

OMAN

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DAILY

Observer

SUNRISE 05:32 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:08 AM

DHUHR 12:18 PM

ASR 03:40 PM

MAGHRIB 06:59 PM

ISHA 08:19 PM

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DON'T FALL PREY TO FAKE JOB OFFERS

INBRIEF

HIS MAJESTY GREETES KING OF THE BELGIANS

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Philippe Leopold Louis Marie, King of the Belgians, on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan lauded the depth of bilateral relations and cooperation, wishing the Kingdom of Belgium progress, prosperity and the realisation of further achievements.

VISA MEDICAL CENTRE OPENS IN MANILA



MANILA: Oman has officially inaugurated the Oman Visa and Medical Centre in Manila, a key initiative aimed at streamlining the work visa application journey for Filipino nationals seeking employment in Oman. The opening ceremony was jointly led by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour. The initiative follows the Cebu-Oman Investment Forum, held this month in Cebu, Philippines. **REPORT ON P3**

YOU CAN CHANGE HIGHER ED OPTIONS FROM TODAY

MUSCAT: The preference modification phase for registration and admission for the 2025/2026 academic year will begin today and continue until July 31. The results of the initial sorting will be announced on August 19, while accepted students will have the opportunity to complete procedures starting from August 19 until August 24. Ahmed bin Mohammed al Azri, Director-General of the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, stated that the number of available seats received from government higher education institutions, domestic scholarships, private sector grants for private higher education institutions, and external scholarships and grants from Arab countries for the 2025/2026 academic year has reached 29,252 seats. Of these, 16,884 seats are in various government higher education institutions, 607 are for external scholarships and grants. **REPORT ON P2**

DHOFAR MUSEUM OPENS



The Dhofar Museum opened in the Wilayat of Salalah under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, on Monday. The opening of the new museum is part of efforts aimed at promoting heritage and cultural tourism in Dhofar Governorate. **REPORT ON P2**

OMAN’S FDI SURGES OVER RO 30 BN IN Q1

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has recorded a sharp rise in foreign direct investment (FDI), surpassing RO 30.611 billion by the end of the first quarter of 2025, according to preliminary data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Inflows during the period reached RO 5.225 billion, up from RO 4.111 billion in the corresponding quarter of 2024. The oil and gas extraction sector remained the dominant magnet for foreign investment, accounting for a staggering 81 per cent of total FDI. Financial intermediation drew RO 1.3 billion in investment, supported by inflows of RO 217.8 million. The real estate, rental, and commercial project activities sectors, however, saw a decline, with total investments standing at RO 653.1 million — down 36.8 per cent from the same quarter last year. The United Kingdom maintained its position as the largest foreign investor in Oman, contributing RO 15.574 billion — equivalent to 50.9 per cent of total FDI. The United States followed with RO 7.824 billion, Kuwait (RO 1.223 billion), China (RO 894.9 million), the United Arab Emirates (RO 753 million), and Qatar (RO 669.3 million). **SEE ALSO P13**

Khuta new smart career tools to guide students

THE National Employment Programme has unveiled a second package of services on the “Khuta Career Guidance Platform,” Oman’s first national digital platform dedicated to career counselling. The new package includes a range of smart features aimed at enriching the career guidance journey. These tools are designed to help users shape career paths aligned with both their personal aspirations and the evolving demands of the job market. Among the most notable additions is the “Study Plan” service, targeted particularly at Grade 10 students. It allows them to choose study paths based on their interests, strengths, and university requirements. Another key feature is the “Entrepreneurial Traits Assessment,” a science-based tool. It enables students to assess their entrepreneurial potential by analysing their behavioural traits



The new package includes a range of smart features aimed at enriching the career guidance journey. In a first-of-its-kind initiative, Khuta supports visually impaired users in discovering careers based on their capabilities and interests and attitudes. The platform also now includes the “Khuta AI Assistant,” which uses data analytics to suggest career and academic options suited to each user’s profile. Khuta has also launched the “Career Interests Assessment for Visually Impaired Individuals”— a first-of-its-kind initiative in Oman. This tool supports visually impaired

users in discovering career pathways based on their capabilities and interests. These developments mark a major step forward in strengthening Oman’s career guidance ecosystem, offering youth the tools and insights they need to make well-informed decisions about their futures. The initiative also supports Oman Vision 2040, which prioritises the development of a knowledge-based economy and the sustainable growth of the national workforce. Dr Badr bin Hamood al Kharousi, Adviser and Head of Capacity Building at the National Employment Programme and General Supervisor of the platform, underscored the central role of career guidance in aligning educational outcomes with market requirements. He highlighted Khuta as a successful model of cross-sector collaboration, developed with support from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, and private sector partners. — ONA

Motorists urged not to drive over Dhofar grasslands

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 21

Waaï (which in Arabic means awareness), a grassroots environmental campaign, warned four-wheel-drive drivers in Dhofar Governorate to avoid the region’s fragile, rain-soaked grasslands, saying they risk irreparable damage to the unique khareef ecosystem. The initiative, operating under the soon-to-be-registered Nature Conservation Society of Dhofar, said repeat offenders are flagrantly breaching environmental laws by

driving over green spaces that only flourish during the June–September monsoon season. “Driving across the grass is neither adventurous nor harmless,” the group said. “It is a direct assault on the ecosystem that makes Dhofar unique.” Local authorities have recorded fresh tyre scars on plateaus overlooking Salalah, while herders in neighbouring valleys report that compressed soil from vehicles has slowed new plant growth. Khareef greenery is shallow-rooted and easily destroyed by repeated off-road driving.



Flagrant breaching of Oman’s environmental protection laws by driving over green spaces that only flourish during khareef

Waaï is calling on the Royal Oman Police and Dhofar Municipality to step up enforcement by increasing mobile patrols, erecting barriers around sensitive picnic areas, and imposing on-the-spot fines or impounding vehicles for serious breaches. The campaign also urges clear, tri-lingual signage — in Arabic, English and Malayalam — at known off-road entry points, along with QR-code maps to guide visitors to legal viewpoints and parking bays. Outreach programmes in schools, the group added, would help foster a “khareef guardian” culture

among local youth. Protecting Dhofar’s seasonal greenery aligns with Oman Vision 2040 goals on sustainable tourism and biodiversity conservation. Tourism officials say last year’s khareef season drew more than 950,000 visitors, supporting thousands of jobs in hospitality, transport and retail. Unchecked habitat damage, Waaï warns, could put this vital income at risk. For now, Waaï is appealing as much to conscience as to compliance. “Let’s not erase the khareef magic in a few reckless minutes,” the group said.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The session addressed the relationship between culture and Library and Information Science. — ONA

DIALOGUE DEBATES LIBRARIES’ ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth on Monday conducted a dialogue session titled ‘Culture, Library Science, and Sustainable Development’ as part of the Civilisational Horizons programme.

The session debated the challenges facing libraries due to the digital revolution and the spread of the Internet, and how libraries have been able to adapt to these transformations and provide reliable information. It also highlighted the role libraries play in supporting education, scientific research and innovation.

The session addressed the relationship between culture and Library and Information Science (LIS), and the role of libraries as cultural institutions that have contributed throughout the ages to enriching human culture and promoting the values of pluralism, tolerance and freedom of expression.

The session highlighted the vital role libraries play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by organising knowledge and managing the vast intellectual output through smart systems that keep pace with technological developments.

The session discussed the contributions of libraries to enhancing artificial intelligence, thanks to their vast databases, and their role in training users to use these technologies to produce reliable and knowledge-based texts. It also addressed the reality of LIS in the Sultanate of Oman, the information strategy and digital transformation within the Oman Vision 2040 as well as the most prominent challenges facing the library sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

It also reviewed investment opportunities in cultural and creative industries and the role of libraries in this field. — ONA

MoH WARNS AGAINST DIGITAL ADDICTION DURING SUMMER HOLIDAYS

ZAKIYA AL HUSSAINI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

The Ministry of Health (MoH) urged families to be vigilant about the excessive use of electronic devices among children during the summer break. It said that such behaviour may signal early signs of digital addiction.

In an awareness poster on its official X platform, the MoH listed several behavioural indicators that could point to unhealthy dependence

on screens, including frequent mood swings, neglect of social or academic life and reduced interest in offline activities.

Among the most notable warning signs are excessive use of electronic devices, lack of self-control over screen time, and compulsive checking of text messages or notifications, MoH affirmed. The ministry noted that affected individuals may exhibit withdrawal symptom such as anxiety, irritability, or Danger, when not using electronic devices.

Other red flags include persistent sleep disturbances, signs of depression, and ongoing stress. The ministry added that children may lose interest in everything unrelated to the Internet. Speaking about this issue, Shamsa al Siyabi, a mother of two, said her five-year-old daughter had become addicted to YouTube. However, after following advice to remove the phone from her child’s reach, she observed a significant improvement in her daughter’s erratic behaviour.

You can change higher ed preferences from today

THE preference modification phase for registration and admission for the 2025/2026 academic year will begin today and continue until July 31. The results of the initial sorting will be announced on August 19, while accepted students will have the opportunity to complete their procedures starting from August 19 until August 24.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Azri, Director-General of the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, stated that the number of available seats received from government higher education institutions, domestic scholarships, private sector grants for private higher education institutions, and external scholarships and grants from Arab countries for the 2025/2026 academic year has reached 29,252 seats. Of these, 16,884 seats are in various government higher education institutions, 607 are for external scholarships and grants, while the number of domestic scholarships and grants for study at private universities and colleges in the Sultanate of Oman stands at 11,761.

He added that the preference modification phase is one of the most critical stages of registration, allowing students to finalise their programme choices in the system for the initial sorting competition. He noted that the updates this year focus on two main aspects, namely admission procedures and academic programmes.

As for academic programme updates, he pointed out that higher education institutions (scholarship providers) have aligned programmes with labour market



The preference modification phase is one of the most critical stages of registration, allowing students to finalise their programme choices. — ONA

demands. New domestic scholarship programmes for bachelor’s degrees include Emergency Medical Services Science, Environmental Management and Practices, and Human Medicine at Dhofar University. Domestic scholarships have also been introduced for students with learning difficulties to study at private higher education institutions.

Al Azri further added that new external scholarships have been introduced for specialisations overseen by the External Scholarships Department at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, such as Healthcare, Health Planning, Health Risk Management, Therapeutic Nutrition,

Law and Actuarial Studies.

He said that the ministry, represented by the Domestic Scholarships Department, has also directed scholarships toward high-demand specialisations in the labour market, including Process Engineering, Production Operations, Occupational Health and Safety, Welding, Mining, Renewable Energy, Quality Control Management, Tourism and Hospitality Management and Legal Assistant Studies. Additionally, new professional diploma scholarships for Air Transport Pilot Licences have been introduced at the Oman Aviation Academy.

He noted that government higher education institutions have expanded their programmes and specialisations. The Military Technological College has increased its capacity this year, opening admissions for female students alongside males in various engineering disciplines (bearing in mind that these are not coupled with employment). The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) has added a new engineering specialisation at its branch in Musandam Governorate. The university has also introduced an advantage for social security family students, allowing them to apply without allocated seats in engineering programmes; upon acceptance, they may choose the nearest branch of the university to their residence.

The trial sorting results showed that 1,936 students with an 80 per cent grade or higher did not receive a preliminary programme offer. 76 per cent of them had listed too few preferences, focusing on highly competitive, limited specialisations. — ONA

Dhofar Museum to promote heritage and cultural tourism

SALALAH: The Dhofar Museum opened in the Wilayat of Salalah under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, on Monday.

The opening of the new museum is part of efforts aimed at promoting heritage and cultural tourism in Dhofar Governorate.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Hamza bin Mohammed al Ghassani, a member of the Board of Directors of Dhofar Museum, explained that the museum’s vision is not limited to documentation or display but also includes educating generations, serving researchers and school and university students as well as promoting heritage and cultural tourism in the Sultanate of Oman, and Dhofar Governorate in particular.

Al Ghassani explained that the museum’s objectives are introducing the historical perspective of human cultural heritage, building a unique broad base for contemporary thought, and documenting all aspects of heritage within an integrated cultural project that describes the vital aspects of our ancient heritage.

The museum provides means of facilitating visitors’ enjoyment and discovery of the details of the scientific material, enabling them to explore these exhibits as they tour through the museum’s halls using modern technological means



The museum features several environments, each displaying a section that highlights the history of the region, such as Islamic culture, terminology and images. — ONA

for informational materials and valuable collections the details of which are available in four languages (Arabic, English, French and German). The museum also allows Omani craftsmen to display specialised traditional crafts, encouraging them and achieving professional and institutional integration.

The museum features several environments each displaying a section that highlights the history

of the region, such as Islamic culture, terminology and images. It also embodies aspects of the past of Dhofar Governorate, including the civilisations of Samahram, Al Baleed, and Ubar, and their important cultural, civilisational and commercial roles. It also highlights the historical maritime role of the Sultanate of Oman and its relations with ancient cultures and civilisations.

The museum features



coastal, rural, desert, and urban environments. It includes several sections that showcase the Samahram and Al Baleed civilisations, the Omani character, Dhofari culture, architectural heritage, traditional crafts, folk dances, hunting, the coconut tree, agricultural crops, Dhofari cuisine, traditional Dhofari clothing, Dhofari weapons, documents, manuscripts, photographs and coins. — ONA

SHORTTAKES



Sayyid Badr and Dr Mahad officially opened the Oman Visa and Medical Centre in Manila.

OMAN OPENS INTEGRATED VISA CENTRE IN MANILA

MANILA: Oman has officially inaugurated the Oman Visa and Medical Centre in Manila, a key initiative aimed at streamlining the work visa application journey for Filipino nationals seeking employment in Oman. The opening ceremony was jointly led by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour. The initiative follows the Cebu-Oman Investment Forum, held this month in Cebu.

The centre offers a fully integrated, one-stop experience that includes biometric enrolment, medical examinations, attestation services, contract validation and digital payments. It has been designed to enhance efficiency, protect applicants and employers, and eliminate reliance on unregulated intermediaries. Employers too will benefit from the initiative, as it supports verification of skills and qualifications to ensure that selected candidates meet job requirements.

In addition to its core services, the centre facilitates bank account setup in Oman, provides an application information hub, and conducts orientation sessions on workers’ rights and responsibilities. These measures ensure that applicants are fully informed and supported throughout the process, promoting a smooth and dignified pre-departure experience.

During the visit, the Omani delegation held formal discussions with the Philippines Department of Migrant Workers, reaffirming a shared commitment to worker protection and ethical recruitment. Both sides agreed to work closely to ensure the success of this initiative in line with the objectives of both nations.

The Manila Centre is the first in a series of similar facilities planned across key labour-sending countries. Additional centres are expected to be inaugurated in the near future as part of Oman’s broader strategy to enhance labour mobility frameworks and protections for workers and employers in accordance with Oman’s Labour Law.

WORKSHOP REVIEWS AL WUSTA URBAN PLAN



HAIMA: A workshop focused on monitoring the implementation of the urban strategy in Al Wusta Governorate was held on Monday in the Wilayat of Haima, organised jointly by Al Wusta Governorate Office and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

The session aimed to evaluate progress on the governorate’s urban development plan, clarify essential tasks to meet strategic objectives, and conduct direct monitoring of ongoing projects and data accuracy.

Attendees reviewed a detailed project classification presentation and agreed on a coordinated working mechanism between the Governor’s Office and the Housing Directorate to ensure seamless collaboration. The workshop also highlighted the importance of effective communication with stakeholders for project updates and role integration.

The discussions addressed key challenges related to data updates, with practical solutions proposed to overcome them. The event was attended by Shaikh Mohammed bin Ali al Ghufaili, Wali of Haima, alongside several senior officials from Al Wusta Governorate. — ONA

TRA ENHANCES TELECOM NETWORK READINESS IN DHOFAR

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has announced the completion of network readiness in Dhofar Governorate ahead of the Khareef Dhofar Season 2025, ensuring enhanced telecommunications quality and continuity during one of Oman’s busiest tourist periods.

The initiative is part of a broader effort to strengthen service infrastructure and deliver a seamless communication experience to the thousands of visitors who flock to Dhofar each year for the monsoon season. TRA confirmed that the enhancements align with national objectives to support digital transformation and elevate the overall telecom experience for residents and tourists alike.

As part of the preparations, 33 new stations have been installed - including seven along Sultan Said bin Taimur Road - to expand coverage across the governorate. Additionally, 432 existing telecommunications stations

have been upgraded to advanced networks to improve bandwidth efficiency and boost capacity.

TRA also noted significant strides in performance and service stability, with 189 station connections upgraded and 31 mobile stations deployed to serve high-traffic and temporary locations.

Crucially, 5G technology has now been activated in 108 stations, enhancing speed and network responsiveness. Technical and field teams have been strategically deployed across Dhofar to provide rapid response capabilities in case of any emergency disruptions during the season.

Given the surge in tourists during khareef, dependable telecommunications services are vital. TRA emphasised that it will continue to monitor network quality and performance in real time to ensure optimal service levels.

