whom 154 hold leadership positions, enhancing their role in developing educational policies and decision-making, according to a statistic published by the Planning and Statistics Department (2025). — ONA

‘ W O M E N A R E P A R T N E R S I N D E V E L O P M E N T ’

Omani women at the forefront in different fields

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, OCT 15

The Sultanate of Oman will celebrate Omani Women's Day on Friday, which falls on October 17 every year with Omani women being equal partners in the march of renaissance and comprehensive development in the Sultanate of Oman. Women in Oman have taken on distinctive roles in various social, cultural, economic and sports fields. The Observer caught up with enterprising ladies to reflect on the day.

Omama al Lawati is known for her actions in support of the Palestinian cause. When asked where she derives her strength to boldly sail for 20 days to reach aid to Gaza, she said, "I think we all have principles in our lives. We have values that guide us, and for me, it was always telling the truth, no matter what happens. Don't be distracted by lifestyles. What others do can be distracting, even trends. But we should not get distracted. In Oman, we always count on women to make the right decisions in boycotting because women make the buying decisions."

"If we have the strength to bring up kids, raise them, give them good values, and teach them, we have the strength to do anything. I'm not saying that as a woman, you should give up your female identity, but you need to be strong because your kids will learn that from you, your community, and the people around you. We always say in Arabic that the mother is the first school in a child's life. So this is really true. We get all our inspiration, confidence and value from our family firsthand," she added.

RESILIENCE AND COMPASSION
Nutaila al Kharousi, managing director at Al Harub Medical Centre and is a psychotherapist specialising in anxiety disorders, parenting issues, and trauma, who is now a PhD student investigating chronic adverse social withdrawal among Omanis.

According to Nutaila, the strength of a woman is not in how loud she is or how much she achieves by external standards; it is in her quiet resilience, her compassion, and her ability to hold space for others while still showing up for herself. A woman's strength is in her



The Sultanate of Oman will celebrate Omani Women's Day on October 12, under the slogan 'Women are Partners in Development'. This occasion honours her journey filled with dedication in building the renaissance of this nation under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. — ONA

empathy, intuition, and capacity to nurture even in the midst of chaos.

She reflected, "I wish more women would celebrate these qualities instead of comparing themselves to how men

measure success. We don't need to use the same metrics: our power looks different, and that's exactly what makes it beautiful."

She pointed out that this year, she finds herself reflecting on how far Omani women have come. They are strong, educated, and deeply rooted in values that balance ambition with grace.

Umaima al Ajmi, an established author whose books focus on self-development, said, "A woman's strength shines through her love, creativity, and courage to keep going no matter what. She inspires others with her gentle heart and strong spirit, turning every challenge into a lesson and every dream into a goal."

This year's Omani Women's Day holds a special meaning for her as a writer and an Omani woman.

"It reminds me of how far we, as women, have come, balancing our dreams with our responsibilities and proving that our voices matter. Through my books, I aim to inspire others to believe in their inner strength and to follow their dreams with confidence. This day is a celebration of

every woman's journey, her words, her work, and her passion, and a reminder that each of us contributes to the story of Oman's growth and pride," she added.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT
Lujaina al Hinai, Marketing Department Team at Oman REFCO, said, "At Oman REFCO, we believe that empowering women is essential to building stronger communities and a more prosperous nation. Omani Women's Day is a moment to celebrate not only the achievements of women across Oman but also their growing contribution to shaping the country's future."

"We just concluded the Oman REFCO Women's Football Tournament, which brought together talented female players from schools and academies across the Sultanate of Oman. The tournament provided a platform for women to develop their skills, showcase their talents, and pursue their passion for sports — reflecting Oman's vision of enabling Omani women to thrive in every field and supporting the next generation of national talent," she said.

SHORT TAKES



MOBILE VETERINARY CLINIC BOOSTS LIVESTOCK HEALTH

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, OCT 15

In a move that strengthens Oman’s food security and supports rural livestock breeders, the Department of Animal Wealth at the General-Directorate of Agricultural, Fisheries and Water Resources in Al Batinah North recently launched a mobile veterinary clinic to provide medical and advisory services in several mountain villages of Suhar, including Sham, Hibi, Katm, Al Hijal and Hilal Bani Issa.

The initiative aims to reach remote communities with essential veterinary care, promoting the health and productivity of local livestock which is a cornerstone of Oman’s food sustainability efforts. During the recent visit, the mobile clinic treated more than 300 heads of livestock, addressing common diseases and providing guidance on proper breeding practices such as hoof trimming and parasite control.

The team also conducted hands-on training for breeders on electronic registration in the national vaccination project, a key step towards improving disease monitoring and livestock management across Oman.

“The mobile clinic is a great initiative that makes us feel connected and supported and it is happening for the first time,” said Khalid al Maktoomi, a livestock breeder from Hibi village. “For many of us living in the mountains, it’s difficult to access veterinary services regularly. The team not only treated our animals, but also taught us valuable techniques to keep them healthy. It shows that the government truly values our role in supporting national food security.”

Officials emphasised that such field initiatives reflect the ministry’s ongoing efforts to empower rural breeders and reduce economic losses caused by preventable animal diseases. The mobile veterinary service is expected to continue visiting more remote areas in the coming months.

Effective readiness begins with empowerment

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, OCT 15

The two-week Food Security Lab, organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, aimed to attract investments in the food sector and enhance food security. The event, held at the St. Regis Hotel in Al Mouj, is expected to generate valuable initiatives and recommendations to promote sustainability.

The 2025 edition of the lab is part of a series that began in September 2021, followed by the Halhala Clinics for Food Security Projects in 2022, and the Food Security Labs in 2023 and 2024.

Mohammed bin Mansour al Riyami, Capacity Development Specialist at the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Unit, stated, “We are developing qualitative initiatives to enhance institutional performance, including training programmes for future leaders and job rotation guides to empower employees and ensure knowledge continuity.”

Al Riyami also mentioned plans for a unified electronic training platform to provide the employees with specialised training programmes and certifications, promoting a culture of continuous learning.

In terms of partnerships, Al Riyami highlighted collaborations



Mohammed bin Mansour al Riyami

with public and private sectors to design job qualification programmes and career paths, aiming to enhance national efficiency and local investment opportunities.

The ministry is working on performance indicators to measure institutional readiness, service quality, sectoral impact and

human capital development. These indicators will be displayed on digital dashboards for transparent monitoring.

The empowerment and development pillar of the Food Security Lab 2025 focuses on building institutional and human capacities, strengthening partnerships, and empowering communities in the agricultural, fisheries and water sectors to enhance sector efficiency and serve strategic goals. The ministry’s efforts aim to develop an integrated system that invests in human capital and fosters a flexible institutional environment to address food security challenges and align with national transformation goals.

Plan underway to outline sustainable food guide

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, OCT 15

STRATEGIC PLANNING is a crucial national pillar for shaping sustainable food security in alignment with Oman Vision 2040. This falls under the framework of the ‘Food Security Lab 2025’, which will conclude on October 16.

Dr Mahira al Zadjali, Director of the Strategic Planning Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, emphasised the importance of this pillar in reflecting Oman’s commitment to building an integrated system that enhances food security, improves government performance and supports sustainable economic development.

She highlighted the alignment of the ministry’s plans with the



DR MAHIRA AL ZADJALI



Strategic planning is a crucial national pillar for shaping sustainable food security in alignment with Vision 2040

Eleventh Five-Year Plan, achieved through reviewing the Tenth Plan, extracting lessons learned, and detailed preparation for the 2026 Plan.

“This pillar aims to develop a well-thought-out national plan

that includes a list of projects and initiatives compatible with the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, a national import substitution plan, and sub-accounts for food security sectors, in cooperation with the National Centre for Statistics and Information,” she said.

Dr Mahira explained that Oman Vision 2040 serves as the supreme framework for all sectoral plans, with the five-year plans serving as the implementation tool for that vision.

The ministry is working on implementing an electronic agricultural census, linking data with relevant entities. The use of modern technologies such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), drones and smart applications in fish surveys is enhancing the government’s ability to make accurate and informed decisions in the field of food security.

Omani author chronicles pain, hope

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 15

‘Maryanz’, the latest English novel written by Mohammed bin Anwar al Balushi, an Omani author known for his deep reflections on life, love and the human condition, takes readers on an emotional and philosophical journey through the life of Maryanz — a woman who becomes a symbol of inner struggle, silence and spiritual awakening.

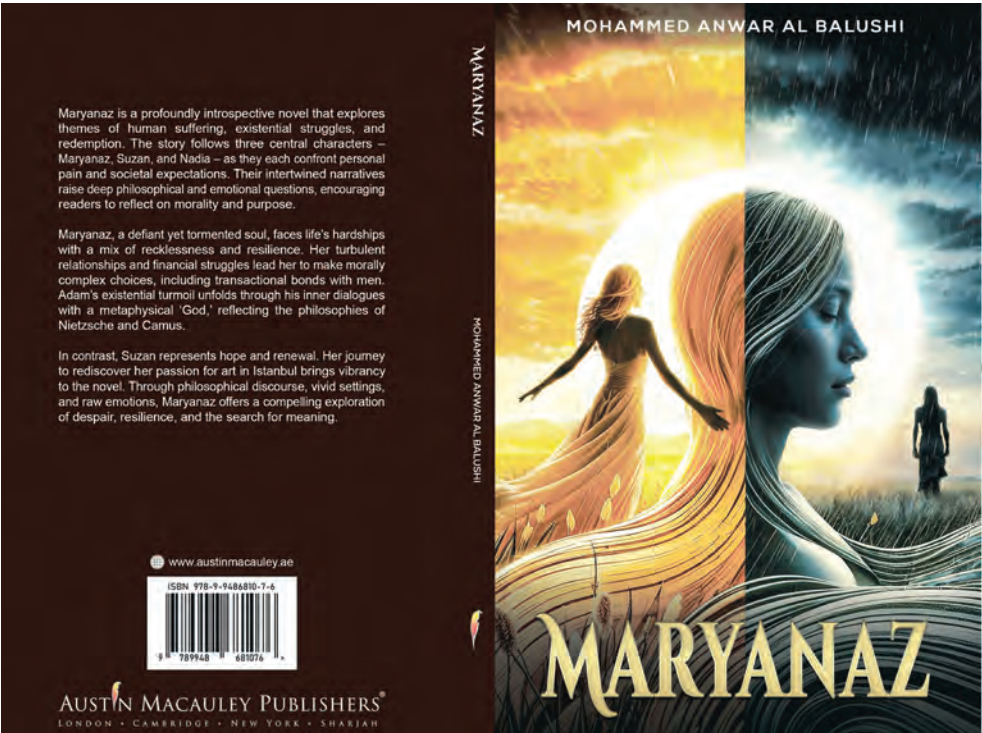
It is not merely a love story but a mirror of human experiences — pain, hope and transformation.

Through Maryanz, Al Balushi invites readers to look within themselves and question the meaning of destiny, faith and self-discovery. The language of the novel is poetic yet realistic, beautifully blending the simplicity of everyday emotions with the complexity of the human soul.

The author’s storytelling style combines modern thought with deep cultural and philosophical insights, making the novel both local and universal.

“What truly inspired me to write Maryanz was the complexity of the human situation — the way life’s circumstances transform people from one phase to another, often forcing them into an inner struggle between what they are and what they must become. It is these moments of change, where emotions collide with reality, that reveal the depth of human resilience and vulnerability,” Al Balushi said.

“Every person faces situations



Through Maryanz, Al Balushi invites readers to look within themselves and question the meaning of destiny, faith and self-discovery.

that test their strength, shape their character and redefine their purpose. Maryanz was born from observing these transformations — the silent battles within hearts, the courage to endure, and the profound realisation that life’s situations do not merely alter our paths; they redefine who we truly are,” he added.

Set against an atmosphere that feels both Omani and global, Maryanz explores how silence can sometimes speak louder than words, and how love can heal even the deepest wounds. It challenges

readers to rethink how they perceive life’s struggles and inner peace.

With Maryanz, Al Balushi adds a significant voice to Omani literature in English, marking a new step in the country’s evolving literary landscape.

The book is available internationally, including on Amazon, and has already drawn attention for its emotional depth and reflective tone. It is a story that lingers in the heart long after the last page is turned — a celebration of silence, resilience and the eternal search for meaning.



University Medical City

ANNOUNCEMENT

Sultan Qaboos University Hospital announces their desire to sell used furniture in sealed envelopes. Those wishing to enter the auction must adhere to the following conditions: -

- Interested parties can view used furniture in auction stores and receive the bidding on Sunday and Monday 19-20/10/2025 from 03:00am to 05:00pm.
- Pay a deposit of (300) RO as an insurance, provided that it is refunded in case the auction is not awarded the participant or after transferring the furniture from the site.
- Submitting the offer in a sealed envelope after viewing the used furniture, entitled by the name of the head of the committee for selling used furniture and put the envelope in bid box.
- The presented offer is binding on its owner if it is placed on it, and in the event that the buyer does not pay the purchase price on time, the insurance amount will be forfeited with taking the responsibility of any financial and legal consequences, and the sale will be awarded to another applicant.
- Those who win the bidding will be contacted. They must pay the remaining sum, and they are responsible for moving their items on Wednesday and Thursday 29-30/10/2025 from 09:00am to 04:00pm.
- The used furniture is sold in their current condition and SQUH is not responsible for any loss or damage to the sold material and if the moving is not completed after the end of the sale (20) Omani Riyals will be imposed for each day of after 2/11/2025.

Notes:-

- Prices are sorted according to groups and the higher price is taken.
- Funds will be collected electronically through visa card.
- Entering the auction stores through Gate No. (2)
- For more information, please contact 99233144 - 91137770 - 92937748

WORLD

POLITICALSHIFT



Members of Madagascar Army CAPSAT unit walk past an old taxi near the CAPSAT base, in Antananarivo. — AFP

MADAGASCAR ADJUSTS TO MILITARY RULE, COLONEL SEIZES POWER

ANTANANARIVO: Madagascar braced for a new era of military rule Wednesday, a day after an elite army unit seized power following President Andry Rajoelina’s impeachment and pledged elections in less than two years. The CAPSAT military contingent assumed power Tuesday moments after parliamentarians voted overwhelmingly to impeach Rajoelina, who appeared to have fled the island nation as soldiers joined weeks of street protests at the weekend.

The capital Antananarivo, was calm early on Wednesday, but there was some uncertainty about what to expect next with international bodies expressing concern. CAPSAT commander Colonel Michael Randrianirina, the new de facto president of the impoverished country, told reporters on Tuesday the transition would take under two years and include the restructuring of major institutions. It would be overseen by a committee of officers from the army, gendarmerie and police.

Randrianirina pledged elections in 18 to 24 months and said the committee would seek a “consensus prime minister” to form a new government.

The constitutional court validated his authority after accepting the vote against Rajoelina. Randrianirina had long been a vocal critic of Rajoelina’s administration and was reportedly imprisoned for several months from November 2023 for inciting military mutiny with a view to a coup.

The presidency denounced “a clear act of attempted coup” and insisted that Rajoelina, whose whereabouts were unknown and who was last seen in public a week ago, “remains fully in office”. The United Nations said Tuesday it was waiting for “the dust to settle” but it would be “concerned about any unconstitutional change of power”.

