

OMAN
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SUNRISE 05:20 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 03:52 AM

DHUHR 12:11 PM

ASR 03:30 PM

MAGHRIB 06:58 PM

ISHA 08:20 PM

12
ALCARAZ
BEATS SINNER
TO WIN FRENCH
OPEN TITLE

INBRIEF

HM GREETSPRESIDENT OF PORTUGAL

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Dr Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa of the Portuguese Republic, on the occasion of his country's National Day.

In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to the President, wishing him more success in leading the friendly Portuguese people and meeting their aspirations for a stable and advanced life.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed the hope that relations of cooperation and partnership between the Sultanate of Oman and the Portuguese Republic would continue to grow and expand at all levels.

OMAN WINS INTERNATIONAL AWARD FOR SERVING HAJ PILGRIMS



Oman wins international award for serving Haj pilgrims

MECCA: The Sultanate of Oman has received the “Commitment to Health Capacity Award” presented by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Haj and Umrah, during the annual closing ceremony of Haj Season 1446 AH. The ceremony aimed to honour outstanding Haj affairs offices and non-profit organisations engaged in serving the pilgrims. The award was presented in recognition of the efforts made by the Omani Haj Mission in providing high-level preparedness and quality health services to pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman.

Every year the Omani Haj Mission is accompanied by a medical team from the Ministry of Health. The medical team comprises specialised health personnel, including doctors, nurses and pharmacists. The clinic set up by Omani team operates in coordination with counterparts in Saudi Arabia. During the ceremony, Dr Tawfiq Fawzan al Rabiah, Minister of Haj and Umrah of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, announced the 1447 AH Haj Season’s Preliminary Arrangements Document that was delivered to Haj affairs offices. The step, aimed to raise the level of preparedness for the next season of pilgrimage, deals with contracts and other arrangements like booking, establishing sites and integrating the service system. **SEE ALSO P2**

Khareef rains may land in Dhofar on Saturday



The khareef, or monsoon season, typically spans from June to September, bringing cool temperatures, light drizzles and dense fog to the region

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JUNE 9

EARLY SIGNS of the khareef season have begun to emerge over southern Oman, with climate models and satellite imagery indicating the likely arrival of rain-bearing clouds across Dhofar Governorate starting next Saturday. The announcement, made by noted weather researcher Mohammed al Barami, points to a possible early onset of the monsoon, bringing welcome news for tourism operators and local residents alike.

Al Barami stated that atmospheric activity is intensifying over the Arabian Sea, with initial cumulus cloud

formations observed near Salalah and adjacent coastal zones. He added: “The monsoon winds are expected to become active off the coast of Dhofar, leading to cloud build-up that may result in seasonal khareef rainfall, interspersed with convective formations capable of producing showers of varying intensity.” Satellite imagery supports these forecasts, showing cloud accumulation along the Dhofar coastline, especially around Salalah, Rakhout, and the nearby highlands. These developments are being closely watched as indicators of the approaching seasonal shift.

The khareef, or monsoon season, typically spans from June to September, bringing cool temperatures, light

drizzles and dense fog to the region — a striking climatic transformation that turns Dhofar’s barren mountains into green pastures. This unique weather phenomenon, rare in the Arabian Peninsula, makes Salalah and its surroundings a prime destination for eco-tourism and domestic travel.

Last year, the season attracted over 830,000 visitors, according to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, with peak arrivals recorded during July and August. Hoteliers and tourism operators across Salalah, Taqah and Mirbat have already begun scaling up preparations, including promotional offers, facility upgrades and coordination with local authorities.

Officials expect this year’s

khareef to witness an even greater influx of travellers, particularly if the rains arrive early. The ministry has emphasised its efforts to enhance visitor services, digital booking platforms, and emergency response systems in coordination with the Royal Oman Police and the Civil Aviation Authority.

The Oman Meteorology Department is expected to issue further updates later this week as models are refined.

As Dhofar prepares to enter one of its most celebrated seasons, residents and tourists alike are watching the skies with anticipation — and optimism that the coming weeks will mark the return of nature’s greenest show in the Sultanate of Oman.

Israeli forces seize Gaza aid boat carrying Greta Thunberg

JERUSALEM/ASHDOD: Israeli naval forces boarded and seized a charity vessel carrying Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, which had tried to break the naval blockade of the Gaza Strip on Monday.

The British-flagged yacht, Madleen, which is operated by the pro-Palestinian Freedom Flotilla Coalition, had aimed to deliver a symbolic amount of aid to Gaza later on Monday and raise international awareness of the humanitarian crisis there. “If you see this video,

we have been intercepted and kidnapped in international waters by Israeli occupational forces or forces that support Israel,” Thunberg, 22, said in a video released by the FCC, filmed before the vessel was captured.

“I urge all my friends, family and comrades to put pressure on the Swedish government to release me and the others as soon as possible.”

The Israeli Foreign Ministry confirmed that the vessel was under Israeli control. Israel has called



An Israeli soldier passes a bun to Greta Thunberg onboard ‘Madleen’ on Monday. — Reuters

Thunberg an “antisemite” and dismissed the aid ship as a stunt.

“The ‘selfie yacht’ of the ‘celebrities’ is safely making its way to the shores of Israel. The passengers are expected to return to their home countries,” the ministry wrote on X. All passengers were safe and unharmed, it later added: “They were provided with sandwiches and water. The show is over.”

A photograph showed the crew seated on the boat, all wearing life jackets, with their hands in the air.

Israel’s foreign ministry later distributed a photo showing Thunberg in a green hat and orange life vest, smiling while a soldier held out a sandwich.

The yacht is carrying a small shipment of humanitarian aid, including rice and baby formula. The Foreign Ministry said it would be taken to Gaza.

“The tiny amount of aid that was on the yacht and not consumed by the ‘celebrities’ will be transferred to Gaza through real humanitarian channels,” it wrote. **SEE P5**

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SHORTTAKES

2 OMANIS DROWN IN WADI AL HAWQAIN



Two Omanis drowned in Wadi Al Hawqain in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, said the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority in Al Batinah South Governorate, on Monday. Rescue teams from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority in Al Batinah South Governorate recovered the bodies of two citizens who drowned in Wadi Al Hawqain. The CDAA urges citizens and residents not to swim in undesignated areas to avoid tragic drowning accidents.

‘NO PHYSICAL CHALLENGE IS AN OBSTACLE’



Amaan Ahmed

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Amaan Ahmed, a six-year-old child prodigy from Indian School Al Seeb, is an assistive technology advocate, a motivational speaker and an academic achiever, who is redefining what it means to overcome barriers, ‘challenges are not real challenges but new opportunities’ that one can accept or reject. He is the youngest visually challenged student to use a laptop in a mainstream school-starting right from kindergarten, and is a nationally celebrated persona for showcasing the power of assistive technology in early education.

From memorising 200 digits of Pi, to winning three awards in his school’s talent fest Sargotsav, to winning the first place in Indian School Talent Fest (ISTF) and in Indian School Quiz (ISQUIZ), Amaan’s achievements span academics, tech and communication. He is also the record-holder with the India Book of Records for typing maximum words in a minute blindfolded, without using a screen reader. “Amaan’s story is a ‘turning scars into stars’ one and I hope he is continuously inspired by his surroundings and leaves some motivational vibes for his fellow beings,” says Nausheen, his mother. He is an academic Achiever as well. Has scored 100 per cent, in all subject assessments. He independently answers his assessments/ tests without needing a scribe with the help of assistive technology (screen readers). He is an avid reader as well, listens to audiobooks and possesses high order thinking skills and has excelled in mathematics, spellings and is an inspirational speaker/orator.

Omanis laud flawless Haj

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

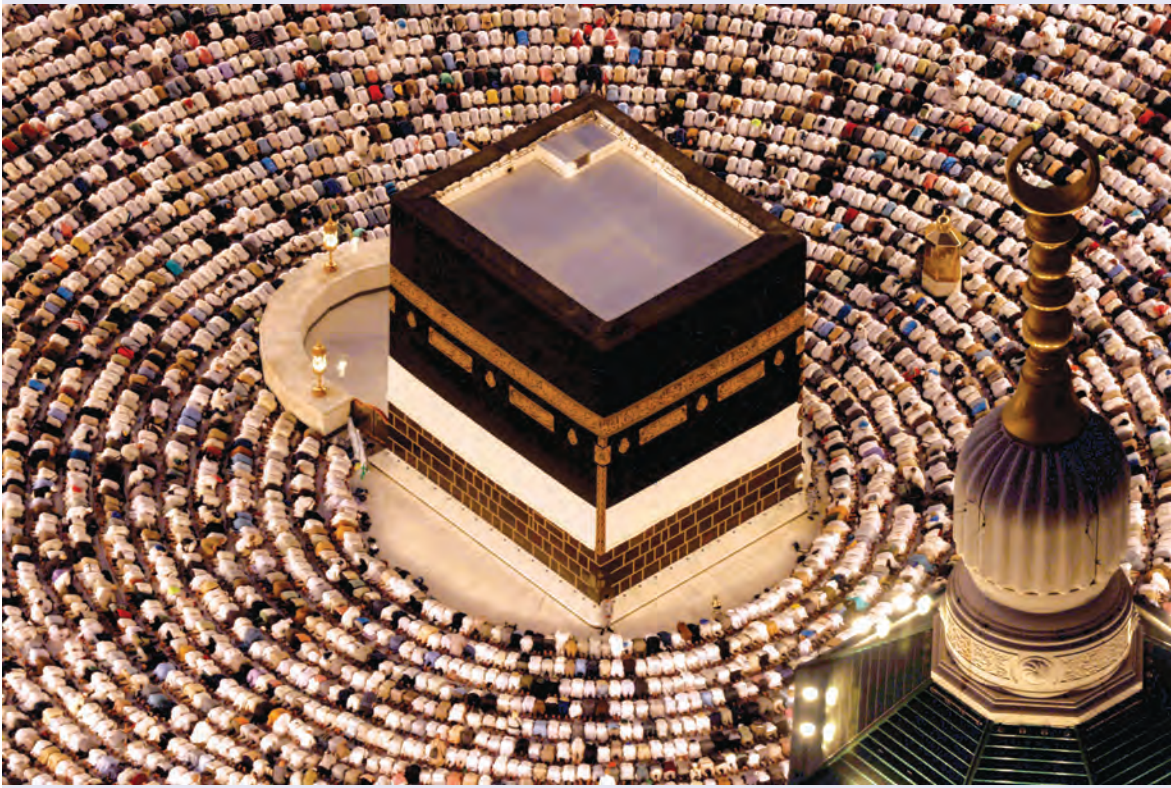
PILGRIMS FROM Oman will return on Thursday after the successful completion of the final rituals of Haj 1446, according to the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. Before leaving the holy land, the pilgrims would do another ‘Tawaf ‘ around the Holy Kaaba and hold special prayers for the suffering Palestinians.

Tawaf is the ritual of circumambulation of Mecca, in which the pilgrims offer prayers to the Almighty. Pilgrims will be able to complete it according to the dates of their return home. This year, Oman sent 14,000 pilgrims to the holy city comprising 13,530 Omanis and 470 expats.

“Our pilgrims who used the ministry portal for the same, will return in batches from Thursday after the final rituals,” said a spokesperson from the ministry. He further said that the beautiful moments of love and brotherhood that several millions of believers from different parts of the world spent in the holy land for six days, regardless of their nationality or language, are an example to the world.

The pilgrims, led by Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and Head of the Omani Haj Mission, reached well before the actual rituals so that they could carry out the step-by-step procedures of Haj 1446. Following successful departure of pilgrims, entry restrictions to Mecca will be lifted from Wednesday. Umrah permits for foreigners will be issued from June 14. However, those within Saudi Arabia will be allowed from the 11th.

Oman Haj Mission lauded Saudi Arabia for the flawless implementation of Haj. The Omani pilgrims have lauded the Saudi authorities, the Ministry of Haj and Umrah and its partners for immaculate organising of the Haj and for excellent crowd management. According to statistics,



Before leaving the holy land, the pilgrims would do another ‘Tawaf ‘ around the Holy Kaaba and hold special prayers for the suffering Palestinians.

over 1.4 million international pilgrims representing more than 130 countries arrived at the holy sites this week and were transported safely and efficiently via over 20,000 buses and the Mashair Train network.

“This is one of the largest coordinated people-movements on Earth. Pilgrims were able to fulfil their rites in peace and without crowding – on their own schedule,” he said.

Saudi Arabia’s mastery of crowd management is the result of decades of experience hosting the world’s largest recurring religious gathering. Every Haj season builds on the last, with extensive simulations, audits, and post-event analysis feeding into a dynamic system of continuous improvement.

The Kingdom’s ability to harmonise massive movement with minimal disruption is not only a logistical achievement – it’s a spiritual service.

“Everything felt so calm and organised,” said Fatima Ahmed, a first-time pilgrim. “I was nervous before arriving in Saudi, but the way we were guided made it feel like the journey was being carried out for us.”

The Kingdom’s Haj operation is now studied globally as a model for managing mass gatherings – religious or otherwise. With its seamless fusion of technology, infrastructure, cultural empathy, and governance, the Kingdom has shown the world how to manage crowds with care, precision, and purpose.

Women import bags worth RO 9.5m in 2024

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

Women in Oman imported handbags worth RO 9.5 million in 2024, marking a 37 per cent rise compared to the same period in 2023. The National Center for Statistics and Information said Oman has witnessed a notable diversification in the types of imported handbags ranging from materials to designs to international brands thus catering to the different ages and tastes.

Part of this increase is attributed to the growing online stores that have become key players in the market. These platforms have helped provide diverse options, competitive prices and convenient shipping across Oman.

Maryam al Muqbali, owner of one of the online stores, said that the demand for online handbag purchases has witnessed remarkable growth in recent years, especially during festivals.

“I love buying handbags, whether from stores or online. In Oman, there’s a wide variety of handbag stores, both in large shopping centres and small local markets, and each store offers different collections to suit all tastes.”

KHADIJA AL BALUSHI

“We’ve noticed that women are increasingly relying on online shopping because it offers attractive deals and prices, as well as multiple payment options and fast delivery services, all of which have significantly boosted sales. We always strive to import high-quality handbags that keep up with the latest fashion trends to meet the needs of women of all ages.”

Khadija al Balushi, one of the consumers, said, “I love buying handbags, whether from stores or online. In Oman, there’s a wide variety of handbag stores, both in large shopping centres and small local markets, and each store offers different collections to suit all tastes. I often look for handbags that suit my daily needs in terms of quality and durability. Sometimes, I resort to online stores if I want new designs or special offers. But at the same time, I love shopping in person because I can touch and see the

product up close before buying, which is important to me to ensure the product is genuine, as some online accounts might sell counterfeit items.”

She said sometimes she hesitate before buying, “because I’m not sure about the product’s quality, so I focus on reading reviews and others’ experiences before making a purchase. Nevertheless, online shopping has made many things easier for us, especially when time is tight.”

She said she has both original and imitation handbags, noting that she prefers the originals. She explained that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between original and fakes. She believes that the genuine product is worth the price. This increase comes within the context of the continuous growth of the Omani consumer market, especially during holidays, vacations and social occasions, which are periods that typically see increased demand for such products.

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SHORT TAKES



HEAVY RAINFALL CONTINUES IN SEVERAL WILAYATS

MUSCAT: Rains continued to fall in several wilayats across the Sultanate of Oman’s governorates causing several wadis to overflow, on Monday.

Rainfall continued in several villages in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq in Al Batinah South Governorate for the second day on Monday. The rainfall was concentrated across the wilayat’s centre and Wadi Bani Auf causing several wadis to overflow. Some villages also witnessed rainfall of varying intensity.

Rainfall ranging from heavy to moderate was reported in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, with heavy rains concentrated on the Eastern Mountain and the villages of Jabal Shams, resulting in the overflowing of Wadi Al Madaam and Wadi Shama. Rain also fell on the village of Bani Subh and the Eastern Mountain. The Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar witnessed moderate to heavy rainfall. Moderate to heavy rains were also reported in Hail Al Masbat area leading to the flow of wadis in the Khab Hail Mahlab area and other areas.

Light scattered rains were reported in Saiq, Saih Qatna, Al Sharihah, Al Aqar and Al Ain in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

In Al Batinah North Governorate, moderate to heavy rains fell on the mountainous areas of Wadi Haibi in the Wilayat of Suhar and on the tops of mountains including Wadi Al Halti causing many wadis to flow. Scattered rains also fell on Wadi Al Sarmi in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah.



FAREWELL TO EID

People gather around the cannon after a “feast” on the fourth day of Eid. Cannon firing marks the end of Eid Al Adha in Fanja.

PHOTO BY
ABDUL WAHID AL HAMDANI

Sorouh residential projects work in full swing

THE TOTAL INVESTMENT VALUE OF THE PROJECT EXCEEDS RO 600 MILLION COVERING A VAST AREA OF OVER 6 MILLION SQUARE METRES

YOUSUF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

EIGHTEEN projects of the Sorouh Integrated Neighbourhoods and Housing Schemes Initiative have made significant progress in different governorates with some of them nearing completion of the first phase and ready to deliver housing units. The total investment value of the project exceeds RO 600 million covering a vast area of over 6 million square metres.