Oman continues to make strong progress in digital infrastructure, with Dhofar’s seasonal demand serving as a key driver for accelerated technological upgrades.

‘Eidaad’ internship programme launched

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

THE Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in partnership with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and various higher education institutions, launched the sixth phase of the national internship programme ‘Eidaad’.

The launch ceremony saw the signing of 12 agreements (cooperation protocols) between industrial and academic sectors. The agreements were signed by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Farid bin Khalfan al Harthy, Executive Director of Corporate Support at PDO, and representatives of the industrial and private sector institutions concerned.

Eidaad is a flagship initiative that bridges the gap between academia and industry by offering a full-year practical training opportunity with leading companies in Oman. The programme is designed to provide Omani university students with an immersive, hands-on learning experience aligned with their academic specialisations and labour market demands.

Dr Mariam bint Belarab al Nabhaniyah, Director-General of Private Universities and Colleges at the Ministry, in her speech emphasised the strategic significance of the initiative in achieving Oman Vision 2040.

“Empowering Omani youth and enhancing their skills to meet job market demands is one of the core objectives of Oman Vision 2040. This is evident in our ongoing commitment to providing inclusive education, lifelong learning and impactful scientific research to develop national capabilities and foster a knowledge-based society.”

Farid bin Khalfan al Harthy, stated: “The Eidaad programme reflects PDO’s institutional transformation and our redefined role in contributing to Oman’s future. It equips Omani youth with skills that meet emerging market requirements and supports the development of a resilient, knowledge-based economy. This partnership reaffirms our long-term commitment to



The launch ceremony saw the signing of 12 agreements (cooperation protocols) between industrial and academic sectors.

human capital development and creating lasting impact for future generations.”

Eng Hamed bin Saif al Hadhrami, Manager of External Training and Development at PDO, also noted: “We are proud to take part in this pioneering national initiative, which brings tangible value to the country and nurtures young talent. It is crucial that we continue to work closely with academic institutions to align educational outcomes with industry needs and to update curricula that reflect real-world challenges. This collaboration will open doors for students to enter the job market with strong foundational skills for long-term success.”

Since its inception in 2020, over 1,000 students have graduated from the programme. In its current phase, more than 400 students from various institutions across Oman are expected to participate, with placements across more than 40 companies spanning multiple sectors.

This phase of the programme introduces enhanced features, including the “Specialisation Alignment Initiative” which helps students and academic advisers better understand career pathways related to specific fields of study. This empowers students to make informed decisions about

their professional futures. Additionally, the programme’s updated framework incorporates core competencies such as critical thinking, communication and professional ethics to better prepare students for a rapidly evolving job market.

Among the participants, students Ma’ther Ali and Sheikha al Badi expressed pride in being part of the Eidaad experience. “The programme gave us the freedom to choose meaningful projects, while also offering academic and emotional support along the way. It helped us gain practical insight into real-world environments that will serve us in our future careers.”

Nisreen Abdullah, a student from the German University of Technology in Oman (GÜtech), shared a similar sentiment: “Eidaad has been both academically and professionally enriching. I strongly encourage all university students to join, as it offers significant value to one’s future career.”

The Eidaad programme stands out as a practical model for effective collaboration between higher education and the private sector - enhancing graduate readiness, fostering innovation and supporting the national agenda for sustainable economic development.

Al Alya Mosque embodies depth of Islamic heritage

A’RUSTAQ: Al Alya Mosque in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, Al Batinah South Governorate, stands as one of the most prominent religious and historical landmarks in the Sultanate of Oman. It carries profound spiritual, intellectual and architectural significance, reflecting the depth of Islamic heritage that has characterised the region for centuries.

The mosque dates back to the era of Imam Nasser bin Murshid al Yaarubi in the 17th century.

Located in the heart of Al Alya Village, approximately 800 metres from Al Rustaq Fort, the mosque occupies a central position, serving residents for prayers and social gatherings. Built on elevated ground about



The mosque dates back to the era of Imam Nasser bin Murshid al Yaarubi in the 17th century. — ONA

six metres above the falaj (traditional irrigation channel), it is surrounded by diverse orchards — some of which are endowed as waqf (religious endowment), such as the Al Furudh orchard to the south and the Al Jahal orchard to the east, highlighting the mosque’s economic and social importance in the community.

Eng Ahmed bin Saif al Mazrouei, one of the caretakers of the mosque’s endowment, explained that the mosque holds significant endowed assets, including 47 water shares in Falaj Al Maysar, valued at approximately RO 94,000, as well as orchards containing over 553 palm trees and agricultural plots, with an estimated total value of RO 166,000.

In a statement, Al Mazrouei added that the mosque was historically used to distribute zakat (alms) and food supplies

to eligible villagers during religious occasions such as Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha. It also served as a venue for weddings and funerals until recently, when these events were moved to Sablat Al Alya.

The mosque was a gathering place for community leaders, locally called “Ahl Al Hall wal Aqd,” to discuss village affairs and host visits by imams and governors. It was also a site for reconciliation meetings and judicial proceedings. A designated area within the mosque provided drinking water through traditional clay vessels (jihal), filled with water from Falaj Al Maysar and hung in their designated spots. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT



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KABEER YOUSUF
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WHEN a job hunter of Asian origin received a message on his phone stating that he had been shortlisted for a position he had only applied for a few hours earlier, he was overjoyed.

Like many desperate job-seekers clinging to hope, he believed his time had finally come. With his heart pounding and expectations rising, he waited anxiously for the next step.

Soon, a call followed. A representative from the so-called ‘company’ claimed that they were in the process of establishing operations in Oman and were actively looking to onboard graduates as part of their expansion drive.

The caller, fluent in a mix of English and an Asian language, spoke convincingly. He requested academic credentials and explained that a nominal fee of RO 50 was required as a ‘processing charge’ to expedite the offer.

Desperate and hopeful, the young man scrambled to collect the money - borrowing small amounts from friends and well-wishers. He wired the amount as instructed and waited for confirmation of his employment. But that moment never came. Days passed. The number he had been communicating with became unreachable, and reality began to sink in. He had been scammed.

This is not an isolated incident. With the growing number of job-seekers and increasing digital activity, fraudsters are finding innovative ways to trap victims. The combination of economic stress, job market competition and emotional vulnerability makes it easier for scammers to manipulate their targets.

In a particularly heartbreaking case, a woman from a neighbouring GCC country tearfully shared her ordeal. Working as a waitress, she had saved RO 2,000 for her upcoming wedding. She was approached by someone claiming he could secure a job in Oman for her fiancé.

Desperate to build a future with her partner, she transferred the entire sum to the fraudster, only to later realise that she had fallen victim to an elaborate con. “I trusted him blindly, dreaming of starting a new life in Oman with my fiancé,” she said. “Now I have nothing left - not even the money for my wedding.”

The scammer, it is believed, resides in Oman and continues to operate by targeting vulnerable individuals - both within and outside Oman. The method is often the same: luring the victim with a promising offer, establishing communication via local mobile numbers to appear legitimate and then requesting upfront payments under various pretexts - processing fees, verification costs, or legal clearances.

Even journalists trying to expose these cons have not been spared. In one shocking instance, a journalist who had taken it upon himself to highlight and follow up on these scams was maliciously targeted by the fraudsters. They circulated his photo on social media platforms, falsely portraying him as the mastermind of the operation. It was an attempt to defame him and discredit his work, while the real culprits sought to escape unnoticed.

Authorities have taken note. The Directorate-General of Criminal Investigations at the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has issued public advisories urging people to exercise caution. A senior ROP official confirmed that they are tracking such fraudulent activities and actively pursuing those behind them.

“We have detected a rise in fraudulent schemes targeting job-seekers, young adults and individuals seeking online services or secondhand goods,” the official said. “The scammers often use SMS or messaging apps to send fake job notifications and entice victims into sending money in return for false promises of employment.”

In some cases, victims are told they have won valuable prizes and must pay a small amount to claim them. Once the initial payment is made, further demands follow - each more convincing than the last - until the victims realise they’ve been trapped in an organised scam.

The ROP strongly advises all residents and citizens to verify the source and authenticity of any such job offers or online announcements. Any suspicious activity or suspected fraud should be reported immediately to the nearest ROP station or via their official communication channels.

As Oman continues to welcome talent from across the globe, it is essential for job-seekers and residents alike to remain alert. While the job market may pose challenges, falling victim to deceitful promises only deepens the pain. Information, awareness and timely action are the best tools we have against such fraud.



FAKE JOB SCAMS ARE RISING IN OMAN, TARGETING DESPERATE JOB-SEEKERS

VICTIMS ARE TRICKED INTO SENDING MONEY, ONLY TO FIND THE SCAMMERS VANISH

ROP URGES THE PUBLIC TO STAY VIGILANT AND REPORT FRAUD IMMEDIATELY

DON'T FALL PREY TO FAKE JOB OFFERS

SHORT TAKES



Syed Shaandar Ali Shah Bukhari has been awarded a Certificate of Appreciation by the International Human Rights Movement (IHRM)

Pakistani social worker feted for selfless service

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 21

Syed Shaandar Ali Shah Bukhari, a well-known social worker in Muscat, has been awarded a Certificate of Appreciation by the International Human Rights Movement (IHRM). The prestigious recognition honours Bukhari’s tireless efforts in humanitarian work, including the repatriation of prisoners, aiding the disabled, assisting in returning deceased individuals to their home countries, facilitating blood donations and supporting the underprivileged.

A silent force of good in the community, Bukhari has long worked without seeking recognition, guided by a deep sense of duty and empathy. This award, he says, is more than a personal achievement - it is a continuation of a legacy of service passed down by his late father, a revered figure in Oman’s social welfare circles.

At the heart of Bukhari’s work are the teachings of Islam and the enduring words of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): “Whoever alleviates the suffering of a believer, Allah will alleviate their suffering on the Day of Judgment.” His approach has always been inclusive — reaching out to those in need regardless of background, status, or belief.

“Oman has given me so much, and I want to give back through charity. This recognition from IHRM is a tribute to the generosity of this nation, its leadership and its people,” said Bukhari. He expressed hope that his efforts would reflect the spirit of Oman’s humanitarian traditions and inspire others to give back in their own ways.

This award also stands as a homage to his late father’s teachings. “My father always taught me that true wealth is not measured by possessions, but by the positive change you bring to others’ lives,” he said.

The IHRM plays a key role in recognising and supporting individuals who exemplify the spirit of humanitarian service. This recognition was made possible with the support of IHRM President Rana Basharat Ali and Ambassador M Nadeem Raza.

As Bukhari continues his mission, he hopes to inspire a new generation of changemakers: “We all have the power to make a difference. Whether it’s a small gesture or a large act of kindness, every action counts.”

ROP foils drug smuggling attempts from Iran, Yemen



MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP), represented by the Coast Guard Police Command, in cooperation with the Directorate-General for Combating Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances, seized a smuggling boat coming from Iran. The boat was tracked by the Coast Guard Police (CGP) and was seized upon entering the Omani territorial waters after the smugglers attempted to evade the CGP vessels. On board the boat, there were three Pakistani infiltrators who were arrested off the coast of Qurayyat.

They were in possession of more than 70 kilogrammes of hashish. Legal proceedings are underway against them.

The Coast Guard Police at Dhofar Governorate Police Command, also foiled an attempt to smuggle more than 550 kilogrammes of drugs by three Yemeni nationals who had illegally entered the Omani territorial waters on a fishing boat. Legal proceedings are underway against the defendants.

ONA AT BAKU SHUSHA GLOBAL MEDIA FORUM

BAKU: Oman News Agency (ONA) participated in the third edition of the Shusha Global Media Forum, held in the city of Shusha, the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The forum aims to enhance international media cooperation and discuss current challenges facing the media amidst rapid technological advancements. It also seeks to explore the prospects of digital transformation and ways



The forum aims to enhance international media cooperation

to combat rumours while boosting media credibility. Forum sessions also include discussions on press freedom, the evolution

of artificial intelligence in newsrooms and the importance of media in building bridges of cultural understanding among

peoples. The event facilitates the exchange of expertise among various international media institutions.

Approximately 140 media experts and specialists from 52 countries are participating in the forum. This includes representatives from over 30 news agencies, seven international organisations and nearly 80 media institutions, alongside Azerbaijani media officials and representatives. — ONA

Supervision programme launched for start-ups

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

THE Omani Start-up Accelerator has launched the ‘Supervision and Follow-up’ programme - an initiative designed to support the sustained growth of emerging start-ups across the Sultanate of Oman.

Targeting start-ups that have graduated from the accelerator or hold the official ‘Start-up Card’ issued by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), the programme will run from July 2025 to January 2026. It offers a robust six-month support system tailored to guide start-ups through their critical early-growth phase.

The programme delivers a wide array of integrated services, including specialised advisory sessions covering financial management, legal compliance and business model development. It also enhances technical readiness and market access, equipping start-ups to confidently scale into regional and international markets.

“This programme is a strategic extension of our efforts to institutionalise start-up growth in Oman,” said Qais al Toubi, General Supervisor of the Rising Omani Start-ups Programme and Deputy President for Finance and

The initiative also facilitates participation in entrepreneurship exhibitions and investment conferences, provides fully-equipped office spaces and organises regular networking sessions with investors and sector experts - ensuring that start-ups receive holistic support.



The initiative is a joint effort between ASMED and Madayn, through its enabling arm, the Industrial Innovation Academy

Investment.

“It delivers hands-on, targeted support to help start-ups overcome sector-specific challenges, build investment readiness and grow in line with Oman Vision 2040.”

The initiative also facilitates participation in entrepreneurship exhibitions and investment conferences, provides fully-equipped office spaces and organises regular networking sessions with investors and sector experts - ensuring that start-ups receive holistic support.

A key feature of the programme is its active monitoring mechanism, which tracks each start-up’s growth trajectory, ensuring that clear

milestones are achieved throughout the supervision period.

The initiative is a joint effort between ASMED and Madayn, through its enabling arm, the Industrial Innovation Academy, reflecting a national commitment to building a globally competitive start-up ecosystem.

By enhancing investment readiness and enabling expansion into new markets, the ‘Supervision and Follow-up’ programme is expected to empower Omani entrepreneurs to take their ventures to the next level - contributing positively to the diversification and resilience of the national economy.

Muscat resident Sasha wins Mrs World Pride 2025

MUSCAT: Bringing global pride to Oman, Sasha Saldanha, a long-time Muscat resident, has been crowned Mrs World Pride 2025 at the prestigious Mrs World International held in Gurgaon, India.

Out of more than 25,000 global applicants, only 152 finalists reached the grand finale. Among them, Sasha distinguished herself with her poise, charisma and multifaceted talents - earning her the coveted Mrs World Pride title.

Having made Oman her home for over 30 years, Sasha’s journey is rooted in values of resilience, grace and quiet strength. Sasha has carved out an impressive career of her own, spanning top institutions in Oman including Al Madina Takaful Insurance, Sultan Qaboos University and ANZ Bank.

A double degree holder, she is also widely recognised for her



Sasha Saldanha crowned Mrs World Pride 2025 at the Mrs World International in Gurgaon, India

earlier modelling work, representing iconic brands such as Oman Air, Bank Muscat and Oman Oasis, making her a familiar face in Oman’s fashion and lifestyle scene.

Her love for rhythm found expression through dance as she became a Salsa Instructor with Oman Salsa Group, bringing people together

and fostering community connections through culture and movement.

Speaking on her victory, Sasha said: “This title isn’t just about skin-deep beauty. It celebrates confidence, resilience and transformation. I’m deeply honoured to represent Oman — my home for over three decades — and to stand as a symbol of empowered womanhood.”



جمعية الرحمة
ALRAHMA ASSOCIATION
for Motherhood & Child Care
جمعية الرحمة للأمومة والطفولة

Tender (4/2025)

Al Rahma Association for Motherhood and Child Welfare

Al Rahma Association announces a tender for the implementation and installation of photovoltaic solar energy system at Al Rahma Center in Al Khoudh – Wilayat Al Seeb, with covering a total area of 278.22 m² and capacity of (62.3) KW.

Interested Institutions and companies wishing to participate in the tender are invited to contact the association via the following email:
Email: finance@alrahma.om
Contact Number: 99219972



Announcement of the tender TND GSI G3 0007/07/2025 for the Design, Supply, Installation & Commissioning Support of Sewage Treatment Plant for Al Ghubrah III IWP

GS INIMA (AL GHUBRA) LLC has been awarded with the Engineering, Procurement and Construction of AL GHUBRAH III IWP in Oman, for CAPITAL DESALINATION COMPANY S.A.O.C.

Omani companies are invited to quote their most competitive price **for the Design, Supply, Installation & Commissioning Support of Sewage Treatment Plant.**

To participate in the bidding please send copy of CR, copy of VAT certificate and copy of SME card (if any), via e-mail to: **ghubrah.3.site@inima.com**, subject: **TND GSI G3 0007/07/2025 by 24th July 2024 1:00 PM.**

A reply with RFQ documents will be sent to candidates on the same day of receiving above required documents.