The security body of regional SADC grouping — of which Rajoelina was holding the rotating presidency — said it was “particularly alarmed by reports of an attempted coup d’etat”. “The military leaders who have seized power should respect and protect the rights of all Malagasy people,” the Human Rights Watch said on Wednesday.

The youth-led movement that initiated the protests on September 25 over lack of water and energy welcomed the intervention of Randrianirina. Rajoelina, re-elected in disputed polls in 2023, came to power in a 2009 military-backed coup that was denounced by the international community which froze foreign aid and investment for nearly four years.

He resisted mounting calls to step down, saying in a national address from an unknown location on Monday that he was seeking solutions to Madagascar’s problems. Amid reports that he had been helped to leave with assistance from France, the former colonial power, he said he was in a “safe place to protect my life”.

France on Wednesday urged all players in Madagascar to show “restraint and responsibility” after an elite army unit seized power from President Andry Rajoelina, adding that democracy must be preserved in its former Indian Ocean island colony. — AFP

LIFELONG LOYALTY

Kenya’s veteran leader Raila Odinga dies



Kenya’s veteran opposition leader Raila Odinga, who was imprisoned multiple times, died aged 80 on Wednesday in Kerala, India. Odinga had been receiving medical treatment abroad and suffered a cardiac arrest. He was for decades at the heart of Kenyan politics, striking alliances with former foes, serving as prime minister for a term, and inspiring lifelong loyalty from his base, particularly among fellow Luos in the west and in the capital Nairobi. — Reuters

LOUD EXPLOSIONS

Deadly drone attack strikes Sudan capital



A series of drone attacks targeted the Sudanese capital Khartoum for multiple hours on Wednesday. The army had shot down “most of the drones”, which targeted two army bases in the capital’s northwest. Eyewitnesses in Omdurman, part of greater Khartoum, said they saw drones flying over the city and heard “loud explosions coming from the north” throughout the night on Wednesday. It was the second day in a row drone strikes. — AFP

VESSEL BLAZE

Indonesia tanker fire kills 10, injures dozens



An oil tanker undergoing repairs at a shipyard in western Indonesia caught fire, killing 10 people and injuring 21 others. The blaze broke out aboard the MT Federal II at around 4:30 am, while the vessel was docked at a shipyard on Batam Island, near Singapore, local police chief Zaenal Arifin said. Sparks were seen inside a storage area of the vessel, he added. The fire was extinguished about an hour later. — AFP

Aid cuts risk pushing 13.7m people into extreme hunger

ROME: The UN’s World Food Programme warned on Wednesday that “staggering” cuts to its funding risked pushing up to 13.7 million people currently receiving food aid into “emergency” levels of hunger — one step before famine. It warned that six key operations — in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Haiti, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan — “are currently facing major

disruptions, which will only get worse by year-end”. “WFP is facing a staggering 40 per cent reduction in funding, with projections of \$6.4 billion compared to \$9.8 billion in 2024,” the Rome-based agency wrote in a new report. “The humanitarian system is under severe strain as partners pull back from frontline locations, creating a vacuum,” it added. Across the world, “WFP estimates that its

funding shortfalls could push 10.5 to 13.7 million people currently experiencing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels of acute food insecurity into Emergency (IPC Phase 4)”, it said. “The world is facing hunger issues on a scale never seen before — and the funds needed to help us respond are woefully insufficient,” said WFP Executive Director Cindy McCain. “We are watching the lifeline for millions of people disintegrate

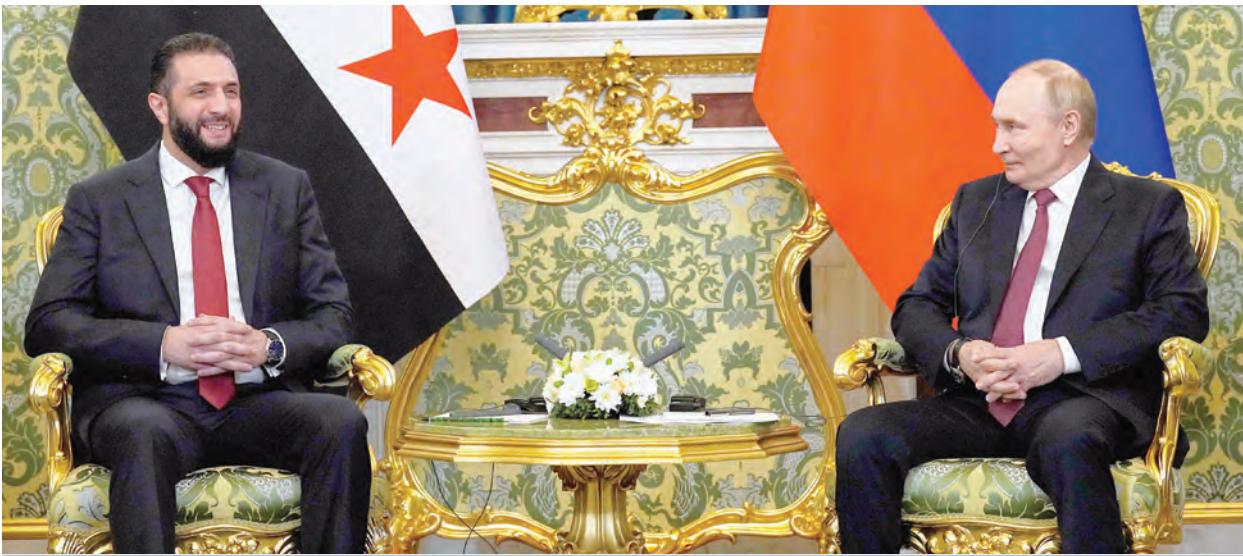
before our eyes.” The WFP said just 600,000 people will get its food aid this month in DRC, down from a planned 2.3 million, while less than 10 per cent of those in need are getting assistance in Afghanistan, despite soaring malnutrition rates. In South Sudan, expensive airdrops in famine-risk areas are under threat due to funding constraints. — AFP

Syria may push Moscow for extradition of Assad

SYRIAN

President Ahmed al Sharaa said on Wednesday he wanted to “redefine” relations with Moscow as Russian President Vladimir Putin hosted him in Moscow, their first meeting since key Kremlin ally Bashar al Assad was ousted last year. In front of the television cameras, Putin greeted Sharaa warmly at the Kremlin, but behind closed doors the Syrian leader was expected to push for Moscow to extradite Assad, who fled to Moscow after being toppled.

The two were also expected to discuss the status of Russia’s prized military bases in the country — the naval base in Tartus and air base at Hmeimim — the fate of which have been uncertain since the rebel takeover. Russia was a key ally of Assad during the bloody 14-year Syrian civil war, providing vital military support that kept his forces in power. But he was ousted from power last December in an offensive led by Sharaa’s Islamist forces, fleeing to Russia, which has been sheltering him and his family for the past 10 months. In remarks at the start of the meeting, Sharaa acknowledged the two countries’ historic ties but said he wanted a recalibration, as he brings Damascus in from isolation on the world stage. “We are trying to restore and redefine in a new way the nature of these relations so there is independence for Syria, sovereign Syria, and also its territorial unity and integrity and its security stability,” Sharaa told Putin. The Russian leader



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Syrian president Ahmed al Sharaa hold a meeting at the Grand Kremlin Palace in Moscow. — AFP

We are trying to restore and redefine in a new way the nature of these relations so there is independence for Syria, sovereign Syria, and also its territorial unity and integrity and its security stability

AHMED AL SHARAA

hailed “special relations” between the two countries that “have developed between our countries over many decades.” Neither mentioned Assad or the Russian bases, the main sticking points in the relationship.

The Kremlin said before the talks that the fate of Russia’s two main bases in Syria — the Hmeimim air base in Syria’s Latakia province, and its naval facility at Tartous on the coast — would be discussed. Russia, which has economic and energy-related interests in Syria that it also wants to secure, has a military presence at Qamishli airport — in the northeast near the borders of Türkiye and Iraq. Russian and Syrian officials discussed potential energy cooperation during a meeting in Moscow, including

oil projects in Syria, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on Wednesday. Novak said a shortage of oil was a major problem for Syria as it looks to rebuild its economy and infrastructure after years of conflict. “Russian companies have been working in Syrian oil fields for a long time. There are fields that require development, others that are mothballed, and new fields,” Novak told reporters.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov confirmed earlier this week the ousted leader was still living in Moscow. “We have granted asylum to Bashar al Assad and his family for purely humanitarian reasons.

He has no issues residing in our capital,” Lavrov said at a forum on Monday. — Agencies

DEVASTATED GAZA AWAITS AID TRUCKS



CAIRO: Aid trucks rolled into Gaza on Wednesday, and Israel resumed preparations to open the main Rafah crossing. The war has caused a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, with nearly all inhabitants driven from their homes, a global hunger monitor saying famine was present in the enclave and health authorities overwhelmed. A video showed a first group of trucks moving from the Egyptian side of the border into the Rafah crossing at dawn on Wednesday, some tankers carrying fuel and others loaded with pallets of aid. However, it was not clear if that convoy would complete its crossing into Gaza as part of the 600 trucks that were due to enter the enclave on Wednesday - the full daily complement required under the ceasefire plan. Aid trucks entered Gaza through other crossings. Rafah is due to be opened to Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza, either entering or exiting the enclave. But those awaiting medical evacuation said they had not yet received notification to prepare for travel. — Reuters

OFFICIALANNOUNCEMENT



South Korea's Second Vice Foreign Minister Kim Jin-a (L) and Park Sung-joo (R), the head of the National Investigation Headquarters of the National Police Agency, walk as they depart for Cambodia. — AFP

S KOREA BANS TRAVEL TO CAMBODIA AFTER STUDENT KILLING

SEOUL: Seoul banned travel to parts of Cambodia with South Korea shaken by the torture and killing of a college student there. The move comes as South Korea sent a team to the Southeast Asian country on Wednesday to discuss cases of fake jobs and scam centres involved in kidnapping dozens of its nationals.

“The Bokor Mountain area in Kampot Province, Bavet City and Poipet City are designated as travel ban zones”, the foreign ministry said in a statement. “South Korean nationals visiting or staying in those areas may be subject to penalties. Citizens planning to travel to such areas are therefore strongly advised to cancel their trips”, it said.

The ban follows an official announcement earlier on Wednesday that about 1,000 South Koreans — of around 200,000 people in total — are estimated to be working in Cambodian scam operations, targeting potential victims in South Korea. Seoul said 63 South Koreans were believed to have been detained by Cambodian authorities and officials have vowed to bring them home. “We are arranging a flight to bring them home... We aim to complete this by the end of the week”, National Security Adviser Wi Sung-lac told reporters.

Of the 63 detained, there were both “voluntary and involuntary participants” in the scam operations, he said. “Most of them should be regarded as having committed criminal acts” for taking part in the schemes, he said, regardless of their initial intentions, adding they would be subject to investigation upon returning home.

The South Korean team, headed by the vice foreign minister, departed Wednesday evening, said a foreign ministry official. Touch Sokhak, a spokesman for Cambodia's interior ministry, said that its government would welcome the South Korean team and work with them to “crack down on transnational crimes”. “Following recent operations conducted by Cambodian authorities, there are 80 South Korean nationals who are being taken care of — not in detention — by our immigration authority because they have decided not to return to South Korea”, Touch Sokhak said.

Representatives of Seoul's embassy had met with its nationals in Cambodia, he said, adding he did not know why they had not opted to return to South Korea. The spokesman also said he could not confirm whether the South Koreans with Cambodian immigration were the same individuals reported missing by Seoul. — AFP

JAPAN YET TO SCHEDULE VOTE ON NEW PM AS COALITION TALKS DRAG ON

TOKYO: Japan's parliament failed to set a date for its vote on a new prime minister on Wednesday, after party leaders spent a day in inconclusive coalition talks. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party has proposed a vote on October 21 to the parliamentary scheduling committee, but opposition parties have not agreed to that date, citing ongoing coalition discussions across parties. The LDP chose Sanae Takaichi as its new chief earlier this month, but her path to becoming Japan's first female prime minister has become trickier after the party's

longstanding partner Komeito chose to end their coalition last week, opening up the possibility of the next premier coming from one of the opposition parties. “There's still some distance between us and the CDP”, Tamaki told reporters after their meeting lasting about an hour. He added that another leaders' meeting could be held as late as next Monday if they can iron out their differences by then. Tamaki said Takaichi had also asked him for his support. “I understood (from the meeting) that she was proposing a coalition

with us”, Tamaki said. “She said she wanted me to share the responsibility and her asking me to write her name in the vote for prime minister to me meant that she was asking for a coalition”. Takaichi also met the Japan Innovation Party's leaders and asked for their support for the premiership vote and proposed a coalition. “We will vote for her if we agree in policy talks”, said Japan Innovation Party leader Hirofumi Yoshimura, adding that his party would make its decision by next Monday. — Reuters

Hegseth urges EU to boost spending on arms for Kyiv

US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth on Wednesday called on Nato allies to increase spending on purchases of US weapons for Ukraine, following a report that highlighted a sharp decline in military support for Kyiv in July and August. “You get peace when you are strong. Not when you use strong words or wag your fingers, you get it when you have strong and real capabilities that adversaries respect”, he told reporters ahead of a meeting with his Nato counterparts at the alliance's headquarters in Brussels.

Hegseth urged allies to ramp up investment in the Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List (PURL) programme, which replaced US arms donations to Ukraine and now requires allies to pay for US weapons deliveries. “Our expectation today is that more countries donate even more, that they purchase even more to provide for Ukraine, to bring that conflict to a peaceful conclusion”.

Nato Secretary-General Mark Rutte said he expected further pledges, noting that \$2 billion already had been committed through the mechanism. However, this amount falls short of the \$3.5 billion Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had hoped to secure by October. Sweden, Estonia and Finland pledged contributions on Wednesday, but countries including Spain, Italy, France and Britain have faced criticism for holding back.

Ukraine remains heavily reliant on US weapons as it braces for another winter of conflict with Russia. The Kiel Institute for the World Economy reported on Tuesday that military aid to Ukraine fell by 43% in July and August compared with the first half of the year. According to the institute, most military support now flows through the PURL initiative, which by August had been joined by Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

Meanwhile, Hungary would suffer if it was cut off from Russian energy, Budapest's foreign minister said during a visit to Moscow on Wednesday, reiterating that the country would not accept outside pressure when it came to decisions on its energy



(From L-R) US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth, British Secretary of State for Defence John Healey, Ukraine's Defence Minister Denys Shmyhal and German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius attend a meeting at the Alliance headquarters, in Brussels. — Reuters

supplies. Peter Szijarto was attending the Russian Energy Week forum as Nato defence ministers met in Brussels to discuss military aid for Ukraine, underlining Budapest's differences with most other members of the alliance when it comes to dealing with Moscow. Hungary has maintained its reliance on Russian energy since the start of the conflict in Ukraine, prompting criticism from several European Union and Nato allies.

Szijarto told reporters in Moscow that national interest was paramount for Budapest when it came to energy supplies. “We have never been let down (by Russia). The deliveries have always arrived... Contracts were always respected. And my question is only why we should cut this relationship”, Szijarto said.