Habiba al Amri, Project Engineer at the Sorouh Initiative, said that construction and infrastructure work on the integrated residential neighbourhoods is in full swing across various governorates. “Among the most prominent projects currently witnessing remarkable progress is the Al Azm neighbourhood in Al Rustaq, where 100 per cent of the units offered have been sold with approximately 40 per cent of the construction work completed in the first phase and the delivery is scheduled for June 2026. Construction work is also proceeding at a rapid pace in the Al Samou neighbourhood in Al Mudhaibi, which has also recorded full sales. The first phase is almost 20 per cent complete with delivery scheduled for December 2026.”

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning confirmed that the projects are not limited to their urban aspect alone, but also involve effective employment of national cadres with more than 360 Omanis working on the implementation of Sorouh projects.

In addition, more than 145 small and medium enterprises have benefited from supply and contracting opportunities in 18 projects.

In this regard, Sorouh represents a significant economic and social driver in the governorates, boosting local economy, providing job opportunities and supporting entrepreneurs.

The ministry announced that the first phase of Sorouh involves 18 projects on a total area of over 6



More than 360 Omanis are working in Sorouh projects. In addition, more than 145 small and medium enterprises have benefited from supply and contracting opportunities in 18 projects.

“Among the most prominent projects currently witnessing remarkable progress is the Al Azm neighbourhood in Al Rustaq, where 100 per cent of the units offered have been sold with approximately 40 per cent of the construction work completed in the first phase and the delivery is scheduled for June 2026.

HABIBA AL AMRI
Project Engineer at the Sorouh Initiative

million square metres with an investment value exceeding RO 600 million benefiting more than 10,000 families.

The ministry as signed 44 cooperation agreements to implement infrastructure works in several integrated residential neighbourhoods under the Sorouh initiative.

These agreements cover 15 integrated Sorouh projects in different governorates including those of Al Ula, Al Ezz, Al Masarat, Al Shurooq, Al Naseem, Al Nama, Al Salam, Al Azm, Al Samou, Al Noor, Al Luban, Al Majd, Al Ahd, Hisn Al Zain and Tilal Al Nakhil.

Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North, said: “The governorate attaches great importance to the integrated residential neighbourhood projects implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning across the governorates. Among these projects are Al Ezz neighbourhood in the Wilayat of Liwa and Al Majd neighbourhood in the Wilayat of

Suhar which embody a modern vision for providing integrated residential environments. The availability of services and integrated infrastructure meet citizens’ aspirations and keep pace with the rapid urban expansion in the governorate.”

Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, said: “Focusing on development and real estate projects in Al Dhahirah Governorate is a fundamental pillar of comprehensive development, given their pivotal impact in enhancing economic and social stability and providing modern urban environments that meet citizens’ needs and aspirations. The real estate development projects within the Sorouh initiative are not limited to urban development but also spur economic activity, attract investment and strengthen public-private partnerships. This contributes to generating job opportunities and empowering local communities in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.”

Employer Survey project 2025

Objective:
The Employer Survey Project aims to collect and analyze the opinions and expectations of employers regarding the skills and specializations of graduates from higher education institutions, in order to guide the development of academic and training programs, and enhance their alignment with labor market needs. This contributes to improving the quality of education and bridging the gaps between higher educational outcomes and the private sector's requirements."

Who is targeted in the Employer Survey?

Target Group:
All employers and recruitment officers across various economic sectors.
Large companies and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that employ graduates from higher education institutions.

Steps to Participate:

1 Access to the employers' survey link

2 Completing the electronic questionnaire

A PUBLIC GARDEN WITHIN FALAJ DARIS HAS FURTHER ENHANCED ITS ATTRACTION

NIZWA HAS ACHIEVED REMARKABLE PROGRESS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECTS ARE STRATEGICALLY DESIGNED TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL ECONOMIES

NIZWA'S OPERATIONAL PROJECTS ATTRACTED RO 504M INVESTMENTS AND GENERATED 6,100 JOBS

MADAYN SETTING UP RO 1.2M ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPLEX, STUDYING AN INTEGRATED RESIDENTIAL ZONE

Nizwa: Bridging sustainable development and heritage



The Wilayat of Nizwa is an attractive investment hub for tourism and infrastructure projects



Harat Al Aqr has transformed into a flagship example of youth empowerment,

THE WILAYAT OF NIZWA in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah stands as one of Oman's most prominent cultural and touristic destinations, renowned for its rich historical legacy and archaeological landmarks that chronicle significant chapters of the nation's past.

The iconic Nizwa Fort dominates the historical landscape as a masterpiece of traditional Omani architecture. Adjacent to the fort, the vibrant Nizwa Souq showcases exceptional local craftsmanship, from intricately forged daggers and handcrafted silverware to traditional markets selling livestock, fresh produce and artisanal goods.

Falaj Daris, recognised on Unesco's World Heritage list as one of Oman's largest aflaj irrigation systems, represents another jewel in Nizwa's heritage crown. This ancient water network sustains extensive agricultural lands while demonstrating centuries-old Omani ingenuity in sustainable water management. The recent development of a public garden within the falaj has further enhanced its ecological and touristic value.

Nizwa's strategic geographical location, combined with its diverse topography of wadis, mountains and verdant oases, has established it as a prime destination for cultural and eco-tourism. These natural assets, along with progressive development initiatives, have positioned the Wilayat of Nizwa as an attractive investment hub for tourism and infrastructure projects.

Nizwa has achieved remarkable progress in sustainable development through strategic initiatives. These initiatives have further enhanced urban infrastructure and quality of life.

Significant development projects currently under way include Al Dakhiliyah Square launched earlier this year, an Integrated Public Transport Station, and restoration works in Harat Al Aqr. The Public Garden Project has reached 40 per cent completion, collectively aiming to elevate Nizwa's status as Oman's premier cultural-tourism destination while creating new economic opportunities.

Harat Al Aqr has transformed into a flagship example of youth

empowerment, hosting 78 entrepreneurial ventures that have generated over 300 jobs for young Omanis.

Shaikh Saleh bin Dhiyab al Rubaiee, Wali of Nizwa, said that developmental projects are strategically designed to strengthen local economies while preserving cultural heritage. He highlighted how historical neighbourhood restoration forms a cornerstone of Nizwa's economic strategy, serving the dual purpose of safeguarding cultural identity through architectural conservation while creating employment via tourism and SME development.

Nizwa Industrial City, under the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), represents another facet of Nizwa's growth with 186 operational projects, attracting RO 504 million in cumulative investments and generating 6,100 jobs with a 45-per cent Omanisation rate.

Ishaq bin Ibrahim al Kharousi, acting Director-General, revealed Madayn's upcoming RO 1.2 million Entrepreneurial Complex and ongoing studies for an integrated residential zone within the industrial city.

Ahlam bint Hamad al Qasabiyah, Director of the Heritage and Tourism Department in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, outlined the ministry's comprehensive SME support programmes including streamlined licensing procedures, specialised training initiatives and incentive packages for heritage hospitality ventures.

She noted how the conversion of historical homes into heritage inns perfectly illustrates the purple economy approach, citing 600,000 visitors to Harat Al Aqr in the first quarter of 2023 as evidence of this model's success in merging cultural preservation with economic viability. The ministry continues to prioritise fortress restorations and historical documentation to enhance Oman's sustainable tourism offerings while safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. This comprehensive development approach positions Nizwa as a model for balanced sustainable growth, creating new opportunities while maintaining the unique identity. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



The image shows smoke rising from a Singapore-flagged cargo ship in the Indian Ocean. — Reuters

Indian navy deploys on burning container ship

NEW DELHI: India deployed coast guard aircraft and a warship on Monday after a Singapore-flagged container ship caught fire off the southern coast, the defence ministry said, with four crew members missing. Singapore’s Maritime and Port Authority (MPA) said that there were “some injuries” among the crew, with four members unaccounted for.

Photographs taken by a coast guard plane showed a thick plume of billowing black smoke and containers that had seemingly been hurled up by a powerful explosion on board. “Fire incident reported onboard Singapore-flagged container vessel MV Wan Hai 503,” India’s defence ministry said, adding that it had diverted a destroyer to aid the stricken ship.

Singapore’s MPA said that, of the total crew of 22, 18 had been “accounted for and are in the process of being transferred from lifeboats to a passing vessel”, adding that “some injuries have been reported among them”. “The Indian Coast Guard and Indian Navy are rendering assistance to the crew and conducting search and rescue operations for the missing crew,” the MPA said.

— AFP



South Sudanese soldiers stand in line on the streets of Juba. — Reuters

South Sudan to disarm youth in volatile state

JUBA: South Sudan’s army said on Monday it would carry out a voluntary then “forceful” disarmament of young people in an area where President Salva Kiir has announced a state of emergency. The young nation has been plagued by insecurity and poverty despite its oil riches.

Kiir declared a six-month emergency in Warrap State and Mayom County last week after a surge of inter-communal violence over cattle raids. The army has deployed forces to the area in order to conduct the disarmament, the South Sudan People’s Defence Forces (SSPDF) spokesperson Lul Ruai Koang told reporters in the capital, Juba.

Initially, it will be a “voluntary disarmament”, he said, allowing armed youth in the area a “grace period of one week to voluntarily start handing over their weapons”. Then, he said, “SSPDF forces will launch coordinated and simultaneous forceful disarmament exercises in Warrap and Mayom County”. — AFP

MALAYSIA BUS CRASH KILLS AT LEAST 15, MOSTLY STUDENTS

KUALA LUMPUR: A bus carrying university students back to their campus smashed into a minivan in northern Malaysia on Monday, killing at least 15 people, police and rescue services said.

Thirteen victims died at the scene near the town of Gerik, on the busy East-West Highway near the Thai border, while two died in hospital.

The accident is the deadliest in more than a decade on Malaysia’s hazardous roads and came as students were returning to school

after an Islamic public holiday over the weekend.

“It looked like the bus had lost control and hit the (minivan) from behind,” Perak State Police Chief Hisam Nordin said, based on initial investigations.

Images from the scene taken by the fire and rescue department showed a green bus overturned on its right side with a smashed rear end cover, while the red minivan had slid into a ditch, with its windows blown out.

“Some victims managed to get

out on their own, some victims were thrown out while others were still (trapped) in the bus,” the Perak state disaster management authority said in a statement. Rescuers had to use a hydraulic cutter to free people from the bus.

The death toll included 14 students from the Sultan Idris Education University (UPSI), while the last victim was a bus attendant, the emergency services said.

Thirty-three others were injured, with seven in critical condition taken to hospital, it added. — AFP

Türkiye slams Israel for intercepting aid boat

TÜRKİYE slammed Israel for intercepting a Gaza-bound boat carrying activists including Swedish campaigner Greta Thunberg early on Monday, describing it as a “heinous attack”. The Madleen left Italy on June 1 to raise awareness over food shortages in Gaza, which the United Nations has described as the “hungriest place on Earth”, with the entire population at risk of famine. “The intervention by Israeli forces on the ‘Madleen’ ship.. while sailing in international waters is a clear violation of international law,” Türkiye said, calling it as a “heinous attack” by the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In a statement, the Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC) said Israeli troops “forcibly intercepted” the vessel in international waters at 0102 GMT as it was approaching the Gaza Strip. Türkiye’s foreign ministry said there were Turkish nationals among those on board, with FFC’s website indicating there were 12 people from seven countries, including Türkiye. Two of them hold Turkish passports. Gaza’s Hamas rulers condemned the move in a statement that said the Madleen was being taken to the Israeli port of Ashdod.

A Turkish foreign ministry source said the boat was “expected to reach land in the evening” and that its consular officials had taken “the necessary initiatives to meet them as soon as they disembark from the ship and to ensure their release”. “We are also in contact with other countries whose citizens are on board. The families of our citizens are being regularly updated,” the source added.

The ministry earlier said Israel’s “aggressive and lawless attitude will not silence the voices defending human values” and that the international community’s “justified reaction to Israel’s genocidal policies, which use hunger as a weapon in Gaza and prevent the delivery of humanitarian aid, will continue”.

The boat’s interception came



Palestinians react following an Israeli strike, in the Saftawi neighbourhood, west of Jabalia. — AFP

just over 15 years after Israeli commandos staged a botched raid on the Mavi Marmara, a Turkish ship carrying activists to Gaza, killing 10 civilians — all of them Turkish nationals. The assault sparked a years-long diplomatic crisis between Türkiye and Israel, which only restored diplomatic ties in 2022 — in a reconciliation which has since been shattered by Israel’s war on Gaza’s rulers.

France on Monday said it would work to ensure the rapid return home of French citizens aboard a boat carrying aid bound for Gaza that was intercepted by Israeli security forces. President Emmanuel Macron has requested that the six French nationals aboard the Madleen “be allowed to return to France as soon as possible”, a presidential official said, asking not to be named, while Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said that Paris would work “to facilitate their swift return to France”.

Iran on Monday condemned Israel’s interception of a Gaza-bound

aid vessel carrying international activists, describing it as an act of piracy. “The assault on this flotilla — since it happened in international waters — is considered a form of piracy under international law,” foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei told a press briefing in Tehran.

On Saturday, Israeli forces had killed at least 36 Palestinians, six of them in a shooting near a US-backed aid distribution centre. The Israeli military said that troops had fired “warning shots” at individuals it said were “advancing in a way that endangered the troops”.

The shooting deaths were the latest reported near the aid centre run by the Gaza Humanitarian Fund (GHF) in the southern district of Rafah, and came after it resumed distributions following a brief suspension in the wake of similar deaths earlier this week.

The GHF, officially a private effort with opaque funding, began operations in late May as Israel partially eased a more than two-month-long aid blockade. — AFP

A Turkish foreign ministry source said the boat was “expected to reach land in the evening” and that its consular officials had taken “the necessary initiatives to meet them as soon as they disembark from the ship and to ensure their release”.

Iran plans to submit own nuclear proposal to US soon

TEHRAN: Iran said on Monday it will soon present a counter-proposal on a nuclear deal with the United States, after it had described Washington’s offer as containing “ambiguities”. Tehran and Washington have held five rounds of talks since April to thrash out a new nuclear accord to replace the deal with major powers that US President Donald Trump abandoned during his first term in 2018. The longtime foes have been locked in a diplomatic standoff over Iran’s uranium enrichment, with Tehran defending it as a “non-negotiable” right and Washington

describing it as a “red line”.

On May 31, after the fifth round of talks, Iran said it had received “elements” of a US proposal, with Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi later saying the text contained “ambiguities”. Foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei criticised the US proposal as “lacking elements” reflective of the previous rounds of negotiations, without providing further details. “We will soon submit our own proposed plan to the other side once it is finalised,” Baqaei told a weekly press briefing. “It is a proposal that is reasonable, logical



Iran’s Ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Reza Najafi (R) and Massimo Aparo, IAEA Head of the Department of Safeguards, speak in Vienna, Austria. — AFP

and balanced, and we strongly recommend that the American side value this opportunity.”

Also on Monday, Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi told state news agency IRNA that Iran’s response “is a framework for agreement”. “If we reach an understanding on this framework in principle, further extensive negotiations will begin on its details,” he added. Iran’s parliament speaker has said the US proposal failed to include the lifting of sanctions -- a key demand for Tehran, which has been reeling under their weight for years.

Trump, who has revived his “maximum pressure” campaign of sanctions on Iran since taking office in January, has repeatedly said Tehran will not be allowed any uranium enrichment under a potential deal.

On Wednesday, Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the US offer was “100 per cent against” notions of independence and self-reliance.

He insisted that uranium enrichment was “key” to Iran’s nuclear programme and that the US “cannot have a say” on the issue. — AFP

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney speaks during a news conference, in Ottawa. — AFP

CANADA TO HIT DEFENCE NATO SPENDING TARGET

TORONTO: Canada will hit Nato defence spending threshold of two per cent this year, Prime Minister Mark Carney said on Monday, warning that in a “darker” world, Canada must reduce its security dependence on the United States. “I am announcing today that Canada will achieve Nato’s 2 per cent target this year — half a decade ahead of schedule,” Carney said during a speech at the University of Toronto. “The threats that Canada faces are multiplying,” he added.

Carney’s pledge followed similar announcements by members of the alliance and comes after consistent pressure by US President Donald Trump for Nato members to spend more on defence. “In a darker, more competitive world, Canadian leadership will be defined not just by the strength of our values, but also by the value of our strength,” Carney said.

“The United States is beginning to monetise its hegemony: charging for access to its markets and reducing its (relative) contributions to our collective security,” Carney said, condemning Trump’s trade war. — AFP



A woman enters a polling station during the local elections in Kosjeric town. — AFP

SERBIAN TOWN VOTES IN KEY TEST FOR GOVERNMENT

KOSJERIC: Residents of a small Serbian town turned out in large numbers for a municipal election that posed a high-stakes test for the national government after months of student-led protests. The vote in Kosjeric was the first since the protests broke out against the governing nationalist party in November after 16 people died when the roof of a newly renovated train station collapsed in the city of Novi Sad. The governing Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) was challenged by the united independent candidates’ list United for Kosjeric, supported by student protest leaders, in the town of 10,000 people. Vucic said his SNS had won the election with more than 50 per cent of votes, but his opponents also claimed victory.

The town’s electoral commission had yet to publish official results late on Sunday. Vucic told a news conference in Belgrade: “We won because the people chose the state; because the people said: ‘You will not destroy Serbia!’” His opponents earlier rallied in Kosjeric, claiming victory themselves after the close of voting. “Victory has begun. Let all Serbia celebrate,” lead candidate Slavic Pantovic told a crowd. — AFP

SPAIN’S TOP PROSECUTOR CLOSER TO TRIAL OVER LEAK

MADRID: Spain’s top prosecutor moved closer on Monday to facing trial over a legal leaks case that has embarrassed Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez after a court ruled he may have breached judicial secrecy. Alvaro García Ortiz is suspected of leaking secret case files concerning the partner of Isabel Díaz Ayuso, the powerful conservative leader of the Madrid region — one of several controversies putting pressure on Sánchez’s minority left-wing government.