Bid closing date : **4th August 2025 1:00PM**

WORLD

DEFUSING CRISIS



Evacuating Bedouins ride in the back of a truck stopping at a security checkpoint in Taara. — AFP

SYRIA EVACUATES BEDOUINS FROM SWEIDA AMID TRUCE

SWEIDA: Syrian authorities on Monday evacuated Bedouin families from the city of Sweida, after a ceasefire in the southern province halted a week of sectarian bloodshed that a monitor said killed more than 1,100 people. A correspondent outside the devastated provincial capital saw a convoy of buses and other vehicles enter Sweida and then exit again carrying civilians, including women and children.

They were headed for reception centres in neighbouring Daraa province and to the capital Damascus, in coordination with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. State news agency SANA said 1,500 people from Bedouin tribes were to be evacuated.

The ceasefire announced Saturday put an end to the sectarian violence that has left more than 1,100 dead, most of them Druze fighters and civilians, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor, whose toll also includes hundreds of government security personnel.

“We reached a formula that allows us to defuse the crisis by evacuating the families of our compatriots from the Bedouin and the tribes who are currently in Sweida city,” the province’s internal security chief Ahmad Dalati told state television. The ceasefire, though announced on Saturday, only effectively began on Sunday after Bedouin and tribal fighters withdrew from parts of Sweida and Druze groups regained control.

The deal allowed the deployment of government security forces in Sweida province but not its main city. Security forces had erected sand mounds to block some of Sweida’s entrances. The violence has displaced more than 128,000 people, an issue that has also made collecting and identifying bodies more difficult. — AFP

FEARS OF ESCALATION AFTER ISRAEL HITS YEMEN PORT

HODEIDA: Israel pounded Yemen’s port of Hodeida with air strikes on Monday for the second time in a month, stoking fears of escalation as it warned Yemen could face the same fate as Iran.

Areas of Yemen have come under repeated Israeli strikes since the Ansar Allah group began launching missile and drone attacks on Israel, declaring they act in solidarity with Palestinians over the Gaza war.

The renewed strikes on Yemen are part of a year-long Israeli bombing

campaign against the Yemenis, but the latest threats have raised fears of a wider conflict in the poverty-stricken Arabian Peninsula country.

A Gulf official said that there were “serious concerns in Riyadh... that the Israeli strikes on the Yemen could turn into a large, sustained campaign to oust the movement’s leaders”.

Any Israeli escalation could “plunge the region into utter chaos”, said the official. The Al Masirah television reported “a series of

Israeli air strikes on the Hodeida port”. Another security official, said that “the bombing destroyed the port’s dock, which had been rebuilt following previous strikes.”

On July 7, Israeli strikes hit Hodeida and two nearby locations on the coast. A Yemeni port employee in Hodeida said the strikes targeted “heavy equipment brought in for construction and repair work after Israeli air strikes on July 7... and areas around the port and fishing boats”. — AFP

Western nations call for immediate end to Gaza war

MORE than two dozen Western countries called for an immediate end to the war in Gaza on Monday, saying that suffering there had “reached new depths” as Israel’s military expanded its operations to the central city of Deir Al Balah. After more than 21 months of fighting that have triggered catastrophic humanitarian conditions for Gaza’s more than two million people, Israeli allies Britain, France, Australia, Canada and 21 other countries, plus the EU, said in a joint statement that the war “must end now”. “The suffering of civilians in Gaza has reached new depths,” the signatories added, urging a negotiated ceasefire, the release of hostages held by Palestinian militants and the free flow of much-needed aid.

The plea came as Deir Al Balah came under intense shelling on Monday, after Israel’s military warned of imminent action in an area where it had not previously operated. The military, a day earlier, had ordered those in the central Gaza area to leave immediately as it was expanding operations, including “in an area where it has not operated before”. Between 50,000 and 80,000 people were in the area when the evacuation order was

The Western countries also denounced Israel’s aid delivery model in Gaza, saying it was dangerous, fuels instability and deprives Gazans of human dignity. We condemn the drip feeding of aid and the inhumane killing of civilians, including children, seeking to meet their most basic needs of water and food



Smoke, flames rise from a residential building hit by an Israeli strike, in Gaza. — Reuters

issued, according to initial estimates from the UN’s humanitarian agency OCHA.

Deir Al Balah resident Abdullah Abu Saleem, 48, said on Monday that “during the night, we heard huge and powerful explosions shaking the area as if it were an earthquake”. He said this was “due to artillery shelling in the south-central part of Deir Al Balah and the southeastern area”. “We are extremely worried and fearful that the army is planning a ground operation in Deir Al Balah and the central camps where hundreds of thousands of displaced

people are sheltering,” he added.

In their statement, the Western countries also denounced Israel’s aid delivery model in Gaza, saying it was “dangerous, fuels instability and deprives Gazans of human dignity”. The UN has recorded 875 people killed in Gaza while trying to get food since late May, when Israel began easing a more than two-month aid blockade. “We condemn the drip feeding of aid and the inhumane killing of civilians, including children, seeking to meet their most basic needs of water and food,” the statement said. — AFP



MUSCAT GOVERNORATE
MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. (23/2025)

Muscat Municipality invites Companies specialized in the field and registered with General Secretariat of **Tender Board**, to participate and obtain tender documents from the website via the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below:

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
(PRF/25/009)	Organizing Entertainment activities for Muscat Nights 2026	10/08/2025	31/08/2025
(PRF/25/010)	Muscat Nights Food Festival - 2026	10/08/2025	31/08/2025
(PRF/25/011)	Design, Operation & Management of the Muscat Nights' International Circus 2026	10/08/2025	31/08/2025
(PRF/25/012)	Rent tents for Muscat Nights 2026	10/08/2025	31/08/2025
(PRF/25/013)	Design, Supply & Fix of Kiosks for Muscat Nights 2026	10/08/2025	31/08/2025
(PRF/25/014)	Supply & Fix of LED Screens for Muscat Nights 2026	10/08/2025	31/08/2025
(PRF/25/015)	Rental of Mobile Offices for Muscat Nights 2026	10/08/2025	31/08/2025
(PRF/25/016)	Design, Built, Operation & Management of "Candy Land" for Muscat Nights 2026	10/08/2025	31/08/2025
(PRF/25/017)	Design, Built, Operation and Management of "MASHA & THE BEAR" for Muscat Nights 2026	10/08/2025	31/08/2025
(PRF/25/018)	Rental of Mobile Toilets for Muscat Nights 2026	10/08/2025	31/08/2025

1. Bidders submit their offers electronically.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e/tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to etenderhd@gstb.gov.om or call (+968 24402200).

Bangladesh training jet crash kills 20



DHAKA: At least 20 people were killed as a Bangladesh air force training aircraft crashed into a college and school campus in the capital city of Dhaka on Monday, a fire services official said. More than 50 people, including children and adults, were hospitalised with burns, a doctor at the National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery told reporters.

The incident occurred at the Milestone School and College in Dhaka’s northern area of Uttara, officials said. “Bangladesh Air Force’s F-7 BGI training aircraft crashed in Uttara. The aircraft took off at 13:06,” the military’s public relations department said

in a statement.

Videos of the aftermath of the crash showed a big fire near a lawn emitting a thick plume of smoke into the sky, as crowds watched from a distance. Firefighters sprayed water on the mangled remains of the plane, which appeared to have rammed into the side of a building, damaging iron grills and creating a gaping hole in the structure.

“A third-grade student was brought in dead, and three others, aged 12, 14 and 40, were admitted to the hospital,” said Bidhan Sarker, head of the burn unit at the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital, where some victims were taken. Visuals also showed

people screaming and crying as others tried to comfort them. “When I was picking (up) my kids and went to the gate, I realised something came from behind...I heard an explosion. When I looked back, I only saw fire and smoke,” said Masud Tarik, a teacher at the school.

Muhammad Yunus, head of Bangladesh’s interim government, said “necessary measures” would be taken to investigate the cause of the accident and “ensure all kinds of assistance”. “The loss suffered by the Air Force...students, parents, teachers and staff, and others in this accident is irreparable,” he said. — Reuters

RENEWED TALKS



Esmail Baqaei

IRAN BLAMES EUROPEANS FOR N-DEAL COLLAPSE

TEHRAN: Tehran on Monday blamed European powers for the failure of the 2015 nuclear deal, accusing them of breaking commitments ahead of renewed talks in Istanbul with Britain, France and Germany. The 2015 agreement — reached between Iran and UN Security Council permanent members Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States, plus Germany — imposed curbs on Iran’s nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief.

However, it unravelled in 2018 when the United States, during Donald Trump’s first term as president, unilaterally withdrew from the accord and reimposed sweeping sanctions.

Though Europe pledged continued support, the mechanism to offset US sanctions never effectively materialised, forcing many Western firms to exit Iran and deepening its economic crisis.

“Iran holds the European parties responsible for negligence in implementing the agreement,” said foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei ahead of Friday’s talks in Istanbul with Britain, France and Germany on the deal’s future.

Tehran will also host a trilateral meeting today with Chinese and Russian representatives to discuss the nuclear issue and potential sanctions. The Chinese foreign ministry said Beijing would “continue to play a constructive role in pushing relevant sides to restart dialogue and negotiations, and reach a solution that takes in account the legitimate concerns of all parties”.

Germany said the Istanbul talks would be at the expert level, with the European trio working “flat out” to find a sustainable and verifiable diplomatic solution. “If no solution is reached by the end of August... the snapback also remains an option for the E3,” said its foreign ministry spokesman, Martin Giese.

Using the snapback clause was “meaningless, unjustifiable and immoral”, Baqaei told a news conference, arguing that Iran only began distancing itself from the agreement in response to Western non-compliance. “Iran’s reduction of its commitments was carried out in accordance with the provisions outlined in the agreement,” he said.

Western powers — led by the United States and backed by Israel, Iran’s arch-enemy — have long accused Tehran of secretly seeking nuclear weapons capability. Iran has repeatedly denied this, insisting its nuclear programme is solely for civilian purposes such as energy production.

Tehran and Washington had held five rounds of nuclear talks since April, but a planned meeting on June 15 was cancelled after Israel launched strikes on June 13, triggering a 12-day conflict. — AFP

MUSK’S X CALLS FRENCH PROBE ‘POLITICALLY MOTIVATED’

PARIS: A French probe into alleged foreign interference and bias via the algorithm at Elon Musk-owned social network X is “politically motivated”, the company said in a post on Monday, adding that it was refusing to cooperate. “X believes that this investigation is distorting French law in order to serve a political agenda and, ultimately, restrict free speech,” the social network said. It added that it “has not acceded to the French authorities’ demands” to access its

recommendation algorithm and real-time data, “as we have a legal right to do”.

Cybercrime prosecutors announced the opening of the probe on July 11 into suspected crimes including manipulating and extracting data from automated systems “as part of a criminal gang”. The move followed two complaints received in January about “foreign interference” in French politics via X -- one of them from Eric Bothorel, an MP from

President Emmanuel Macron’s centrist party.

Bothorel had complained of “reduced diversity of voices and options” and Musk’s “personal interventions” on the network since his 2022 takeover of the former Twitter.

Musk has raised hackles in Europe with political sallies, including vocal backing for the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party ahead of February legislative elections. — AFP

Kremlin cautions ‘lots of work’ prior Ukraine deal

RUSSIA on Monday downplayed the chances of a breakthrough in peace talks with Ukraine, saying the two sides held “diametrically” opposed positions, hours after it launched a massive drone and missile barrage on Kyiv. Moscow said a date for talks was being worked on, after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky proposed holding fresh negotiations over the weekend.

Efforts to reach a diplomatic solution to the three-year-long war have stalled after US President Donald Trump forced the two sides to open direct talks after he returned to the White House in January.

The two sides last met more than a month ago in Istanbul, exchanging draft ideas of what a peace deal could look like. “We now need to exchange views and hold negotiations on these two drafts, which are currently diametrically opposed. A lot of diplomatic work lies ahead,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters in a briefing call. The talks have so far resulted only in prisoner exchanges, with momentum for a ceasefire having sapped.

Trump, who has expressed mounting frustration with Putin, last week gave the Russian leader a 50-day ultimatum to make a deal or face massive economic sanctions. Zelensky on Friday called for talks to take place this week. Moscow said it was ready, but that there was no agreement for when the next round would take place yet. “As soon as there is final agreement on the dates, we will inform you immediately,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Russia last month demanded Kyiv’s army retreat from four Ukrainian regions Moscow claimed to annex in September 2022, but does not have full control over, as well as reject all forms of Western military support. Kyiv dismissed it as an unacceptable ultimatum, and has at times questioned the point of further negotiations if Moscow was not willing to make concessions. Ukraine called for an immediate ceasefire and for Moscow to respect its Nato and EU ambitions.

Russia has fired a record number of drones and missiles at Ukrainian cities in



This photo shows a damaged residential building following a Russian attack in Kyiv. — AFP

recent weeks, deadly attacks that Kyiv says show Moscow is not serious about halting its attack. Two people were killed across the country in the latest wave, Zelensky said on Monday, calling it an “assault on humanity.” French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot arrived in the capital for a surprise visit while rescuers were still sifting through the rubble.

Six districts of Kyiv came under attack on Monday, sparking fires at a supermarket, multiple residential buildings and a nursery, authorities said. A reporter saw damage to multiple buildings, as well as debris and shattered glass on streets. The entrance to a metro station where civilians were sheltering from the barrage was also damaged.

Russia’s attack has killed tens of thousands, forced millions to flee their homes and devastated much of eastern Ukraine. Russia launched 450 drones and missiles in total, according to Ukraine’s air force. Barrot condemned the attacks during a visit to the Kyiv station. “The shelters themselves are no longer entirely safe, as

the metro station behind me, which is being used as a shelter for the people of Kyiv, has been targeted,” he said. “These strikes have no military purpose. They’re meant to terrorise Ukrainian people and they must stop now,” he said in a speech in Kyiv.

The European Union agreed on Friday an 18th package of sanctions on Moscow that targeted Russian banks and lowered a price cap on oil exports. Barrot said the sanctions were aimed at increasing the cost of war for Russia to pressure Putin into negotiations.

Meanwhile, The UK government on Monday called for a 50-day drive to arm Ukraine to take advantage of a recent ultimatum put to Russia by US President Donald Trump. UK Defence Secretary John Healey told a meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group (UDCG) that Kyiv’s backers stand at a moment of “maximum opportunity”.

“As members of this UDCG, we need to step up, in turn, a 50-day drive to arm Ukraine on the battlefield and to help push Putin to the negotiating table,” Healey told the virtual meeting of 52 nations. — AFP

Greece to create new marine reserves to protect wildlife

ATHENS: Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis on Monday said that his government was creating two new protected marine areas, fulfilling a promise he made at a United Nations conference on the oceans in June. The new protected areas — in the Ionian Sea and in the Southern Cyclades in the Aegean Sea — would be “among the largest marine protected areas in the entire Mediterranean”, he said in a video message in English.

The prime minister said that the “hugely damaging practice of bottom trawling” by commercial fishing boats would be banned within the new marine reserves and in all Greece’s marine protected areas by 2030, making it the first country in Europe to take such a significant step in preservation. Fishing is generally allowed in protected marine areas worldwide, even by trawlers which scrape the seabed with a huge funnel-shaped

net, to devastating effect. Mitsotakis said that he had “made a promise to honour (Greece’s) unique marine heritage” at last month’s UN Oceans Conference in southern France, “and to protect it for generations to come”. “Today I am delivering on that promise with the establishment of two new marine national parks... because when we protect our ocean, we protect our own future.”

Greece is located in the eastern Mediterranean and has around 13,600 kilometres of coastline and hundreds of islands. Greece, Brazil and Spain all used the UN conference in Nice, to announce new protected marine reserves and measures to ban bottom trawling, in order to better protect marine wildlife. Mitsotakis said that the size of the new Greek marine reserves “will enable us to achieve the goal of protecting 30 per cent of our territorial waters by 2030”. He said



Greek PM Kyriakos Mitsotakis deliver a speech, in Athens. — Reuters

that the government would work with “local communities, local fishermen, scientists (and) global partners (to) make these parks examples of what is possible”.

In May, Athens banned bottom

trawling in the waters of the Fourni Korseon island chain in the Aegean to protect recently discovered coral reefs that are exceptionally rich in marine wildlife.

Neighbouring Turkiye, whose

western coast is close to the Aegean islands, responded to Monday’s announcement by criticising such “unilateral action”. “International maritime law encourages cooperation between the coastal states of these seas, including on environmental issues,” the foreign ministry in Ankara said.

Mitsotakis said that “Ocean”, a new documentary by British natural history broadcaster Sir David Attenborough, had inspired Greece to accelerate efforts to protect life below the waves. “Ocean”, which features spectacular footage of undersea habitats and marine life, emphasises the importance of healthy seas for tackling climate change and the current sweeping loss of wild species across the planet. Mitsotakis said “Ocean” showed that the sea was “not just beautiful scenery”. “It is life itself. Delicate. Powerful. And under threat.” — AFP

OPINION

Peace in peril: The Middle East’s struggle for stability



THE Middle East, a land of ancient civilisations, continues to grapple with persistent conflicts, which raises a pertinent question: Can total peace ever truly return to a region where nights are often shattered by sirens, bombings and gunfire? The human cost, particularly to civilians, including children, is immeasurable and tragic.