Separately, he was quoted saying by Interfax news agency that Russia has supplied around 3.6 million metric tonnes of oil to Hungary so far this year and will export between 5 million tonnes, or 100,000 barrels per day and 5.5 million tonnes in 2025. He also said Hungary plans to maintain that level in 2026.

Hungary has pushed back against plans

by the European Commission to phase out the EU's imports of all Russian gas and liquefied natural gas by the end of 2027, deepening a rift with Brussels over relations with Moscow. Hungary signed a 15-year deal in 2021 with Russia to buy 4.5 billion cubic metres of gas annually and increased purchases from Gazprom last year, importing some 7.5 billion cubic metres of Russian gas via the Turkstream pipeline.

Meanwhile, one of President Vladimir Putin's top economic officials on Wednesday pushed back at US President Donald Trump's warning that the Russian economy was going to collapse amidst lines for gasoline in some regions.

Trump on Tuesday said that Putin should settle the Ukraine war which the 47th US president said was making Russia look bad. He also mentioned “long lines waiting for gasoline” and said the Russian “economy is going to collapse”.

Asked about Trump's remarks at an energy conference in Moscow, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, who oversees energy and the economy for the government, said that Russia had a stable supply of gasoline. — Reuters

Pakistan, Afghanistan agree to temporary truce after fresh fighting

ISLAMABAD/KABUL: Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to a “temporary ceasefire” on Wednesday, Islamabad said, after an air strike and ground fighting sent tensions between the South Asian neighbours soaring, killing more than a dozen civilians. Wednesday's fighting along the volatile, contested frontier shattered a fragile peace after weekend clashes that killed dozens, the worst between the two countries since the Taliban seized power in Kabul in 2021.

A Pakistani foreign ministry statement said that the two countries had decided to implement a “temporary ceasefire” for 48 hours starting 13:00 GMT on Wednesday. “During this period, both sides will make

sincere efforts, through constructive dialogue, to find a positive solution to this complex yet resolvable issue”, the statement said, adding that the truce was agreed upon at the request of the Afghan Taliban government. Afghan Taliban administration spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said the ceasefire agreement was a result of the “request and insistence of the Pakistani side”.

Kabul directs all its forces to observe the ceasefire provided the other side does not commit aggression, he said in a statement. The recent friction between the two former allies erupted after Islamabad demanded that the Afghan Taliban administration tackle militants who have stepped



Afghan fighters patrol near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border in Spin Boldak. — Reuters

up attacks in Pakistan, saying they operate from havens in Afghanistan.

The Taliban denies the charge and accuses the Pakistani military of conspiring against

Afghanistan by spreading misinformation, provoking border tension and sheltering ISIS-linked militants to undermine the country's stability and sovereignty. Pakistan's military denies

the charges and points to attacks in Pakistan by ISIS-K, or IS Khorasan, the regional affiliate of the IS group active in the neighbours. Both claim to have destroyed each other's military posts

Fresh fighting broke out on Wednesday along the volatile Pakistan-Afghanistan border, killing more than a dozen civilians and troops to shatter a fragile peace after weekend clashes that killed dozens. The weekend fighting was the worst between the neighbours since the Taliban seized power in Kabul in 2021, despite regular clashes between their security forces along the contested 2,600 km frontier. The Afghan Taliban said more than a dozen of its civilians were killed and 100 wounded as Pakistani forces launched attacks in the early

hours of Wednesday in the district of Spin Boldak.

Pakistan said four of its civilians were wounded in attacks by “Taliban forces” in the district of Chaman, which is opposite Spin Boldak across the frontier. Fighting between troops and militants in a second incident in Pakistan's border district of Orakzai killed six Pakistani paramilitary soldiers and wounded six, two security officials said.

Nine militants were also killed, they said, adding that the violence broke out during a search in the area by troops after a militant attack last week killed 11 Pakistani soldiers. The Pakistani military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the Orakzai clash. — Reuters

OPINION

The new geography of conservation



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is an environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development
LinkedIn @rumaithaalbusaidi

EVERY Summit begins with vision statements. This one began with a ledger. The IUCN Conservation Congress treated conservation as a balance sheet of species, coastlines, and political will. The week prioritised practical questions over inspiration and focused on determining outcomes. Who is funding restoration? Who is protecting depth? Who is enforcing rights? The ocean stood on the agenda as an asset that demands governance.

A decisive action was taken to make the shift evident. Members supported the protection of the mesopelagic zone through approval of Motion 035. The twilight zone from roughly 200 to 1,000 metres holds vast biomass and moves carbon each day with the rise and fall of small fish. The motion calls for a precautionary approach to any new activity in that layer until science and governance can keep pace. For us in the Arabian Sea, these lands are close to home. It touches food security and climate stability, opening a path for regional leadership in a field with few maps. A second decision set rules for innovation. Members adopted a policy on synthetic biology for conservation through Motion 087. It allows innovation with safeguards. At the Environment Society of Oman, we engaged deeply in this debate because marine

restoration is accelerating across our coasts. Coral, mangrove, and seagrass projects bring promise and hard questions about the limits of intervention. The policy gives countries room to judge tools case by case and to build the expertise needed for informed consent so communities understand risks and benefits before pilots begin. The Congress also widened the role of non-state actors. California and Massachusetts announced their intention to join IUCN at the state level. This initiative offers a model for our side of the world. Port cities, governorates, and coastal authorities in Oman and the region can seek direct participation in global conservation forums. Imagine Muscat, Suhar, and Salalah with well-defined programmes, transparent public reporting, and targets that are in harmony with national plans. Finance moved in step with this agenda. Major development partners have signalled that capital is returning to ecosystems. The call was simple. Develop projects that are ready for implementation and integrate restoration with livelihoods, enabling the region to benefit from the redirected finance. Aligning finance, policy, and science has become fundamental for establishing credibility. In Oman, the pathway is no longer abstract. The ingredients exist in science,

Leadership will not come from proximity alone, but from the discipline to build systems that endure. It begins with standards that hold, data that can be trusted, and collaboration that reaches across coasts and ministries.

policy, and the growing recognition that nature and economy are part of the same system. What is needed now is orchestration that connects land and sea, research and industry, planning and community. The country has the knowledge and the projects, but their power lies in coherence. Data must move freely, guiding where investment flows and how results are measured. Monitoring should be treated as infrastructure, not as an afterthought, with open information that builds trust and accountability. Evidence driving spending and measuring outcomes in restored ecosystems, resilient jobs, and stronger communities makes progress visible. That is how stewardship turns from ambition into practice, and the environment becomes both foundation and future. Across the region, the same truth takes root. Leadership will not come from proximity alone, but from the discipline to build systems that endure. It begins with standards that hold, data that can be trusted, and collaboration that reaches across coasts and ministries. Depth, in this sense, is not only about the ocean. It is a way of working: deliberate, evidence-driven, and connected to both people and place. As the decade's midpoint passes, the ocean at our doorstep continues to test our resolve, asking whether we will stay on the surface of ambition or move deeper into practice.

Award-winning agronomist dreams of a cassava ‘revolution’

LESLIE FAUVEL

Mercy Diebiru-Ojo’s ambitions are straightforward — increase Nigerian yam and cassava yields by 500 per cent, fight hunger and raise her country’s position on the agricultural value chain from a mere grower to a processor. The first steps, at least, are already underway for the 44-year-old agronomist, who was awarded this year’s prestigious Africa Food Prize for her research on yams and cassava, both major food staples in Africa. Traditionally, farmers in Nigeria — which produces 70 per cent of the world’s yams — replant chunks of yams and cassava from the previous year’s harvest, to grow this year’s crop. Gradually, the plants lose their resistance to diseases — a serious problem for food security in a country where 30 million people are not getting enough to eat, according to the United Nations’ World Food Programme. Diebiru-Ojo’s research involves growing the plants hydroponically in greenhouses, where they are protected from disease. Then, as they sprout, a portion is cut and planted in potted mineral-rich soil in the greenhouse. Only later is it replanted in the fields outside. The result — 30 tonnes of yams and cassava per hectare, compared to the typical five. Diebiru-Ojo worked with US agro-research firm Sahtechno, which developed what it calls “semi-autotrophic hydroponics” (SAH) some two decades ago, to adapt the technique to Nigerian agriculture. Despite being the world’s top cassava producer, “when it comes to the yield, actual yield potentials and all of that, we are still way behind”, Diebiru-Ojo said. As is the case in many African countries, skilled farmers, with generations of knowledge, face a host of challenges. They must rely on seasonal rains for irrigation, soils are declining in health, financing costs are high and governments have limited budgets for extension services. Despite producing roughly 20 per cent of the world’s cassava each year, Africa’s most populous country still imports some \$600 million in cassava products, according to the Central Bank of Nigeria. Yams are also a prized ingredient in Nigerian cuisine — fried, boiled, mashed or turned into flour. But there’s also a huge — if largely unrealised — potential for their use in bioplastics and biofuels, as well as cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and textiles, thanks to their starch. Moving up the so-called “value chain” — switching from producing raw materials to transforming them into finished products — is a key step in any country’s economic development, economists say. — AFP

Mr Trump, on ME please move fast & break things

LISTENING to President Donald Trump telling Israelis and Arabs on Monday that they were at “the historic dawn of a new Middle East” was like watching Trump selling his bankers on a plan to build the biggest, most beautiful, most amazing hotel in the world on a toxic waste dump. On the one hand, you tell yourself: This man must be crazy. Doesn’t he know the history of this place? You can’t build a hotel there! And on the other hand, a voice in the back of your head whispers: What if he can bring it off? Trump’s ability to combine bullying, flattering and exaggerating is truly a sight to behold, and it was on full display Monday in his addresses to the Israeli parliament and then to more than 20 world leaders at a gathering in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. I will give Trump this: No traditional diplomat or foreign policy professor would have advised the president to take such risks — to declare that we are on the road to Middle East peace and that he, Donald Trump, will chair the “Board of Peace” that will deliver it. But Trump went to business school, not the School of Foreign Service, and he clearly believes that he can cajole, muscle and bluster this conflict to a happy ending.

Since that strategy brought Trump both multiple bankruptcies in real estate and two terms as president in politics, I am not going to bet against him or for him. I am just going to give him this free advice: Mr President, to get this deal done you need to move fast and break things. So far, I don’t see it. I realise it is early, but right now I don’t even see the baby steps to the next phase. I see no UN resolution on the table creating the Arab/international peacekeeping force to oversee Hamas’ disarmament and security in the Gaza Strip until



THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

The author is a reporter and a NYT columnist

The only way to get there is if Hamas is quickly disarmed, if the Palestinian Authority is quickly reformed and integrated into Gaza and if Netanyahu either finds some new Israeli governing partners in the centre or goes into the wilderness.

a proper Palestinian security force can be created. I see no money on the table for the billions that will be needed for reconstruction, and I have no idea who is supposed to appoint and manage the Cabinet of Palestinian technocrats who are supposed to run Gaza instead of Hamas. As a journalist, if I wanted to know what is going to happen next and how, I have no clue whom to call. This is a prescription for trouble. Because, Mr President, what got you to this great hostage release, prisoner exchange and ceasefire will not get you to a wider Middle East peace — unless you lay down the law with both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and Hamas’ overseers: Türkiye, Egypt and Qatar. You don’t have a second to rest. As someone who wants you to succeed, I have to remind you: As hard as the first stage was, you have not even seen hard yet. While Hamas has signalled that it is willing to hand over civilian rule in Gaza to a different Palestinian entity, the group has never publicly confirmed that it would disarm, although it apparently said so privately. “They said they’re going to disarm and if they don’t disarm, we will disarm them,” Trump said Monday, adding that he believed it would happen in a “reasonable time.” If Hamas fails to disarm, that will give Netanyahu an excuse to restart the war and avoid all the political land mines that the next phases present him. There is no possibility — none whatsoever — of Trump’s advancing this ceasefire to a wider peace without Hamas being replaced, as soon as feasible, by a reformed Palestinian Authority and without Netanyahu establishing a more centrist ruling coalition or Israeli voters replacing Netanyahu. Sooner or later — and I believe it will be sooner — Trump will realise that if he wants the Gaza peace to succeed and spread, he needs to get

a reformed Palestinian Authority into Gaza as soon as possible. The PA ran the strip before being ousted by Hamas in June 2007, and it did so under a legal, economic and trade framework painstakingly negotiated over two years by Israelis and Palestinians in the Oslo Accords. That framework just needs to be dusted off. Trying instead to reinvent governance in Gaza from scratch now is a mistake; it will take months, at least, to organise, and Hamas will take advantage of the vacuum. The only reason that the PA was being kept out of the picture was to satisfy Netanyahu’s political desire not to ever have a unified Palestinian leadership in the West Bank and Gaza. But Netanyahu’s political needs are not aligned with US interests to get to a permanent peace — and never have been. Trump needed to satisfy Netanyahu’s political needs to get to this point, but now Trump needs to steamroll over them to put in place the next stage. The only long-term solution — in my view — is a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank whose borders are negotiated with Israel. That state, though, must be run by a reformed PA — with the ongoing support of an Arab/ international peacekeeping force that would guarantee this Palestinian state never threatens Israel, and the support of an international “Board of Peace” that would guarantee its economic success. The only way to get there is if Hamas is quickly disarmed, if the Palestinian Authority is quickly reformed and integrated into Gaza and if Netanyahu either finds some new Israeli governing partners in the centre or goes into the wilderness. None of them, in their present incarnations, are partners for long-term peace. May their transformations or disappearances happen quickly.

Cutting-edge technologies vs the realities of starvation



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is a journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

INDEPENDENT of social media narrative control, the transformative impact of digital technologies on significant events, such as warfare and politics, is increasingly evident. The Internet continues to rewrite the script of contemporary political conflict.

As the Global Sumudu Flotilla recently sought to break the Israeli naval blockade of Gaza, with a sophisticated social media campaign with updated boat tracking technology and an ingenious interactive website design, the mission gained worldwide attention and support.

Sumudu is the name of a maritime initiative aimed at challenging the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. The word ‘Sumud’, Arabic for ‘steadfastness’ or ‘resilience’, is the organising principle and name of the international effort.

During the voyage, the flotilla sent regular updates via social media platforms and held press conferences via Zoom with activists on board. There were live feeds from the vessels, and cameras gave a live view as the Israeli Navy boarded the boats.

The Sumud flotilla was carrying humanitarian aid (including food, medical supplies, and other essential items), along with parliamentarians and activists from dozens of countries.

This campaign was the latest in a movement that has existed for over 15 years to challenge Israel’s long-running

blockade of the Gaza Strip. In May 2010, Israel intercepted six vessels that were transporting humanitarian aid to Gaza. The operation resulted in the deaths of nine civilians and left many passengers injured.

Earlier this year, the boat called The Conscience, carrying activists and aid bound for Gaza, was hit by an explosion off the coast of Malta. Israel then intercepted the Madleen in June and the Handala in July.

With credit to social media platforms, the public sphere gains access to information that governments and mainstream media would otherwise filter. Individuals can express opinions, as they can be both information providers and receivers. However, social media reporting has its issues, such as misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech.