In March last year, Spanish media published a draft agreement between the public prosecutor’s office and the lawyer of businessman Alberto González Amador, who is under investigation for alleged tax fraud. According to the reports, Amador proposed a plea deal in which he would admit to the alleged offences in exchange for avoiding a criminal trial. Ayuso’s conservative opposition Popular Party (PP) has demanded Ortiz’s resignation and accused allies of

Sanchez of organising the leak. In a ruling seen on Monday, Supreme Court judge Angel Luis Hurtado said there is sufficient evidence to potentially send García Ortiz to trial, pointing to signs the attorney general disclosed details of a judicial investigation. The judge gave all parties involved 10 days to present comments or file appeals before deciding whether to refer Ortiz to a criminal court – the final procedural step before a formal trial. — AFP

Police order LA protesters in downtown to go home

POLICE declared all of downtown Los Angeles to be an unlawful assembly area and ordered protesters to go home on Sunday night after a third day of violence hit demonstrations against President Donald Trump’s immigration policy. National Guard troops — deployed by Trump at the weekend to help quell the protests in a move that California Governor Gavin Newsom called unlawful — guarded federal government buildings on Sunday. The unrest in Los Angeles has become a major flashpoint in Trump’s signature effort to clamp down on illegal immigration.

The Republican president has pledged to deport record numbers of people who are in the country illegally and to lock down the US-Mexico border, setting the border enforcement agency ICE a daily goal of arresting at least 3,000 migrants. California state and local officials, mainly Democrats, accuse Trump of inflaming initially small-scale protests by mounting a federal response. He calls the protesters insurrectionists.



Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) officers move in on demonstrators in front of LA City Hall. — Reuters

Los Angeles police said some protesters had thrown concrete projectiles, bottles and other items at police. Police declared several rallies to be unlawful assemblies and later extended that to include the whole downtown area

Demonstrators shouted “Shame on you!” at police and some appeared to throw objects, video images showed. One group blocked the 101 Freeway, a major downtown thoroughfare. City Police Chief Jim McDonnell told a media briefing on Sunday evening that people had a right to protest peacefully but the violence he had seen by some was “disgusting” and the protests were getting out of control. Police said they had arrested 10 people on Sunday and 29 the previous night,

adding arrests were continuing. California Governor Newsom, a Democrat, said he requested the Trump administration to withdraw its order to deploy 2,000 National Guard troops in Los Angeles County, calling it unlawful. Newsom said in an interview with MSNBC he planned to sue the administration over the deployment, adding that Trump “has created the conditions” around the protests. He accused the president of trying to manufacture a crisis and of violating California’s state sovereignty. — Reuters



POWERFUL QUAKE SHAKES BOGOTA

Buildings swayed, sirens blared and panicked Bogota residents raced into the streets, after a shallow 6.3 magnitude earthquake rattled the Colombian capital. The quake struck at 8:08 am and was widely felt across central Colombia. Authorities reported minor damage in some villages near the epicentre, about 170 kilometres east of the capital.

Local firefighters were investigating reports of a main road being damaged, and cracks and fissures in several buildings including a church. There were no reports of damage or injuries in Bogota, a city nestled in the high Andes that is home to eight million people. But the lengthy jolt prompted sirens to go off around the city and there was widespread alarm. — AFP

PUBLICATIONS ROBBERY

Lithuania sentences thief of rare books



A Lithuanian court on Monday sentenced a Georgian national for stealing rare editions of Russian literary classics, accusing him of belonging to a group behind a spate of similar thefts across Europe. Mikheil Zamtaradze was sentenced “for stealing, as part of an organised group, 19th-century publications valued at 606,000 euros that have high cultural and historical value,” judge Mindaugas Razanskas told reporters at the Vilnius City District Court. — AFP

STORED BOMBS

4 injured in explosion at US air base



An explosion injured four men at a Japanese facility for storing unexploded bombs at a US air base in Okinawa on Monday, a fire official said, with their condition reportedly not critical. Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) members at the facility at Kadena Air Base were trying to wipe rust off items at the facility to re-assess if they were bombs. During that process, there was an explosion that injured four male SDF members who were rushed to hospital. — AFP

ROAD TRAGEDY

Tanzania deadly crash kills around 28



A lorry driver lost control of its brakes and slammed into two other vehicles in Tanzania, killing at least 28 people in one of the worst recent road accidents in the country, officials said. The cause of the accident has been attributed to the negligence of the lorry driver, who failed to control the vehicle on the steep Iwambi hill. Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan said that she learnt of the deadly accident “with deep sorrow”. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Britain's Defence Secretary John Healey (R) and Nato Secretary-General Mark Rutte (L) speak as they visit steel-makers Sheffield Forgemasters, northern England. — AFP

NATO TO URGE 400 PER CENT RISE IN AIR DEFENCE

LONDON: Nato head Mark Rutte was on Monday to urge a “quantum leap” in defence capabilities including a “400-per cent increase” in air and missile defence to shield the alliance against Russia. “We see in Ukraine how Russia delivers terror from above, so we will strengthen the shield that protects our skies,” the Nato secretary-general Rutte was to say in a speech to the Chatham House think-tank in London, according to comments released in a statement.

To maintain credible deterrence and defence, Nato needs “a 400-per cent increase in air and missile defence”. “The fact is, we need a quantum leap in our collective defence,” he was to say.

Rutte will meet UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Monday ahead of his speech, their second Downing Street talks since the Labour leader came into power in July 2024. — AFP

ITALY’S REFERENDUMS SUNK



Italian referendum proposals to ease citizenship laws and tighten job protection rules failed on Monday due to low voter turnout, YouTrend polling agency said, in a setback for the centre-left opposition and unions that had championed them. Official data from about half of the polling stations showed slightly less than 30 per cent of eligible voters had cast their ballots at the end of two days of voting, far short of the 50 per cent plus one of the electorate needed to make the vote legally binding. The outcome is a blow for the coalition of centre-left opposition parties. — Reuters

LE PEN HOSTS EUROPE ALLIES IN SHOW OF FAR-RIGHT UNITY

PARIS: French far-right leader Marie Le Pen was on Monday hosting key allies from across Europe, including Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, in a bid to flaunt the unity and strength of the anti-immigration wing of European politics. The get-together in the bucolic countryside of Mormant-sur-Vernisson in the Loiret region south of Paris is ostensibly aimed at marking one year since Le Pen's National Rally (RN) crushed opponents to win their best-ever vote share in European elections.

But the meeting is also a show of

force from political factions that are increasingly buoyant in the wake of Donald Trump's return to the White House earlier this year and strong election results across the continent. Others attending as well as Orban include Italy's Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the League party Matteo Salvini, the leader of Spain's Vox party Santiago Abascal and former Czech premier Andrej Babis.

They are all part of the Patriots for Europe faction in the European parliament, one of no less than three

competing far-right factions in the chamber. “The winds of change are gathering,” Orban wrote on X late on Sunday after the leaders met in the Chateau of Fontainebleau nearby to coordinate their positions.

The meeting also comes less than two years ahead of watershed presidential elections in France where President Emmanuel Macron, who has long promoted himself as a bulwark against the far right, cannot stand again and the RN sees its best ever chance of taking power. — AFP

Ukraine and Russia make biggest swap of prisoners

RUSSIA AND Ukraine on Monday swapped a first group of captured soldiers — part of an agreement reached during peace talks that appeared to be in doubt over the weekend. The deal to exchange prisoners of war and repatriate the bodies of killed fighters was the only concrete agreement reached at the talks, which have failed to lead to a breakthrough towards ending the three-year war. Progress has stalled. Russia has issued tough conditions for halting its attack and has repeatedly rejected calls for an unconditional ceasefire.

“Today an exchange began, which will continue in several stages over the coming days,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on social media. He posted images of soldiers draped in Ukrainian flags, cheering and hugging. “Among those we are bringing back now are the wounded, the severely wounded, and those under the age of 25,” he added.

Russia's defence ministry also confirmed the swap was part of “agreements reached on June 2 in Istanbul”. Neither side said how many prisoners were released. After the talks in Istanbul, both said it would involve more than 1,000 captured soldiers, making it the largest exchange of the three-year war.

The swap itself had appeared in jeopardy over the weekend, when Moscow and Kyiv traded accusations of delaying and thwarting the planned exchange. Zelensky accused Russia on Sunday of playing a “dirty, political game” and of not sticking to the agreed parameters — to free all captured soldiers that are sick, wounded or under the age of 25. Russia said Kyiv was refusing to take back bodies of dead soldiers, 1,200 of which it said were waiting in refrigerated trucks near the border.

Pressed by US President Donald Trump to end the conflict, the two sides have opened direct negotiations for the first time in more than three years in search of an agreement. But they appear as far apart as ever from an agreement. In Istanbul on June 2, Russia demanded Ukraine withdraw its forces from areas still under its control, recognise Moscow's annexation of five Ukrainian



Police experts work at the site of the Russian air strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine. — Reuters

regions and renounce all Western military support. Kyiv is seeking a full ceasefire and a summit between Zelensky, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Trump to try to break the impasse. While welcoming POW exchanges, Zelensky said last week said it was “pointless” to hold further talks with the current Russian delegation since they could not agree to a ceasefire.

Meanwhile fighting on the front lines and in the skies has intensified. Russia said on Sunday its troops had crossed into Ukraine's industrial Dnipropetrovsk region for the first time in its campaign — a potentially key advance given that Moscow has not put forward a territorial claim to that region. And Moscow launched a record 479 drones at Ukraine overnight, Kyiv's air force said on Monday.

The Ukrainian mayor of the western city of Rivne, Oleksandr Tretyak, called it “the largest attack” on the region since the start of the war. Russia said it had targeted an airfield near the village of Dubno in

the Rivne region. 70 buildings — including private houses and a nursery — were damaged in the attack. It called the attack “one of the retaliatory strikes” for a brazen drone attack by Ukraine on June 1 against Russian military jets stationed at air bases thousands of kilometres behind the front line. Kyiv also claimed responsibility for an attack on a Russian electronics factory overnight, saying it manufactured parts for drones. Russian officials said the site had been forced to temporarily suspend production after a Ukrainian drone attack.

Moscow said Monday its strikes are continued retaliation for a bold Ukrainian attack on its bomber planes parked deep inside Russia, including in Siberia, that infuriated the Kremlin. Russia said it had targeted an airfield near the village of Dubno in the Rivne region.

“This is one of the retaliatory strikes against terrorist attacks by the Kyiv regime on Russian military airfields,” its defence ministry said. — AFP

UN urges ratification of treaty to protect the planet’s fragile oceans

NICE: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday urged world leaders to ratify a treaty that would allow nations to establish protected marine areas in international waters, warning that human activity was destroying ocean ecosystems. Guterres, speaking at the opening of the third UN Ocean Conference in Nice, cautioned that illegal fishing, plastic pollution and rising sea temperatures threatened delicate ecosystems and the people who depend on them. “The ocean is the ultimate shared resource. But we are failing it,” Guterres said, citing collapsing fish stocks, rising sea levels and ocean acidification.

Oceans also provide a vital buffer against climate change, by absorbing around

30 per cent of planet-heating CO2 emissions. But as the oceans heat up, hotter waters are destroying marine ecosystems and threatening the oceans' ability to absorb CO2. “These are symptoms of a system in crisis — and they are feeding off each other. Unravelling food chains. Destroying livelihoods. Deepening insecurity.”

The High Seas Treaty, adopted in 2023, would permit countries to establish marine parks in international waters, which cover nearly two-thirds of the ocean and are largely unregulated. Hitherto, only an estimated 1per cent of international waters, known as the “high seas”, have been protected.

The drive for nations to turn years of promises into



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres (L) meets France's President Emmanuel Macron on the sideline of the third UN Ocean Conference, in Nice. — Reuters

meaningful protection for the oceans comes as President Donald Trump pulls the United States and its money out of climate projects and as

some European governments weaken green policy commitments as they seek to support anaemic economies and fend off nationalists.

The United States has not yet ratified the treaty and will not do so during the conference, Rebecca Hubbard, director of The High Seas Alliance, said. “If they don't ratify, they are not bound by it,” she said. “The implementation will take years but it is critical we start now and we won't let the US absence stop that from happening.”

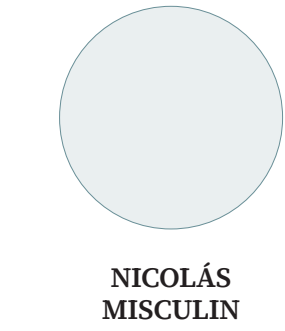
French President Emmanuel Macron, the conference's co-host, told delegates that 50 countries had now ratified the treaty and that another 15 had promised to do so. The treaty will only come into force once 60 countries ratify it. Macron's foreign minister said he expected that would happen before the end of the year. The United States has not sent a high-level

delegation to the conference. “It's not a surprise, we know the American administration's position on these issues,” Macron told reporters late on Sunday. Britain's Prince William said protecting the planet's oceans was a challenge “like none we have faced before”.

Ocean experts have also seized on the conference as an opportunity to rally investment for the ocean economy, which has long struggled to attract sizeable funding commitments. At a two-day gathering of bankers and investors in Monaco over the weekend, philanthropists, private investors and public banks committed 8.7 billion euros over five years to support a regenerative and sustainable blue economy. — Reuters

OPINION

Argentine leader licking his chops ahead of October elections



NICOLÁS
MISCULIN

ARGENTINA'S FIREBRAND right-wing President Javier Milei has largely tamed runaway inflation with a ruthless austerity plan and he aims to solidify power when his party and its allies take on a divided opposition in legislative elections in October.

The trash-tweeting, shaggy-haired economist, has overseen a steady dollar-peso peg but relies on legislative allies in Congress to pass his agenda. Many of the changes he has implemented have been through presidential decrees, like his ideological ally, US President Donald Trump, who called Milei his favourite president. Voters will choose about half the seats in the lower chamber of Argentina's Congress and a third of the upper Senate on October 26. A big victory would not give Milei a legislative majority, but it would offer him leverage to make deals to sell off government-owned companies, cut social spending, change tax and labour policy and embrace social conservatism.

That plan is in stark contrast to the programme of the parties that are the ideological descendants of General Juan Peron, who ruled the country from 1946-1955 and 1973-1974, and his wife Evita. Their governments nationalised industries, unveiled pro-labour policies and rolled out social programmes including free healthcare. The economic stability spurred by Milei, who took power in late 2023 and quickly slashed spending as part of a shock therapy to pull the South American country out of a deep crisis, has not translated into across-the-

board improvements. Pensioners continue to protest the cost of living, and anger over the relatively poor salaries of healthcare workers at a respected paediatric hospital has turned into a months-long saga. Nearly 40 per cent of Argentines remain in poverty, and many of them reject Milei's policies. "I'm not a Peronist, but I'll vote for them because I'd vote for anyone before Milei," said Jorge, a 42-year-old "cartonero" who collects cardboard for recycling.

The man, who declined to give his last name, said one of his four children was treated at the paediatric hospital where staff are protesting.

Posing another threat to Milei's popularity is the possibility that he may in coming months have to further tighten economic policy to meet the terms of a \$20-billion International Monetary Fund loan that has boosted Argentina's reputation among investors, whose dollars the country desperately needs.

Up for grabs in the election is the vast province surrounding the capital, Buenos Aires, which is the geographic heart of Peronism and home to 40 per cent of the country's voters.

A government source told reporters Milei has vowed to defeat Peronist Governor Axel Kicillof there. Milei's candidate unexpectedly placed first in a recent Buenos Aires local election, and consulting firm Observatorio Electoral shows Milei's Libertad Avanza party with a slim 37-36 per cent advantage over the centre-left Peronists.

A big victory would not give Milei a legislative majority, but it would offer him leverage to make deals to sell off government-owned companies, cut social spending, change tax and labour policy and embrace social conservatism

Nationally, 42 per cent of voters favour Milei against 23 per cent for the Peronists. Beating the standard-bearers of Juan Peron's legacy would have seemed impossible a few years ago, but with inflation down to a projected 30 per cent this year, from 118 per cent last year, and Milei credited with cutting corruption, some voters are ready to give the political firebrand more power.

"I'll vote for Milei again because he's achieved a degree of normality in the economy," said Federico Segovia, a 22-year-old university student who blamed the last Peronist president, Alberto Fernandez, for leaving the economy in disastrous shape. A recent survey by the consulting firm Synopsis found that the share of those who viewed Milei positively rose to 43.4 per cent in May from 40.9 per cent in April.

Perhaps the biggest wind in Milei's sails comes from the power struggle that has pitted Kicillof and his one-time mentor, former president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner.

Kicillof, who served as economy minister in Fernandez de Kirchner's government from 2013 to 2015, is expected to run for president in the 2027 election. "The rupture is inevitable," a Peronist source said. The two opposition politicians are still debating whether they will join forces for the congressional elections. "If there is no agreement for the legislative elections and Peronism is divided, La Libertad Avanza will win the elections in the province of Buenos Aires," the source said. — Reuters

KENYAN MOTHER'S SEARCH FOR SON YEAR AFTER PROTESTS

MARY KULUNDU

Susan Wangari has lost count of the morgues, hospitals and police stations she has visited in search of her son, who went missing at the height of Kenya's mass protests last June.