The ongoing Israeli military actions in Gaza — with their devastating impact on civilian lives — coupled with incursions into sovereign Lebanese territory and, more recently, strikes in Iran that severely disrupted regional air travel, underscore the volatile nature of the current landscape.

These events unfold against a backdrop of other global conflicts which show no signs of abatement despite international pressure and the strong rhetoric from leaders.

Gaza’s hunger crisis is a new level of desperation, with people dying from lack of humanitarian assistance. Malnutrition is rising, with around 90,000 women and children in urgent need of treatment.

Even in Syria, where a glimmer of hope for normalcy appeared with a recent regime change, the past week has seen a renewed

surge in fighting.

While a ceasefire deal was announced amid international pressure, the efficacy of such agreements in the current climate remains a sobering question.

Israel’s continued military operations, even in the face of ceasefire declarations and widespread international condemnation, further complicate the path to lasting peace.

Not to forget Oman’s neighbour Yemen, where food insecurity is at an all-time high. Nearly 18 million Yemenis, over half the population, starve, with about 2.7 million pregnant and breastfeeding women needing treatment for acute malnutrition, and 55 per cent of children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Nearly 5 million people have been displaced from their homes, over 75 per cent of them being women and children. These individuals end up in displacement camps or dangerous makeshift shelters, often without any insulation or privacy. There, they face daily uncertainty about where they will end up, or if they’ll ever return home.

Amidst this turmoil, the citizens and residents of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states consistently advocate for cross-

GCC countries continue to champion cross-sectoral collaboration particularly in tourism and business and their emphasis on the vital link between political stability and economic growth is reflected in the region’s robust economic performance

sectoral cooperation, particularly in areas like tourism and business. Their emphasis on the symbiotic relationship between political stability and economic prosperity is evidenced by the robust economic indicators of the region’s fastest-growing markets.

The challenges hindering these nations cannot be easily understood. The overthrow of established regimes without viable ‘Plan B’ scenarios has frequently led to power vacuums.

Ironically, these countries are home to some of the world’s oldest civilisations, boasting immense potential for cross-border tourism. This inherent wealth of cultural and historical assets, if properly harnessed, could be a powerful catalyst for shared prosperity.

The critical question is: Why can’t local leaders in these nations prioritise peace and progress? Why can’t they envision a future that benefits all segments of society, equally serving both minority and majority populations?

The pursuit of stability and cooperation, rather than conflict and fragmentation, holds the key to unlocking the vast potential of this vital region and ensuring a future where its people can finally go to bed without fear.

UK BATTLES ANTI-VAX MYTHS AFTER KID’S DEATH

ANNA MALPAS

A child’s death from measles has sparked urgent calls from British public health officials to get children vaccinated, as the UK faces an onslaught of misinformation on social media, much of it from the US. Measles is a highly infectious disease that can cause serious complications. It is preventable through double MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) jabs in early childhood.

Health Secretary Wes Streeting on July 14 confirmed to parliament that a child had died in the UK of measles.

No details have been released, but The Sunday Times and Liverpool Echo newspapers reported the child had been severely ill with measles and other serious health problems in Alder Hey hospital in the northwestern city. Anti-vaxxers quickly posted unconfirmed claims about the death on social media. One British influencer, Ellie Grey, who has more than 200,000 followers on Instagram, posted a video denying the child died from measles.

Grey criticised Alder Hey for posting a video “really, really pushing and manipulating parents into getting the MMR vaccine”.

Her video was reposted by another British influencer, Kate Shemirani, a struck-off ex-nurse who posts health conspiracy theories.

“No vaccine has ever been proven safe and no vaccine has ever been proven effective,” Shemirani claimed falsely. Liverpool’s public health chief Matthew Ashton attacked those “spreading misinformation and disinformation about childhood immunisations” in the Echo newspaper, saying “they need to take a very long, hard look at themselves.”“For those of you that don’t know, measles is a really nasty virus,” he said in a video, adding that the jab is a way of “protecting yourself and your loved ones”.

Alder Hey said it has treated 17 children with measles since June.

It posted a video in which a paediatric infectious diseases consultant, Andrew McArdle, addresses measles “myths”, including that the MMR jab causes autism. This false claim comes from a debunked 1998 study by a British doctor, Andrew Wakefield, who was later struck off. But it sparked an international slump in vaccinations.

Benjamin Kasstan-Dabush, a medical anthropologist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said there are still “lingering questions around the Wakefield era”.

In a video in response to the reported death, Vanessa Saliba, a consultant epidemiologist, explained the MMR jab protects others, including those “receiving treatment like chemotherapy that can weaken or wipe out their immunity”. — AFP

Summer breaks reduce teachers’ stress, burnout

WHILE summer breaks are traditionally seen as ‘time off’, they can be reframed as strategic opportunities for emotional, cognitive and professional renewal.

However, there is limited academic research specifically on how teachers use summer for self-care, growth and sustained well-being.

In recent years, the intensification of curriculum demands, the increase in administrative responsibilities and rapid technological advancements have significantly compounded the complexity of the teaching profession. Consequently, teaching is now widely recognised as one of the most emotionally taxing occupations, frequently leading to elevated levels of stress, professional burnout and workforce attrition.

According to a global survey, a substantial proportion of teachers report experiencing emotional exhaustion and a lack of sufficient opportunities for personal recovery throughout the academic year.

Although summer breaks are commonly perceived as a passive respite from professional duties, they offer a valuable opportunity for educators to engage in deliberate and structured well-being practices.

Although relatively under-researched, summer breaks have been increasingly recognised for their potential to function similarly to sabbaticals, offering educators critical opportunities for psychological renewal. Research in educational psychology indicates that structured breaks - those combining restorative and enriching activities - can enhance emotional regulation and professional efficacy.

Additional, summer breaks may serve as an optimal period for mitigating teacher burnout, which is characterised by emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation



According to a global survey, a substantial proportion of teachers report experiencing emotional exhaustion and a lack of sufficient opportunities for personal recovery throughout the academic year.



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and diminished personal accomplishment. Empirical studies have consistently linked such burnout to excessive workloads, escalating administrative demands and persistent classroom challenges. To address these issues, evidence-based strategies grounded in occupational stress theory and resilience research have been proposed, emphasising psychological detachment from work - such as disengaging from school-related communication — as essential to emotional recovery.

Additional recommendations include maintaining regular sleep patterns, participating in low-intensity physical activities such as walking or yoga and engaging with restorative natural environments.

Moreover, re-establishing a personal identity beyond

the professional role has been advocated as a means of combating emotional fatigue. This process may involve creative pursuits and volunteerism outside the education sector, both of which can foster intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being.

Aligned with Stress Recovery Theory, such recovery experiences — characterised by rest, mental detachment, autonomy and mastery — are associated with reduced stress and improved overall life satisfaction.

To conclude, summer break is regarded as a critical period for the implementation of practical strategies. Intentions should be set at the outset through reflective consideration of individual needs, such as rest, personal growth, social connection, or creative engagement.

The loss of magazines in Oman: A summer longing for print



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AL ZIDJALY

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Sultan Qaboos
University

THERE was a time when Thursdays in Oman were not complete without a trip to the bookstore or corner shop to pick up the latest magazines. The glossy covers of National Geographic, Elle, TIME, and even People beckoned from their tidy displays. Some were gateways into worlds I longed to enter — worlds of fashion, art journaling, slow living, and global affairs. Others were guilty pleasures, filled with celebrity gossip and colourful layouts that provided a sense of lightness at the end of a long week. Today, however, that ritual has all but vanished. In Oman, the era of printed magazines is gone.

The disappearance has been slow but brutal. The Covid-19 pandemic delivered a final blow to what was already a dwindling market. Imported magazines became harder to find, more expensive, and eventually disappeared from even the most well-stocked supermarkets. Local bookstores downsized their periodical sections, replacing print with digital subscriptions and Instagram reels. Some people moved on. I did not.

This past spring, my longing for the tactile joy of flipping through a printed magazine reached a breaking point. There

was something unbearably sterile about the infinite scroll of Pinterest and the monotony of e-magazines, which lack the texture and smell that make reading a sensorial experience. In a moment of desperation, I asked an American colleague and friend — who was visiting the US for just a few days — to buy me Daphne’s Diary, a whimsical Dutch magazine I treasure for its dreamy visuals and art journaling inspiration. I also begged him to bring back anything he could find: fashion glossies, travel monthlies, even tabloid weeklies. I just wanted to touch paper again, to feel the rustle of a page turning in my hands.

When he returned, handing me a small stack of magazines — some glossy, others matte, some refined, others wonderfully trashy — I nearly cried. I sat on the floor that evening, flipping through the pages like I had been reunited with long-lost friends. It was not just the content I missed; it was the ritual, the slowness, the pause in time that print allows. There’s something meditative about leafing through a magazine, dog-earing pages you love, cutting out images for collages, or reading an article without pop-up ads and notifications.

This summer, I couldn’t wait to travel — not

Magazines were curated, beautiful, imperfect — they slowed you down and gave you a world outside your own. In a country where summer stretches endlessly, where heat confines us indoors, magazines used to be a ticket to elsewhere.

just for a change of scenery, but for a chance to stand in a foreign airport or train station and be overwhelmed by a wall of printed magazines. In London, Berlin, or Washinton DC, magazine culture still survives, if barely. It may be niche, expensive, and curated, but it exists. I wanted to run my hands along the spines, pull issues off the shelves, flip through them at random. I wanted to buy too many and cram them into my suitcase like someone smuggling back a piece of a lost era.

The loss of magazines in Oman is more than the loss of a format; it is the loss of a certain kind of dreaming. Magazines were curated, beautiful, imperfect — they slowed you down and gave you a world outside your own. In a country where summer stretches endlessly, where heat confines us indoors, magazines used to be a ticket to elsewhere. Now, we scroll endlessly but absorb less. We click, but we don’t connect.

I still hope that one day, a new generation in Oman will rediscover the magic of print. Perhaps small independent presses will rise. Perhaps nostalgia will triumph over convenience. Until then, I will keep collecting issues where I can, asking friends for favours, and travelling not just to see new places, but to hold old pages.

‘TRUMP BEFORE TRUMP’: ORBAN’S ILLIBERAL MODEL ON SHOW

ANDRAS ROSTOVANYI

At the American embassy in Budapest, the atmosphere has changed since US President Donald Trump was sworn in six months ago.

“No more public scoldings. No more moralising from podiums,” the new charge d’affaires Robert Palladino told guests, including several Hungarian ministers, at this month’s US Independence Day celebration.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban wants his country to serve as a laboratory of far-right ideas and an inspiration for Donald Trump, whom the nationalist describes as “a great friend”, and is hoping for a US presidential visit.

Self-touted as a “Trump before Trump”, Orban has transformed the national life of Hungary, an EU member and home to 9.5 million people, during his 15-year rule.

In his drive to build what he has called an “illiberal state”, he has been accused of silencing critical voices from the judiciary, academia, media and civil society, and of restricting minority rights. Trump’s predecessor Joe Biden once accused him of “looking for dictatorship”.

“Hungary is like an open-air museum, whose leader appears to have proved it is possible to bring back the so-called good old days,” Zsolt Enyedi, a senior democracy researcher at Vienna-based Central European University, said.

“Illiberal ideas have been institutionalised,” he added.

“When institutions that should be neutral are so far to the left, it takes a strongman like Trump just to try to bring them back to the centre.”

The Trump administration has threatened to cut funding to prestigious universities like Harvard and Columbia, criticised federal judges who suspend its decisions and is in open conflict with major media outlets.

By limiting access to certain journalists and replacing them with fringe media loyal to his cause, Trump is very similar to Orban, according to Enyedi.

This week, the CBS network announced the end of Stephen Colbert’s “The Late Show”, long a staple of late night US television, saying it was “purely a financial decision”.

It came days after the comedian blasted parent company Paramount’s \$16 million settlement with Trump as “a big fat bribe”.

But, for now, dissenting voices remain much stronger in the United States than in Hungary.

While Prime Minister Orban has not yet been invited to the White House in Trump’s current term, envoy Palladino foresees that a visit by the US president to Budapest is “hopefully not too far off”.

Such a “historic visit” would, he said, be “a reflection of real alignment between two sovereign nations that believe in tradition, strength, and identity.

“But that moment won’t happen on its own. It will require vision, effort, and commitment — on both sides of the Atlantic.” — AFP

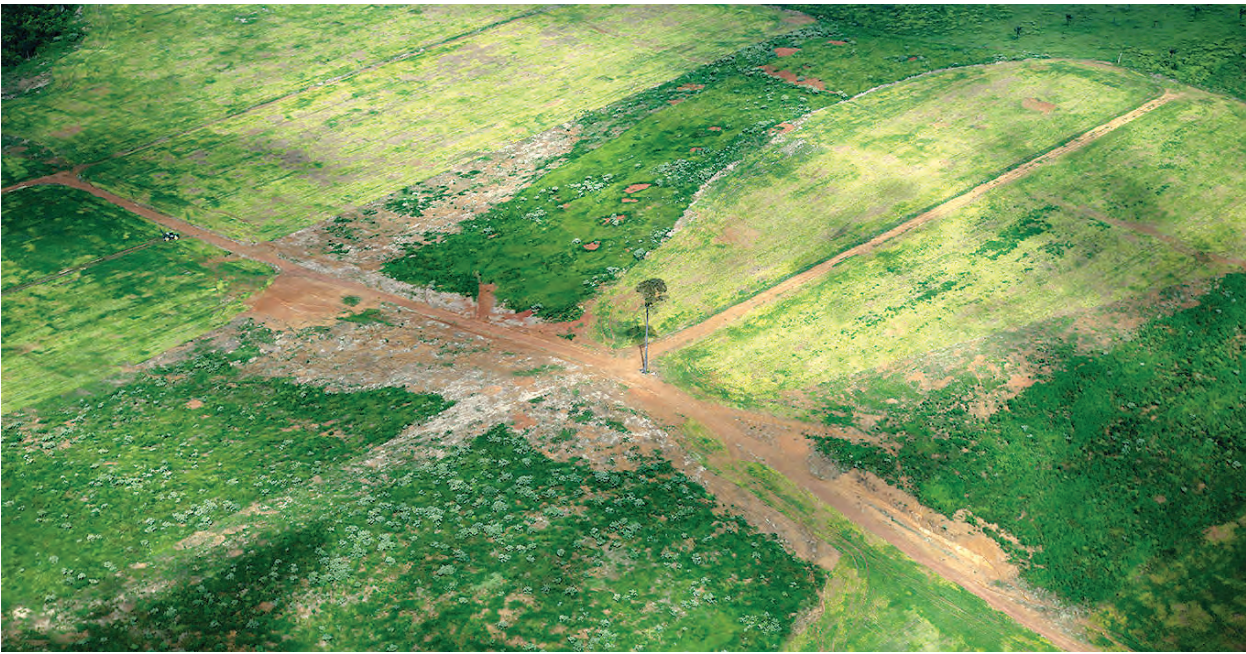
Brazil’s moment to lead on forest conservation

WITH greenhouse-gas emissions still rising globally and nature loss continuing apace, the Amazon rainforest is approaching a tipping point. To avert climate catastrophe, the world must make rapid and significant progress on protecting forests and building a sustainable, inclusive bioeconomy. And Brazil must lead the way, starting at this November’s United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Belém.

The Amazon represents one of the planet’s most powerful defences against climate change. It is more than a carbon sink; it is a reservoir of biodiversity, a regulator of rainfall across South America, and a vital component of our planet’s climate system. As the custodian of nearly 60 per cent of the Amazon, Brazil has not only a responsibility to be a good steward, but also an opportunity to demonstrate global leadership at a pivotal moment for people and the planet. Brazil seems to recognise this. The government’s renewed commitment to forest protection, under President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva’s administration, is reflected in a sharp decline in deforestation rates. But this is just the beginning. Brazil is also working to deliver the bold ideas, scalable finance, and robust partnerships that the global green transformation demands.

Nature-based solutions — which simultaneously advance environmental imperatives and ensure sustainable economic growth — are central to this effort. Recognising that the preservation of existing nature produces the fastest, most cost-effective results, these solutions are typically based on three pillars: protect, restore, and manage.

To protect forests, Brazil is advancing innovative approaches, both domestically and internationally. At home, the country is helping to pioneer a jurisdictional approach, which links carbon finance to state-level action to protect forests, as part of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change’s framework for “reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries” (REDD+).Brazil’s jurisdictional REDD+ programmes reward regions for reducing deforestation, enhancing forest carbon stocks, and ensuring



Brazil has proposed a \$125 billion Tropical Forest Forever Facility, which would reward developing countries with historically low rates of deforestation and compensate them for upholding good stewardship.