Previous attempts to challenge the blockade illustrate how effectively the Internet can be harnessed to garner public support, mobilising individuals for both political and humanitarian initiatives. Social media has redefined the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Unfiltered real-time streams of images and stories from onboard bring reality into the public eye. It functions as an awareness-raising process designed to inform and educate society, influencing their attitudes and behaviours regarding the suffering of people in Gaza.

It also brings attention to the use of starvation as a weapon of war and genocide

Social media is changing the political communication landscape while also creating opportunities for new voices to emerge

as an instrument of domination. It is a deliberate act of terror. According to the Free Gaza Movement, the vessels attempting to cross the Israeli blockade aim to deliver aid to the civilians in Gaza. Israel justifies its actions by invoking its right to enforce the blockade and prevent the flow of ‘contraband’ from reaching the territory.

The situation in the Gaza Strip bears a resemblance to past events. The Stalin regime used man-made famine against Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 for both political and ethnic purposes, employing it as a collective punishment, seizing land, people, and resources to boost industrialisation, and intimidating Ukrainians into submission.

However, this time, the Internet and digital capabilities are the new mechanisms that not only surpass the controlled media narrative but also spread information like fire. Never in the history of humanity have we witnessed a genocide in real time like what we are seeing in Gaza.

Even if the vessels do not (yet) reach the shores of Gaza, a digital movement worldwide refuses to let ‘political forces’ normalise genocide and death by hunger.

Social media is changing the political communication landscape while also creating opportunities for new voices to emerge.

Machines and algorithms are driving a political campaign in support of civilians in Gaza, while pro-Palestinian activists refuse to yield to silence, fear, or complicity.

IN CHINA, CLIMATE LITIGATION STARTS WITH THE STATE

SAM DAVIES

With thousands of dedicated courts and more than a million recent cases, environmental and climate litigation is booming in China, but it often looks different to the trend seen elsewhere.

Instead of a movement led by activists and NGOs, in China, climate litigation is dominated by state prosecutors seeking to enforce existing regulations, rather than encourage government climate ambition.

Globally, domestic and international courts have become a new arena in the fight to pressure governments on climate.

Perhaps their most high-profile win came in July at the International Court of Justice, where countries were told they had a legal duty to tackle climate change. In China though, cases tend to focus on regulatory enforcement and NGOs and activists are largely shut out.

“Courts in China use climate change provisions scattered across various laws and regulations to implement climate policy, rather than bring about policy changes,” said Zhu Mingzhe, a legal scholar at the University of Glasgow. Though many cases “are conducive to climate change mitigation... they don’t deal with climate change directly”. China is the world’s biggest greenhouse gas emitter, and will determine the planet’s climate change trajectory. Ahead of the COP30 climate talks next month, President Xi Jinping outlined China’s first-ever emission targets, pledging to reduce greenhouse gases by 7-10 per cent within a decade.

Those figures fall short of what experts say is needed, but there is little chance they will be challenged in court. Instead, “the courts and prosecutors make sure the law grows teeth”, Boya Jiang, a climate lawyer at ClientEarth in Beijing, said. A decade ago, local authorities might have escaped sanction for skirting environmental obligations if they achieved economic growth.

Now, “they will be brought to court and there will be severe punishments”, said Jiang.

“Companies also have to really consider environmental impacts.” Between 2019 and 2023, courts resolved more than a million cases, according to Chinese state media, up almost 20 per cent from the previous five-year period.

China probably has the most comprehensive and “systematically established mechanism” for environmental justice, said Jiang. And support for bringing cases is widespread, with the central government empowering prosecutors and public opinion in favour, said Lu Xu, a legal scholar at Lancaster University.

“If there is anything that is ‘politically correct’ for all audiences in China, this is it,” he said. In 2020, for example, prosecutors in Huzhou, eastern China, won a public interest case against a company that had used Freon, a banned ozone-depleting substance and potent greenhouse gas. It was ordered to pay compensation.— AFP

Power asymmetries and reconciliation in Gaza

THE ink on the ceasefire agreement has barely dried. For many, the sounds of artillery have been replaced by an uneasy quiet. But those of us who have walked the thin lines between conflict and post-conflict know this moment well: the deceptive stillness after destruction, before the ghosts of war reawaken. The question is not whether fragility exists—it does—but whether we have the vision and resolve to prevent this moment of reprieve from being just another lull before the next eruption.

Ceasefires are tools of de-escalation, not peace. Without addressing the structural asymmetries—military, political, economic—between Israel and Palestine, any pause in violence is, hence, inherently temporary.

On the one hand, Israel continues to dominate the strategic terrain with the backing of powerful allies and superior infrastructure. On the other hand, Palestine, particularly Gaza, remains shattered, governed by a fragmented leadership, with limited mobility, dependency on external aid, and internal fissures aggravated by blockade and factional divides.

Fragility here is multilayered. Firstly, vertical fragility between the state and its citizens (e.g., Hamas’ legitimacy in Gaza, Fatah in the West Bank). Secondly, horizontal fragility between factions and communities (e.g., intra-Palestinian tensions). Thirdly, geopolitical fragility as regional and global powers instrumentalise the conflict for energy, ideology, or electoral capital.

There is a silver lining: a discernible recalibration of international postures along two intersecting lines. Firstly, Israel’s long-standing impunity is being challenged. Global public opinion, legal cases at the ICJ and ICC, and recognition of Palestinian statehood by several



AHMED AL MUKHAINI

The author is a policy analyst

The challenge ahead is to turn stillness into structure, and memory into momentum. Political accords must be matched with civic repair

European and Global South nations reflect a loss of moral high ground for Israel, especially under Netanyahu’s hawkish leadership.

Secondly, Trump’s transactional pragmatism may offer unexpected room. If motivated by the optics of a Nobel Peace Prize, geopolitical influence, or access to gas fields off Gaza’s coast, Washington might back a transition framework under new rules of engagement—so long as Israel’s existential security is assured.

This moment, though far from ideal, may represent a rare convergence of moral outrage and strategic recalibration. The window is narrow—but it is open.

A fundamental mistake in past transitions (eg, post-Oslo and MEPP) was postponing social reconstruction and reconciliation in favour of premature “state-building” or security reform. This must be reversed.

First and foremost, immediate, localised psychosocial interventions are needed, especially for over 17,000 orphaned children in Gaza. These children are the future peace or the next war—depending on what the world chooses now. Second, cultural continuity projects.

Archives, oral history, local museum networks, and storytelling circles must be supported, and national memory must be preserved.

Without a space to mourn, remember, and narrate, collective trauma festers. Third, cross-factional Palestinian dialogue must begin with dignity-based frameworks—not donor-led political engineering. The objective is to prevent the recurrence of civil fragmentation among Palestinians.

A long-overdue initiative that Palestinians could benefit from is the establishment of a Palestinian Reconciliation and Renewal Council—inclusive of non-factional actors, women,

youth, religious leaders, and returnee diaspora.

At the same time, deploying regional conflict mediation teams (eg, Oman, Jordan, Indonesia) to stabilise inter-factional tensions, with embedded ceasefire monitors. Once the aforementioned two steps are underway, investing in local economic recovery zones with employment tied to reconstruction and joint civic engagement would be achievable and necessary.

The offshore gas fields near Gaza’s coast — estimated to hold billions in natural gas — will become a flashpoint. If monopolised by Israel or global companies, this will reignite conflict.

But if structured through equitable regional partnerships, the gas sector could fund reconstruction bonds for Gaza, provide regional energy corridors linking Gaza to Egypt, Jordan, and beyond, and facilitate the establishment of joint Palestinian-Israeli-Egyptian trust funds governed by international stakeholders (eg, UNDP, World Bank, Islamic Development Bank).

Palestine’s economy must move from dependency to dignity. The war in Gaza has rekindled the Palestinian Plight and tested the world’s moral spine. The ceasefire is a start, not a solution.

The challenge ahead is to turn stillness into structure, and memory into momentum. Political accords must be matched with civic repair. Reconstruction must be cultural, not just contractual. And above all, peace must become a shared inheritance — not just a diplomatic handshake between men in suits.

It is time we built a peace that lives not just in treaties, but in the streets, hearts, and futures of those who endured the war.

SPORTS

ARAB CHAMPIONSHIP



The Oman delegation left for Alexandria, Egypt.

Oman’s Billiards and Snooker players set for regional challenge

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 15

The Oman national billiards and snooker delegation departed on Tuesday evening for Alexandria, Egypt, to participate in the Arab Combined Billiards and Snooker Championship from October 15 to 22. The tournament features wide participation from Arab national teams and is regarded as one of the region’s leading events, bringing together elite players in an atmosphere of high-level competition.

The delegation is headed by Captain Khalid al Shabibi, member of the Oman Billiards and Snooker Committee, who affirmed before departure that the players are fully prepared and eager to deliver a performance that reflects the progress of the sport in the Sultanate of Oman in recent years.

In the snooker team, Oman will be represented by Captain Ahmed al Khusaibi, Captain Omar al Busaidy, Captain Sami al Hamrashdi, Captain Abdullah al Raisi, Captain Hussain al Lawati and Captain Qasim al Balushi. These players possess strong experience from previous participations in Arab and Asian tournaments and aim to achieve positive results that place Oman among the leading teams in this edition.

As for the junior snooker team, it includes Mohammed bin Qasim al Balushi, Ezz bin Abdullah al Raisi and Khalid bin Waleed al Balushi. The inclusion of these young players comes as part of the committee’s long-term strategy to develop a promising generation capable of carrying the sport forward and gaining valuable experience through exposure to high-level competition. Meanwhile, the billiards team comprises Captain Mohammed al Balushi, Captain Nasser bin Tamim al Hinaï, and the young players Hassan al Musawi and Hamad al Ghabshi. The team aims to deliver a strong showing after a series of intensive training camps.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 15

The press conference announcing the details of the Asia Rugby Emirates trophy was held at the headquarters of the Oman Olympic Committee and Sports Associations on Wednesday. The event, organised by the Oman Rugby Committee, will take place from October 25 to 26, with the participation of 14 Asian nations. During the conference, the Oman Rugby Committee surprised the sports and media community by announcing that the national team will not participate in the tournament, despite Oman hosting the event. Nabil al Busaidy, Chairman of the Oman Rugby Committee, explained that the decision came after a detailed technical assessment, emphasising that the safety of the players is the top priority. He said it would not be reasonable to enter the team into such a strong tournament without sufficient preparation that allows them to compete fairly with other national teams. He added that the national team requires a longer preparation period and comprehensive training programmes to ensure both physical and technical readiness before

Nabil al Busaidy, Chairman of the Oman Rugby Committee, explained that the decision to pull out came after a detailed technical assessment, emphasising that the safety of the players is the top priority. He said it would not be reasonable to enter the team into such a strong tournament without sufficient preparation.

Omani women duo defeats Bahrain for bright start

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 15

THE opening day of 30th edition of Arab Men’s and 20th edition of Arab Women’s Beach Volleyball Championships featured strong competition as Oman women’s team began their campaign with an impressive win against Bahrain by 2-1 on the sands of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Wednesday. Oman’s women’s team duo of Maryam al Oraimi and Liqaa al Hosni delivered a spirited performance to defeat the Bahraini pair Muneera and Fatma 2-1 in overall result. The Omanis took the opening set 21-18 before Bahrain levelled the match in the second. In the deciding set, Maryam and Liqaa showcased their dominance, closing out the match with a commanding 15-6 victory.

ALGERIA PREVAIL

Elsewhere, Algeria’s men’s and women’s teams also enjoyed winning starts. In the men’s category, Algeria’s Kalooshand Suwadi outplayed Yemen’s Abdullah and Omar in straight sets (21-18, 21-8). Meanwhile, Algerian women’s duo of Hasayen Ikram and Shaheya Mukhtar posted a confident 2-0 win (21-11, 21-9) against Saudi Arabia’s Basma and Lujain. The championship, hosted by the Oman Volleyball Association (OVA), featured attendance of 20 teams including 12 men’s and 8 women’s from across the Arab region, including teams from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan and Oman. Oman are fielding two teams in both men’s and women’s categories as Men’s Team 1 represented by Ahmed al Hosni and Hood al Jalboubi while Men’s Team 2 comprised from Yousef al Abri and Nooh al Jalboubi. Women’s Team 1 pair featured from Maryam al Oraimi and Liqaa al Hosni and Women’s Team 2 comprised from Furat al Balushi and Al Shaima al Zadjali. The men’s team is under the guidance of coach Badar al Subhi, while the women’s team is coached by Azhar al Bahrani. The tournament will run for four days and will conclude on Saturday promising high-level beach volleyball action in Muscat.



Oman women’s team began their campaign with an impressive win against Bahrain.



Action from the opening day of Arab Beach Volleyball Championships in Muscat on Wednesday.

14 nations to compete at Asian rugby, Oman withdraw

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 15



Nabil al Busaidy said such events help reinforce Oman’s position as a growing hub for sports.

taking part in any continental or international event. He described this tournament as an important learning opportunity for Oman to gain experience from other Asian teams, which will contribute to the sport’s development at the local level. Al Busaidy affirmed that hosting the championship represents a major sporting milestone for the Sultanate of Oman, as it is the first officially sanctioned international rugby tournament to be held in Oman. He stated that this achievement places Oman on the Asian and global rugby

map, noting that the event also serves as a chance to promote Oman’s national identity and enhance sports tourism, thanks to close cooperation between the committee and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, as well as strong support from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and sponsoring entities. He added that the championship is not only about competition but also about promoting Oman globally. The event is expected to reach around one million viewers across Asia through media and social platforms. So far, it

has already generated over RO 25,000 in hotel bookings. Al Busaidy said such events help reinforce Oman’s position as a growing hub for sports and sports tourism in the region. Meanwhile, Brian Hopkins, Head Coach of the Oman national rugby team, expressed his pride in being part of organising this major Asian event, describing it as a blend of sport and culture. He said Oman is welcoming 18 teams from 14 countries, some of which have already arrived, while others will come over the next few days. Many teams are staying longer to experience Omani hospitality and culture, which he described as a wonderful benefit of hosting such an event. Hopkins noted that the competition includes 13 men’s teams and 5 women’s teams, marking a significant step for women’s participation and the expansion of rugby in the region. He added that the official captains’ photo will be taken in front of Al Alam Palace near Al Mirani Fort, an iconic and timeless location that captures Oman’s beauty and cultural identity. The matches will be held on Saturday and Sunday at the Royal Oman Police Stadium, with free entry for the public.

SHORTTAKES



OTA chief Mutasim al Zadjali with the President of the Asian Tennis Federation.

MUTASIM ATTENDS ASIAN TENNIS MEET IN KAZAKHSTAN

SPORT REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 15

Mutasim bin Hamoud al Zadjali, Chairman of the Oman Tennis Association (OTA), took part in the Asian Tennis Federation meetings hosted in Almaty, the capital of Kazakhstan, with wide participation from presidents and representatives of Asian tennis federations. The meeting discussed several topics aimed at developing the sport and enhancing its presence across the Asian continent.

The agenda of the federation's annual general meeting included approving the minutes of the previous meeting held in Hong Kong last year, reviewing reports and initiatives submitted by member associations, and presenting the federation's activities during the current year, along with development programmes initiated by the International Tennis Federation.