She last saw Emmanuel Mukuria, 24, on the morning of June 25, 2024, the day that thousands of Kenyan youths thronged the streets of Nairobi and stormed parliament in protest at planned tax rises and corruption.

"It would be better if my son were dead; at least I could visit his grave," she said.

Rights groups say at least 60 people were killed during the protests in June and July, and more than 80 abducted by the security forces since then, with dozens still missing.

Mukuria's friends say he was arrested during the protests in the city centre, where he worked as a minibus tout.

"Every time we hear that bodies have been found somewhere, we are anxious to know whose they are." Two men told her they shared a cell with Mukuria, but they are too afraid to speak publicly about their ordeal.

One was only released in February, giving her hope that her son is still alive in captivity.

Last month, President William Ruto, in a clear admission that security forces had engaged in kidnappings, said all those abducted during the protests had been "returned to their families".

Rights groups say dozens are still missing and police have shown little progress in investigating the disappearances despite Ruto claiming an "accountability mechanism" was put in place.

The police spokesman said they had no information on Mukuria's case. An officer-in-charge at the station where Wangari reported him missing said the matter was still under investigation.

Many other families are still dealing with the aftermath of the violence. Rex Masai, 29, was the first to die during the protests, shot and killed in the city centre on June 20.

"We are hoping for the best but we are not near the truth," Masai's mother Gillian Munyao said.

She found her son lying lifeless in a pool of blood at a clinic where he was taken that day. — AFP

Forsyth: Adventurer and bestselling spy novelist

A PILOT who turned to writing to clear his debts, British author Frederick Forsyth, who died on Monday aged 86, penned some 20 spy novels, often drawing on real-life experiences and selling 70 million copies worldwide. In such bestsellers as "The Day of the Jackal" and "The Odessa File", Forsyth honed a distinctive style of deeply researched and precise espionage thrillers involving power games between mercenaries, spies and scoundrels.

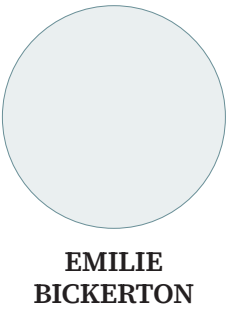
For inspiration he drew on his own globe-trotting life, including an early stint as a foreign correspondent and assisting Britain's spy service on missions in Nigeria, South Africa, and the former East Germany and Rhodesia.

"The research was the big parallel: as a foreign correspondent you are probing, asking questions, trying to find out what's going on, and probably being lied to," he told The Bookseller magazine in 2015.

"Working on a novel is much the same... essentially it's a very extended report about something that never happened — but might have." He wrote his first novel when he was 31, on a break from reporting and in dire need of money to fund his wanderlust.

Having returned "from an African war, and stony broke as usual, with no job and no chance of one, I hit on the idea of writing a novel to clear my debts," he said in his autobiography "The Outsider: My Life in Intrigue" published in 2015.

"There are several ways of making quick money, but in the general list, writing a novel rates well below robbing a bank." But Forsyth's foray came good. Taking just 35 days to pen



EMILIE
BICKERTON

For inspiration he drew on his own globe-trotting life, including an early stint as a foreign correspondent and assisting Britain's spy service on missions in Nigeria, South Africa, and the former East Germany and Rhodesia.



British novelist Frederick Forsyth

"The Day of the Jackal", his story of a fictional assassination attempt on French president Charles de Gaulle by right-wing extremists, met immediate success when it appeared in 1971.

The novel was later turned into a film and provided self-styled revolutionary Carlos the Jackal with his nickname. Forsyth went on to write a string of bestsellers including "The Odessa File" (1972) and "The Dogs of War" (1974).

His eighteenth novel, "The Fox", was published in 2018. Forsyth's now classic post-Cold War thrillers drew on drone warfare, rendition and terrorism — and eventually prompted his wife to call for an end to his dangerous research trips.

"You're far too old, these places are bloody dangerous and you don't run as avidly, as nimbly as you used to," Sandy Molloy said after his last trip to Somalia in 2013 researching "The Kill List", as Forsyth recounted to AFP in 2016.

There were also revelations in his autobiography about his links with

British intelligence.

Forsyth recounted that he was approached in 1968 by "Ronnie" from MI6 who wanted "an asset deep inside the Biafran enclave" in Nigeria, where there was a civil war between 1967 and 1970.

While he was there, Forsyth reported on the situation and at the same time kept "Ronnie informed of things that could not, for various reasons, emerge in the media".

Then in 1973, Forsyth was asked to conduct a mission for MI6 in communist East Germany. He drove his Triumph convertible to Dresden to receive a package from a Russian colonel in the toilets of the Albertinum museum.

The writer claimed he was never paid by MI6 but in return received help with book research, submitting draft pages to ensure he was not divulging sensitive information.

In later years, Forsyth turned his attention to British politics, penning a regular column in the anti-EU Daily Express newspaper.

He also wrote articles on counter-terrorism issues, military affairs and foreign policy.

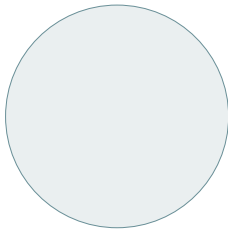
Despite his successful writing career, he admitted in his memoirs it was not his first choice.

He trained as a Royal Air Force pilot, before joining Reuters news agency in 1961 and later working for the BBC.

But after he wrote "Jackal", another career path opened up.

"My publisher told me, to my complete surprise, that it seemed I could tell a good story. And that is what I have done for the past forty-five years," he recalled in his autobiography. — AFP

Infantino and Trump — handshakes and warmth



PIRATE IRWIN

The author is a journalist with Agence France Presse

THE HEADS of state who have felt the lash of US President Donald Trump’s tongue in the Oval Office could do worse than seek advice from Fifa chief Gianni Infantino, who seems to have got their relationship down to a fine art.

Infantino has shown a deft touch when it has come to dealing with hard-nosed leaders, from Russian President Vladimir Putin, when Russia hosted the 2018 World Cup, and now Trump with the United States set to co-host football’s global showpiece next year.

Trump has been quite the opposite, showing no mercy to those who have dared challenge him -- he has laid into Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and his South African counterpart Cyril Ramaphosa in extraordinary scenes at the White House.

However, with Infantino it is all smiles, compliments and Trump’s traditional use of the words “great” and “greatest” when he likes something or somebody.

Infantino was one of just a handful of prominent sports figures present at Trump’s inauguration.

“Infantino handles Trump really well,” Martin Sorrell, the founder of advertising giants WPP who is putting together a documentary for next year’s World Cup, said.

Sorrell pointed to when Infantino was filmed with Trump in March, showing off the trophy for the upcoming Club World Cup.

“Trump, who had the Fifa trophy behind him in the Oval Office on the video, said... ‘as one president to another,’” he noted.

Infantino appears to have placed his relationship with Trump front and centre — perhaps unsurprising as the women’s 2031 World Cup is also expected to be hosted in the US as well as the inaugural women’s Club World Cup in 2028.

However, there are signs that the relationship can grate with others as it did with UEFA representatives when Infantino arrived late at a Fifa Congress in Paraguay in May having been with Trump on the US president’s visit to Qatar and then Saudi Arabia.

Nevertheless, whether some like it or not Infantino has restored relations with the US which reached its nadir under his predecessor Sepp Blatter.

After the US lost out to Qatar for the right to host the 2022 World Cup, a FBI investigation resulted in ‘Fifagate’, leading to several of the governing body’s senior figures going to jail and Blatter resigning.

In 2018, two years after Infantino was elected, the US were named co-hosts of the 2026 World Cup, earning him an invitation to the White House.

Two years later the ‘bromance’ was strengthened when Trump asked Infantino to deliver the address at a dinner he hosted at the Economic Forum in Davos.

“America is on the verge of becoming a great soccer power,” purred Infantino.

“The ‘American dream’ is something we all

Infantino has shown a deft touch when it has come to dealing with hard-nosed leaders, from Russian President Vladimir Putin, when Russia hosted the 2018 World Cup, and now Trump with the United States set to co-host football’s global showpiece next year.

need to have. All those who love soccer.”

Trump responded by praising Fifa as a “steadfast movement” and Infantino as “my great friend.”

Infantino’s loyalty — a characteristic Trump values in others above all else — has remained rock solid.

The press conference-shy football boss has in his social media posts steered clear of commenting on the slights made by Trump regarding his World Cup co-hosts Mexico and Canada.

So keen is he to maintain smooth relations, he did not even step in to correct Trump, sitting behind him, when the US president said inviting Russia to the 2026 World Cup could facilitate them making peace with Ukraine.

Russia are barred from the qualifiers due to the 2022 attack of Ukraine.

However, both have so much invested in the World Cup being a success that nothing must blight the landscape.

“Gianni’s obviously got a very close relationship with Trump and he’s leveraging that because both sides have a mutual interest for 2026 to work,” John Zerafa, an experienced sports communications strategist based in the UK, said.

“Trump is a guy that’s driven by headlines and being in the spotlight, and he’s going to love being in the spotlight in the run-up to and during the World Cup, and he knows that it’s got to go smoothly.

“So they’ve got a mutual interest for 2026 to work.” — AFP

CLIMATE CHANGE HEIGHTENS RISK OF INDIAN FARMER SUICIDES

AISHWARYA KUMAR

On a small farm in India’s Maharashtra state, Mirabai Khindkar said the only thing her land grew was debt, after crops failed in drought and her husband killed himself.

Farmer suicides have a long history in India, where many are one crop failure away from disaster, but extreme weather caused by climate change is adding fresh pressure.

Dwindling yields due to water shortages, floods, rising temperatures and erratic rainfall, coupled with crippling debt, have taken a heavy toll on a sector that employs 45 per cent of India’s 1.4 billion people.

Mirabhai’s husband Amol was left with debts to loan sharks worth hundreds of times their farm’s annual income, after the three-acre (one-hectare) soybean, millet and cotton plot withered in scorching heat.

He swallowed poison last year. “When he was in the hospital, I prayed to all the gods to save him,” said 30-year-old Mirabai, her voice breaking. Amol died a week later, leaving behind Mirabai and three children. Her last conversation with him was about debt.

Last year, extreme weather events across India affected 3.2 million hectares (7.9 million acres) of cropland — an area bigger than Belgium—according to the New Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment research group.

Over 60 per cent of that was in Maharashtra. Between 2022 and 2024, 3,090 farmers took their own lives in Marathwada, an average of nearly three a day, according to India’s Minister of Agriculture Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

Government statistics do not specify what drove the farmers to kill themselves, but analysts point to several likely factors.

“Farmer suicides in India are a consequence of the crisis of incomes, investment and productivity that you have in agriculture,” said R Ramakumar, professor of development studies at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

Farming across many Indian smallholdings is done largely as it has been for centuries, and is highly dependent on the right weather at the correct time.

The government could support farmers with better insurance schemes to cope with extreme weather events, as well as investments in agricultural research, Ramakumar said.

Faced with uncertain weather, farmers often look to stem falling yields by investing in fertilisers or irrigation systems. But banks can be reluctant to offer credit to such uncertain borrowers.

Some turn to loan sharks offering quick cash at exorbitant interest rates, and risking catastrophe if crops fail. — AFP

Rebuild aid consensus

IN 2015, the United Kingdom’s then-prime minister, David Cameron, stood before the United Nations General Assembly and challenged other donor countries to follow the UK’s lead and back the newly-minted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for eradicating poverty with their aid money. “We haven’t just achieved the UN’s 0.7 per cent [aid-to-GNI spending] target, we’ve enshrined it in law,” he declared.

That was then. As heir to an extraordinary bipartisan consensus forged under the post-1997 Labour government, Cameron’s Conservative government had established Britain as the most generous aid donor in the G7, and one of just four countries to meet the 0.7 per cent aid target. Now, a Labour government has torn up the remnants of that consensus, joined a global attack on aid, and set a course that will leave the UK among the world’s least generous countries.

The fact that a UK government led by the Labour Party, with its long tradition of internationalism and solidarity, has all but abandoned its leadership role on an issue encoded in its DNA illustrates the political forces shaping a new world order, notably US President Donald Trump’s view of international cooperation as a zero-sum game played by losers. But it also challenges development advocates in the UK to focus on strategies aimed at minimising harm and rebuilding the case for aid.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced the decision to cut foreign aid and channel the savings to an expanded defence budget ahead of a meeting with Trump. The aid budget is set to fall from 0.5 per cent to 0.3 per cent of Gross Nation Income – the lowest level since the late 1990s. After removing the roughly one-quarter of the official development assistance spent on refugees in the UK, Britain will slip from ninth to 22nd in a ranking of countries’ Overseas Development Assistance as a share of GNI.

While there has been opposition



KEVIN WATKINS

The author a former CEO of Save the Children UK, is a visiting professor at the Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa at the London School of Economics.

Ultimately though, the case for aid must be fought and won in a public square increasingly dominated by right-wing populists. Political leaders in the UK and across the West need to communicate the hard truth that global challenges like climate change, war, and poverty require international cooperation

to the aid cuts, a new consensus has taken root. Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch applauded the decision to convert ODA into defence spending. The far-right Reform UK party’s election manifesto called for the aid budget to be halved. When Jenny Chapman, Britain’s development minister, delivered ODA’s death warrant, she told a parliamentary committee in May that “the days of viewing the UK government as a global charity are over.” Some two-thirds of Britons, including most Labour supporters, support increased defence spending at the expense of overseas aid.

The UK is hardly alone. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which accounted for more than 40 per cent of all humanitarian aid in 2024, has been dismantled. In Germany, the world’s second-largest donor, Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s new government will reduce an already-diminished aid budget. France is set to slash ODA by 40 per cent, while the recently collapsed right-wing government in the Netherlands, a longstanding member of the 0.7 per cent club, has decreased aid spending by more than two-thirds.

SUSPENSION OF AID

The human toll of the cuts is already starting to emerge. The demolition of USAID has left acutely malnourished children without food, HIV/AIDS patients without antiretroviral drugs, and clinics unable to treat deadly diseases like childhood malaria. According to a recent study, Trump’s suspension of aid could result in 14 million additional deaths, including 4.5 million children under five, by 2030. Cuts by the UK and other donors will inevitably add to these human costs. An already chronically under-financed humanitarian aid system now confronting famine threats and food emergencies from Sudan to Gaza and the Sahel has been pushed to the brink of collapse: less than 10 per cent of the 2025 UN appeal is funded.

The political currents fuelling the attack on aid vary across

countries. In the US, nihilistic anti-multilateralism has been a driving force. In Europe, fiscal pressures have interacted with right-wing populist narratives linking aid to migration, pressure on public services, waste, and corruption.

Starmer now cites Russian security threats to justify deeper cuts.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

So, what can be done to rebuild an aid consensus? The first priority is to minimise harm. Maintaining the UK’s £1.9 billion (\$2.6 billion) commitment to the World Bank’s International Development Association is critical because every dollar contributed can leverage \$3-4 of financial support for the poorest countries. The UK could also make the most of a shrinking aid budget by channelling more humanitarian aid through local actors, rather than bureaucratic UN agencies.

Still, tough choices must be made. There is a strong argument to protect spending on life-saving programmes, such as child nutrition, vaccinations, and HIV/AIDS, and for minimising cuts in areas where the UK is a global frontrunner, like girls’ education and social protection.

Even with a diminished aid budget, the UK could exercise greater leadership. With debt-service costs now crowding out spending on essential services in many low-income countries, Starmer’s government could demand comprehensive debt relief at this month’s UN International Conference on Financing for Development.

Ultimately though, the case for aid must be fought and won in a public square increasingly dominated by right-wing populists. Political leaders in the UK and across the West need to communicate the hard truth that global challenges like climate change, war, and poverty require international cooperation. And they need to tap into the deep reservoirs of generosity, solidarity, and moral concern that define public sentiment even in the midst of our troubled times.

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SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Cristian Chivu. — AFP

INTER MILAN HIRE CHIVU AS NEW COACH

MILAN: Inter Milan have chosen Cristian Chivu to lead the Serie A club into a new era, confirming the former Romania defender as Simone Inzaghi’s replacement ahead of the upcoming Club World Cup.

“Inter Milan is pleased to welcome Cristian Chivu as the new head coach of the first team. The coach has signed a contract with Inter until 30 June 2027,” Inter said in a statement.

Still reeling from humiliation at the hands of Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League final, Inter have gambled on novice Chivu after failing to get Cesc Fabregas from Como. Chivu has reportedly agreed a two-year contract with Inter worth 2.5 million euros (\$2.85 million) a season, taking charge of one of Europe’s biggest clubs only a few months after beginning his senior coaching career with Parma.

Parma confirmed Chivu’s departure earlier on Monday, setting up his arrival at Inter where he won three Serie A titles and the 2010 Champions League as a player.

The 44-year-old replaced Fabio Pechia in February and guided Parma to Serie A safety in his first job in football of any form since leaving Inter’s youth set-up last summer.

“I thank the club, staff, players and fans for having believed in me and our project,” said Chivu on Instagram.

“Together we overcame obstacles and wrote a page (in Parma’s history) which will remain in my heart.”

Chivu’s first match in charge of Inter will be against Monterrey in the Club World Cup next week, in the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California.

He will lead a group of players who looked dead on their feet during their 5-0 hammering against PSG in the Champions League final late last month.

Inzaghi left Inter in the wake of the Italians’ thumping in Munich, taking the job at Saudi Pro League club Al Hilal who are also taking part in the Club World Cup. — AFP

Al Harthy awaits for the ‘24 Hours of Le Mans’ race

GLOBAL motorsport’s greatest and most challenging race, the 24 Hours of Le Mans at the famous Circuit de la Sarthe in France, is mere days away for Oman’s Ahmad al Harthy who intends to mount a major bid for silverware with team-mates Valentino Rossi and Kelvin van der Linde.