KEITH
TUFFLEY

The writer is
a former head
of investment
banking, partner,
and board member
at Goldman Sachs
Australia, is CEO of
Race to Belém

that benefits reach indigenous peoples and local communities. The state of Tocantins is a worthy example: its forest-protection programme, which aims to generate high-integrity carbon credits, has been shaped by inclusive public consultations and features strong governance. An initial issuance of jurisdictional REDD+ credits is expected early next year.

At the international level, Brazil has proposed a \$125 billion Tropical Forest Forever Facility, which would reward developing countries with historically low rates of deforestation and compensate them for upholding good stewardship. Unlike carbon markets, which focus on verified reductions in emissions, the TFFF would provide predictable, long-term payments to countries based on the number of hectares conserved.

These two approaches are highly complementary. Jurisdictional programmes address the imperative of reducing deforestation now through performance-based finance, while the TFFF offers the steady, long-term support that is needed to sustain those gains. Together, they correct a critical market failure: the undervaluing of standing forests.

Forest protection is not easy: it demands rigorous oversight, transparent benefit-sharing, and unwavering community engagement. But when done right, it can unlock significant climate finance, catalyse private-sector participation, and

drive sustainable development. The Race to Belém initiative, of which I am CEO, aims to make the most of this potential by mobilising a huge amount of private-sector investment for forest protection in advance of COP30. But protection is only the first pillar. Brazil is also making strides in nature restoration and sustainable land management. It has set a number of ambitious goals, including restoring 12 million hectares of forested areas by 2030; converting 40 million hectares of degraded pastureland into productive systems for food, biofuels, and high-productivity forests over the next decade; and promoting a bioeconomy that respects nature and people. The Brazil Restoration and Bioeconomy Finance Coalition, which seeks to mobilise \$10 billion in private investment by 2030, underscores the growing role of the business sector.

Far from just another gathering, COP30 is shaping up to be a defining moment for climate action – and, in particular, forest preservation, restoration, and management. With Belém located on the edge of the Amazon, delegates will be immersed in the landscape they seek to protect. More importantly, their host will present them with a menu of proven nature-based solutions – behind which political momentum and private-sector support are already building – that address the many causes of forest loss.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Oman's participation in this event is part of their structured preparation for the AFC U-23 Asian Cup

Oman hold Kyrgyzstan in international friendly match

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

The Oman U-23 Olympic football team earned a 1-1 draw against the hosts Kyrgyzstan in their second match of the underway four-nation international friendly tournament in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The competitive fixture took place at Dostuk Arena in Besh-Kungey on Sunday, with both teams sharing one point after a tough encounter.

Kyrgyzstan opened the scoring in the 17th minute through forward Iskandarbekov, who managed to capitalize on a defensive error and fired a low shot into the net. The hosts maintained their lead through much of the match despite Oman creating several opportunities in both halves. The first half ended for the hosts leading by 1-0. In the following half, Oman's persistence paid off in the closing stages, as midfielder Loqman al Hadidi equalised in the final ten minutes at 82nd minute after receiving a well-placed ball inside the box and then Loqman The draw meant Oman reached to four points following their victory over Bahrain by 1-0 in the opener. Kyrgyzstan earned their first point in the tournament as they suffered to a 2-1 defeat against Syria in the opening match.

In the other match on Sunday night, Bahrain and Syria also played out a 1-1 draw continuing the trend of closely contested matches in this friendly tournament. Syria took the lead through Hasan Dahan, who curled in a superb free-kick in the 69th minute. But Bahrain equalised deep into stoppage time as substitute Issa Abdullah converting a penalty to earn a dramatic draw.

The final round of matches will take place on Wednesday as Oman set to face Syria in a highly anticipated encounter that could decide the top team of the tournament.

Oman fall to Qatar in West Asia volleyball championship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

Oman's national men's volleyball team lost to Qatar 3 sets to 1 in their second match of the West Asia Championship, held at the Isa Bin Rashid Hall in Riffa, Kingdom of Bahrain. The match featured clear technical fluctuations, with Oman shining in the third set before Qatar sealed the win with more consistent performance.

The Red Warriors started the match energetically, taking an early 4-0 lead thanks to strong performances from Al Juradi and Al Maamari. However, Qatar quickly regained balance, capitalising on defensive errors and poor reception to win the first set 25-19.

In the second set, the Qatari team fully dictated the pace. They appeared more organised and composed, while Oman struggled with focus and accuracy in passes and spikes, despite individual efforts from Ismail al Hidi and Saud al Maamari. Oman dropped the set 25-16.



The players entered with determination, showing clear intent to mount a comeback

The third set saw Oman's best performance of the match. The players entered with determination, showing clear intent to mount a comeback. Ismail al Hidi stood out with several powerful spikes, while Younis al Amri and Saud al Maamari's movements helped establish a 23-21 lead. At the crucial point, Al Hidi returned to seal the set for Oman at 25-23, reviving hopes for a comeback.

Despite a promising start to the fourth set, with Mahmoud al Saadi scoring the opening point followed by a strong shot from Al Maamari, individual errors re-emerged, especially in reception and backcourt coverage. This gave the Qataris the edge to regain control. As Oman lost focus midway through the set, Qatar widened the gap and closed the set 25-14, winning the match 3-1.

Statistically, Oman scored a total of 79 points, committed 23 unforced errors, missed 6 serves, and registered 7 blocks. The standout performer for Oman was Ismail Al-Hidi, who scored 26

points (24 attack, 1 serve, 1 block) and was named Best Player of the Match despite the defeat.

After the match, Ismail al Hidi, a player for the national team, confirmed that the team had played an ideal third half and had come close to a comeback, but that the physical decline and lack of concentration in the fourth half had a significant impact. He added that he had tried to give the team a morale boost through his offensive performance, while also emphasising that the team still had much to offer in the tournament. Mohammed al Muqbali acknowledged Qatar's strength, saying, We faced a very organised team. Small details made the difference. We must move past this loss and prepare for what's next.

Younis al Amri noted the team's improvement in the third set but admitted the loss of focus afterwards. The tournament is still in its early stages. We'll correct our mistakes and come back better.

Despite the loss, Oman still has a chance to recover in upcoming matches.

Scheffler wins his first British Open at Portrush

PORTRUSH, Northern Ireland: A relentless Scottie Scheffler sealed his first British Open triumph by four shots as he turned the final day of the tournament into a procession at Royal Portrush on Sunday.

The 29-year-old American world number one started out with a four-stroke lead and apart from one blip, never looked like relinquishing his iron-like grip on the chasing pack.

Scheffler resembled a towering giant amongst men all week on the glorious Causeway Coast, rekindling memories of 15-times major winner Tiger Woods in his pomp as he rubber-stamped his fourth major title with a clinical final-round 68.

After tapping in for par in front of a packed 18th green grandstand, Scheffler's laser-focus finally cracked and he threw his white cap skywards, tearfully embracing caddie Ted Scott and wife Meredith and scooping up his toddler son Bennett.

"Thanks to the fans for all the support. I know I wasn't the fan favourite today so I appreciate you guys coming out to support, overall it's been a great week," the under-stated Scheffler, the third successive American to win the Open and fourth in five years, said after lifting the Claret Jug.

Take the dominant Scheffler out of the equation and the 153rd Open would have been a thriller with the leaderboard underneath him chopping and changing all weekend.

In the end, Harris English was the best of the rest on 13 under after a 66 with fellow American Chris Gotterup, winner of last week's Scottish Open, a further shot back.

Huge galleries descended on the course all week and thousands arrived on a sunny Sunday hoping to witness a Rory McIlroy miracle.

But Northern Ireland's favourite sporting son, who began six shots behind Scheffler, was unable to mount a charge and ended up



Scottie Scheffler celebrates with the Claret Jug after winning the 153rd Open Championship golf tournament at Royal Portrush. — Reuters

Scheffler wins Open by four shots

World number one secures fourth major title

Local hero McIlroy finishes tied seventh

English and Gotterup complete all-American top three

or more and the first world number one to win the Open since Tiger Woods in 2006.

"When you play against the best they make it look easy and you can't quite figure out why they are so good," said England's Justin Rose, who finished on seven under. Those who thought that Texas-based Scheffler might stumble on a layout featuring holes known as Calamity Corner and Purgatory should probably have known better.

On the last nine occasions Scheffler had gone into the final round of a PGA Tour event ahead, he emerged victorious. His three previous major wins also came after a 54-hole lead.

A sense of anticipation brewed as the leading groups reached the first tee but when Scheffler birdied the first, fourth and fifth holes the only question seemed to be whether he could eclipse Woods's modern era Open record winning margin of eight strokes at St Andrews in 2000.— Reuters

SHORT TAKES



Issam bin Nasser al Siyabi

AL SIYABI LEADS FIBA U-18 FINAL IN CHINA

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

Omani international basketball referee Issam bin Nasser al Siyabi officiated the final match of the FIBA U-18 Women's Asia Cup held in China, which brought together the national teams of Australia and Japan. The match ended with an 88-79 victory for Australia, crowning them continental champions. The tournament took place from July 13 to 20 and featured top national teams from across Asia.

Al Siyabi was selected to referee the final as a recognition of his outstanding performance throughout the tournament. He had previously officiated the semifinal between Australia and South Korea, as well as the quarterfinal match between Japan and New Zealand. During the group stage, he also officiated high-profile matches, including Lebanon vs. the Philippines, Korea vs. China, New Zealand vs. Korea, and Australia vs. the Philippines.

With an extensive refereeing career at both regional and international levels, Al Siyabi has previously participated in the second round of the FIBA Asia Cup qualifiers held in Bahrain in 2020. He has also refereed in the finals of the Bahraini and Qatari leagues, Gulf championships for men, youth, and juniors, in addition to prominent tournaments such as the Dubai International Basketball Championship and the Shaikh Khalifa Cup in Bahrain. His experience underscores the competence and growing reputation of Omani officiating on the global stage.

Commenting on the achievement, Al Siyabi expressed his pride, saying "officiating the final of a major tournament like the FIBA U-18 Women's Asia Cup is a very significant milestone in my refereeing career. I'm extremely proud to represent Oman at such a prestigious continental event. This achievement is the result of years of hard work and dedication across local, regional, and international competitions."

"Refereeing in such tournaments demands a high level of focus and both physical and mental effort. The diverse experiences I've gained from Gulf, Arab, and international tournaments have helped me manage games with confidence and consistency." He added

Al Siyabi concluded by thanking the Oman Basketball Association for its continuous support, as well as his fellow referees, noting that this participation will serve as a strong motivation to further develop his performance and continue representing Oman in more international championships.



Al Manar Racing BMW M4 GT3 EVO car

Al Zubair finishes fourth in Misano race track

AL MANAR

Racing by Team WRT's Al Faisal al Zubair and German colleague Jens Klingmann overcame the disappointment of a first-lap retirement from race one to finish fourth in the Gold Cup category in race two at the 2025 GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Sprint Series on Sunday.

At the wheel of their BMW M4 GT3 EVO, the duo performed well in the practice and qualifying sessions at the demanding Misano track in Italy, but Al Zubair was handed a 10-place penalty on the starting grid for race two after the disappointment of the premature retirement from race one.

The second race was red-flagged in the early stages and there was a significant delay while circuit Armco was repaired. It developed into the longest one-hour race in history and took 3hr 18min to complete by the time the safety aspect of the circuit run-off area had been secured.

Al Zubair eventually handed over to Klingmann for the final 30 minutes but the Al Manar Racing duo could not make further in-roads and had to settle for fourth place in the Gold Cup category and 20th overall behind the Emil Frey Racing Ferrari, the Saintéloc Racing Audi and the race one-winning Garage 59 McLaren.

Al Zubair said: "It was a long race and I think it was a bit difficult because we had a grid penalty to start. We started P32 (overall) but the car felt mega the whole race. We made it up to P21 in my stint but, unfortunately, we lost a bit of time in the pits, about seven seconds, and that dropped us out of P3 in Gold Cup. We finished P4.



Al Faisal al Zubair

After collecting no points in the first race on Saturday, it was difficult and not the best weekend for us. We hope to collect more points at the next one and continue the fight for the championship. In race one, there was a bit of contact at turn six between my team-mate Jens, Chris Lulham and Maxime Martin. We were out of the race but we also got a penalty, so to finish P4 today is a result we should be happy with. Having the car working so well all weekend made it even more frustrating."

Al Zubair and Klingmann made the perfect start to their race weekend by topping the times in the free practice session on Friday afternoon. They ran for 49 laps with a fastest run of 1min 33.026sec to lead the way from Emil Frey Racing and Saintéloc Racing. They then went on to top the Gold Cup times in the evening's pre-qualifying session.

Klingmann finished first qualifying in second place behind Lulham in the Emil

Frey Racing Ferrari and would line up in second place in the Gold Cup category and eighth overall on the grid for the first of the one-hour races. The Garage 59 McLaren was third.

But lady luck determined that Klingmann's challenge for honours in the first of the races would be short-lived: after a twilight start, the German was clouted from behind after a few turns of lap one and was only able to limp to the pits with rear suspension damage before the Al Manar Racing BMW was sidelined.

The incident also took out pole sitter Lulham and the Briton's demise paved the way for Louis Prette to secure victory in the Gold Cup section for the Garage 59 McLaren after 36 laps of racing. The Monaco driver came home just ahead of Gilles Magnus in the Saintéloc Racing Audi and Leonardo Moncini in the Tresor Attempto Racing Audi. Ricky Collard retired the Barwell Motorsport Lamborghini after 11 laps.

The race one disappointment left Al Zubair with it all to do in Sunday morning's qualifying for the second race. Magnus claimed pole for Saintéloc Racing and the Omani settled into fourth place with a best run of 1min 32.952sec after the BMW had been repaired by Team WRT technicians. Unfortunately, Al Zubair was then handed a five-place penalty on the starting grid, as a result of the incident involving his team-mate in race one. A team appeal had successfully reduced the penalty from an original 10-place drop on the starting grid.

The 2025 GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Sprint Series resumes with round four at Magny-Cours in France on August 1-3.

Kulkarni named as deputy head coach of Oman Cricket

Oman Cricket (OC) appointed Sulakshan Kulkarni as the Deputy Head Coach of the Oman Men's Cricket Team.

A seasoned cricketing mind and former first-class cricketer, Kulkarni brings with him over two decades of elite coaching experience and a deep understanding of the game, having contributed significantly to Indian domestic cricket and International assignments.

A former Mumbai stalwart, Kulkarni played first-class cricket from 1985 to 2002, sharing the dressing room with legends such as Sunil Gavaskar and Sachin

Tendulkar. He also boasts an illustrious record with seven Ranji Trophy and Irani Cup titles with Mumbai, as a player and coach then. He was also named among the probable squad in India's 1987 World Cup squad.

His coaching portfolio spans across top Indian domestic teams including Mumbai, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu, and Maharashtra.

Under his guidance, Mumbai lifted both the Ranji Trophy and the Deodhar Trophy, while West Zone emerged victorious under his strategic leadership.



Sulakshan Kulkarni

Sulakshan, a gritty batter and a elite coach, has played a pivotal role in shaping the careers of numerous international stars such as Rohit Sharma, Ajinkya Rahane, Suryakumar Yadav, Cheteshwar Pujara, and Avishkar Salvi.

In 2018, he also served as the Batting Consultant for Nepal, during the ICC World Cup Qualifiers Division II, where Nepal secured ODI status for the first time in its history.

With over 20 years of coaching experience for National, International and IPL teams, Sulakshan Kulkarni's appointment

underscores Oman Cricket's commitment to building a strong and competitive team structure with solid backroom staff led by Duleep Mendis ahead of key international fixtures such as the ICC EAP Asia Qualifier Final and the on-going cycle of the ICC CWC League 2, both of which are a step to the T20 World Cup 2026 and Cricket World Cup 2027 respectively.

Oman Cricket extends a warm welcome to Kulkarni and looks forward to his valuable contribution in elevating the performance and development of our national cricket team.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Mitchell Owen (R) of Australia not out by Gudakesh Motie (L) of West Indies during the 1st T20i between West Indies and Australia at Sabina Park, Jamaica. — AFP

AUSTRALIA BEAT WINDIES IN FIRST T20

JAMAICA: Mitchell Owen made an impressive debut as Australia beat West Indies by three wickets to take a 1-0 lead in the five-match Twenty20 International series in Jamaica on Sunday.

Owen took a wicket with his medium pace bowling before returning to smash 50 off 27 balls as Australia chased down a 190-run target with seven balls to spare.

West Indies, who lost the preceding test series 3-0, got off to a strong start after being put into bat at Sabina Park.

Captain Shai Hope (55), Roston Chase (60) and Shimron Hetmyer (38) laid the platform for a 200-plus score but the late flourish they expected never materialised. — AFP



Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik raises the trophy after winning the men's singles final match against Argentina's Juan Manuel Cerundolo. — AFP

BUBLIK WINS FIRST TITLE IN GSTAAD

GSTAAD, Switzerland: Kazakh Alexander Bublik won his first tour-level claycourt title at the Swiss Open in Gstaad, beating Argentina's Juan Manuel Cerundolo 6-4 4-6 6-3 in the ATP 250 event's final on Sunday.