The discussions also covered updates on the membership of the Palestinian Tennis Federation within the International Federation and the decision to reinstate its membership in the Asian Tennis Federation.

In his remarks, Al Zadjali emphasised that the meeting represented a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences among Asian federations and to strengthen cooperation to advance the sport at all levels. He said: "We extend our sincere thanks to the Asian Tennis Federation and the Kazakhstan Tennis Federation for their excellent organisation and warm hospitality. We are pleased to represent Oman and to participate alongside other Asian federation leaders who share the goal of developing tennis across the continent."

DE JONG PENS NEW BARCA DEAL TO 2029



Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong

BARCELONA: Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong signed a new deal until 2029, the Spanish champions announced on Wednesday.

The 28-year old Dutch international joined Barcelona from Ajax in 2019 and is in his seventh season with the Catalan giants, winning two La Liga titles and the Copa del Rey twice.

"Barca are confident that the midfielder can be a pivotal part of the current sporting project due to his quality and experience," said the club in a statement.

De Jong has struggled for form at times but became a key part of the midfield under Hansi Flick last season alongside Pedri Gonzalez.

"I always dreamed of playing for Barca, and now that I am living the dream I have always had since I was a child, I want to continue pursuing this dream for many more years, and I am eager to win titles," De Jong told a news conference.

Arriving under previous Barca president Josep Maria Bartomeu, De Jong is one of the club's highest earners, with Spanish media reporting he has accepted a pay cut in his new deal starting from the 2026/27 season.

De Jong said previous media reports over his salary were exaggerated and had affected how he was viewed by fans. "I will not tell you what I will earn, they've always talked about it a lot but I think that numbers regarding what I earned before have been exaggerated a lot," he said. — AFP



In Category 'E', with fences set at 100 cm, a total of 26 horses competed.

Show jumping season opens with strong competition

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
BARKA, OCT 15

THE OMAN Equestrian and Racing Federation launched the Show Jumping Championship for the 2025/2026 season on Tuesday at Al Rahba Farm jumping arena, marking the official start of the new season amid strong participation from riders representing various equestrian centres, clubs and military teams.

The opening day witnessed exciting performances across multiple height categories, attracting a large turnout of spectators and equestrian enthusiasts.

In category 'E', with fences set at 100 cm, a total of 26 horses competed, Rashid bin Amer al Mashaykhi from the Royal Oman Police clinched first place riding Raad, followed by Mohammed bin Rashid al Wahaibi on Azhar from the Royal Cavalry in second and Abdulrahman bin Fahmi al Harrasi on Ventasis from the Olympic



Medal winners pose on the podium.

Equestrian Training Centre in third.

In category 'D', featuring 16 horses and fences at 110 cm, Sarah bint Suhail al Kathiriyah from Al Rayan Stables claimed first place riding Lonny Geng, Khalid bin Said al Wahaibi, also from Al Rayan Stables, secured second place on Hensley, while Basem bin Nasser al Ghabshi from the Royal

Oman Police finished third on Fifty Fifty.

In category 'C', with fences at 120 cm, international rider Sultan bin Hamood al Touqi from the Olympic Equestrian Training Centre continued his fine form, taking first place on Extreme, reinforcing his reputation as one of Oman's top show jumpers.

The day concluded with category 'B', fences set at 130 cm, featuring three competitors. Once again, Sultan bin Hamood al Touqi dominated the event, winning first place on Fantasia from the Olympic Equestrian Training Centre, Madin bin Said al Yousfi on Wadoud from the Royal Cavalry finished second, while Mohammed bin Salim al Hadhrami on Thikrayat from the Royal Cavalry came in third.

Trainers praised the high level of organisation and competitiveness displayed on the first day, noting that the new season promises stronger performances as riders and horses gear up for upcoming regional championships.

Noman stars in Pakistan's 93-run win over SA

LAHORE: Left-arm spinner Noman Ali was South Africa's chief tormentor as Pakistan won a gripping first Test by 93 runs in Lahore on Wednesday.

Set a daunting 277-run target for victory, the visitors and World Test champions were bowled out for 183 in the afternoon session on day four.

Man of the match Noman finished with 4-79 and 10-191 in the match for his third haul of ten wickets or more in Tests.

With the weary Gaddafi Stadium pitch taking sharp turn and low bounce, the 39-year-old exploited the conditions well despite a stubborn 73-run stand between Dewald Brevis and Ryan Rickelton in the morning.

In all, spinners from both sides took 34 wickets, with just six going to fast bowlers.

South African left-armer Senuran Muthusamy took 11-174 in the match.

Pakistan made 378 in their first innings, with South Africa scoring 269 in reply.

On a deteriorating surface, the hosts collapsed in their second-innings 167 but it proved



Pakistan's Noman Ali (C) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of South Africa's Dewald Brevis during the fourth day of the first Test. — AFP

enough. "We won the Test match and it's gone exactly to plan," said Shan Masood, who now has four wins in 13 Tests as captain, with nine losses.

On Wednesday, with the tourists 137-6 at lunch the writing was very much on the wall, then Sajid Khan dismissed Muthusamy for six soon after the break.

Pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi dismissed Kyle Verreynne (19), Prenelan Subrayen (eight) and

Kagiso Rabada (nought) to finish with 4-33.

The victory gives Pakistan an ideal start to the World Test Championship (WTC), having come last in the previous edition. The second and final Test starts in Rawalpindi from Monday.

"The spinners came into play, reverse swing helped the bowlers do their job today and the batters did well enough, but we still have a lot of challenges

in the middle order," said Masood.

"We lost 11-37 over the course of two innings, which is not good, we must overcome that."

The defeat broke South Africa's sequence of ten straight Test wins, culminating in the WTC title in June this year when they beat Australia at Lord's.

Skipper Aiden Markram said the first-innings deficit of 109 was crucial. "They (Pakistan) had a really good partnership in the first innings when we had them five wickets down," he said Markram of a Mohammad Rizwan-Salman Agha stand of 163 runs for the sixth wicket.

"We probably could have scored a few more runs in the first innings but I am proud of the way we fought."

"But we need to clean up our game and come back better in the next match."

Brevis took the fight to the Pakistan spinners in the morning and had reached an aggressive career-best 54, with six fours and two sixes, when Noman bowled him with a sharply turning delivery. — AFP

SPORTS

ASIAN QUALIFIERS



Qatar's Ayoub Al Oui in action with United Arab Emirates' Ali Saleh Amro. — Reuters

QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA QUALIFY FOR 2026 WORLD CUP

DOHA: Qatar and Saudi Arabia became the latest teams to book their spots at the 2026 World Cup, with each finishing top of their respective groups on Tuesday in the fourth round of Asian qualifying.

In Group A, Qatar saw off the United Arab Emirates 2-1 in their must-win clash in Doha, where second-half goals from captain Boualem Khoukhi and Pedro Miguel sealed the 2022 hosts' place at next summer's finals in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Then, later in Jeddah, the Saudis came through a goalless draw at home to Iraq to book a berth at the 2026 showpiece.

Against the UAE on Tuesday, the winners of the past two Asian Cups took the lead four minutes into the second half at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium where Khoukhi headed home Akram Afif's in-swinging free-kick.

On 74 minutes, the hosts doubled their lead, this time Pedro Miguel making the most of a mistake by UAE goalkeeper Khalid Essa to nod into the empty net.

Coached by former Spain, Real Madrid and West Ham boss Julen Lopetegui, Qatar had to survive Tarek Salman's sending-off late on for a studs-up tackle, while the UAE were provided a lifeline from substitute Sultan Adil's volley eight minutes into injury-time.

To their credit, though, Qatar held on to take their place at a first World Cup on foreign soil.

In Group B, Saudi Arabia made it through to a third successive finals by avoiding defeat to Iraq at their King Abdullah Sports City.

Iraq, last participants in 1986, remain in the hunt for the World Cup: next month, they contest a two-legged tie against the UAE, with the winner then going into an intercontinental playoff. — AFP

Oman book place in ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

THE Sultanate of Oman have secured place in their fourth ICC Men's T20 World Cup as the hosts along with Nepal were guaranteed top three spots on Wednesday in the Asia/East Asia-Pacific Qualifier following UAE's win over Samoa and Qatar's victory over Japan at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat.

The qualification comes on the back of an impressive outing in the recent Asia Cup where Oman made their debut.

Oman had inched closer to the qualification after a thrilling five-wicket victory over close-contenders the UAE on Monday.

The win marked Oman's fourth successive victory in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Asia/EAP Qualifier and also avenged their Asia Cup defeat to the UAE last month.

Against UAE, Oman needed 29 runs from the last three overs. Nadeem Khan's blistering 30 off 16 balls, including three towering sixes and two boundaries, sealed the crucial points in favour of Oman.

Oman and Nepal were due to face each other in Super Six phase later on Wednesday evening. Both the teams have six points each ahead of the match.

Oman brought over two over two points to the Super Six stage after defeating Samoa and Papua New Guinea in the group stage and cruised to a first win over Qatar, comfortably defending 172 in the Super Six.

UAE hold third position for now after a 77-run win over Samoa, and will meet Japan in a crucial match.

Qatar beat Japan by three wickets to stay afloat. They need other results to go their way, a win over the Samoans on Thursday, and the edge on net run rate to remain alive.

NEPAL QUALIFY

Five of the first six matches in the Super Six stage went to the final over to highlight the fine margins between the sides, with the Nepalis prevailing in two nail-biters to book their tickets. Unbeaten in group action, the side brought two carry over points to the Super Six stage before their final-ball



victories against UAE and Qatar.

Dipendra Singh Airee was taken for six by Dhruv Parashar to make the equation just three runs off the final three balls for the Emiratis, though a catch hit to Sundeeep Jora and two run outs back-to-back meant a last-gasp Nepal victory.

A day later, Rohit Paudel's team pulled another win out of the fire, with Qatar 97 for 1 inside 12 overs chasing 148. Sandeep Lamichhane (5-18) sparked a collapse, and with only two wickets in hand needing 10, the Qataris left themselves too much to do.

The Samoans, who could not repeat their strong group stage performance where they beat regional rivals Papua New Guinea, have been mathematically eliminated from a top three spot.

Remaining Fixtures (Oman Time)
October 16, 14:30: United Arab Emirates v Japan
October 16, 19:00: Qatar v Samoa
October 17, 10:00: Japan v Oman
October 17, 14:30: Samoa v Nepal

England secure 2026 WC qualification, Portugal forced to wait after draw

PARIS: Harry Kane scored twice as England thrashed Latvia 5-0 on Tuesday to secure qualification for the 2026 World Cup, while Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal were forced to wait to clinch their spot at the finals after being held by Hungary.

Elsewhere, Italy's vital win over Israel and Spain took another step towards qualification with a big victory against Bulgaria.

Thomas Tuchel's England brushed aside Latvia in Riga to make it six wins from six in Group K and guarantee top spot before their final two fixtures next month — they have 18 points and an unassailable seven-point lead over second-placed Albania.

Anthony Gordon opened the scoring before Kane produced a lethal finish and then netted a penalty to make it 3-0 at half-time — the Bayern Munich striker has 21 goals in 13 games this season for club and country. Maksims Tonisevs scored an own-goal and Eberechi Eze added the fifth, with England now able to look forward to December's draw for next year's finals.

"It comes rarely that you qualify for a World Cup, so the mood is very, very good," said Tuchel.

All 12 group winners in Europe qualify directly for the World Cup, with the runners-up going on to play-offs. Serbia are a point behind Albania after fighting back to win 3-1 in Andorra. Guillaume Lopez gave Andorra the lead with a stunning



Cristiano Ronaldo in action with Hungary's Andras Schafer. — Reuters

strike from inside the centre circle which sailed over Serbia goalkeeper Djordje Petrovic. Christian Garcia's own-goal brought Serbia level before Dusan Vlahovic headed them in front and Aleksandar Mitrovic netted a penalty.

Portugal were on the brink of punching their ticket as they led Hungary 2-1 in stoppage time in Lisbon, knowing a win would confirm first place in Group F.

Attila Szalai headed Hungary in front only for Ronaldo to turn in Nelson Semedo's driven cross to equalise midway through the

first half. Ronaldo then converted a Nuno Mendes cross to give Portugal the lead in first-half stoppage time, taking the 40-year old Al Nassr superstar to an all-time international record of 143 goals in 225 appearances for his country.

He now holds the record for the most goals in World Cup qualifying with 41, two more than retired Guatemala international Carlos Ruiz on 39. However, Hungary snatched a draw when Liverpool's Dominik Szoboszlai finished from close range in injury time.

That means Hungary remain five points behind Portugal with two games left and so could still top Group F, while Ireland theoretically could too after Evan Ferguson's header secured a 1-0 victory against Armenia, who had Tigran Barseghyan sent off.

There was a huge security presence around the Bluenergy Stadium hosting the Group I fixture, won 3-0 by Italy.

Mateo Retegui converted a penalty in first-half stoppage time and scored again with a stunning hit on 74 minutes. Gianluca Mancini headed in a late third to ensure that Italy will finish at least second in the group and are now just three points behind leaders Norway with two games left.

European champions Spain have four wins from four in Group E after beating Bulgaria 4-0 in Valladolid. Mikel Merino scored two headers and now has 6 goals in 4 games. — AFP

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SHORTTAKES



Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, receives Nasiruddin Mohammed Saleh, Eritrea's Minister of Commerce and Industry.

OMAN AND ERITREA STRENGTHEN TRADE, ECONOMIC TIES

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Eritrea have reaffirmed their commitment to deepening trade and investment ties, as senior officials from both nations met in Muscat to explore new areas of collaboration.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, received Nasiruddin Mohammed Saleh, Eritrea's Minister of Commerce and Industry, who is on a two-day official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The visit includes meetings with key figures from the public and private sectors to strengthen bilateral economic relations. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed existing cooperation in trade, industry, and investment, while discussing potential partnerships in high-growth sectors such as mining, manufacturing, tourism, food security and logistics.

They also examined ways to boost trade exchanges and promote stronger ties between private sector entities in both countries. Talks extended to collaboration in energy, minerals, livestock and fisheries, alongside discussions on opening direct banking channels to facilitate smoother trade and imports.

Both ministers also supported the idea of organising an Omani-Eritrean Business Forum to connect entrepreneurs and investors and explore joint ventures in productive industries.

Al Yousef described the visit as an important step towards broadening economic cooperation between Oman and Eritrea in line with Oman Vision 2040.

He emphasised that the Ministry continues to build economic bridges with African nations to diversify markets and attract high-quality investments. — ONA

Oman’s Innovation Centre to drive smart tech goals

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, OCT 15

THE establishment of a National Innovation Centre in Oman marks a turning point in Oman's technological transformation, positioning the country as a regional hub for semiconductor design and smart communication technologies, according to Eng Said bin Abdullah al Mandhari, CEO of ITHCA Group, the tech investment arm of Oman Investment Authority (OIA)

Speaking exclusively to the Observer following the \$20 million investment agreement between ITHCA and US-based Movandi, Al Mandhari said the initiative embodies Oman Vision 2040 goals of building a knowledge-based, innovation-driven economy.