Marking the halfway stage of the FIA World Endurance Championship season, round four of the 2025 campaign, this year’s visit to Le Mans — the race begins on Saturday, June 14 — will be Al Harthy’s third attempt at the endurance racing classic where he is a past podium finisher. Memorably, of course, he made history on his 24 Hours of Le Mans debut back in 2023 when racing to a sensational second place result in the then GTE Am class — success which he happily dedicated to his Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Now competing in LMGT3, the successor to GTE, the Omani’s second season with Team WRT in the No.46 BMW M4 LMGT3 has been impacted by some misfortune but there has been celebration as well thanks to a fantastic second place — a mere 0.3 seconds shy of victory — at Imola in Italy in April.

Climbing to sixth in the LMGT3 standings at that point, having had to settle for 11th place during the season-opening event at Lusail in Qatar, a podium bid last time out at Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium ultimately became ninth due to a pit-lane speed limiter glitch which resulted in a luckless penalty.

While there have been frustrations with some of the misfortune, the overall pace and performance across qualifying and race conditions from the Team WRT entry has been outstanding and Al Harthy himself has been extremely satisfied with the level of his own personal performance



Ahmad Al Harthy seeking podium return in motorsport’s most famous race

France’s 24hrs of Le Mans marks Rd4 and halfway point of FIA WEC season

Omani driver delighted to be back at unmistakable Circuit de la Sarthe

Al Harthy, Rossi and van der Linde ready for biggest race of year



Al Harthy, Rossi and van der Linde ready for Le Mans race.

thus far. Supported as always by OQ Group, Sohar International, Omantel, Oman LNG, BMW Oman, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), and Experience Oman, Al Harthy is very much looking forward to welcoming plenty of key partners to the 93rd staging of the 24 Hours of Le Mans later this week.

This year’s race entry features a combined total of 62 cars across the Hypercar, LMP2 and LMGT3 classes, with 24 in LMGT3 alone —

the biggest class of the three. The No.46 BMW LMGT3 will be battling competition from the likes of Aston Martin, Corvette, Ferrari, Ford, Lexus, Mercedes-AMG and Porsche.

AHMED AL HARTHY

“Le Mans is always the biggest event of the year, not just in WEC but in motorsport as a whole, and it truly is an incredible honour to again represent Oman at such a prestigious, famous and historic race. It was the proudest moment of my career to climb the podium in the 24 Hours of Le Mans a couple of years ago on my debut in the race, truly an amazing moment to see the Omani flag fly.

“We’re working as hard as we can to be back on the podium this weekend, and with Vale and Kelvin we’re pushing as hard as ever to prepare as strongly as possible for the race. It’s going to be an amazing week building-up to the race, I can’t wait to get started.”

Oman eye playoff spot in match against Palestine today

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

Oman will eye to secure the last available slot for the playoff in group B as they will meet Palestine in a tight clash on Tuesday at King Abdullah II Stadium in Amman city in the concluding round of the AFC Asian Qualifiers — Road to 26.

The match will kick off at 10:15 pm (Oman time). With just one point separating the two sides, Oman sits ahead in the standings and requires only a draw to confirm their place in the next round of the qualifiers.

Palestine, on the other hand, will be in a must-win situation as they aim to continue their historic run in their first-ever appearance at this stage of AFC World Cup Qualifying.

The Red Warriors, under the leadership of head coach Rasheed Jaber worked very hard to close the chapter on their previous 3-0 defeat to Jordan last Thursday. The result which ended their hopes of automatic qualification.

Training sessions since the team’s arrival in Amman have been focused on tactical refinement and psychological readiness, with a

The Red Warriors, under the leadership of head coach Rasheed Jaber worked very hard to close the chapter on their previous 3-0 defeat to Jordan last Thursday. The result which ended their hopes of automatic qualification.



Head coach Rasheed Jaber with other staff

clear goal to deliver a determined performance and secure passage to the playoff stage, where two additional tickets to the 2026 Fifa World Cup remain up for grabs. Coach Rasheed Jaber, who confirmed



Oman player during the training session

the final squad following Monday’s training session, expressed confidence in his players: “We are still in the race. Our focus now is fully on Palestine. I asked the players to give their best, maintain

concentration and aim for the result that ensures our qualification,” Jaber said.

Oman will be boosted by the return of Mohsin al Ghassani adding firepower to the attacking line. However, the team will be without the services of the experienced player Ali al Busaidy who was suspended due to card accumulation.

Ahmed al Kaabi is expected to slot into the backline while Al Mundher al Alawi is likely to be deployed in midfield to strengthen Oman’s core.

Palestine arrived at this fixture in strong form following their earned back-to-back victories, including a crucial 2-0 win over Kuwait last Thursday.

Head coach Ihab Abu Jazar will look to capitalize on that momentum and deliver another spirited performance. Oman’s attacking midfielder Salah al Yahyaei emphasised the team’s readiness.

“We have put the Jordan match behind us. Our full focus is on Palestine. Despite having two chances including victory or a draw, we are aiming to win. Palestine is a strong side, but we are prepared and we count on our fans’ support.”

SHORT TAKES



Ryan Fox holds the winner's trophy. — Reuters

NEW ZEALAND'S RAYAN FOX WIN PGA CANADIAN OPEN

MONTREAL: New Zealand's Ryan Fox birdied the fourth playoff hole to defeat American Sam Burns on Sunday and win the US PGA Tour's Canadian Open for his second triumph in five weeks.

The 38-year-old Kiwi hit a 3-wood from the fairway to eight feet and two-putted for victory when Burns lipped out an 11-foot birdie putt on their fifth playing of the par-five 18th, counting their regulation birdies in Sunday's final round.

"Probably the greatest shot I've ever hit considering the circumstances," Fox said of his second shot on the last extra hole.

"To be honest, Sam and I had a bit of a pillow fight there for three holes. It was some average golf from both of us, some average putting."

Fox became the first New Zealand golfer to win two PGA Tour titles in one year after taking his first at last month's Myrtle Beach Classic.

Burns and Fox each finished 72 holes on 18-under par 262 at TPC Toronto Osprey Valley. Burns fired an eight-under 62, his second-lowest career round, while Fox shot a 66, his closing birdie from just inside 17 feet forcing the playoff. Both Fox and Burns laid up and made routine pars in the first three holes of the playoff, Burns missing a six-foot putt for the win on the first extra hole. In a pre-planned move, officials changed the hole location before the third extra hole and still they were tied.

The drama went to the fourth playoff hole when Fox blasted his second shot on the green to eight feet.

The triumph came with the New Zealand football team watching after a match the night before in Toronto. — AFP

"But that shot I hit on 18, that 3-wood, was probably the best shot I've ever hit. Would have been nice to make it but hey I'll take it."

Fox became the first New Zealand golfer to win two PGA Tour titles in one year after taking his first at last month's Myrtle Beach Classic.

Taiwan's Kevin Yu was third on 263 with Americans Cameron Young and Matt McCarty sharing fourth on 264.



Cristiano Ronaldo lifts the trophy as he celebrates with teammates. — Reuters

Portugal beat Spain to win Nations League

RUBEN NEVES scored the decisive spot kick after Alvaro Morata missed as Portugal beat Spain 5-3 on penalties following a 2-2 draw in Munich on Sunday to claim their second Nations League title.

Portugal twice went behind in regulation time but twice fought back to level the scores.

"Our fighting spirit and togetherness were decisive today," Bruno Fernandes, who converted his penalty, said.

"When we stay together like this, we're very difficult to beat." After 21 minutes, Martin Zubimendi took advantage of some sleepy Portugal defence to put Spain in front.

The brilliant Nuno Mendes levelled things up five minutes later. Mikel Oyarzabal, Spain's goalscorer in the Euro 2024 final and the 2023 Nations League final, put La Roja back in front just before the break.

Cristiano Ronaldo, quiet as he had been before scoring the winner against Germany in the semis, equalised with 61 minutes gone, adjusting quickly after a Mendes cross was deflected into the air, muscling past Marc Cucurella and volleying the dropping ball home. Ronaldo was subbed off before full-time with cramp. Even though Portugal had the better of extra time, the match went to penalties.

Both sides converted their first three spot kicks. Mendes buried Portugal's fourth, before Morata stepped up and shot straight at Diogo Costa.



Neves nervelessly converted in front of the red and green of the Portugal fans. On the sidelines, Ronaldo could not watch the final penalty, burying his face in a teammate's back. Once Neves converted, the Portugal veteran fell to his knees and was embraced by players and staff. The victory was just Portugal's second competitive win over Iberian rival Spain in their long history. Portugal's only other win over Spain in a

competitive fixture was a 1-0 victory which booted the Spaniards out of Euro 2004, with a 19-year-old Ronaldo on the left wing.

Portugal became the first two-time winner of the Nations League, launched in 2018. It was Portugal's third major title, along with Euro 2016.

Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said the match was "equal".

"We did a lot well, but in football sometimes things happen and the opponent is able to beat you," he said.

PORTUGAL EQUALISE TWICE

While Nico Williams and Lamine Yamal's fluid movement troubled the Portugese defence early in the match, La Roja's opener was scrappy.

Yamal chipped from outside the box and the Portugal defence froze, botching a clearance which fell to Zubimendi, who leathered the ball into the net.

The goal was just rewards for Spain's early dominance, but Portugal hit back almost immediately.

Mendes, put through by Pedro Neto, drilled a low shot across the goal and in.

Just before halftime, Spain picked Portugal's pocket in their own half before advancing. Pedri linked with Oyarzabal, who threaded the ball past Diogo Costa.

Oyarzabal's goal meant he has scored in three international finals — against England at Euro 2024, which Spain won, and the 2023 and 2025 Nations Leagues, which Spain lost.

— Reuters

Thunder power past Pacers to level NBA Finals 1-1

LOS ANGELES: The Oklahoma City Thunder, fuelled by an efficient 34 points from Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, thumped the Indiana Pacers 123-107 on Sunday, punching back hard to level the NBA Finals at one game apiece. NBA Most Valuable Player Gilgeous-Alexander connected on 11 of 21 shots and added five rebounds, eight assists and four of Oklahoma City's 10 steals as the Thunder bounced back from an agonizing game one defeat on their home floor. Jalen Williams added 19 points, and center Chet Holmgren bounced back from a lackluster six-point game one to score 15 points with six rebounds for the Thunder, who limited Pacers star Tyrese Haliburton to 17 points, three rebounds and six assists

with five turnovers. Haliburton, who drilled the last-gasp game-winner for Indiana in their 111-110 series opening triumph, had just five points through the first three quarters. Despite his 12 points in the fourth, the Pacers never looked like mounting the kind of comeback that saw them erase a 15-point fourth quarter deficit in game one.

"We know with them (defense) is where it starts," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "They're a high powered offense, they play fast, score a bunch of points and if you don't get stops you end up running all game and they can beat you that way."

With their latest bounce-back performance, the Thunder denied the Pacers the 2-0 lead they had grabbed in their three prior series, climbing



Oklahoma City Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (2) blocks the shot of Indiana Pacers forward Aaron Nesmith (23). — Reuters

back on even terms as the best-of-seven championship showdown heads to Indianapolis for games three and four on Wednesday and Friday.

GAME OF UPS AND DOWNS

"We did some good things tonight," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "We did some things bad and we've got to be able to get better, get ready for game three."

Alex Caruso scored 20 points off the bench and fellow reserve Aaron Wiggins made five three-pointers on the way to 18 for the Thunder, who closed a back-and-forth first quarter on a 9-0 run to lead 26-20.

Holmgren punctuated the period with a three-pointer and Oklahoma City only ramped up the pressure in the second.

Another 9-0 run included a three-pointer from Williams off a feed from Holmgren and a Holmgren dunk.

After Wiggins drilled a step-back three-pointer, Gilgeous-Alexander drove for a reverse layup that pushed the Thunder lead to 52-29.

The turnovers that bedevilled the Pacers in game one began to creep up again, but Indiana offered a glimpse of just how dangerous they can be as they reeled off 10 unanswered points to slice the deficit to 13 before Oklahoma pulled away again to lead 59-41 at halftime.

The Thunder took a 93-74 lead into the fourth and were up by 22 after a three-pointer from Wiggins on a possession kept alive by three offensive rebounds. — AFP

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Denmark's Anders Antonsen celebrates on the podium. — Reuters

ANTONSEN WINS FIRST INDONESIA OPEN CROWN

JAKARTA: Badminton world number three Anders Antonsen clinched his first Indonesia Open title on Sunday after beating Chou Tien-chen of Taiwan, while South Korea's An Se-young won her second championship in Jakarta.

The 28-year-old Dane sank world number seven Chou at the Indonesian capital's Istora Senayan arena, winning 22-20, 21-14 in a 60-minute match to secure the prestigious Super 1000 event. Antonsen came out on top in a tightly contested first game before cruising to victory in the second.

The Danish shuttler said he was thrilled to win the Indonesia Open title but declared he was "hungry for more" trophies.

"I'm winning a Super 1000, one of the absolute biggest tournaments of the year," Antonsen told reporters. "It's incredible. I'm so grateful for how this place has changed my life many, many times."

In a more closely fought women's singles final, South Korean ace and world number one An fought back from one game down to beat China's Wang Zhi Yi in three games. She beat her Chinese rival 13-21, 21-19, 21-15 in 81 minutes. An, the 2024 Olympic gold medallist, said she was "happy" to win another Indonesia Open title after securing her first in 2021.

"It was a weird game, a difficult game. But fortunately, I can find my own confidence and never gave up," An told reporters through an interpreter. French mixed doubles pair Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue triumphed against Thailand's Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Supissara Paewsampran.

The pair, ranked 10th in the world, beat the sixth-ranked Thai pair 21-16, 21-18 in a 48-minute match, securing France's first Super 1000 title.

— AFP

Alcaraz beats Sinner to win French Open title

CARLOS ALCARAZ saved three championship points as he produced an astonishing fightback from two sets down to beat Jannik Sinner in a French Open final for the ages on Sunday.

Reigning champion Alcaraz rallied from the brink of defeat to overcome world number one Sinner 4-6, 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (10/2) after five hours and 29 minutes to clinch his fifth Grand Slam title.

The 22-year-old Spaniard is now unbeaten in five Grand Slam finals after snapping Sinner's 20-match winning run at the majors.

"This was the most exciting match that I've played so far without a doubt," said Alcaraz. "I think the match had everything."

Alcaraz pulled off his first ever comeback from two sets down in the longest Roland Garros final in history, recovering from 5-3 down in the fourth set when Sinner had three match points.

"Today was all about believing in myself. Never doubted myself today and I tried to go for it," he said.

"Real champions are made in those situations."

Alcaraz is the first man to win a Grand Slam title after saving match point since Novak Djokovic beat Roger Federer in the 2019 Wimbledon final. The only other man to do it in the Open era was Gaston Gaudio at Roland Garros in 2004. Sinner fell agonisingly short of a third successive Grand Slam crown after last year's US Open title and back-to-back Australian Open triumphs.

"It's easier to play than talking now," said a devastated Sinner. "I won't sleep very well tonight but it's OK."

"We try to delete it somehow and take the positive and keep going. There are no other ways," he added.

"It hurts, but you cannot keep crying."

Sinner suffered his fifth straight loss to Alcaraz in what was their first meeting in a Grand Slam final — and the first championship match at a major between two men born in the 2000s. Alcaraz leads 8-4 overall having also beaten Sinner in the final in Rome, where the Italian returned to competition in May after a three-month doping ban.

Alcaraz put the pressure on Sinner by carving out three break points to start Saturday's final, but the Italian resisted and soon had a chance of his own.