French Open quarter-finalist Bublik, seeded second in Gstaad, was playing in his first final on clay. He had not dropped a set en route to the final but had to regroup after a patchy second set to seal the win in just over two hours.

"Juan, as I told you at the net, this was not tennis. It was complete torture," Bublik joked at the trophy ceremony.

"This is my sixth title and I have played the greats of the game, but this final I will remember as one of the toughest I ever played."

"I can't wait to come back next year. The beautiful Alps. It's an amazing spot. I'm really happy that I'm standing here as a winner, but even if I'd lost in the first round, the view is amazing anyway." — AFP

Arsenal manager Arteta pleased with early transfer business

KALLANG, Singapore: Mikel Arteta said he was happy that Arsenal had signed a number of top-quality players in the early stages of the transfer window, and that they had given the Premier League club impetus to raise their level in the coming season.

Runners-up for the last three seasons, Arsenal have signed winger Noni Madueke and goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga from Chelsea, as well as midfielders Christian Norgaard from Brentford and Martin Zubimendi from Real Sociedad.

"They bring new excitement, a new energy as well," Arteta told reporters in Singapore on Monday ahead of a pre-season match against Serie A side AC Milan.

"We signed very important players as well. Again, everybody feels like their

ARTETA PLEASED WITH ARSENAL SIGNINGS

SAYS CLUB FOLLOWED RIGHT PROCESSES OVER PARTEY

DEFENDER GABRIEL BELIEVES ARSENAL WILL BE STRONGER



Arsenal Spanish manager Mikel Arteta attends a press conference ahead of their football match against AC Milan at the National Stadium in Singapore. — AFP

Gerard holds off Rooyen to win Barracuda title

RYAN GERARD held off South African Erik van Rooyen down the back nine on Sunday to win the Barracuda Championship for his first US PGA Tour title.

The 25-year-old American, whose best career finish had been a runner-up effort at this year's Texas Open, eagled twice in the final round for the victory.

"It's just like a culmination of a lifetime of work," Gerard said. "I can't tell you how many hours I've spent hitting golf balls dreaming of winning on the PGA Tour. It's really special."

Gerard edged Van Rooyen 47-44 under the Modified Stableford scoring system to capture the event at Tahoe Mountain Club in Truckee, California.

Under the unique scoring format, an albatross is worth eight points, an eagle five and a birdie two. Pars are no points while a bogey is minus-one point and any worse score is minus-three points.

The tournament was played opposite the British Open, where top-ranked Scottie Scheffler won his fourth career major title and second major crown of the year.

Gerard, who shared the 54-hole lead on 34 points, added 13 points in the last round with two eagles, four birdies and five bogeys.

"I've been playing a lot of really good golf," Gerard said. "I've felt like I haven't been getting the scores out of the shots that I've hit and it has been a long time, a long grind. Yeah, it's pretty cool that I end up on top."

Van Rooyen, whose first PGA victory was at the 2021 Barracuda, settled for his second runner-up finish of the year after the CJ Cup Byron Nelson in May.

Filipino standout Rico Hoey and Gerard shared the 54-hole lead, but Hoey stumbled back with a double bogey-bogey start.

Gerard birdied the second hole and eagled the third, and answered bogeys at the fourth and fifth with a birdie at the seventh to stand on 41 with his nearest rival on the course, Van Rooyen, seven adrift.

After both birdied the 10th, Van Rooyen chipped in for birdie at 11.

Gerard, however, answered at 11 when, after getting relief from a sprinkler head in his stance that let him move his ball to the fringe, he curled in a long eagle putt to reach 48 points, 10 ahead of Van Rooyen.

Gerard made bogeys at 12 and 13 but responded with a birdie at 14 while Van Rooyen made bogey at 14 but eagled the par-five 15th to pull within six.

When Gerard made a three-putt bogey at the par-three 16th, his lead was down to 47-42.

Van Rooyen sank a birdie from the fringe at the 18 to climb within 47-44, but Gerard tapped in at 18 for par and the victory. — AFP



Ryan Gerard of the United States poses with the Barracuda trophy after winning the Barracuda Championship 2025 at Tahoe Mountain Club. — AFP

height has to go to a different level, and that's what we're seeking," he added.

"Ideally, you want it (transfers) done on day one in pre-season. We've done very, very well so far. I'm very pleased with the way the club is supporting the necessities and improvements that we required in the team."

Swedish striker Viktor Gyokeres, who scored 54 goals in 52 games for Sporting last season, is also expected to move to the Emirates Stadium.

"There's still a long time in the window, and we are seeking. In terms of numbers, we are short, and we have to improve the depth and the quality of the squad," Arteta added.

"We are constantly looking in the market, but until that happens, I can focus on the players that we actually have, work with them, and I'm very

pleased with what I've seen so far in the first 10-15 days."

DIFFERENT ARSENAL

Arsenal have let Premier League titles slip through their grasp in the last couple of years but this season will be different, defender Gabriel Magalhaes said.

"I think the players that came will help us out a lot. The club is doing what is best for the players and the manager," Gabriel told the BBC in an interview published on Sunday. "We want to have the best players. To be in the dispute for titles, you have to have the best players ... We have let a couple of titles slip through our fingers recently. We almost won but I think this year, things will be different."

Arsenal begin their 2025-26 Premier League campaign on August 17 with a trip to Manchester United. — Reuters



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The project will culminate in the development of a comprehensive road map.

Oman charts path to circular economy with groundbreaking initiative

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Economy on Monday hosted the second workshop on the “Circular Economy Gap Calculation Project”, an ambitious national initiative designed to pave the way for Oman’s transition towards a circular economy.

The project will culminate in the development of a comprehensive road map, reinforcing the Oman’s long-term sustainability goals.

Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy, described the project as the first of its kind in the Middle East and North Africa. He said it aligns with Oman’s commitment to achieving Net-Zero carbon emissions by 2050.

“This vital initiative is centred on three main goals,” he noted. “Establishing a national baseline to measure our circular economy gap, benchmarking against other countries, and designing a tailored roadmap to empower national capacities in both public and private sectors.”

Al Maawali underlined the strategic value of this project in achieving sustainable, low-carbon economic growth. He said it would also open new investment avenues in green sectors such as renewable energy and the wider green economy.

Ahmed bin Said al Siyabi, Director-General of Economic Policies and Programmes, opened the workshop with a detailed presentation on the project’s preliminary findings. He explained that the workshop aimed to assess the initial baseline calculations for sectors and introduced related initiatives such as training programmes and an interactive platform to showcase results. — ONA

Oman’s FDI surges over RO 30 billion in Q1 2025

THE Sultanate of Oman has recorded a sharp rise in foreign direct investment (FDI), surpassing RO 30.611 billion by the end of the first quarter of 2025, according to preliminary data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Inflows during the period reached RO 5.225 billion, up from RO 4.111 billion in the corresponding quarter of 2024.

The oil and gas extraction sector remained the dominant magnet for foreign investment, accounting for a staggering 81 per cent of total FDI.

Investments in this sector alone amounted to RO 24.701 billion, with inflows of RO 4.812 billion during the quarter. The manufacturing sector followed, attracting RO 2.749 billion in FDI, with RO 592.3 million in inflows, reflecting continued investor confidence in Oman’s industrial base.

Financial intermediation drew RO 1.3 billion in investment, supported by inflows of RO 217.8 million. The real estate, rental and commercial project activities sectors, however, saw a decline, with total investments standing at RO 653.1 million — down 36.8 per cent from the same quarter last year.

In the transport, storage and communications sector, FDI totalled RO 357.9 million, with limited inflows of just RO 3.2 million. Investments in the electricity and water



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sector reached RO 292 million, representing an 11-per cent drop year-on-year. The trade sector received RO 262 million in FDI, with cash inflows

amounting to RO 14.5 million.

The hotels and restaurants sector recorded investments of RO 116.6 million, marginally lower by 0.5 per cent compared to Q1 2024. Meanwhile, the construction sector attracted RO 88.5 million in total FDI, though inflows dropped by RO 4.9 million.

Investments in the ‘other activities’ category reached RO 89.9 million, with inflows of RO 7.3 million.

The United Kingdom maintained its position as

the largest foreign investor in Oman, contributing RO 15.574 billion — equivalent to 50.9 per cent of total FDI.

The United States followed with RO 7.824 billion, trailed by Kuwait (RO 1.223 billion), China (RO 894.9 million), the United Arab Emirates (RO 753 million) and Qatar (RO 669.3 million). Bahrain, the Netherlands, India and Switzerland also featured prominently, while investments from other countries amounted to RO 2.238 billion. — ONA

EDO records revenues of \$3.776 billion for Q1 2025

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 21

ENERGY Development Oman SAOC (EDO) — the wholly government-owned energy sector holding company — posted revenues totalling \$3.776 billion for the first quarter of this year, marginally lower than the \$4.005 billion recorded in the corresponding period of 2024.

Announcing its unaudited interim condensed consolidated financial results for the first three months of 2025, EDO reported production expenses of \$290.882 million, down from \$333.128 million in Q1 2024.

Royalty expenses dipped slightly to \$1.422 billion, compared to \$1.577 billion a year earlier. Profit before tax amounted to \$510.220 million, down from \$890.416 million in Q1 2024.

Total assets were reported at \$27.534 billion this year, roughly



EDO, affiliated with the Ministry of Finance, manages a group of spinoffs associated with various energy-related businesses.

on par with last year’s figure of \$27.843 billion. Shareholders’ equity totalled \$10.169 billion, also broadly similar to last year’s

Affiliated with the Ministry of Finance, EDO owns 60% of Block 6 operated by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), 100% of Block 6’s non-associated gas concession, and 100% of Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom), the master planner of the Sultanate of Oman’s green hydrogen industry.

\$10.197 billion.

Total equity and liabilities stood at \$27.534 billion, mirroring the \$27.843 billion recorded at the end of Q1 2024.

Affiliated with the Ministry of Finance, EDO owns 60% of Block 6 operated by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), 100% of Block 6’s non-associated gas concession, and 100% of Hydrogen Oman (Hydrom), the master planner of the Sultanate of Oman’s green hydrogen industry.

Other affiliates of EDO include

Oman New Energies SPC (ONE), incorporated to explore future power-related business but currently not operational; and EDO Gas SPC (GasCo), which assumed the participating interest in the Gas Operations of Block 6 from EDO effective on July 1, 2023.

In June 2023, GasCo established EDO Sukuk Limited, a special purpose vehicle created to act as issuer and trustee of the Sukuk trust certificates under the trust certificate issuance programme.

Also part of the EDO Group are: EDO InfraCo SPC, which is currently non-operational; and ECO SPC, a wholly owned subsidiary established in September 2024 to handle the inventory of surplus and scrap equipment and materials from operations under the Block 6 Petroleum Agreements, the Block 6 Gas Concession Agreement, and other oil and gas operations in the Sultanate of Oman.

ADVERTORIALS

POWERSTAGE



Sébastien Ogier and co-driver Vincent Landais secured second place in their No 17 Toyota GR Yaris Rally1.

TOYOTA GAZOO RACING SECURES PODIUM FINISH AT ACROPOLIS RALLY GREECE

MUSCAT: Toyota Gazoo Racing World Rally Team (TGR-WRT) has braved turbulent roads, twisting mountain trails and searing ambient temperatures to claim a hard-fought podium finish at Acropolis Rally Greece.

Sébastien Ogier and co-driver Vincent Landais secured second place in their No. 17 Toyota GR Yaris Rally1, their performance helping the team maintain its drivers' championship lead and Toyota its 65-point manufacturers' championship advantage.

Greece's rough, rocky terrain and temperatures exceeding 40°C posed a significant challenge for TGR-WRT and the GR Yaris Rally1. The early stages west of Athens were especially demanding, with loose stones and step-like bedrock testing the car's durability, while the narrow, twisting mountain roads in the final legs left no room for error. Ogier maintained a leading pace despite running second on the road during the first day, helping clear a racing line while still delivering competitive times.

Building on that performance, he and co-driver Landais began the final leg 43.6 seconds behind the leader and mounted a determined push, clocking the fastest times in both the penultimate test and the rally-ending power stage. The result saw them top the final-day classification and earn 10 bonus points, in addition to 17 for securing second place overall.

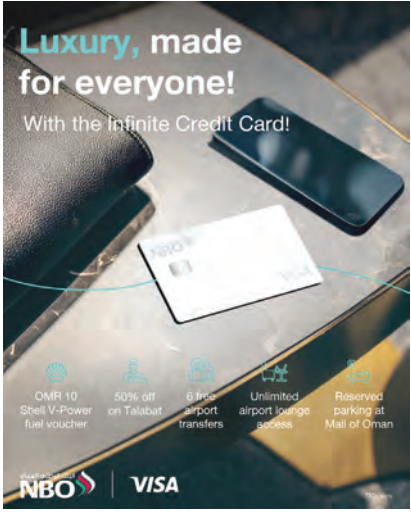
Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC) and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established TGR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand.

Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people and the people build the cars,' TGR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, TGR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure and joy of driving to everyone.

Round 8 of the 2025 FIA WRC is Rally Estonia (July 17–20), which returns to the calendar after a one-year absence. The event features high-speed gravel stages around Tartu, Estonia's second-largest city and the rally's central hub, combining wide and narrow sections with a predominantly soft, sandy surface.

NBO OFFERS EXCLUSIVE BENEFITS FOR ITS INFINITE CREDIT CARDHOLDERS

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) offers a range of exciting features for its Infinite Credit Cardholders, tailored for individuals seeking a unique combination of convenience, exclusivity, and meaningful rewards. Such cards provide exclusive discounts, milestone rewards, and exceptional privileges designed to complement a modern lifestyle. Commenting on the launch, Maha al Raisi, Assistant General Manager and Head of Products at NBO, said: "We are dedicated to deliver exceptional value to our customers by catering to their needs, and offering rewards and lifestyle benefits that elevate their everyday experiences."



Our infinite credit card features include a 50% discount on Talabat that equals a saving of RO 3 twice a month, exclusive complimentary

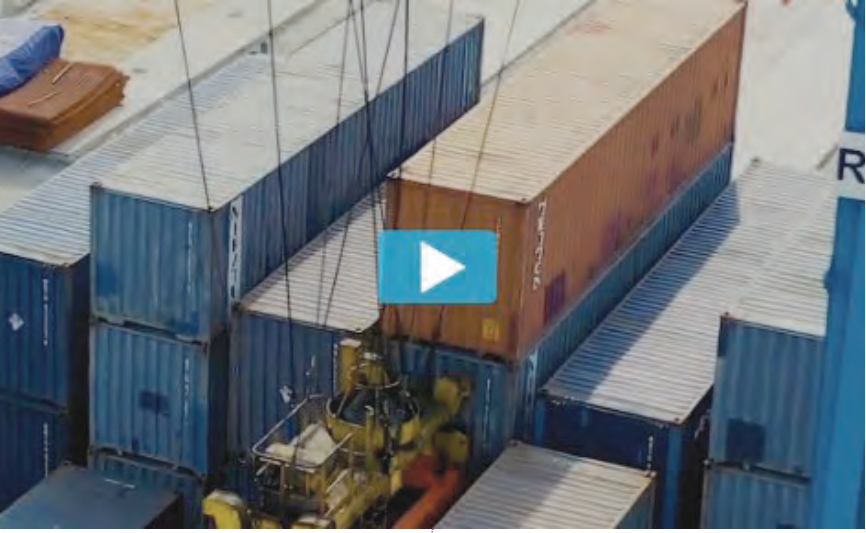
parking at the Mall of Oman, additional chauffeur-driven airport rides, and milestone rewards featuring Shell V-Power vouchers. The Infinite Credit Card also offers an outstanding range of premium benefits, including 1% cashback on spends, unlimited airport lounge access with one guest, and multi-trip travel insurance for added peace of mind. Cardholders can also enjoy 50% off VOX Cinema tickets, with up to six tickets per month, including two Gold Class tickets, as well as 2-for-1 offers on Xperience with Entertainer. These exciting offers further enhance the card's privileges, reinforcing our commitment to being a trusted financial partner."

OBG video explores reforms, green logistics

OMAN'S transport and logistics sector is playing a central role in the country's economic transformation under Vision 2040, supported by large-scale investment, policy development and digital integration.

A new Growth Perspectives video produced by Oxford Business Group (OBG), in partnership with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), examines how infrastructure upgrades and sustainability initiatives are reinforcing Oman's role as a strategic trade and logistics hub.

The video, titled Oman's transport sector seeks to drive sustainable trade, highlights the sector's contribution of 7% to GDP in 2023, with aims to surpass 10% by 2040. Backed by RO 2.5 billion in targeted investment from 2021 to 2025, Oman is enhancing efficiency, boosting non-oil exports



The video highlights the sector's contribution of 7% to GDP in 2023.

and improving multimodal connectivity. Particular focus is placed on the role of the country's deepwater ports—Suhar, Al Duqm and Salalah—which are positioned to support industrial development, energy production and international trans-shipment. These ports, together with improved road and airport

access, are enabling Oman to expand its logistics footprint regionally and globally. The video also outlines the country's efforts to advance green and digital logistics solutions in support of its target of net-zero emissions by 2050. New initiatives include incentives for electric vehicles, adoption of blockchain and e-seal technologies, and the

development of green trade corridors. The Oman Logistics Centre, a directorate under MoTCIT, is leading the National Logistics Strategy and overseeing the sector's digital transformation. Key projects include Customs streamlining, last-mile delivery improvements and measures to increase transparency and efficiency across the logistics value chain. Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said Oman's investment in infrastructure and innovation is enabling the country to strengthen its position as a regional gateway for trade. "The transport and logistics sector is a vital enabler of Oman Vision 2040. Through integrated planning, policy development and advanced infrastructure, we are supporting economic growth while aligning with the country's broader sustainability objectives."