“The innovation centre is not only about technology — it is about people”, he said. “It will focus on building Omani capabilities in semiconductor design, wireless communication systems and AI-driven networks. These fields are the backbone of the global digital economy and Oman aims to be an active contributor, not just a consumer”.



The innovation centre is not only about technology — it is about people. It will focus on building Omani capabilities in semiconductor design, wireless communication systems and AI-driven networks. These fields are the backbone of the global digital economy and Oman aims to be an active contributor, not just a consume.

ENG SAID BIN ABDULLAH AL MANDHARI
CEO of ITHCA Group

OPEC TO HIRE CONSULTANT TO ASSESS MEMBERS’ CAPACITY

Dubai: The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is moving to appoint “one of the top consultants” to visit member states and assess their production capacity in the coming months, Kuwait’s oil minister Tareq al Roumi said on Wednesday.

OPEC+ ministers asked OPEC’s headquarters in May to develop a mechanism to assess the maximum sustainable production capacity for each member, which will be used as reference for their 2027

production baselines. Determining the maximum production capacity of each OPEC or OPEC+ member is contentious because some, such as the United Arab Emirates, have increased their production capacity, pressing the case for higher quotas.

Meanwhile others, such as African members, have seen declines.

OPEC did not immediately reply to a request for comment.

Al Roumi did not say whether Kuwait would seek to raise its

production quota after expanding its own capacity.

“Let’s see the results of this study first, and then we decide. It’s difficult to answer this question now,” he told reporters in Kuwait.

Kuwait’s crude oil production capacity stands at 3.2 million barrels per day, Al Roumi told a Kuwaiti newspaper in September.

This marked the highest level in more than a decade, after peaking at 3.3 million bpd in 2010 then falling below 3 million. — Reuters

Oman, UK explore prospects for economic partnership

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom have explored prospects for enhancing trade and investment cooperation between the two countries and advancing the free trade agreement negotiations between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and the United Kingdom. This aims to broaden economic partnerships and augment trade exchange.

This took place during a virtual meeting held by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, with Sir Chris Bryant, UK Minister of State for Trade. The meeting reviewed the course of negotiations between the two sides, with an emphasis on Oman's support



Qais al Yousef underlined Oman's keenness to develop economic relations with the United Kingdom across various fields. — ONA

for efforts to complete the upcoming negotiation rounds in preparation for signing the agreement. At the outset of the meeting, Qais al Yousef underlined Oman's keenness to develop economic relations

with the United Kingdom across various fields. He indicated that the agreement will open broader horizons for the exchange of goods, services, and investments between the two parties and will contribute to diversifying

markets and increasing intra-trade flows.

He added that Oman looks forward to establishing a long-term economic partnership with the United Kingdom, based on mutual interests and the integration of investment opportunities.

The importance of enhancing communication between private sector institutions in both countries was also emphasised. The two sides touched upon the Strategic Consultation Group between Oman and the United Kingdom and its role in strengthening economic and trade cooperation and expanding partnership areas between the two nations.

The two sides also discussed encouraging the establishment

of joint trade and investment forums and exhibitions, and exploring new partnership opportunities in industrial, technological, and logistical fields.

It is noteworthy that the volume of trade exchange between Oman and the United Kingdom reached approximately RO 221.7 million by the end of 2024. Meanwhile, the volume of direct British investments in Oman exceeded RO 158 million, distributed across 632 companies with British shareholding, marking a 52 per cent increase compared to 2023.

British investors are among the largest investors in Oman, reflecting their growing interest in the promising Omani market. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

MEANINGFUL INITIATIVE



The initiative brought together Muscat’s hospitality community for the annual fun yet meaningful initiative supporting the United Nations’ #ZeroHunger movement.

UNITED FOR A CAUSE: MUSCAT HOTELS RACE AGAINST HUNGER

MUSCAT: Over 200 hospitality professionals from 12 of Muscat’s leading hotels came together at LuLu Hypermarket, Darsait for the Seventh edition of the World Food Day — Food Cart Race 2025. The initiative, once again led by Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, brought together Muscat’s hospitality community for the annual fun yet meaningful initiative supporting the United Nations’ #ZeroHunger movement. The participating hotels, including Al Bustan Palace, Aloft Muscat, Kempinski Hotel Muscat, Grand Millennium Muscat & Studio M Muscat, Hilton Garden Inn, Jumeirah Muscat Bay, JW Marriott Muscat, The Chedi Muscat, Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah Muscat, Sheraton Oman, St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort, W Muscat, went all out with their creative initiatives such as bake and cake sales, community fun fairs, themed food festivals, spin to win and in-house charity games to raise funds. A total of RO 10,209.200 was raised during the event, with Kempinski Hotel Muscat contributing RO 1,552.200, followed by W Muscat with RO 1,445. In addition to their fundraising efforts, Kempinski Hotel Muscat also achieved the fastest time in purchasing and packing groceries, completing the challenge in just 10 minutes, demonstrating remarkable teamwork and dedication under the leadership of Ms Nadine al Balushi, General Manager.

The event not only reinforced the spirit of collaboration within Muscat’s hospitality sector but also highlighted the industry’s ongoing commitment to giving back to the community. General Manager of W Muscat, Fethi Yucel said, “At W Muscat, we proudly took part in World Food Day, coming together as a team to raise RO 1,445 in support of global efforts to promote food security. This initiative reflects our shared commitment to making a positive impact in our community, one small step at a time”. Samir Messaoudi, Chairman of the Oman Marriott Business Council said “I am proud to see our teams unite once again in the spirit of community for World Food Day. Together, we have demonstrated that we can make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. This collective effort reflects the true spirit of serving our world and supporting those in need across our communities”.

Bank Muscat posts net profit of RO 191.57 million

BANK MUSCAT, the flagship financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, announced its preliminary unaudited results for the nine months ended September 30, 2025. The Bank posted a net profit of RO 191.57 million for the period compared to RO 170.79 million reported during the same period in 2024, an increase of 12.2 per cent.

The key highlights of the results for the period are as follows:

1) Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 310.9 million for the nine months period ended September 30, 2025 compared to RO 293.91 million for the same period in 2024, an increase of 5.8 per cent.

2) Non-interest income was RO 123.57 million for the nine months period ended September 30, 2025 as compared to RO 110.33 million for the same period in 2024, an increase of 12.0 per cent mainly due to growth in business volumes and higher investment income.

3) Operating expenses for the nine months period ended September 30, 2025 was RO 162.82 million as compared to RO 154.64 million for the same period in 2024, an increase of 5.3 per cent.



Particulars (RO millions)	30 Sep 2025	30 Sep 2024	Change (%)
For the period ended			
Net interest income & Islamic financing income	310.90	293.91	5.8%
Other operating income	123.57	110.33	12.0%
Operating expenses	162.82	154.64	5.3%
Operating profit	271.65	249.60	8.8%
Net profit	191.57	170.79	12.2%
Particulars (RO millions)	30 Sep 2025	30 Sep 2024	Change (%)
As at period ended			
Total Assets	14,555	14,056	3.6%
Net loans and Islamic financing	10,702	10,268	4.2%
- Conventional loans and advances	9,041	8,685	4.1%
- Islamic financing receivables	1,661	1,583	4.9%
Customer deposits and Islamic customer deposits	10,099	10,110	-0.1%
- Conventional customer deposits	8,524	8,568	-0.5%
- Islamic customer deposits	1,575	1,542	2.1%
Total Equity*	2,528	2,407	5.0%

4) Net impairment losses on financial assets for the nine months period ended September 30, 2025 was RO 43.63 million as against RO 46.12 million for the same period in 2024.

5) Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 4.2 per cent to RO 10,702 million as against RO 10,268 million as at September 30, 2024.

6) Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits stood at RO 10,099 million as against RO 10,110 million as at September 30, 2024. The full results for the nine months period ended September 30, 2025 along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the Board of Directors of the Bank at its meeting scheduled later during October 2025.

NATIONAL FINANCE PARTICIPATES IN OMAN CHILDHOOD CONFERENCE

MUSCAT: Exemplifying its commitment to child and community development, National Finance, the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, participated in the Oman Childhood Conference & Expo 2025. Marking its second edition, the event was organised by the Children First Association under the theme ‘Horizons of Rehabilitation and Empowerment for People with Disabilities in the Era of Emerging Technologies’. National Finance’s involvement reflected its broader social responsibility vision of fostering family stability, supporting child empowerment and advancing education, all in alignment with the People and Society pillar of Oman



The event provided National Finance with a valuable platform to highlight the importance of nurturing financial literacy.

Vision 2040. Held from October 14-16, 2025, the event provided National Finance with a valuable platform to highlight the importance of nurturing financial literacy and responsible money habits from an early age; key foundations for sustainable community well-being and long-term socio-economic progress. The company’s booth offered a lively experience, featuring fun financial literacy games for children, spinning wheel challenges and exciting prizes; and an interactive wall where young participants shared their aspirations for the future. Adding to the engaging atmosphere, visitors could access

a QR code linking directly to National Finance’s website for more information about its services, while on-site representatives actively interacted with attendees, addressed queries and shared insights into the company’s comprehensive range of financing solutions. Commenting on the company’s participation, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer at National Finance, stated: “It was a proud moment for us to take part in the Oman Childhood Conference, where meaningful discussions focused on empowering children through modern technological advancements. At National Finance, we firmly believe that children are the foundation upon which the nation’s future is built.

Al Mouj Muscat honours remarkable role of Omani women in its success

MUSCAT: At Al Mouj Muscat, the Sultanate of Oman’s premier lifestyle destination, the spirit of Omani Women’s Day is more than a celebration — it is embedded in the company’s culture, championed by its leadership and reflected in the personal and professional journeys of the women who shape it. This year, the occasion serves not just as a tribute, but as a testament to the progress made, the potential realised and the pathways that continue to open. Across departments and disciplines, Omani women are not only contributing to Al Mouj Muscat’s success; they are showing that leadership in Oman’s future is not defined by gender, but by vision, contribution and character. In practice, this translates

to a workforce at Al Mouj Muscat where women are not only present but empowered, with approximately 40% of women in senior leadership and middle management. Together, they form a talent pipeline that is robust, dynamic and deeply rooted in Omani excellence.

THE PULSE OF PROGRESS Women now comprise 32% of the workforce at Al Mouj Muscat, with over 91% being Omani — figures that reflect a culture intentionally designed to create opportunity. From strategic planning and brand building to operations and executive support, women are present at every level of the organisation, with many having grown alongside it. Notably, the average tenure of female employees



Women now comprise 32% of the workforce at Al Mouj Muscat, with over 91% being Omanis.

is nine years which is a clear indicator of long-term engagement and mutual investment. In the past five years alone, 16 Omani women have joined the company, bringing with them fresh ideas and energy while contributing to a culture defined by both stability and innovation. At Al Mouj Muscat, professional development is more than policy — it’s an ecosystem. Access to leadership programmes, certifications and financial training ensures talent is not only recognised but nurtured. Family-friendly policies, structured mentorship and internal mobility frameworks create real space for sustainable, long-term growth. What makes progress

sustainable is not just the numbers, it’s the people behind them”, says Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat. “The women of Al Mouj Muscat are not only driving our success; they are helping shape the future of our organisation and, in many ways, we have inspired the private sector in Oman by setting an example in women empowerment. We remain deeply committed to enabling their growth and fostering an environment where ambition, inclusion and impact are not just ideals, but are the foundation of success we build on every day”. At the heart of these achievements are the stories of individuals whose careers reflect what’s possible when talent is met with trust.

SHORTTAKES

TEJARAH TALKS
SESSION TO EXPLORE
THE GCC ADVANTAGE

MUSCAT: A decade ago, global was the word that defined business ambition. Global markets, global supply chains, global reach. The world seemed borderless and scale was the measure of success.



HH SAYYID
DR ADHAM
AL SAID

Recent years have told a different story. Tariffs, trade disputes and supply-chain congestion have exposed the fragility of long-distance interdependence. Geography has returned as a practical advantage. Across many regions, collaboration closer to home is producing results once expected only from

globalisation. In Southeast Asia, coordinated industrial policies and shared digital frameworks under the ASEAN umbrella are supporting a steady rise in cross-border manufacturing and investment in regional data centres.

In Africa, the African Continental Free Trade Area is creating one of the world's largest trading zones, with the World Bank estimating it could increase intra-African trade by 33% once fully implemented.

In Europe, joint energy interconnections and rail modernisation projects are reinforcing resilience as much as competitiveness.

The logic applies in the Gulf as well.

Regional collaboration has long been central to economic development and is gaining renewed focus as countries link energy corridors, digital infrastructure and logistics networks. With industries pursuing decarbonization, digitalisation and diversification, cooperation is becoming both an economic and strategic necessity.

These themes will be examined at the next session of 'Tejarah Talks', set to take place at 11 am on Tuesday, October 21, 2025, at the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science.

Discussions will bring together His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Co-Founder, The Firm; Dr Firas al Abduwani, Director General, Renewable Energy & Hydrogen, Ministry of Energy and Minerals; and Essam al Sharji, General Manager, Corporate Affairs, be'ah.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 15

KARWA

Motors, Oman's leading vehicle manufacturer, has signed an agreement with Daimler Truck, one of the world's largest commercial vehicle manufacturers, to build Mercedes-Benz bus chassis at its facility in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

A strategic partnership agreement to this effect was signed by Dr Ibrahim al Balushi, CEO of Karwa Motors and Michael Dietz, President and CEO of Daimler Truck Middle East & Africa. The signing took place on the sidelines of Busworld Europe 2025, billed as the world's largest bus and coach expo, which concluded recently in Brussels.

The agreement designates Karwa Motors as an official Daimler Buses Approved Builder, formalising a direct supply arrangement for Mercedes-Benz bus chassis for both domestic operations in Oman and exports to international markets.

The latest agreement underscores the ambitions of Karwa Motors — a joint venture between Mowasalat Qatar, the state-owned transport company of Qatar; and the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the Sultanate of Oman's sovereign wealth fund — to forge strategic global partnerships.

Just last month, the JV signed a deal with Empl Fahrzeugwerk GmbH of Austria for the manufacture of a range of specialised vehicles, including firefighting and civil rescue trucks, as well as military vehicles designed for security and defence



Top executives of Karwa Motors and Diamler Truck at the signing in Brussels.

The agreement designates Karwa Motors as an official Daimler Buses Approved Builder, formalising a direct supply arrangement for Mercedes-Benz bus chassis for both domestic operations in Oman and exports to international markets.

applications in Oman.

Similar arrangements are also in place with The Armored Group (US), Amkodor (Belarus) and MAZ (Belarus). The deal with Daimler Truck, however, is the most significant to date.

Headquartered in Leinfelden-Echterdingen, Germany, Daimler Truck focuses exclusively on the design, production and servicing of trucks and buses.

The company operates globally through major brands such as Mercedes-Benz Trucks, Freightliner, Western Star, FUSO, BharatBenz, Thomas Built Buses and Setra; and reported revenues exceeding €55 billion in 2024.

"This agreement represents an important milestone in the development of our collaboration

with Karwa Motors", said Marcus Watts, Vice President, Daimler Buses, Daimler Truck Middle East & Africa.

"It demonstrates the strength of industrial partnerships in the region and lays the foundation for a robust, export-oriented manufacturing base in Oman".