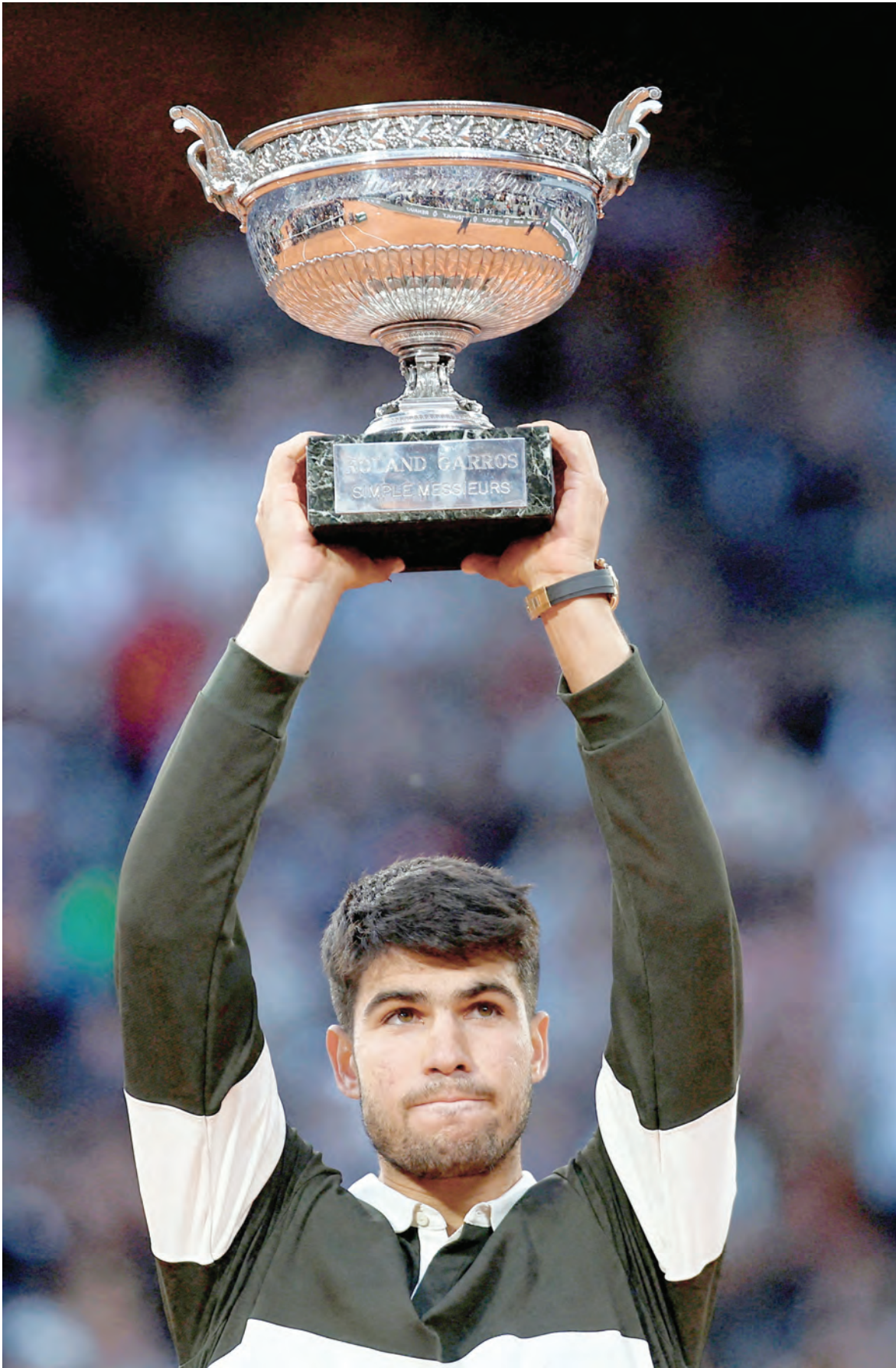
He couldn't take advantage and found himself having to fend off two more break points at 1-1, producing clutch serves to grind out another tough hold.

Alcaraz's persistence paid off in the fifth game when he broke to nudge 3-2 ahead, only for the Spaniard to immediately hand the lead back.

The unshakeable Sinner threatened to break again at 4-3, with a brief lapse from Alcaraz eventually enabling Sinner to snatch the first set.

Sinner hit the accelerator to start the second set, surging 3-0 in front. After facing seven break points in the opener, he tightened up considerably on serve.

But Alcaraz brought up his first break point of the second set with Sinner serving



Carlos Alcaraz celebrates with the trophy. — Reuters



Jannik Sinner (L) and Carlos Alcaraz of Spain pose together at the trophy presentation. — Reuters

for a two-set lead, duly pouncing on the opportunity. With the swagger back in his step at a crucial juncture, Alcaraz sought to bring the crowd into the contest but Sinner remained unflustered in the tie-break.

The first five points went with serve before Sinner whipped a forehand down the line and Alcaraz then steered a drop-shot wide.

A tame return into the net gave Sinner four set points. Alcaraz saved two before Sinner unleashed a blistering cross-court forehand to move to within a set of the trophy.

It all looked to be going his way when he broke Alcaraz to begin the third set, but the Spaniard refused to surrender his title quietly and rattled off four games on the bounce to lead 4-1.

— AFP

England seal T20 series win over the West Indies

BRISTOL: England completed a series win over the West Indies with a game to spare after chasing down a target of 197 in the second T20 international in Bristol on Sunday.

Former captain Jos Buttler led the way with 47 and current skipper Harry Brook made 34 as England reached 112-2 inside 13 overs.

The duo were dismissed in consecutive overs, with England still needing 85 more runs to win but that was the cue for two of the newer team members to lay down a marker.

Jacob Bethell's 26 off 10 balls, including three sixes, and Tom Banton's 30 not out rounded off a four-wicket win with nine balls remaining.

Victory meant Brook has won all five games since succeeding Buttler as permanent white-ball captain and now has the chance to match the preceding 3-0 one-day international series whitewash of the West Indies in Tuesday's T20 finale in Southampton.

"We chased the score beautifully," Brook told Sky Sports.

"It gives us great confidence having Jacob Bethell, Tom Banton and Will Jacks at five, six and seven. The top order can go all out blazing."

West Indies were struggling at 121-4 off 16 overs before adding 75 runs in the final four overs of their innings.

"I thought we were a few runs



England's Jos Buttler in action. — Reuters

short," said West Indies captain Shai Hope, who top-scored with 49 in his side's 196-6.

"We have to try and bounce back, win the (final) game and finish the tour strong."

The recalled Luke Wood gave England the ideal start when his swinging yorker had Evin Lewis lbw with the first ball of the match, but Hope and Johnson Charles (47) repaired some of the early damage in a stand of 90.

Rovman Powell added late impetus with 34 off 15 balls and former captain Jason Holder struck 29 off nine.

Adil Rashid bowled the penultimate over as England again only selected two seamers, but

the veteran leg-spinner conceded 31 runs and finished with figures of 1-59 — his most-expensive T20 return.

But Brook, having praised Wood for "setting the tone", said: "The middle period with the spinners, the game didn't get away from us."

"To have the couple of overs there let us get away with the big over at the end." — AFP

BRIEF SCORES:
West Indies 196-6, 20 overs (S Hope 49, J Charles 47; L Wood 2-25)
England 199-6, 18.3 overs (J Buttler 47, A Joseph 2-45)
RESULT: England won by four wickets
Series: England lead three-match series 2-0

BUSINESS



NEDC invested RO 154 million in capital expansion projects in 2024.

NEDC strengthens future-readiness amid grid expansion challenges

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

NAMA Electricity Distribution Company (NEDC) has pledged to vigorously address any vulnerabilities — legal, digital and operational — that could impact the company’s future resilience and its alignment with Vision 2040 energy goals.

Potential challenges, cited in its 2024 Annual Report, include smart meter data inconsistencies, delayed SCADA integration in rural zones and ongoing legal disputes tied to land access for substation projects — factors that could delay Oman’s grid modernisation efforts and expose the company to compliance risks.

“Readings from smart meters were occasionally inconsistent due to discrepancies during the integration of legacy platforms post-merger,” the report notes.

While NEDC has deployed over 1 million smart meters — achieving 75% national coverage — the integration of disparate systems inherited from the 2023 utility consolidation has created data quality gaps. This raises concerns over billing accuracy, energy auditing and real-time load management, particularly as the utility sector becomes increasingly digitised.

In parallel, the report reveals delays in achieving full operational control across NEDC’s diverse service regions. “Progress in integrating remote monitoring with regional control centres is ongoing, with delays in full real-time observability in rural zones,” the report says.

This limited grid visibility in certain governorates means parts of the network remain vulnerable to manual fault detection, delaying outage responses and reducing the effectiveness of smart infrastructure investments.

The report also discloses that “legal proceedings related to disputes over right-of-way and land access have been initiated in two governorates”.

OQAE kicks off green project operations

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 9

MORE than five years after its establishment as the clean energy investment arm of OQ Group, OQ Alternative Energy (OQAE) is set to formally commence the operational phase of its pivotal mandate.

That phase will begin next year, when three mid-scale renewable energy projects — dubbed Riyah-1, Riyah-2 (both wind-based Independent Power Projects, or IPPs), and the North Oman Solar IPP — come online over the course of the year.

Their launch marks OQAE’s official entry into the operational phase of a portfolio that aims to deliver upwards of 7 GW of new renewable energy capacity through to 2030.

The significance of this milestone in OQAE’s evolution as the National Champion for Renewable Energy in Oman was emphasised in an exclusive interview highlighting how the Riyah-1, Riyah-2 and North Oman Solar projects align with OQAE’s overarching mandate.

That mandate rests on two main pillars: The first is the development of renewable energy and green hydrogen projects; the second is ensuring holistic development across the entire value chain and ecosystem, which includes project execution, competency development, supply chain investment and strategic planning through to implementation.

Integral to these objectives is the aim of attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and advanced technology know-how into Oman. As announced last month, a joint venture comprising OQAE (51%) and TotalEnergies (49%) will develop the three projects at designated sites within the Block 6 concession of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

The renewable electricity generated will be supplied to PDO under long-term Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) at agreed tariffs. The OQAE-TotalEnergies JV will continue to own and operate the projects for the duration of the PPAs.

According to the officials, partnering with a renowned integrated energy company like TotalEnergies aligns with OQ Group’s strategy of leveraging the extensive



In addition to being the first clean energy projects to progress from concept to implementation, Riyah-1, Riyah-2 and North Oman Solar are also set to create a number of firsts for OQAE.

experience and capabilities of global industry leaders.

“Unlike our well-established peers such as OQ Exploration & Production and OQ Refineries & Petroleum Industries, OQAE

The significance of this milestone in OQAE’s evolution as the National Champion for Renewable Energy in Oman was emphasised in an exclusive interview highlighting how the Riyah-1, Riyah-2 and North Oman Solar projects align with OQAE’s overarching mandate.

is just commencing its operational journey,” one executive noted. “As a first step, our partnership spans not only Riyah-1, Riyah-2 and North Oman Solar, but also the 300 MW solar PV project that will contribute to the decarbonisation of the Marsa LNG bunkering project under construction at Solar Port.” Meanwhile, Huadong Engineering Corporation — a subsidiary of Chinese contracting giant PowerChina — has already begun work

on the three PDO-linked renewable energy projects. An initial batch of eight wind turbines is expected to arrive at the Port of Duqm for Riyah-1 in October.

The supplier, Goldwind, a leading

Chinese manufacturer, was awarded the contract to supply 36 turbines (18 for each site), each with a capacity of 117 MW, for the two wind farms.

Solar PV panels for the North Oman Solar project will be supplied by Longi, a global leader in solar technology. More than 200,000 bifacial N-type panels, with a generation capacity of 128 MW DC, will be installed across a 3.5 km² site at Saih Nihayda in central Oman.

The commercial operation dates are targeted for Q2 2026 for North Oman Solar and Q4 2026 for the wind farms.

In addition to being the first clean energy projects to progress from concept to implementation, Riyah-1, Riyah-2 and North Oman Solar are also set to create a number of firsts for OQAE.

They are the first to achieve Final Investment Decision (FID) and financial closure; the first wind projects to be financed locally by Omani banks — Bank Muscat and ahlibank; the first Wind IPPs in the world to exclusively power oil and gas projects; the first clean energy projects in which both the developers and end customers are from the oil and gas sector; and the first collaboration between oil and gas companies to advance the energy transition.

US, China seek to extend trade truce with London talks

LONDON: The United States and China are to sit down at the negotiating table in London on Monday to attempt to preserve a fragile truce on trade, despite simmering tensions.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and Trade Representative Jamieson Greer are leading the US delegation, President Donald Trump announced on Friday.

Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng — who led Beijing’s negotiating team at previous talks with the United States last month in Geneva — would also head the team in London, China’s foreign ministry announced at the weekend.

“The meeting should go very well,” Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

His press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, told Fox News on Sunday: “We want China and the United States to continue moving forward with the agreement that was struck in Geneva.”

While the UK government reiterated that it was not involved in the content of the discussions in any way, a spokesperson said: “We



The talks in London come just a few days after Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping finally held their first publicly announced telephone talks since the Republican returned to the White House. — AFP

are a nation that champions free trade.”

UK authorities “have always been clear that a trade war is in nobody’s interests, so we welcome these talks,” the spokesperson added.

The talks in London come

just a few days after Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping finally held their first publicly announced telephone talks since the Republican returned to the White House.

Trump said the call, which took place on Thursday, had reached a

“very positive conclusion.”

Xi was quoted by state-run news agency Xinhua as saying that “correcting the course of the big ship of Sino-US relations requires us to steer well and set the direction”.

The call came after tensions between the world’s two biggest economies soared, with Trump accusing Beijing of violating a tariff de-escalation deal reached in Geneva in mid-May.

“We need China to comply with their side of the deal. And so that’s what the trade team will be discussing tomorrow,” Leavitt said on Sunday.

A key issue in the negotiations will be Beijing’s shipments of rare earths — crucial to a range of goods including electric vehicle batteries and which have been a bone of contention for some time.

“Rare earth shipments from China to the US have slowed since President Trump’s ‘Liberation Day’ tariffs in April,” said Kathleen Brooks, research director at trading group XTB.

“The US wants these shipments to be reinstated, while China wants the US to rethink immigration

curbs on students, restrictions on access to advanced technology including microchips, and to make it easier for Chinese tech providers to access US consumers,” she added.

In April, Trump introduced sweeping worldwide tariffs that targeted China most heavily. At one point the United States hit China with additional levies of 145 per cent on its goods as both sides engaged in tit-for-tat escalation. China’s countermeasures on US goods reached 125 per cent.

Then in Switzerland, after two days of talks, the two sides agreed to slash their staggeringly high tariffs for 90 days.

But differences have persisted, including over China’s restrictions on exporting rare earth minerals. The impact was reflected in the latest official export data released on Monday in Beijing.

Exports to the United States fell 12.7 per cent on month in May, with China shipping \$28.8 billion worth in goods last month.

This is down from \$33 billion in April, according to Beijing’s General Administration of Customs. — AFP

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Customers who apply for Iskan Home Financing through OHB and select Muzn Islamic Banking will receive a complimentary Muzn Credit Card.

NBO’S MUZN ISLAMIC BANKING, OHB PARTNER ON HOME FINANCING OFFER

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman’s (NBO) Muzn Islamic Banking has partnered with Oman Housing Bank (OHB) to offer customers a home financing opportunity to support their homeownership aspirations.

As part of the collaboration, customers who apply for Iskan Home Financing through OHB and select Muzn Islamic Banking will receive a complimentary Muzn Credit Card upon request with the first-year annual fee waived.

Available until June 30, 2025, this limited-time offer supports homeowners by providing accessible, value-driven financing solutions.

The offer combines subsidised financing under OHB’s Iskan initiative and Muzn Islamic Banking Sharia-compliant Credit Card, blending affordability with convenience and ethical banking benefits.

This also enables new homeowners to conveniently finance essential home-related purchases such as appliances, furniture and other setup costs, supporting a smoother transition into their new homes.

Commenting on the partnership, Salima bint Obaid al Marzooqiyah, Assistant General Manager and Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Muzn, said: “We are pleased to collaborate with OHB to support families on their homeownership journey. This initiative enables customers to benefit from OHB’s subsidised Iskan Financing Programme while experiencing the Sharia-compliant value-added services and high standards of Muzn Islamic Banking’s financial offerings.”

To ensure a seamless and rewarding banking experience, customers can select Muzn Islamic Banking on the Iskan digital platform when applying for home financing.

Once approved, eligible applicants may request a Muzn Credit Card, which will be issued with the first-year annual fee waived.

This initiative reflects Muzn Islamic Banking’s ongoing efforts to deliver responsible financial solutions that are tailored to the needs of today’s customers. By working with Oman Housing Bank, Muzn Islamic Banking continues to support government efforts in housing development while strengthening its commitment to Sharia-compliant, customer-first banking.

Porsche Centre Oman and Shell Oman to expand EV charging infrastructure in Oman

MUSCAT: Porsche Centre Oman, SATA LLC, has announced a partnership with Shell Oman Marketing Company (Shell Oman) to significantly increase the roll-out of electric vehicle (EV) chargers across Oman.

The agreement will see at least eight co-branded Porsche and Shell DC high performance charging stations installed in the Sultanate of Oman.

Porsche Centre Oman and

Shell Oman will also cooperate to install 125 AC Porsche Destination Chargers at convenient locations, allowing Porsche customers to top up, free-of-charge.

“Today marks a significant step forward in our commitment to a more sustainable future. Through this collaboration with Shell Oman, we are proud to lead the charge — quite literally — in building the infrastructure needed to support electromobility in the Sultanate,”

said Samir Abdul Rasool Qassim al Zadjali, Chief Executive Officer, Porsche Centre Oman.

“By introducing both high-performance and destination chargers, we are not only meeting the evolving needs of our customers but also supporting Oman’s broader vision for electromobility and sustainable progress. Our collaboration with Shell marks a major milestone in accelerating EV adoption in Oman.”

Oman oil price rises \$1.36 to reach \$65.79 per barrel

THE official price of Oman oil (for August delivery) reached \$65.79 per barrel on Monday. The price of Oman oil on Monday increased by \$1.36 compared to last Friday’s price of \$64.43 per barrel.

The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for June delivery reached \$67.87 per barrel, a decrease of \$4.64 compared to the price for May delivery.

Meanwhile, international oil prices were little changed on Monday as investors awaited US-China trade talks in London in the hope that a deal could boost the global economic outlook and subsequently fuel demand.

Brent crude futures gained 4 cents to \$66.51 a barrel by 09:40 GMT while US West Texas Intermediate crude lost 1 cent to \$64.57. Brent rose 4% last week and WTI 6.2% as the prospect of a



The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for June delivery reached \$67.87 per barrel.

US-China trade deal boosted risk appetite for some investors.

US President Trump and China’s leader Xi Jinping spoke on the telephone on Thursday before US and Chinese officials meet in London on Monday in an effort to calm trade tensions

between the two nations.

A trade deal between the US and China could support the global economic outlook and in turn boost demand for commodities including oil.

Monday’s talks could dampen the impact on prices of a slew

of Chinese data releases, said IG market analyst Tony Sycamore.