VOLKSWAGEN OMAN SIGNS MOU WITH SOHAR INTERNATIONAL

MUSCAT: Volkswagen Oman, represented by Premium Motors, has signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Sohar International, ushering in a new era of flexible and competitive car financing solutions in the Sultanate of Oman. The agreement offers preferential interest rates, quick approvals and streamlined processing for customers purchasing new or certified pre-owned Volkswagen vehicles. The MoU was signed by Christian Nehme, General Manager of Premium Motors and Abdul Qader al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer at Sohar International.

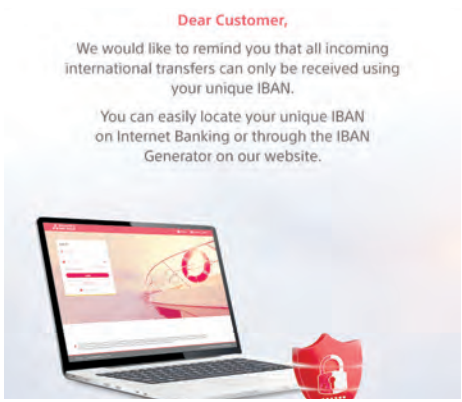


The MoU was signed by Christian Nehme, General Manager of Premium Motors, and Abdul Qader al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer at Sohar International.

This collaboration aims to enhance convenience and affordability, making Volkswagen ownership more accessible for individuals and families across Oman. Sohar International, known for its innovative retail banking approach, will offer customised financing packages tailored to a range of customer needs. This partnership reflects our shared commitment to delivering greater value and peace of mind to car buyers", said Christian Nehme. "Volkswagen stands for quality and trust. With Sohar International's support, we are making the ownership journey even more attainable", he added.

Bank Muscat enables IBAN service for fund transfers

MUSCAT: In a commitment to enhance payment system efficiency and align with international standards for improved customer experience, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has begun to support the International Bank Account Number (IBAN) for fund transfers across borders starting July 1, 2025. This initiative, in accordance with directives from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), aims to reduce operational errors and speed up financial transactions between individuals and businesses,



This initiative aims to reduce operational errors and speed up financial transactions.

ultimately providing beneficiaries with safer and smoother transfers. As part of these directives, cross-border transfers that do not utilise the IBAN will no longer be accepted as of July 1, 2025. The IBAN will be a prerequisite to receive all fund transfers to Oman, while domestic transfers will still have the option to use either the IBAN or the traditional account number. Zuwaina Abdullah al Sharji, Assistant General Manager of Central Operations & Change Management at Bank Muscat, stated, "The bank is committed to complying with international

standards and implementing best banking practices. The decision to adopt the IBAN is intended to accelerate bank transfers (STP), standardise account coordination among all banks, reduce human errors in account entry, and adhere to international standards like the SWIFT system. This will significantly enhance the security and speed of transaction processing." Al Sharji emphasised Bank Muscat's dedication to integrating the latest banking systems to facilitate the swift completion of transactions for individual and corporate customers,

ensuring an exceptional banking experience that meets contemporary local and international standards. She encouraged customers to include a valid IBAN from their account information and to follow the issued guidelines to avoid any complications during transfer operations. Customers can easily obtain their IBAN through various channels, including internet banking, mobile banking, visiting a branch, calling customer service, or accessing the dedicated page: (https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Pages/iban.aspx).

BUSINESS

INVESTMENTROUND



Founded by Hatim Moosa and Almuhammad al Balushi, ZabonEx offers a B2B SaaS platform tailored to the needs of F&B producers, distributors and retailers.

Omani startup secures \$100K to drive smart growth, cut food waste

MUSCAT: Omani startup ZabonEx has closed a \$100,000 pre-seed investment round, led by Future Fund Oman and ITHCA Group, marking a major milestone in its journey to transform the Food & Beverage (F&B) industry. The investment will fuel the company’s growth as it expands its smart predictive analytics platform designed to reduce food waste and improve distribution efficiency. Founded by Hatim Moosa and Almuhammad al Balushi, ZabonEx offers a B2B SaaS platform tailored to the needs of F&B producers, distributors, and retailers. The platform delivers granular, real-time demand forecasts, enabling businesses to make data-driven decisions on inventory management, production, and logistics. “This round is a major step forward for us,” said Hatim Moosa. “It will allow us to accelerate both business development and product enhancement within Oman’s F&B ecosystem. We are committed to building a strong local foundation before expanding to regional markets.”

Co-founder Almuhammad al Balushi echoed the mission. “F&B businesses are under pressure to stay profitable while meeting sustainability expectations. ZabonEx was born from this challenge. We empower them to make better decisions by forecasting demand at a granular level, improving not just margins but also their environmental footprint.” The new funding will support further development of ZabonEx’s core predictive engine and expansion of its technology team. The startup also plans to establish strategic partnerships with local producers and retailers and roll out tailored onboarding and analytics tools to meet the unique needs of Oman’s F&B landscape.

PDO accelerates Oman’s green energy goals

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUCAT, JULY 21

PETROLEUM

Development Oman (PDO), the largest producer of oil and gas in the Sultanate of Oman, is spearheading an ambitious and innovative transition toward a Net Zero future by 2050, underscoring its unwavering commitment to sustainability, energy efficiency, and climate responsibility.

As published in the July edition of Wealth, a newsletter by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, PDO’s strategic roadmap reflects a clear alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and global goals for decarbonisation, as it pushes ahead with a series of integrated projects that merge energy production with significant emissions reduction. Among its most notable initiatives is a pioneering pilot project in the Dhulaima field, which marks a major milestone in carbon management and enhanced oil recovery (EOR).

In a move that reflects a paradigm shift in the application of sustainable production technologies, PDO has successfully deployed carbon dioxide (CO₂) injection into the Upper Shu’aiba reservoir—an area previously considered inaccessible due to the limitations of conventional water injection and low rock permeability.

The results were promising, with the CO₂ injection yielding a positive pressure response and no gas breakthrough,



PDO’s strategic road map reflects a clear alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and global goals for decarbonisation.

demonstrating both technical feasibility and reservoir stability.

This pilot not only opens access to substantial untapped oil reserves but also supports emissions reduction through a carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) framework.

What sets the Dhulaima project apart is its rapid and efficient execution. Delivered within just 12 months, the initiative stands as a clear example of PDO’s capability to carry out complex engineering tasks with exceptional coordination and precision.

The achievement also highlights the dedication and collaboration of multidisciplinary teams who delivered the project on schedule, with an exemplary safety record and zero health or environmental incidents—a hallmark of operational excellence in Oman’s energy

sector.

In parallel with its work in CCUS and EOR, PDO is expanding its investments in renewable energy to reduce its carbon footprint across all operations.

The company has set a target of generating 30 per cent of its operational energy requirements from renewable sources by 2026, a key stepping stone in its broader Net Zero strategy. Several large-scale solar projects are currently underway.

Among them are Riyah-1 and Riyah-2, which, with a combined capacity of 200 megawatts, represent the first projects of their kind globally to be undertaken by an oil and gas company. Once operational in the last quarter of 2026, they are expected to offset around 740,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually.

Another major development

is the North Concession photovoltaic solar project, also with a capacity of 100 megawatts and expected to be commissioned in the second quarter of 2026. This project alone will contribute to a reduction of more than 220,000 tonnes of emissions each year.

Meanwhile, PDO’s Amin photovoltaic solar power plant, which became operational in 2020, has already delivered a cumulative reduction of over 1.1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

The Miraah solar thermal steam generation project also continues to support clean steam supply for enhanced oil recovery, ranking among the world’s largest facilities of its kind.

Complementing these are smaller-scale but equally impactful initiatives such as the Dhiyaa project in Al Jazir, which supplies solar power to public buildings while promoting renewable energy awareness within local communities.

At PDO’s Mina Al Fahal headquarters, the company has implemented a car park solar project, now in its third phase, which contributes to the reduction of approximately 1,800 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions annually.

Equally critical to PDO’s environmental strategy is the sustainable management of produced water, which presents both operational challenges and emissions concerns due to its energy-intensive disposal requirements.

PDO has adopted a nature-based solution through the Nimr Wetlands project, which uses reed beds to naturally purify water.

OQGN sustainability report highlights decarbonisation progress

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, JULY 21

OQ GAS NETWORK (OQGN), Oman’s leading gas transmission operator, has released its maiden annual Sustainability Report, detailing the company’s achievements in environmental stewardship, workforce development and operational transparency throughout 2024.

The report reflects OQGN’s alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and the country’s net-zero ambitions.

Following its public listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange in 2023, OQGN delivered measurable progress across key sustainability indicators. These include a 46 per cent reduction in Scope 1 and 2 emissions compared to the 2021 baseline, a 63 per cent drop in water consumption and the recycling of over 3,400 cubic metres of wastewater.

The company also completed the first-ever Remote Techno Plug (RTP) operation on a 48-inch gas pipeline in Oman, significantly minimising flaring during maintenance. Workforce well-being and inclusion remained



One of the achievements of 2024 was the 45.7 per cent reduction in combined Scope 1 and 2 emissions, compared to the 2021 baseline.

a core focus, with OQGN achieving 14.9 million safe manhours, zero incidents of discrimination and a 76 per cent employee satisfaction score. Additionally, women now represent 13 per cent of full-time middle management roles.

Mansoor al Abdali, CEO of OQGN, said, “At the core of our progress is our determined attention to sustainability. We took a major

step forward by becoming one of the first nine companies in Oman to disclose our ESG performance via the MSX platform. Our stakeholders can be assured that we are not just building a company, but an enduring legacy of innovation and responsibility”.

As part of its commitment to support Oman’s 2050 Net-Zero target, OQGN advanced its company-wide decarbonisation strategy in 2024. The strategy centres around three primary levers: process optimisation and energy efficiency, clean energy and electrification; and the use of data and innovation. Together, these pillars are designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 42 per cent by 2030 and 82 per cent by 2040, with the ultimate goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

One of the achievements of 2024 was the 45.7 per cent reduction in combined Scope 1 and 2 emissions, compared to the 2021 baseline. This was driven by initiatives such as optimising gas-fired heaters and compressors, reducing flaring and venting; and piloting energy-efficient technologies

across key infrastructure. The deployment of solar systems across eight block valve stations further demonstrated the company’s commitment to clean energy integration.

OQGN implemented an in-house digital monitoring platform powered by AI. This system automates the tracking of electricity and fuel consumption, enabling real-time performance evaluation and minimising human error. The company also reported a 96 per cent reduction in vented gas and a 44 per cent reduction in flared gas volumes compared to 2021 levels.

In collaboration with Hydrom, the company is developing national infrastructure for hydrogen and CO₂ transportation. Technical feasibility studies and stakeholder partnerships are underway to support open-access pipeline networks for green hydrogen and carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS). These projects reflect a broader strategy to repurpose existing assets, such as natural gas pipelines, to support low-carbon fuels and ensure long-term sustainability of Oman’s energy sector.

COUNTER MEASURE

EU to ramp up retaliation plans



The European Union is exploring a broader set of possible counter-measures against the United States as prospects for an acceptable trade agreement with Washington fade, diplomats say. A number of EU members, including Germany, are now considering using wide-ranging “anti-coercion” measures which would let the bloc target US services and other sectors in the absence of a deal, diplomats say. — Reuters

CONCERNS REMAIN

Oil prices dipped slightly on Monday



Oil prices dipped slightly on Monday, with the latest European sanctions on Russian oil expected to have minimal impact on supplies while US tariffs ensure demand concerns remain. Brent crude futures dropped 38 cents, or 0.55%, to \$68.90 a barrel by 09:25 GMT after settling 0.35% down on Friday. Light crude declined 30 cents, or 0.45%, to \$67.04 after a 0.3% decline in the previous session. — Reuters

ECONOMIC CONDITION

UK consumer sentiment remains downbeat



British households remained pessimistic about economic conditions and their financial well-being in July, survey data from financial services company S&P Global showed on Monday. The S&P Global consumer sentiment index rose slightly to 45.1 in July from 45 in June. The index tracks household financial well-being, labour market conditions, household spending, savings and debt. — dpa

OPINION

Checked in by a machine in a hotel in Switzerland



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman.

WILL be replaced by robots or a basic connected computer to start with? Yes, unfortunately, to many (or fortunately to some).

I practically witnessed the experience and noted the impact as I continue my long-awaited two-week holiday as a getaway outside Oman across European countries. My article this week revolves around machines already replacing some of the jobs and imprecise receptionists.

I was welcomed with a hospitable “Salaam Alaykum” greeting as I checked in at one of the Asian hotels during the last public holiday, along with being assisted with my family and me with bags to our hotel rooms and having everything about the hotel, their services, and the rooms explained to us. Pleasant, personal, and the usual special check-in experience you would mostly expect.

Fast forward to a week ago: as I checked in at one of the hotels in Paris, the experience was somewhat the same, yet with a warm “Bonjour!” and without the unique hospitality one would expect from many of the Asian hotels (e.g., assisting with bags to the respective rooms).

The staff was pleasant indeed, but the end-to-end experience of check-in cannot be obviously compared.

In Switzerland, however, despite the beautiful weather and scenery, the check-in to the hotel was entirely new. There was no lobby buzz, no front desk, and definitely no smiling human. Instead, I was greeted by an internet-connected machine with a “Check-in Here” prompt. No eye contact, no conversation, just a touch interface and a key card reader slot (which I also shared on my social media feed).

In less than a few minutes, I was all set to check in to our rooms with my family using the generated keycard. The experience was a fast check-in, but it was definitely not friendly, nor was it personal.

Is this only applicable in Switzerland? Definitely not. Japan has the famous Henn-na Hotel, staffed almost entirely by robots. In the US, hotel chains like Marriott and Hilton are rolling out digital check-in via apps and kiosks.

Even Airbnb is encouraging hosts to enable self-check-in through smart locks and code systems. Sooner or later (if not already), the digital transformation (automation) will progress to Asian and even Middle Eastern countries, including here in Oman.

According to McKinsey’s 2023 report, nearly 25% of current work activities across all jobs could be automated by 2030, with hospitality and customer service roles at the forefront.

Receptionists are especially at risk since most of their responsibilities are repetitive, rule-based, and easy to digitise. In fact, the

According to McKinsey’s 2023 report, nearly 25% of current work activities across all jobs could be automated by 2030, with hospitality and customer service roles at the forefront.

World Economic Forum listed receptionist roles among the top 10 most likely to be automated.

Though “contactless” technology and experience have become the most preferred interaction post-Covid for many, and the push towards digital transformation continues to progress, is it better for these specific industries, jobs, and circumstances? Depends on the goals. The advantages are apparent, such as fewer staff, less human error, and 24/7 consistent service.

The disadvantage, however, with machines is that they can’t yet replace empathy, intuition, or the ability to read a guest’s frustration and respond with genuine care. I write out of experience yet won’t deny I loved the speed, and I am sure I loved the cost saved as a result.

In conclusion, the trip showed me two sides of the same coin. One city reminded me of the charm of human hospitality, and the other showed me the future of hotel efficiency using technology.

Clearly the future of automation in these industries is getting closer to our part of the world. How fast is the one million rial question? Looking forward? Not entirely, especially when it comes to replacing the usual pleasant feel I am used to when I mostly need it (during holidays, to give an example). How we can evolve with it is what I aim to share in return back from holidays. Until then, stay positive and curious and continue learning.

A BAD BANK FOR HONG KONG IS FAR FROM UNTHINKABLE

KA SING CHAN

FOR ONE of the world’s most expensive and property-obsessed cities, the mere mention of creating a bad bank for real estate debt is enough to cause a shudder.

That’s why the Hong Kong Monetary Authority on Friday was quick to dismiss reports that lenders are mulling such a plan. But it’s far from unthinkable.

Sure, systemic risks look limited for now. Bad loans from all sectors of the city’s economy stood at \$25 billion at the end of March, amounting to just 1.98% of the banking system’s total, according to the HKMA’s statistics.

And the provision coverage ratio stands at more than 140%. That’s despite a 30% decline in home prices from their 2021 peak.

The valuation of commercial real estate (CRE) has probably fallen more, although the slump has not been fully factored into developers and banks’ books given there have been no notable fire sales.

An extended real estate slump would change that.

At the end of March there were some HK\$1.4 trillion (\$180 billion) of CRE loans in Hong Kong. In a September report, Goldman Sachs analysts argued that a 25% decline in developers’ 2023 pre-tax earnings could push the non-performing ratio for that debt up to 22%, surpassing the 1998 Asian financial crisis peak of 17%.