The partnership between Daimler Truck and Karwa Motors reflects a shared commitment to industrial growth, technology exchange and sustainable development across the region.

It strengthens Oman's position as an emerging manufacturing hub while expanding Daimler Truck's footprint and customer offering throughout the Middle East and Africa, the European company added in a statement.

Knights Bay advances nickel exploration in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, OCT 15

UK-based Knights Bay Minerals (KBM) has reported significant progress in its nickel exploration campaign at Block 21 in Oman, as the company edges closer to establishing the Sultanate of Oman's first nickel pilot plant.

The update marks a major step towards defining a code-compliant mineral resource and advancing Oman's ambitions to develop its strategic minerals sector.

Despite harsh summer conditions, KBM's geology team has completed 12 diamond (HQ) boreholes within a systematic 100m x 100m drilling grid as part of a 33-hole programme at the Central Saaqa area.

The work aims to accurately define and measure a JORC- or NI 43-101-compliant mineral resource for the laterite-hosted nickel deposit.

The average ore body thickness recorded so far is 29.4 metres, with



A total of 103 samples have already been submitted for assay, with more than 200 core samples currently prepared for analytical testing.

an upper lateritic layer of about 11 metres. According to the company, these observations support previous estimates of around 79 million

tonnes of code-compliant resources. Once the new drilling data are fully incorporated, KBM expects to increase its measured and indicated resources to approximately 107.3 million tonnes by the end of 2024.

A total of 103 samples have already been submitted for assay, with more than 200 core samples currently prepared for analytical testing.

Preliminary results have been encouraging. Twelve earlier grab samples of magnetically altered lateritic sediment returned average grades of 0.88% nickel, 40% iron, 440 parts per million cobalt and 2% chromium — all above KBM's internal cut-off grade of 0.7% nickel.

The company has also noted high magnesium levels, consistent with expectations for the region's geology.

"While there may be some weathering effects influencing grades near surface, these results continue to validate our model for a large-scale, high-grade nickel laterite

system in Oman", KBM stated. The company is simultaneously conducting beneficiation and refining test work with international laboratories, including SGS and ERIEZ, to optimise ore recovery and processing methods.

Initial magnetic separation tests produced results that were "too strong", prompting the company to recalibrate its equipment to lower magnetic forces between 600 and 800 gauss.

In a separate round of test work, nine composite samples from across Block 21 — including Shannah, Ibra, East Ibra and Central Saaqa — achieved direct nickel recoveries of between 90% and 95%, except for one altered magnetic lateritic sample, which recorded around 45%.

KBM described the outcomes as "outstanding", reinforcing confidence in the metallurgical potential of Omani laterites.

The next stage of the project

involves sending a 25-tonne bulk sample for pilot-scale refining, which is expected to produce approximately 250 kilogrammes of mixed hydroxide precipitate (MHP) or metal, depending on the availability of an electrowinning circuit.

If successful, the pilot project would pave the way for a commercial-scale facility — potentially positioning Oman as a future player in the regional nickel value chain, amidst growing global demand for battery minerals.

Knights Bay Minerals first commenced exploratory drilling at Block 21 in 2023, following its acquisition of rights over the 1,200-square-kilometre concession.

The project aligns with Oman's national strategy to diversify its economy through the sustainable development of its mining and minerals industries, particularly in critical minerals such as nickel, cobalt and chromium.

LITTLE IMPACT

Trump targets China cooking oil trade



US President Donald Trump said he was considering terminating some trade ties with China, singling out cooking oil, which traders and analysts said would have little impact as such shipments had already plummeted from China over the past year.

"I believe that China purposefully not buying our Soybeans, and causing difficulty for our Soybean Farmers, is an Economically Hostile Act. — Reuters

CURTAIL DEMAND

Oil down as market weighs excess supply



Oil prices edged lower on Wednesday, as investors weighed the International Energy Agency's prediction of a supply surplus in 2026 and trade tensions between the US and China that could curtail demand.

Brent crude futures were down 15 cents, or 0.2%, to \$62.24 a barrel at 10:47 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate futures were down 6 cents, or 0.1%, to \$58.64 a barrel. — Reuters

REINFORCED MOMENTUM

Gold rises as trade tensions renew



Gold prices rose on Wednesday, remaining near record levels, as investors turned to the precious metal, a safe haven, amidst renewed US-China trade tensions and increased global uncertainty. Expectations of a further US interest rate cut reinforced this momentum. Spot gold rose 0.4 per cent to \$4,155.99 per ounce. US gold futures for December delivery rose 0.3 per cent to \$4,174.30. — ONA

OPINION

Franchising can enhance entrepreneurship in Oman



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI.

CHAMBERS of commerce and industry around the world play a major role in integrated strategic media work. Although these institutions are not primarily media outlets, they have a significant impact in supporting and guiding economic and sectoral media by focusing on awareness and media education. This role lies in disseminating economic and commercial information relevant to chamber members, including traders, industrialists, investors and other stakeholders. They also produce reports, bulletins, articles and interviews that highlight market issues and raise public awareness of the role of the private sector in development. The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) plays a major media role in this regard. Through franchising, successful small projects can be transformed into national franchises. This is a strategic investment that can spread success among young people, build competitive national brands and contribute to economic diversification. It also links innovation, entrepreneurship and local investment. Today, OCCI takes diverse steps to promote Omani brands, which are no less popular than other Gulf and Arab brands. These brands can be promoted in Western and

Asian markets, where Oman is renowned for producing high-quality food, beverages and sweets. These products and services can find markets in other countries. Through these products, Omani brands can be built and compete in local, regional and international markets, doubling their added value in economic activities. Franchising can enhance entrepreneurship in the country. Thus, the Chamber organises some events and exhibitions that attract attendees through modern communications and technology channels. This confirms the desire of Omani entrepreneurs and traders to learn about the quality of goods and services provided by institutions to consumers worldwide, most of which are characterised by quality, strong standards and privileged content. Hundreds of companies and brands, from various economic sectors, result in the signing of more commercial contracts and the granting of franchise rights during organising such events. Complementing this effort, various financial institutions assist such initiatives and provide the necessary financing for entrepreneurs wishing to obtain a commercial franchise. At such events, agreements are signed to benefit from different products and services offered. These steps expand Omani-international economic relations, provide opportunities

Through franchising, successful small projects can be transformed into national franchises. This is a strategic investment that can spread success among young people, build competitive national brands and contribute to economic diversification. It also links innovation, entrepreneurship and local investment.

for cooperation between institutions in countries, strengthen national companies in quantitative and qualitative expansion; and accelerate the pace of work in various available commercial fields. These commercial ventures represent qualitative opportunities for cooperation between Omani and other traders; and business owners in various sectors, including industry, tourism, logistics, technology, renewable energy and others. They provide both sides with opportunities to exchange information and expertise; and obtain commercial franchise rights in local markets. Business between the Sultanate of Oman and other countries has expanded over the past decades following the establishment of Joint Business Councils. These councils have continued their work since establishment, opening direct trade channels between Omani traders and business leaders, both male and female. This has contributed to strengthening the role of the private sector between Oman and other countries; and provided opportunities for the companies to enhance their investments and establish companies outside their headquarters, while providing a business environment characterised by greater flexibility in production, manufacturing, promotion and marketing operations.

CHINA BRINGS SHIPPING BATTLE TO US CAPITAL MARKET

KA SING CHAN

China has opened a new front in the epic maritime battle with the US: the capital market. Beijing matched Washington's port fees but is targeting entities with American ownership. That might hit major firms with New York-traded stock. How the rules are enforced will matter, but China is showing it will defend its shipping dominance even at the risk of disrupting global trade. Maritime tensions between the world's two largest economies kicked off in March, when President Donald Trump's administration unveiled plans to levy special docking fees at American ports for Chinese-built or Chinese-flagged vessels. The aim was to bolster US shipbuilders, which have a 0.1% global market share versus 53% from Chinese rivals. But following months of industry pushback, Washington ended up diluting the measures, which went into effect on Tuesday, by significantly easing fees from initial proposals and exempting many US-based operators. Nevertheless, Beijing has retaliated with reciprocal port levies on US-linked vessels. While the fees are nearly identical to Washington's, the new rules apply to vessels that are owned or operated by entities that are 25% or more owned by American businesses or individuals. It's a clever move: while US-made ships account for just 4% of the global fleet, firms owning or chartering ships that might be impacted include Australia's BHP and Brazil's Vale, both of which have American depositary receipts trading in New York. If so, HSBC analysts reckon that will likely lead to a spike in freight rates. That's potentially far more disruptive than the impact of the US fees. Shipping data firm Alphaliner estimates that the latter could cost up to \$3.2 billion in 2026 for the top 10 carriers including MSC and CMA CGM, with China COSCO Shipping bearing the brunt. Moreover, Maersk and others have already switched China-linked ships out of their US shipping lanes. Perhaps as a show of power, officials in Beijing also on Tuesday sanctioned five US-linked subsidiaries of South Korea's Hanwha Ocean which it accused of assisting and supporting a US probe into Chinese trade practices. Notably, Hanwha recently pledged to invest \$5 billion to expand its American shipyard in Philadelphia. — Reuters

How the rules are enforced will matter, but China is showing it will defend its shipping dominance even at the risk of disrupting global trade.

Will the ‘Brit card’ redefine privacy in the UK?

WITH the aim to provide UK citizens and legal residents with a smartphone-based identity card, the Prime Minister, Keir Starmer has announced plans for a digital ID system, or so-called ‘Brit card’. By the end of the current parliament, digital ID is set to become mandatory for ‘right to work’ checks. The government says it will streamline access to services like driving licences, childcare, welfare and tax records while combating illegal working, a key factor in small boat crossings to the UK. These have continued despite various measures put in place to control — even with the help of France where the migrants embark. Potential benefits: Digital IDs could reduce bureaucratic friction, improve verification for employers and protect against fraud. Countries like Denmark and Estonia have shown the potential benefits: Danish students are able to automatically retrieve job or educational qualification, whilst Estonians can access health records and child benefits seamlessly. Elsewhere, India has reportedly saved around £10 billion (£7.43 billion) annually through similar, adjacent schemes by reducing welfare fraud. Supporters have argued the UK system could deliver similar efficiencies while helping employers comply with ‘right to work’ requirement. The Post Office is even exploring the option of offering digital services through its 11,500 branches, thereby extending support to those struggling with digital access. It also called on the government to “make post offices the trusted place for essential government services, like digital ID or pharmacy prescription collection”. As Neil Brocklehurst, Post Office chief executive said: “Like any modern retailer, we must evolve to meet customer demand and sell the product and services which will drive revenue for the postmasters and partners who operate our branch network”.



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

The scheme has faced intense public scrutiny since its announcement, with over two million people having already signed a petition opposing mandatory digital ID within just days of the plan being announced.



Protesters hold signs during a ‘No to Digital ID’ demonstration near to the Labour Party Conference in Liverpool, Britain. — Reuters

Meanwhile, tech leaders like Janine Hirt, the chief executive of Fintech's industry body, Innovate Finance, have expressed the potential for innovation and secure data sharing if the system is designed with competition in mind. Hirt said: “It is vital that the roll-out of digital ID supports a competitive market, underpinned by a trust framework, not via a monopoly or costly State solution”. Mounting public backlash: Yet, she has also recognised that ‘the decision to mandate government ID, however, risks the discussion being focused on civil liberty and sovereignty — rather than the utility and innovation this technology can bring to people across the UK’. And she is not alone in thinking so. The scheme has faced intense public scrutiny since its announcement, with over two million people having already signed a petition opposing mandatory digital ID within just days of the plan being announced. There is a great deal of concern around the matter of privacy, mass surveillance and growing cybersecurity threats, with experts warning that centralising personal

data creates an irresistible target for hackers. Professor Alan Woodward from Surrey University cautioned that a national ID database could become a “huge target” for cyber crime, while civil liberties groups have labelled the system a “nationwide honeypot for cyber criminals”. Civil liberties advocates warn that the system carries a significant risk of “function creep”. As Hirt argued, “a digital ID could provide a useful identity attribute, but if it becomes the de facto scheme, it risks being expanded beyond its original intent into banking, healthcare, housing or even voting”. The concern is that once the infrastructure exists, it could be used to track citizens' movements and interactions more extensively than initially promised. The Labour government insists the scheme will improve security and access, with Starmer labelling it an “enormous opportunity”. The leader of the Conservative opposition, Kemi Badenoch sees it differently. She said that “a compulsory digital ID hands the state too much power over ordinary people's lives”.

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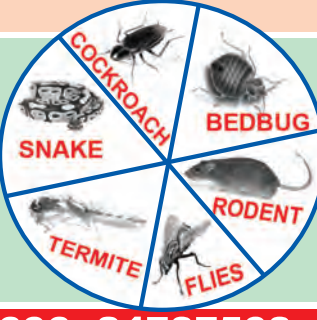
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ANNOUNCEMENT

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CAPITAL REDUCTION

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company GET CONSULTANTS (LLC), which is registered with the Commercial Registration No. 1343728, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials 150,000.000 to 10,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry within 30 days from the date hereof.

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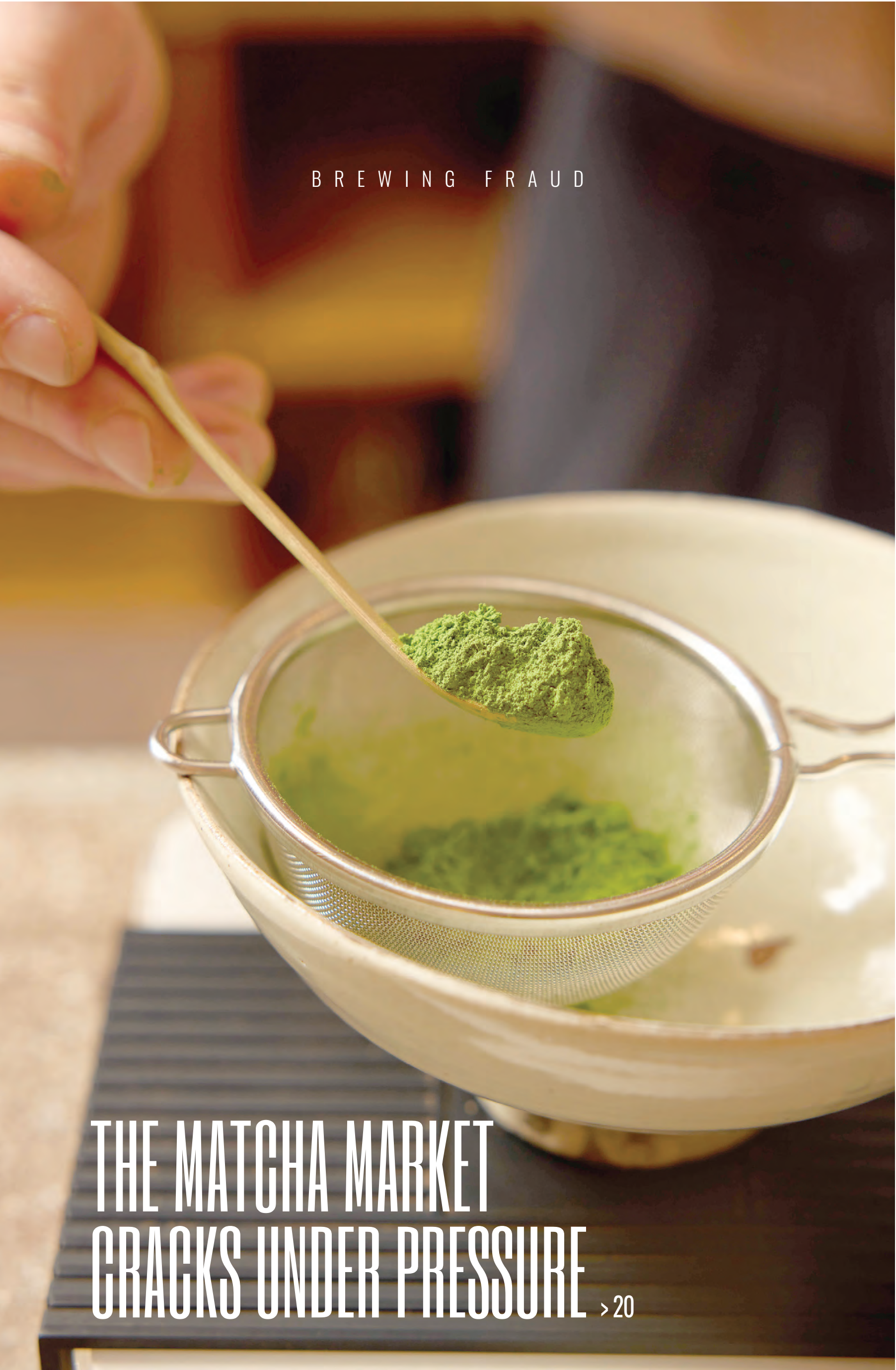
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ART/LIFE



B R E W I N G F R A U D

THE MATCHA MARKET CRACKS UNDER PRESSURE > 20

CHANGING WORLD

Will we be able to discern genuine content from AI generated ones?



SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
The writer is a Senior Editor at the Oman Daily Observer.

The human mind’s ability to discern genuine content from AI-generated ones, especially when used for trolls or memes, is a complex and evolving challenge.

While we possess inherent social and cognitive mechanisms for detecting deception, the sophistication of AI in generating realistic and nuanced content is rapidly advancing, making differentiation increasingly difficult.

This difficulty stems from AI’s capacity to mimic human language, tone and even emotional expressions with high fidelity, blurring the lines between authentic human interaction and synthetic creation.

Last week, the queen of my house approached me, asking for RO 300 for investment purposes. Curious, I inquired about the type of investment she had in mind. She mentioned seeing a video of a senior official promising to double the investment within a few days.

After watching the video, I recognised the senior official but quickly informed her that it was an AI-generated video with no truth behind it. She then decided to learn more about AI.

Later that evening, she sent me a video of a man claiming to be my brother and urged me to come home quickly, as I had never mentioned having a brother.

As I was preparing to drive home, she called me and revealed that it was an AI prank and there was no man waiting for me.

The ongoing development of AI models, particularly in areas like natural language processing and generative adversarial networks (GANs), allows for the creation of highly convincing deepfakes and AI-generated text that can be indistinguishable from human-produced content to the untrained eye.

This raises significant concerns about the potential for AI to be used to spread misinformation, manipulate public opinion and engage in targeted harassment through sophisticated forms of mockery or impersonation.

While experienced human reviewers can sometimes identify AI-generated content based on characteristics like “incoherent content”, “grammatical errors”, or “insufficient evidence-based claims”, these indicators are not always present or consistently recognised.

The use of paraphrasing tools further complicates detection, as they can alter AI-generated text to make it appear more human-like, reducing the effectiveness of both human and AI detectors.

The continuous “arms race” between AI generators and detectors means that as AI generation improves, so too must detection methods, making it an ongoing challenge for humans to keep pace.

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



FASHION

Actor Salman Khan presents a creation by designer Vikram Phadnis, who celebrated 35 glorious years in fashion, in Mumbai. — AFP



CUTE MENACE

The raccoon is an ‘invasive species’. Its proliferation in France, which nothing seems to be able to stop, is disrupting the local wildlife — AFP



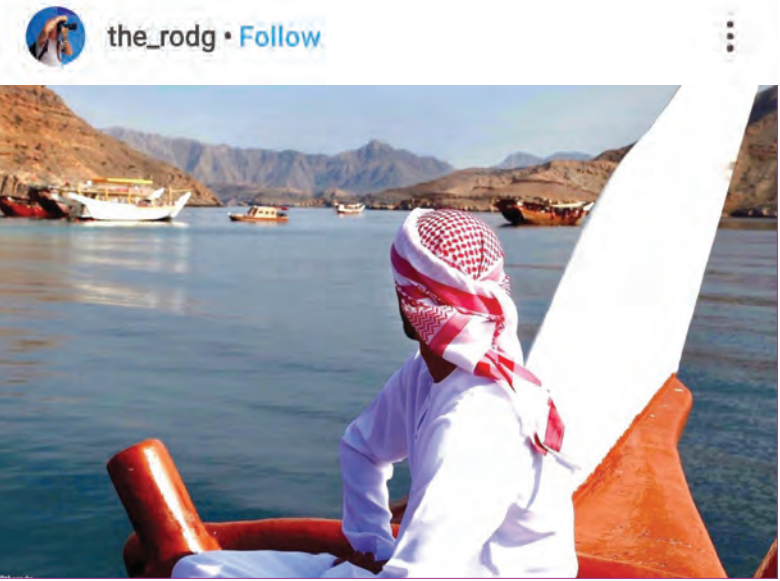
FESTIVAL

Workers prepare laddu, a sweet for sale at a production unit ahead of the celebrations of Diwali, a Hindu festival of lights, in Chennai. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Cradling waves



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Qatar revealed as owner of famed Courbet self-portrait



An attendee takes a photograph with a mobile telephone of Gustave Courbet's oil-on-canvas "The Desperate Man" exhibited at the Musee d'Orsay, in Paris. — AFP

Qatar has revealed itself as the owner of a famous self-portrait by French realist master Gustave Courbet and will loan the painting to Paris's Musee d'Orsay for five years, museum officials said on Monday.

"The Desperate Man" depicts Courbet with a wild-eyed stare looking out of the canvas in a work that is one of his best known alongside "The Stone Breakers" and "The Origin of the World".

It was exhibited in Frankfurt, Germany, in 2010 in a show devoted to the painter and was last seen in France in a major retrospective in 2007-2008, which also travelled to New York.

At this time, the painting was loaned by an unknown private collector with help from French bank BNP Paribas, but has since been acquired by Qatar Museums, a state body responsible for developing the art scene in the oil-rich emirate.

The Musee d'Orsay, which owns around 30 Courbet paintings, will exhibit "The Desperate Man" ("Le Désespéré") from Tuesday for five years before it transfers to its long-term home in Doha, the museum said.

Shaikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani, head of Qatar Museums and sister of the Gulf state's ruler, said the painting was destined for the Art Mill Museum and "will travel regularly between Doha and Paris in the future".

The Art Mill Museum in Doha is part of the emirate's plan to become a Middle Eastern art hub, with the vast complex designed by Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena scheduled to open in 2030.

As head of Qatar Museums, Shaikha Al Mayassa is one of the world's biggest contemporary art buyers, accumulating a multi-billion-dollar portfolio.

— AFP



A person uses an electronic system for tickets for a screening of French director Cedric Klapisch's dramatic comedy La venue de l'avenir at a cinema in Moscow. — AFP

ON a cold autumn evening in Moscow, Alexandra was headed to a cinema, hoping to escape reality for a few hours by taking in a new French comedy.

With Hollywood boycotting the Russian market over Moscow's offensive on Ukraine, French films are one of the few cultural windows Russians have left to the West.

And even as relations between Paris and Moscow have sunk to their lowest in decades, French cinema has retained its popularity as aficionados seek a big-screen dose of "art de vivre", the French philosophy of living well and savouring the moment.

"French films create a colourful bubble where I want to stay", Alexandra said, allowing her to "pause my thoughts about what's going on in the world".

The Moscow cinema hall showing Cedric Klapisch's dramatic comedy "Colours of Time" — recently premiered at the Cannes Film Festival — was crowded.

Other French films on offer range from fresh releases such as Luc Besson's "Dracula" and Quentin Dupieux's "The Piano Accident", to Rene Clement's cult classic "Purple Noon", starring Alain Delon.

Russia was the top export market for French films in 2023 and second in 2024 by ticket sales, according to Unifrance, a French cultural body promoting cinema abroad.

This comes even as pirate copies of Hollywood films were still being shown in some Russian cinemas.

'LIFE-SAVING'

The popularity has endured even as France hit Russia with an unprecedented number of sanctions over the Ukraine offensive; and the Kremlin and Elysee deploy increasingly sharp rhetoric against each other.

French President Emmanuel Macron called his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin an "ogre" and "predator" earlier this year — drawing rebukes from officials in Moscow.

But big box office releases have kept flowing, with 73 French films hitting Russian

FRENCH CINEMA BOOMS IN RUSSIA DESPITE POLITICAL RIFT

And even as relations between Paris and Moscow have sunk to their lowest in decades, French cinema has retained its popularity as aficionados seek a big-screen dose of "art de vivre", the French philosophy of living well and savouring the moment.

cinemas last year.

In 2023, animated film "Miraculous" scored more than three million viewers in Russia — the largest audience for a French film in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"It would be foolish in this situation to abandon the country that invented cinema", Konstantin Ernst, the sanctioned head of Russia's state-run Channel One, said.

"The subtlety, depth and aestheticism of French cinema are closely aligned with the Russian soul", he added.

Many Asian and Latin American producers have tried to fill the void in the Russian market by the formal absence of Hollywood movies — but with little success.

For Marina, a 33-year-old who works at a law firm, they have a "different energy".

"French or European cinema is closer to me in terms of its atmosphere and elegance", she said.

It is "essential, even life-saving", she added.

'DIFFERENT WAY OF LIVING'

Russians have for centuries sought to establish cultural bridges to France — "from French literature in the 19th century to the cinema that replaced it", Joel Chapron, a French expert on Russian cinema, said.

It is "a kind of cultural diplomacy", he added, offering a "glimpse into the culture they've always loved... and an alternative

to propaganda".

As Alexandra put it: "Interwoven for centuries, our two cultures are continuing their dialogue".

Even during the Cold War, French cinema was widely popular behind the Iron Curtain.

The 1952 swashbuckling comedy "Fanfan la Tulipe" starring Gerard Philippe attracted some 30 million viewers.

French actors have also remained high-profile celebrities in Russia. Disgraced star Gerard Depardieu was even granted citizenship in 2013.

Unifrance has defended its decision not to join Hollywood in boycotting the Russian market over the Ukraine offensive.

"Banning culture would mean severing ties with the Russian population", a spokesperson said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Cinema was a way of "providing a glimpse to another culture... and to a different way of living", they added.

Channel One's Ernst hailed that decision as "wise".

Distributors agree.

"Closing doors is never helpful", said Nadezhda Motina, president of Arna Media, which sells French films in Russia.

"We must show Russians another world with its values and bring a little sun into cold water", she said, referring to French writer Francoise Sagan's novel "Sunlight on Cold Water".

— AFP

FEATURES

Once consumed mainly in small, formal tea ceremonies, matcha is now mixed into fruity lattes and preyed on by counterfeiters. Can it survive its own popularity?



THE Matcha MARKET CRACKS UNDER PRESSURE

PETE WELLS

OVER four centuries, Japan built a tradition of drinking matcha that was based on four principles: wa, kei, sei and jaku, or harmony, respect, purity and tranquility.

It took just a few years for a worldwide matcha craze to upend those values and replace them with disharmony, disrespect, impurity and fraud. Highly respected Japanese firms are at war with scores of vendors who resell their matcha far above the normal retail price on Amazon, Facebook Marketplace and other sites. Others are hawking the tea trade’s equivalent of \$45 Chanel bags, counterfeit packages filled with third-rate product or with ordinary tea ground to a dull yellow dust.

Tea companies that have built their reputations over centuries are in despair. Marukyu Koyamaen, founded by Kyujiro Koyama in 1704, has been taking action against counterfeiters for eight years, fighting them in court and making its packages more difficult to copy.

Some of the fakes are filled with “low-quality powdered green tea,” Motoya Koyama, the company’s president and a direct descendant of the founder, said in an email interview. “It would be definitely a great harm to us if those customers who purchased these counterfeit products think that they are



produced by Marukyu Koyamaen.” Other practices, while not as deceptive, are wildly untraditional. Green lattes and smoothies are prepared with shortcuts (batched concentrate nicknamed batcha) and flavorings (banana bread!) that send ripples of horror down the spines of matcha purists. Baristas inhale so much airborne green powder that they joke about coming down with matcha lung. “It’s like the Wild West because there are so many unknowns and so many new contenders in the game,” said Sebastian Beckwith, an importer whose company, In Pursuit of Tea, has offered matcha for more than 20 years.

Matcha, in its most traditional and prized form, is tea that is shielded from the sun for several weeks before it is picked, steamed and ground to a powder between

Matcha, in its most traditional and prized form, is tea that is shielded from the sun for several weeks before it is picked, steamed and ground to a powder between granite millstones. The process is painstaking

granite millstones. The process is painstaking. The number of people in Japan for whom it is an everyday drink has never been large. About 80 per cent of the tea grown in the country is sencha, a whole-leaf green variety. Matcha’s share is about 6 per cent. It is very much a niche product.

In the past five years, it has become more popular abroad than it is at home, rocketing to stardom on TikTok and displacing coffee on cafe menus. Japan now exports more than half the matcha it grows. According to the market research firm NIQ, retail sales of matcha in the United States grew by 86 per cent over the past three years.

Wholesalers are fielding requests from coffee shops in Warsaw, Poland, and in Kazakhstan. Retailers sell out of new shipments in minutes. With demand streaking ahead of the limited supply, all kinds of shady practices have crept into the gulf.

Matcha labeling is almost completely unregulated, making it easier for less scrupulous operators to pass off second- and third-tier products as premium stuff. Previously unknown classifications, like imperial grade and barista grade, are popping up. Even “ceremonial grade,” which is widely used outside Japan, is an invention of American marketers with no formal definition.

The word matcha itself is open to interpretation these days. Although matcha is historically associated with Japan, powdered tea sold under that name is now made in Australia, Kenya and other countries. Starbucks buys its matcha from China and South Korea as well as Japan. There is brown matcha, black matcha and white matcha, in addition to old-fashioned matcha in the vibrant green color of a tree frog. Some of these products were on display at the North American Tea Conference in Charleston, South Carolina, last month.

To understand why farmers cannot simply keep all the overnight converts happy by tripling production, it’s useful to remember that the most coveted matcha is milled from the first harvest of spring, when the leaves are sweetest. “There’s really a supply shortage of first flush,” said Hannah Habes, founder of Matchaful, a New York-based retailer and wholesaler. According to Habes, first-flush matcha grown by a single farmer is the foundation of most of the lattes and other drinks sold at the seven Matchaful cafes. Buying directly from the producer or from well-established retailers is the best way to get what you’re paying for, tea experts say. — The New York Times