Chinese export growth slowed to a three-month low in May as US tariffs curbed shipments while factory gate deflation deepened to its worst in two years, heaping pressure on the world’s second-largest economy at home and abroad.

“Bad timing for crude oil, which was testing the top of the range and knocking on the door of a technical break above \$65,” he said, referring to WTI prices.

The data also showed that China’s crude oil imports declined in May to the lowest daily rate in four months as state-owned and independent refiners began planned maintenance.

The prospect of a potential China-US trade deal outweighed concern over the price impact from increased output by the Opec+ group of oil producers next month.— Agencies

OFM transforms HR with AI-powered hiring solutions

MUSCAT: Oman Flour Mills (OFM), a leading food manufacturing company in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced a strategic partnership with Elevatus, a global provider of AI-powered recruitment solutions.

This partnership aligns with the company’s ongoing efforts to enhance and modernise its hiring processes in line with its innovative vision to boost operational efficiency and candidate experience.

The partnership aims to streamline recruitment by automating every stage of the process, from job posting to hiring and onboarding. Via Elevatus’ all-in-one platform, Oman Flour Mills’ HR team will be able to manage operations more efficiently and accurately, accelerating the hiring cycle and improving selection quality.

Safia Adam, HR Director at



This partnership aligns with the company’s ongoing efforts to enhance and modernise its hiring processes.

Oman Flour Mills, stated, “Our partnership with Elevatus marks a major step towards building a future-ready recruitment process. By eliminating manual bottlenecks and embracing smart automation, we’re not only improving internal

efficiency but also ensuring a professional and engaging experience for every candidate.”

She added that using Elevatus tools will allow the company to send timely, personalised updates to applicants, boosting

transparency and enhancing engagement throughout the hiring journey.

She further affirmed that this initiative is part of a broader strategy to drive innovation in HR management, as the company works towards building an attractive work environment that appeals to top Omani talent.

“By improving the candidate experience, we aim to strengthen our reputation as one of the best employers in the food sector,” she said.

“This partnership is a clear example of how modern technology can optimise administrative processes and support our ambitious business goals.”

Nadin Zureikat, Chief Revenue Officer at Elevatus, expressed gratitude in the partnership, noting that Oman Flour Mills is one of the most iconic food manufacturing companies in Oman.

SFK initiates steps for its real estate project in Al Zorah

MUSCAT: As part of its expansion plans to develop quality projects in the UAE real estate market, SFK Real Estate has announced the awarding of engineering consultancy work for its new real estate project in the Al Zorah area in the Emirate of Ajman to Al Sahel Engineering Consultants.

This decision is due to their distinguished experience in providing comprehensive engineering solutions.

On this occasion, Faisal bin Alawi al Dhib, Chairman of SFK Real Estate, stated that the project is part of the company’s vision to develop modern urban destinations rooted in sustainability principles and



The project will be located in Al Zorah, one of the most promising areas in Ajman.

integrating investment potential with contemporary architectural vision.

He confirmed that the choice of Al Sahel Engineering Consultants is due to their impressive track

record and specialised expertise in consultancy, design and engineering supervision.

The project will be located in Al Zorah, one of the most promising areas in the Emirate of Ajman, known for its strategic location and unique environmental and tourist attributes.

Al Zorah is considered an integrated investment destination combining natural beauty with advanced urban planning, making it an ideal environment for developing upscale residential and commercial projects.

Al Dhib added that the project aims to contribute to energising the residential and commercial sectors in Ajman by providing

innovative urban solutions that offer an integrated environment for living and working, with a focus on supporting medium and small projects; and offering high-quality real estate asset management services.

He noted that Al Sahel will provide technical and engineering advice throughout the project development stages, including planning, design preparation, execution and supervision, with a focus on risk reduction, efficiency improvement and maximising investment returns.

This reflects SFK Real Estate’s commitment to the highest standards of quality and sustainability in its projects.

BUSINESS

TECHSUPERGIANT



Workers walk through the Canary Wharf financial district in London, Britain. — Reuters

UK TO BOOST ‘HOMEGROWN TALENT’ IN NEW AI SKILLS DRIVE

LONDON: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Monday pledged to boost “homegrown talent for the AI age” by teaming up with tech giants to train 7.5 million workers in artificial intelligence skills. Speaking at the start of London’s Tech Week, with a line-up of speakers including Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang, Starmer said: “In this global race, we can be an AI maker and not an AI taker.” Starmer was due to have a one-on-one conversation with the chief of the star Silicon Valley semiconductor firm whose chips are critical for artificial intelligence applications and research. Ahead of the event bringing together industry giants, Starmer announced a government-industry partnership to train 7.5 million workers in AI skills, including in using chatbots and large language models to boost productivity. Tech firms including Nvidia, Google, Microsoft and Amazon committed to make training materials freely available to businesses over the next five years. Google EMEA region President Debbie Weinstein called it a “crucial initiative” essential for developing AI skills, unlocking AI-powered growth “and cementing the UK’s position as an AI leader”. In his opening speech, Starmer said Britain must build “the digital infrastructure that we need to make sure AI improves our public services”. The UK has a “responsibility” to “harness this unprecedented opportunity and to use it to improve the lives of working people”, Starmer added.

“We are going to build more homes, more labs, more data centres and we’re going to do it much, much more quickly.” His government has pledged to fire up the UK’s flagging economy, including with “pro-growth” AI regulations to attract tech investment and turn Britain into an “AI superpower”. “We are putting the power of AI into the hands of the next generation — so they can shape the future, not be shaped by it,” Starmer said in a press release before the event. The British leader unveiled £187 million (\$253 million) in funding to help develop tech abilities including training for one million secondary school students, as part of its “TechFirst” programme. He called it a “step change in how we train homegrown talent for the AI age”. The investment will “embed AI right through our education system”, he said, announcing nearly £150 million in undergraduate and PhD research scholarships in AI and tech. — AFP

LITHUANIAN INFLATION EASES, TRADE GAP WIDENS

RIGA: Lithuania’s consumer price inflation eased in May to the lowest level in five months, figures from the statistical office showed on Monday. Separate official data showed that the trade deficit increased in April as exports fell amidst an increase in imports. The consumer price index rose 3.4% year-on-year in May, slower than April’s stable increase of 4.1%. Further, this was the lowest inflation rate since December last year, when prices had risen 2.1%.

Prices for consumer goods grew by 2.4% and those for services surged by 5.7%. The annual price growth in food and non-alcoholic beverages moderated to 4.4% in May from 5.0% in April. Similarly, inflation based on housing and utilities eased from 4.8% to 2.5%. A 2% fall in clothing and footwear prices also impacted the slowdown in inflation. On a monthly basis, consumer prices dropped 0.3% in May versus a 0.1% gain in April.

Separate data from the statistical office showed that the trade deficit widened to €575 million (\$657 million) in April from €339 million last year. In March, the shortfall was €1.6 billion. Exports decreased 4.5% over the year, while imports increased by 2.7% in April. The downward trend in exports was determined by the fall in outflows of mineral fuels, mineral oils and products of their distillation.— dpa

\$5 bn boost for Sharia housing in Oman and GCC

JOMAR MENDOZA MUSCAT, JUNE 9

A major regional investment firm aims to accelerate the development of affordable, Sharia-compliant housing in Oman and the wider GCC, following a new strategic partnership between international finance institutions. BCIB Holding Co, Ltd, a Thailand-based financial service and investment banking firm, has acquired a 20 per cent stake in Amwalus Finance LLC, a US-incorporated financial institution with strategic operations in Oman, aligning both companies to jointly scale ethical housing finance solutions across the region. The investment is supported by a \$5 billion Medium Term Note (MTN) issued by Bastion Commonwealth Investment Bank, the banking arm of BCIB Holding. According to BCIB Holding Co, the proceeds from the MTN will be used to finance housing projects that adhere to Islamic finance principles, addressing the growing demand



The proceeds from the MTN will be used to finance housing projects that adhere to Islamic finance principles, addressing the growing demand for inclusive and affordable residential solutions in Oman and neighbouring Gulf countries.

for inclusive and affordable residential solutions in Oman and neighbouring Gulf countries. The agreement was formalised in a signing ceremony between Low Chun Keong, Managing Director of BCIB Holding and Wassem Mesto, Managing Director of Amwalus Finance LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of US-based Amwalus Trust. The ceremony was also attended by Dr Chutamas Vongvorakit,

Co-founder and Chief Financial Officer of BCIB Holding. “This strategic investment, backed by institutional financing through Bastion Commonwealth Investment Bank, underscores our commitment to fostering inclusive and sustainable development in Oman and across the region,” said Low. Amwalus Finance focuses on Sharia-compliant financing for affordable housing. With the new

capital injection and support from its strategic partner, the company plans to expand its housing solutions across the GCC, targeting underserved communities. Wassem Mesto welcomed the partnership as a milestone for the company’s mission. “We are proud to welcome BCIB Holding as a key strategic partner in our mission to provide dignified, affordable housing guided by Islamic finance principles,” he said. “With this collaboration and the support of Bastion Commonwealth Investment Bank, we are well-positioned to scale our impact across the GCC and meet the growing demand for ethical, inclusive housing solutions.” The alliance reflects BCIB Holding’s broader goal to promote long-term socioeconomic development through innovative Islamic financial instruments, with a particular focus on infrastructure and housing. Oman, which is advancing national priorities under Oman Vision 2040, is expected to be a central focus of these investments.

Pakistan economy to grow 2.7 per cent in Fiscal Year 2025

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan’s economy is likely to expand 2.7% in the fiscal year ending June 2025 after growing 2.5% during the previous year, the government’s economic survey showed on Monday, a day before the country’s federal budget is unveiled. The government initially targeted 3.6% GDP growth, but lowered it to 2.7% last month. The IMF expects real GDP to grow by 2.6% in FY25 and for the economy to grow 3.6% in FY26. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s



A trader counts Pakistani rupee notes at a currency exchange booth in Peshawar, Pakistan. — Reuters

government aims for 4.2% GDP growth next year, the country’s planning minister said last week, amidst competing priorities, including stimulating investment, maintaining a primary surplus and managing defence expenditure amidst heightened tensions with India. Pakistan’s central bank, in a bid to encourage growth, cut its policy rate by more than 1,000 basis points in the current fiscal year. Its latest cut last month brought the key rate to 11%, resuming an easing cycle

that had brought rates down from 22% after a brief pause in March. Pakistan had a current account surplus of \$1.9 billion in the July to April period of the current fiscal year compared to a deficit of \$200 million in the same period last year, the survey showed. “Pakistan’s economy has been globally acknowledged for achieving macroeconomic stabilisation in the outgoing fiscal year,” Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb said in his foreword to the survey. — Reuters

China’s exports slow as trade war takes toll

BEIJING: Chinese exports grew at a slower pace than expected in May, official figures published on Monday showed, hours ahead of expected talks between Beijing and Washington aimed at easing a gruelling trade war. Imports fell more dramatically than expected last month, with weak domestic consumption in the world’s number two economy highlighted by data earlier in the day revealing another month of falling prices. The 4.8 per cent year-on-year increase in overseas shipments last month was slower than the 8.1 per cent growth recorded in April, also falling short of the six per cent jump that was forecast in a survey of economists by Bloomberg. It comes as representatives



An aerial view shows containers and cargo vessels at the Qingdao port in Shandong province, China. — Reuters

from China and the United States are expected to meet in London on Monday for another round of high-stakes trade talks that markets hope will ease tensions between the economic superpowers. Monday’s reading included a 12.7 per cent plunge in exports to the United States compared with April, when US President Donald Trump unveiled his eye-watering tariffs on China. May’s exports to the United States also represented a year-on-year decline of more than one third — the steepest slide since early 2020. In contrast, customs data showed shipments to Vietnam increased from the previous month. Those to other Southeast Asian countries including Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia

all declined slightly after soaring in April, the figures indicated. “The acceleration of exports to other economies has helped China’s exports remain relatively buoyant in the face of the trade war,” wrote Lynn Song, chief economist for Greater China at ING, noting that shipments to Southeast Asian nations were up 14.8 per cent year-on-year. China’s overall imports in May dropped 3.4 per cent year-on-year, coming up short of the 0.8 per cent decline forecast by the Bloomberg survey. Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management, said the trade outlook “remains highly uncertain”. He pointed to the impact of “frontloading”, when overseas buyers increase shipments ahead of potentially higher tariffs.— AFP

What’s the significance of AI agents?



TARIQ AL BARWANI

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman.

LAST week, my article revolved around the Artificial Intelligence (AI) agents, being digital assistants and/or helpers that go beyond just responding to user inputs and prompts where they actually act proactively and not reactively to user/your requests.

This week, I want to elaborate on what significance do these AI agents have on us? Truth be told, as a senior professional, one can be overwhelmed and loaded too, not just with information as an overload (from news outlets, social media, work, family, etc) yet with personal and professional actions and commitment too (from checking various emails, meetings, projects and a huge to-do-list that continues to grow periodically).

I know some might say that there are productivity tools and apps that might help; and be a solution to help manage time and tasks, yet the proof is in the pudding on the number of hours that may be needed which is not enough to be honest and practical.

A probable solution is therefore my last article on utilising AI agents, for they would (as soon as they mature) assist you 24/7 (365 days) on virtually all your tasks, even while you’re asleep or on vacation.

What’s the significance of these AI agents

though? In a nutshell, having someone smart and knowledgeable available next to you, round the clock, to assist you.

What more? Quicker, cheaper (in price and not in quality), multitasker and are very responsive.

This may not be practical to have as a human being, let aside the bomb (in terms of cost) you would need to pay if such a service is available, for you may require more-than one person or resource to get such activities done (just in case an organisation tries to mimic such a need today).

Humans have emotions, humans need time to rest and humans cannot normally handle more-than one task at a time with superior quality. Yet smart machines and robots can (only with limitations as it stands today) AI agents save lots of time.

Think of all the repetitive tasks it can do for you every day, from replying to emails, reviewing and summarising your readings/ reports, organising your digital calendar and many more.

All these time-consuming tasks can be freed up for you to focus on other activities that only you can do best (or don’t necessarily need assistance with). AI agents learn and can adapt quite fast, thanks to the large language models (LLMs) which I will try and write

What’s the significance of these AI agents though? In a nutshell, having someone smart and knowledgeable available next to you, round the clock, to assist you.

about in the coming articles.

But briefly, LLMs get smart every day by learning from a context, applying some logic and/or sometimes also get creative.

As a pratical example, see how generative AI apps like ChatGPT and Gemini works (they all depend on LLMs).

Lastly, AI agents biggest significance, as I had mentioned earlier, is that they work while you are asleep.

They don’t take break, don’t ask for leave and certainly are not moody (as they don’t have emotions as humans do). This is a big bonus of working with AI agents.

To conclude, AI agents would be able to think, plan and act on your behalf. What you just need to do is to give them a goal (such as “Find me a restaurant here in Muscat that serves Mandi Rice and is at a place near the beach; and book for me at 12 pm next Saturday June 14”).

The AI agent will find out the steps, look for the information and get you the results so as perform the necessary booking for you. AI agents will surely redefine what’s possible by making life management much easier and faster; something I personally need to keep abreast.

Until we catch up again next week, stay positive and tuned.

RATE CUT SIGNALS INDIA’S DISCONTENT WITH GROWTH

SHRITAMA BOSE

INDIA’S status as the fastest-growing major economy isn’t impressing everyone. The country’s central bank sprung a surprise on Friday, slashing the key policy rate by 50 basis points and the cash reserve ratio for lenders by twice as much.

Under new Governor Sanjay Malhotra, the Reserve Bank of India is putting more emphasis on supporting GDP. That’s fine so long as it can fulfil its inflation-targeting mandate when the need arises.

India last month claimed its position as the world’s fourth-largest economy, overtaking Japan. Yet the 6.5 per cent clip at which it grew during the year to the end of March was its slowest pace in four years.

That’s well behind the average 7.8 per cent headline number the World Bank estimates the South Asian country needs to achieve its aim of high-income status by 2047, the 100th anniversary of independence.

That’s the goal Malhotra seems focused on. Barely six months into his role, the former bureaucrat has reduced the central bank’s policy rate by a whole percentage point to 5.5 per cent.

Further cuts face a higher bar, he said on Friday, justifying the front-loading by citing the need for certainty in an environment of global churn.

By bringing rate cuts forward, Malhotra may avoid a potential monsoon-induced spike in inflation from getting in the way of monetary easing. It marks a departure from the styles of former governors: Urjit Patel, who stepped down in 2018, instituted inflation targeting as the bank’s top policy goal and his successor Shaktikanta Das pushed an intense clampdown on unsecured lending.

The size of the rate move will nudge banks led by the State Bank of India to hasten transmission of the past cuts through loan rates. Lending more is one way to charge up tepid urban spending. Overall consumption accounts for 57 per cent of GDP.

Yet there are limits to the RBI’s latest actions. Although the lower reserve ratio for banks will release liquidity worth 2.5 trillion rupees (\$29 billion) by December 2025, an almost equivalent or higher sum will be sucked out of the banking system as the RBI unwinds its short bets on the US dollar made to cushion a falling rupee, economists at HDFC Bank reckon.

Ultimately the central bank left its GDP forecast of 6.5 per cent for the year ending March 2026 untouched.

Under Malhotra, India’s monetary policy may eventually be more supportive to the government’s desire for faster growth.

Such an outcome would reduce friction between the two sides but the thesis will only be truly tested when retail inflation, currently near a six-year low of 3.16 per cent in April, ticks up higher.— **Reuters**

EU can play it cool with Trump’s trade threats

OTHER

governments have so far taken three main approaches to dealing with Donald Trump’s trade threats. China hit back hard at the US president’s tariffs and got him to back down partly.

Canada also retaliated and avoided some of the pain Trump inflicted on other countries.

Meanwhile, Britain cut a quick deal that favoured the United States. None of these is a model for the European Union.

The 27-member group is not China. Though its bilateral goods trade with the United States last year was worth 70 per cent more than between the US and the People’s Republic, the EU is not an autocracy that can outpunch Trump.

If it antagonises the US president, he might up the stakes by pulling the rug from under Ukraine and undermining the EU’s defences. American hard power gives it what geopolitical strategists call “escalation dominance”.

The EU is not Canada either. Ottawa was able to hang tough because its people were infuriated that Trump was trying to blackmail Canada into becoming part of the United States.

While anti-Trump sentiment is high in the EU, politicians who are sympathetic to him, such as Poland’s new president, can still get elected.

On the other hand, the EU is not the United Kingdom. Both are at risk from Russia’s attack on Ukraine. But the EU trades seven times more goods with the United States than Britain does — so Washington has more to lose if economic relations break down.

There is another way for the EU to handle Trump’s threats: play it cool. That is more or less what the bloc is doing. It involves neither escalating the conflict nor accepting a bad deal. It means being open to a good agreement if the US lowers its demands, but willing to play the long game if it does not.

One reason to buy time is to help Kyiv. The longer the EU has to prepare its own support package for Ukraine, which should include getting it a lot of cash, the less the damage if Trump ultimately cuts off all US aid to the country.



A 3D-printed miniature model depicting US President Donald Trump, the European Union flag, and the word ‘Tariffs’ is shown in this illustration. — **Reuters**



HUGO DIXON

The writer is Commentator-at-Large for Reuters. He was the founding chair and editor-in-chief of Breakingviews.

The president’s own vulnerabilities may also increase over time. Just look at the spectacular end of his alliance with Tesla boss Elon Musk.

The fragile US trade truce with China may break down causing more financial turmoil, making Trump less keen to pick a fight with the EU.

If the Supreme Court stops him using emergency powers to impose tariffs, his negotiating position will be weaker. And tariffs could hurt the US more than its supposed victims, by pushing up inflation and crimping growth.

A QUICK DEAL? Trump has zig-zagged in his trade threats and actions against the EU. The current state of play is that there are 50 per cent tariffs on US imports of steel and aluminium from the bloc, a 25 per cent tariff on cars and 10 per cent so-called reciprocal tariffs on most other goods.

And so they’re trying to be the first and the best to get there, which is why everybody’s throwing so much money at it without any clear sense of direction. Meanwhile, The US president has threatened to jack up these reciprocal tariffs to 50 per cent if there is no deal by July 9. He is also looking at more “sectoral tariffs”, including on pharmaceuticals and semiconductors.

While the EU has complained to the World Trade Organization (WTO), it has delayed its own retaliation. Its negotiators accept that they are

unlikely to overturn the reciprocal tariffs, the Financial Times has reported.

The bloc still aims to avoid the sectoral ones. Those on cars and any on pharmaceuticals would hurt it the most. It has dangled the possibility of buying more US equipment and natural gas to get a deal.

An agreement on those lines could be good for the EU. It needs to beef up its defences and eliminate its purchases of Russian gas. While it would be best to have its own arms and energy supplies, buying more from the US makes sense as an interim measure.

An important nuance, though, is that the EU should reserve the right to take action against the reciprocal tariffs after the WTO issues its verdict, says Ignacio Garcia Bercero, a former senior EU trade official.

Such a pact would involve quite a climbdown by Trump. True, arms and gas purchases would narrow the US goods deficit with the EU, which was \$236 billion last year. But his administration has a host of other complaints including the bloc’s value-added tax and food safety standards as well the digital taxes that some of its members impose on tech giants.

It is hard to see the bloc agreeing anything in those areas, says Simon Evenett, professor of geopolitics and strategy at IMD.

BACK TO WAR? Although the US side described last week’s trade talks with the EU as “very constructive”, discussions could easily break down. The question then is how the bloc would react if Trump imposed higher reciprocal tariffs.

The EU has so far imposed no countermeasures. Though it has agreed to tax 21 billion euros of US imports in response to the steel and aluminium tariffs, it has delayed these until July 14 to try to get a deal.

The European Commission, its executive arm, is also consulting on taxing a further 95 billion euros of US imports in response to the car tariffs and the reciprocal ones.

But added together, these tit-for-tat measures would be equivalent to only a third of the 379 billion euros of EU imports subject to Trump’s tariffs.

— **Reuters**

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> 20

ENTERTAINMENT

‘Beetlejuice’ is coming back to Broadway



“BEETLEJUICE” isn’t dead quite yet. The national tour production of the fan-favourite musical comedy, which has had two previous Broadway runs in 2019-20 and 2022-23, will head to the New York stage this fall, producers announced on Tuesday. The show, which is adapted from Tim Burton’s 1988 film and tells the story of a Goth girl and a pushy poltergeist, is set to play the Palace Theatre for 13 weeks, beginning October 8 and running through January 3, 2026. Casting will be announced at a later date. In his review of the original Broadway production, which starred Alex Brightman as the titular ghoul in a striped suit, The New York Times’ Ben Brantley praised Brightman’s performance and the “jaw-droppingly well-appointed gothic funhouse set” by set designer David Korins (“Hamilton”), though he lamented that the show “so overstuffs itself with gags, one-liners and visual diversions that you shut down from sensory overload.” No matter: The musical became a fan favourite, with people dressing in costume, lip-syncing to the cast recording on TikTok and showering the show’s cast with fan art. With a book by Scott Brown and Anthony King, music and lyrics by Eddie Perfect and direction by Alex Timbers (who won a Tony Award for directing “Moulin Rouge!”), the stage production was nominated for eight Tony Awards, but won none. “Beetlejuice” is having a bit of a cultural moment: A popular sequel film, “Beetlejuice Beetlejuice,” also directed by Burton, was released last year, more than three decades after the original, which starred Michael Keaton (Beetlejuice), Alec Baldwin (Adam Maitland), Catherine O’Hara (Delia Deetz) and a young Winona Ryder (Lydia Deetz). The national tour production, which began performances in 2022, has played 88 cities over the past 2-1/2 years. The musical has also had productions in Tokyo; Seoul, South Korea and Melbourne, Australia; and is heading soon to Sydney. — NYT

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



SCIENCE

A researcher demonstrates the process of compounding the ocean-degradable plastic raw materials at the Center for Emergent Matter Science (CEMS) of Japanese research institution Riken in Wako, Japan. — AFP



FILM

Swiss actor and stuntman Daniel Bernhardt attends the Los Angeles special screening of “Ballerina” at the TCL Chinese theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP



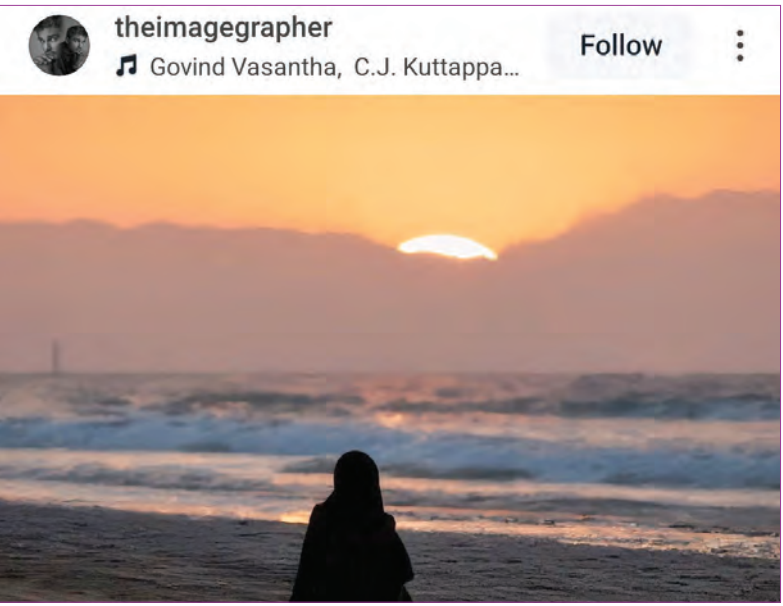
LIFESTYLE

Three-masted sixth-rate frigate “L’Etoile du Roy” sails during the “La semaine du Golfe” old vessels gathering off Vannes, western France. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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How a two-story boulder ended up on a 120-foot-high cliff



Small family farms border the southern coast of Tongatapu, Tonga’s largest island in the South Pacific. Amid the cassava and banana plants, an unusual sight stands out: a massive, off-white boulder. This rock holds significance in Tongan mythology and has recently attracted scientific attention.

Researchers suggest that the boulder was transported inland thousands of years ago during a tsunami event, likely triggered by an earthquake in the nearby Tonga-Kermadec Trench, as reported in Marine Geology.

Globally, scientists have documented large, out-of-place boulders, often attributed to water movement and tsunami waves. In July, a team traveled to Tongatapu after farmers pointed out a large rock on Teisina family farmland.

They found a limestone

boulder, roughly the size of a two-story house, almost camouflaged by vegetation, and estimated it weighed over 1,300 tons.

Named Maka Lahi (“Big Rock”), it sits more than 650 feet inland, far from the coast, indicating it was dislodged by a powerful wave.

Using computer models, the team simulated waves ranging from 10 to 600 seconds in intervals. They concluded that waves at least 160 feet high could have moved Maka Lahi.

By analyzing flowstone on the lower part of the boulder, they estimated the event occurred around 7,000 years ago—well before humans inhabited Tonga.

This study offers insight into the island’s geological history and the force of ancient natural disasters.

— The New York Times



In search of anyplace but the ‘most charming village in France’

I WAS finishing a monthlong book tour in France, travelling by train to new cities each night — many I’d never seen. Those 28 days revealed how much of France exists beyond Paris’s allure.

With four days before returning home, I decided to rent a car and take a spontaneous road trip through southern France. No plans, just the open road. I initially planned to go alone, but then I learned Stephen, an old friend, was also in France, finishing work in Marseille. I suggested we share the adventure. His wife, also a friend, wasn’t with us and there was no romantic motive — just two friends seeking a quiet escape.

“Two for the Road,” minus the love story.

We started in Nice, picked up a car and a local friend recommended we visit Èze, famous for its beauty. But Èze was swarmed with tourists: winding streets lined with shops selling soap and towels. I turned to Stephen. “Let’s avoid any place called the Most Charming French Village.”

We headed north, aimless but eager for small moments — good, affordable food and unexpected sights. My goal was to feel like a character in a French film, though I wasn’t sure which one.

Soon, I saw a handmade sign reading “Fromage” outside a farmhouse. Inside, a young woman looked like she’d stepped out of a Marcel Pagnol film, offering us chèvre. I asked about nearby bread; she pointed to a dirt road where cows ambled. No English, just locals, fresh cheese and quiet charm.

Later, we drove to Gorges du Verdon, a winding river between steep cliffs, bustling with birds. For about \$10, we rented a paddleboard, swam; and ate cheese and bread.

“What about the Côte d’Azur?” Stephen proposed. Who was I to argue?

In Villefranche-sur-Mer, we searched for Jean Cocteau’s Chapel,



famed for its frescoes. It was closed, so we swam near a small quay instead.

A good road trip has no plan and we embraced that. Around 6 pm, we searched for Airbnb. Usually, I’d spend hours hunting, but I let go. We found a simple place and settled in.

‘A DOZEN OYSTERS’

Next morning, we wandered into a village market. For about 10

euros, I bought a dozen oysters and a glass of Muscadet. Alain, behind the stand, handed me the oysters with flair, saying “vive la France.” They might’ve been the best I’d ever had. He even sang as he shucked the second dozen. Stephen glanced at his watch.

Sometimes we had plans, then abandoned them. I wanted to see the Calanques near Cassis, but instead, swam and relaxed on rocks, napping in the sun.

We made a quick stop in Marseille at Maison Empereur, a historic hardware store. I wanted vintage bulbs and cast iron for cooking, but I only bought a feather duster, a pink hot water bottle and some French jokes.

LE LOVE ROOM

Later, in Fayence — a quiet, charming town — the name evoked images of still-life paintings, but the town was peaceful. Flowers spilled from stone houses; fields stretched beyond.

No tourists — just locals and one Airbnb: Le Love Room. After booking, Stephen suggested dinner. The only open restaurant was Les Temps des Cerises, a cozy bistro crowded with locals. We ordered foie gras with Calvados.

Walking back, we passed an elderly woman leaning out her window with her cat, smiling and greeting us. We returned her wave.

Our Airbnb was in an old stone building. Climbing the narrow, steep stairs.

Stephen and I settled for the night — he in the bed, I on a leather couch. I laid out my toothbrush; he pulled out his book. Just two friends, calling it a night.

The next morning, we returned the car early, heading for Charles de Gaulle.

Our brief, surprising escape from the ‘Most Charming Village in France’ confirmed: sometimes, the best moments happen without a plan. — NYT

FEATURES



The story of the brothers begins with a simple desire: to do something meaningful for their family and community. HH Sayyid Adam al Said, the farm’s CEO and one of the main driving forces behind it, shares how they started. “When my brothers and I first decided to set up the farm, it was because we wanted to give our parents food that was truly pure,” he says. “We had no prior farming experience, but what we did have was a strong belief in growing food the right way — without harmful chemicals, pesticides, or synthetic fertilisers. We wanted to build something trustworthy, for our families and for everyone else.”

Their choice of the name “Yuzu” isn’t random. It symbolises curiosity and the desire to explore what natural food can be, much like the Japanese citrus fruit it’s named after. But more than that, it represents their philosophy — wanting to stand out, to be different, to see how far they can push organic methods in Oman’s challenging climate.

One of their proudest achievements? Growing wheatgrass — a tricky crop in Oman’s dry climate. “About seven years ago,” Adam recalls, “we had a request from a German client who wanted us to grow wheatgrass. At first, we weren’t sure it was even possible here, but we took it as a challenge.” After sourcing high-quality organic seeds, they succeeded in establishing a local harvest, proving that with dedication and the right methods, even the most delicate herbs could thrive. Now, wheatgrass is popular among health-conscious locals and it’s become a symbol of what they can achieve.

The farm’s dedication to both quality and environmental responsibility extends beyond just crops. They aim to preserve the land’s natural biodiversity by creating a habitat where bees, birds and beneficial insects can flourish. They avoid pesticides and synthetic chemicals, knowing that healthy soil and plants mean a more resilient, balanced ecosystem.



Adam highlights how important this is: “Soil life is crucial. When we add plant waste and organic matter instead of chemicals, we nurture billions of microbes that help keep plants healthy and ecosystem balanced.”

Innovation plays a strong role, too. The brothers seamlessly incorporate modern technology into their organic system, using advanced irrigation, pest monitoring with sensors and even experimenting with AI data analysis to improve yields and efficiency. Despite Oman’s tough growing conditions, they personify resilience — testing new methods, adapting as they go and always looking for ways to get better. But Adam emphasises that the real innovation isn’t just in tools. It’s about fostering a mindset that values ongoing learning, respect for nature, and a commitment to quality.

For those interested in starting their own organic journey, Adam offers advice: “Focus on ‘why’ you want to do it. Transitioning to organic can be demanding, but if you remember that you’re providing healthier food for people, it helps you push through the challenging times.”

The brothers are acutely aware of climate change’s effects. Increasingly harsh temperatures, storms and droughts threaten their crops, but they see these challenges as opportunities to innovate and improve resilience. Adam believes that eating more vegetables and less processed food can help slow climate change because it reduces emissions and water consumption.

Looking ahead, the brothers hope their journey will inspire others to think differently about food and farming. They believe that change begins at the local level, with farmers, consumers and policymakers working together to shift towards more sustainable practices. Their message is clear: nurturing the land with patience and care isn’t just better for the environment — it’s better for society as a whole.

Their approach draws heavily on practices passed down from their ancestors, combined with new technology. They work the land carefully, using compost teas to boost soil health and planting cover crops that enrich the earth without any artificial help. Crop rotation is a big part of their method — moving crops around to keep pests and disease at bay, rather than using chemical sprays. They also keep a close eye on water use, which is especially important in Oman. Their irrigation systems are tailored precisely for each area, avoiding waste and leaks. It’s a deliberate, thoughtful process, aimed at protecting resources while producing healthy vegetables and herbs.

A MODEL OF SUSTAINABLE AND INNOVATIVE ORGANIC FARMING IN OMAN

BY MAZOUN AL GHAILANI

VISITING the farm means getting used to the smell of fresh soil mixed with the aroma of neem leaves and herbs. There’s a certain calmness in the owners’ routine — watering crops with precision, checking the irrigation systems and making sure pests are controlled naturally. The farm isn’t sprawling like a big industrial operation; instead, it feels more like a close-knit family space. Rows of carefully grown crops stretch out among patches of cover crops, with tools and equipment neatly arranged nearby. The brothers work side-by-side, their conversations light but purposeful, reflecting the careful attention they give to every plant, every action.

This is Yuzu Organic Farm — a place where old-fashioned methods meet modern technology. It’s run by three brothers — Adam, Omar and Fahar — who have made it their mission to grow food that’s healthy, honest and free from chemicals. Their approach isn’t about rushing for big yields or mass production; it’s about quality, sustainability and doing right by the land and the people who eat what they grow.