That may sound like an unlikely dire scenario. But six of 11 smaller developers tracked by Jefferies analysts have posted negative EBIT, excluding fair value changes, since 2024, and carry HK\$173 billion in debt. One of them, Emperor International, defaulted on HK\$16.6 billion of borrowings last month.

Add in unlisted property investors and New World Development, which secured a \$11 billion refinancing deal in June, and up to 30% of CRE loans in the banking system could be at risk of downgrade, per Jefferies.

New World, whose new loans are due in just three years’ time, is in talks to sell a giant airport mall at a 25% loss against its HK\$20 billion investment, Bloomberg reported last week, citing people familiar with the matter.

Such disposals will up the pressure on lenders. For instance, the \$30 billion Hang Seng Bank — majority-owned by HSBC — has 36% of its book allocated to Hong Kong properties. — Reuters

Anchoring investments for a diversified future



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EZAD is more than just an economic zone; it is a symbol of visionary policy, geographic advantage and sustainable development.

OMAN’S economic landscape is undergoing a profound transformation guided by Oman Vision 2040, the Sultanate of Oman’s strategic road map towards a diversified, knowledge-driven economy. Central to this vision is the Al Dhahirah Economic Zone (EZAD), a flagship initiative that reflects Oman’s commitment to redefining its economic narrative and deepening regional integration within the GCC.

EZAD is more than just an economic zone; it is a symbol of visionary policy, geographic advantage and sustainable development.

Situated in the Al Dhahirah Governorate, just 20 kilometres from the Rub Al Khali border crossing with Saudi Arabia, EZAD strategically positions Oman as a gateway to the \$1.6 trillion GCC market. This proximity enables seamless overland trade, substantially reducing transportation costs and delivery times for businesses accessing the Saudi market and beyond.

The newly established direct Oman-Saudi road has already driven a remarkable 350%

increase in bilateral trade between 2022 and 2024, reaching nearly RO 2.18 billion. This momentum underscores the immense potential EZAD holds in enhancing trade flows and industrial collaboration across borders.

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) plays a pivotal role in steering the development of EZAD. The zone encompasses a total area of 388 km², with OPAZ currently focused on Phase 1A, which spans 7.5 km² as part of the initial urgent development stage.

This phase includes essential facilities such as the dry port and a dedicated veterinary quarantine centre. Through a robust regulatory framework and a streamlined ‘one-stop shop’ service, OPAZ ensures a highly investor-friendly environment.

Investors benefit from a suite of competitive incentives including 100% foreign ownership, tax holidays of up to 30 years, duty exemptions on equipment and raw materials and full repatriation of profits.

These advantages firmly position EZAD as a leading investment destination within the Middle East. Aligned with Oman’s economic diversification objectives, EZAD is purposefully

designed to cultivate sectors beyond hydrocarbons. Key industries targeted include clean and renewable energy, high-precision manufacturing, logistics and advanced manufacturing that demand sophisticated infrastructure and specialised facilities.

EZAD is poised to emerge as a regional logistics hub, featuring a 4 km² dry port managed by Asyad Group on behalf of the Omani government. The first phase of the dry port development covers 1 km² and will include customs facilities, bonded warehouses and container handling infrastructure.

Smart city innovations, such as solar-powered lighting and intelligent traffic management systems, underline the zone’s commitment to sustainability and operational efficiency.

To support this expansive vision, RO 122 million has been secured for comprehensive infrastructure development, encompassing roads, drainage systems and connectivity enhancements. Specifically, RO 22.3 million has been allocated for Phase 1, ensuring the foundational infrastructure is in place to catalyse growth and investor confidence.

The zone’s commitment to empowering local businesses

is clear. Contracts stipulate significant subcontracting opportunities for Omani SMEs, with over RO 10 million earmarked for local enterprises. This strategy not only fosters job creation and skill development but also embeds SMEs into regional supply chains, contributing to Oman’s broader economic objectives.

EZAD exemplifies Oman-Saudi collaboration. A joint executive committee oversees the zone’s development, fostering mutual investments, regulatory alignment and business facilitation. Discussions on establishing a joint Saudi-Omani operating company further solidify this bilateral partnership, reducing investor risks and enhancing regional cooperation.

While the zone’s primary focus is regional, it actively seeks investments from Asia — particularly China and India — as well as Europe.

Oman’s stable investment climate, strategic logistics positioning and connectivity to Gulf and African markets present compelling advantages for international investors. The zone is an ideal base for distribution centres, cold storage facilities and third-party logistics operations.

Diverse investment opportunities await both local and international players. Agro-processing units can leverage Al Dhahirah’s agricultural potential, while the veterinary quarantine centre opens pathways in livestock trade. Mining and mineral processing offer prospects to capitalise on Oman’s rich natural resources. Financial institutions like Sohar International Bank stand ready to support these ventures through joint ventures and PPP models.

To maximise EZAD’s potential, strategic enhancements are essential.

BUSINESS

MERZ UNLOCKS €631 BN IN INVESTMENT AT 'MADE FOR GERMANY' MEETING

BERLIN: Chancellor Friedrich Merz spoke of 'one of the largest investment initiatives' seen in Germany in recent decades at a business summit where projected investments totalling €631 billion (\$735 billion) by 2028 were announced on Monday.

As part of his efforts to turn the German economy around, Merz is focusing on creating more attractive conditions for significantly increased business investments in Germany.

Larger public investments could be enormously enhanced by additional private capital, the conservative politician said after a meeting with representatives of an initiative involving several corporations at the Chancellery in Berlin. "We want to unlock this potential and thereby trigger further growth effects," Merz said, adding that structural reforms should also be implemented at the same time to create better conditions. The Made for Germany initiative includes 61 large



German Economy and Energy Minister Katherina Reiche, Siemens CEO Roland Busch, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Deutsche Bank CEO Christian Sewing, German Finance Minister and Vice-Chancellor Lars Klingbeil, CEO of Commerzbank Bettina Orlopp and other representatives of the German economy pose at the launch of the 'Made for Germany' initiative in Berlin. — AFP

companies from various sectors and investment firms, which are projecting investments totalling €631 billion in Germany by 2028. The money is expected to go towards new industrial sites and factories in Germany, but also into research and development and the modernisation of infrastructure. Representatives from leading

German firms attended the business summit, including Siemens and Deutsche Bank, to discuss initiatives to boost investor confidence in Europe's biggest economy.

Following two consecutive years of recession, and amid little hope that the German economy is set to fare significantly better this year, Merz was hoping to convince businesses to increase investments.

Deutsche Bank chief executive Christian Sewing said after the meeting that they are experiencing "a government that is picking up speed" and has growth and competitiveness high on its agenda.

Siemens chief executive Roland Busch spoke of a "new form of collaboration between business and politics." To unlock the announced billions, he said that politics should regulate less and give companies more freedom.

"We welcome the companies' confidence in investing in Germany and its jobs," Merz said ahead of the meeting. — dpa

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INDIAN Male, 4 years of experience in web development in a product based company. Looking for a suitable position as software developer. Contact: + 968-99226403 suhail23599@gmail.com

INDIAN male, MBA (Marketing), 10+ years experience (5 years in Oman) in Supply Chain Management & Logistics. Valid driving license. Seeking job in SCM/Logistics. Contact: 96923008

CHIEF accountant, MBA finance, 9+ years experience in financial statements, auditing, budgeting, VAT, tax, fixed assets, reconciliation, payroll. Seeking a full-time or part-time position in a senior role. Contact: akramhaniffa@yahoo.com / 93988825.

INDIAN male MBA, 20 years experience in Oman & GCC in Project sales/ Dealer market in All construction materials including Cables & Accessories having D/L looking for the post of Sales Manager/Assistant Manager. Contact: 00968 78099493

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INDIAN male (Mechanical Engineering) with 3 years experience in diesel engine works (Gensets/ Engines), 2 years in Machine Maintenance, seeks job. Contact: 78022420

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• PMP will be an added advantage
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ART/LIFE



OMAN INGREDIENTS POWER A UNIQUE PORTUGUESE-ITALIAN CULINARY COLLABORATION^{> 20}

DISCOVERY

Europe’s oldest lake settlement uncovered in Albania



ARCHAEOLOGISTS working on the shores of Ohrid Lake in Albania are convinced they have uncovered the oldest human settlement built on a European lake, finding evidence of an organised hunting and farming community living up to 8,000 years ago. The team, from Switzerland and Albania, spends hours each day about three metres (9.8 feet) underwater, painstakingly retrieving wooden stilts that supported houses.

They are also collecting bones of domesticated and wild animals, copper objects and ceramics, featuring detailed carvings.

Albert Hafner, from the University of Bern, said similar settlements have been found in Alpine and Mediterranean regions, but the settlements in the village of Lin are half a millennium older, dating back between 6,000 and 8,000 years.

“Because it is under water, the organic material is well-preserved and this allows us to find out what these people have been eating, what they have been planting”, Hafner said.

Multiple studies show that Lake Ohrid, shared by North Macedonia and Albania, is the oldest lake in Europe, at over one million years.

The age of the findings is determined through radiocarbon dating and dendrochronology, which measures annual growth rings in trees. More than one thousand wood samples have been collected from the site, which may have hosted several hundred people.

It is believed to cover around six hectares, but so far, only about 1% has been excavated after six years of work.

Hafner said findings show that people who lived on the lake helped to spread agriculture and livestock to other parts of Europe.

“They were still doing hunting and collecting things but the stable income for the nutrition was coming from the agriculture”, he said.

Albanian archaeologist Adrian Anastasi said it could take decades to fully explore the area.

“(By) the way they had lived, eaten, hunted, fished and by the way the architecture was used to build their settlement we can say they were very smart for that time”, Anastasi said. —Reuters

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



LIFESTYLE

Bollywood actress Prachi Shah attends a ghazal festival, ‘Khazana’, to raise funds for the cancer patients in Mumbai. — AFP



MUSIC

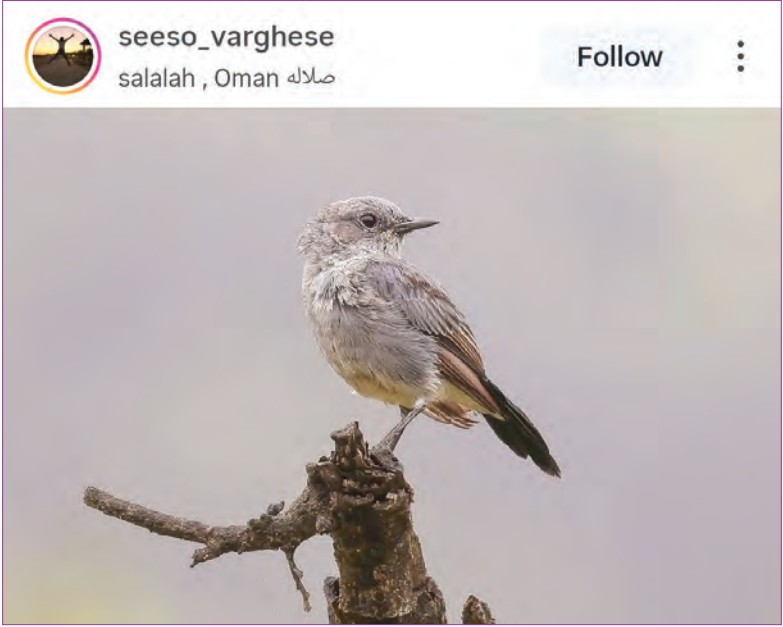
Tunisian singer Hamza Fadhlou performs with the Tunis Symphony Orchestra at the opening of the 59th session of the Carthage International Festival at the Roman amphitheatre in Carthage. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation of ‘Fragments’, a sustainable fashion collection by Venezuelan designer Alejandro Crocker, in Bogota. — AFP

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Martian meteorite sells for \$5.3 million at Sotheby's



A GROUNDBREAKING meteorite weighing 54 pounds (24.5 kg) and identified as the largest known piece of Mars ever found on Earth was sold for \$5.3 million at Sotheby's auction house, setting a new record for meteorite sales. The auction, held on Wednesday, ignited a competitive bidding war lasting 15 minutes, involving both online and telephone bidders eager to secure this rare extraterrestrial specimen. Dubbed NWA 16788, the Martian meteorite was discovered in late November 2023 by a meteorite hunter in the remote Sahara Desert of Niger's Agadez region. Sotheby's Vice-Chairman Cassandra Hatton described the find as "an extraordinary Mars fragment", emphasising its importance to both scientists and collectors. Laboratory testing confirmed its Martian origin; further analysis revealed it is the largest extraterrestrial fragment ever recovered from Mars. Scientists estimate that about five million years ago, an asteroid or comet collided violently with Mars, ejecting large chunks of rock into space. These fragments, including

NWA 16788, travelled vast distances, with this particular piece hurtling through space for approximately 140 million miles before entering Earth's atmosphere. Despite most objects burning up during atmospheric entry, this meteorite survived the fiery descent, landing in the Sahara Desert. The fusion crust on the rock, a result of intense heat and friction during atmospheric entry, gives it a reddish hue consistent with Mars' surface. Its size, condition and unique origin make it a scientifically significant and highly coveted specimen. Of roughly 400 officially recognised Martian meteorites worldwide, NWA 16788 is by far the largest and most intact. Hatton highlighted the rarity of such finds, noting that the journey of this meteorite — from Mars, through space, past Earth's atmosphere and finally into human hands — underscores the sheer improbability of such discoveries. This meteorite offers a unique window into the Red Planet's geology and history, captivating both scientific communities and collectors around the world. — AFP



Finally, another woman designer gets a big brand

IN THE latest move in the unprecedented realignment of the fashion world, Meryll Rogge was appointed creative director of Marni on Tuesday. She will be responsible for womenswear, menswear, accessories, store design and communications, replacing Francesco Risso, who left the Italian brand last month after almost 10 years. Rogge is the 17th new designer named to a big brand since mid-2024, but only the fourth woman. It's a striking imbalance in an industry that is still largely powered by womenswear and accessories; and one that was quick to pay lip service to diversity in recent years but has seemed to retreat from many of its pledges in terms of gender and race. Rogge will become the sole female designer in the stable of OTB, the holding company that also owns Maison Margiela, Jil Sander, Diesel and Viktor & Rolf; and that reported sales of 1.7 billion euros in 2024, down 4% from 2023. Similarly, Louise Trotter, who will make her debut at Bottega Veneta in September, is the only

female fashion designer at Kering, the luxury group that owns Gucci, Balenciaga and Saint Laurent, among other brands. The other two women who became creative directors of major fashion houses this year are Sarah Burton at Givenchy and Veronica Leoni at Calvin Klein. In a news release, Marni CEO Stefano Rosso called Rogge "an exceptional creative talent and an inspiring woman". A Belgian designer who started her career at Marc Jacobs before becoming head of women's design at Dries Van Noten and founding a namesake brand in 2020, Rogge, 40, shares a certain quirky practicality with Marni's founder, Consuelo Castiglioni. It was Castiglioni who transformed her husband's family fur company into a runway name beloved of bohemian intellectuals and art gallerists with a messy bent. In 2012, OTB bought a majority stake in the company, acquiring it fully in 2015. The next year, Castiglioni left, citing personal reasons and Risso was named creative director. Though Risso's collections could be eye-poppingly imaginative, bristling with three-dimensional

metal flowers or covered in what looked like finger paint, they could also seem self-indulgent — fun to look at but hard to wear. Rogge, who is relatively unknown outside the fashion world, became the first woman to be named designer of the year at the Belgian Fashion Awards in 2024 and was the recipient of the Andam Prize earlier this year, one of fashion's most prestigious awards. In explaining the selection, Guillaume Houzé, the president of Andam, cited Rogge's ability to turn "ambiguity, hybridity and the unexpected into allies" Like Castiglioni, she is also adept at marrying the conceptual to the commercial and has an affinity for colour and the sort of print combinations that are alluring in their oddity. In the news release, Rogge called joining Marni "both humbling and inspiring". A spokesperson for Marni did not specify when Rogge would unveil her first collection. She did say, however, that the designer planned to maintain her own line and split her time between the two brands. Multitasking, as it were. — NYT

FEATURES



flavour, thanks to sustainable harvesting practices and traditional fishing communities.

According to sources from the Oman Food & Beverage sector, the country’s seafood exports have been steadily increasing, reaching markets in Asia, Europe and the Middle East. The quality of Oman’s marine produce has attracted attention from international chefs seeking premium ingredients, particularly for fine dining establishments that value consistency and authenticity.

Beyond seafood, Oman’s spice trade — centred historically around ports like Muscat — has contributed aromatic herbs and spices such as cardamom, cumin and coriander to the culinary landscape. These



OMAN INGREDIENTS POWER A UNIQUE PORTUGUESE- ITALIAN CULINARY COLLABORATION

BY YERU EBUEN

In today’s competitive culinary world, diners are increasingly seeking more than just exotic flavours — they crave authenticity, quality and a narrative behind every plate. As a result, the importance of selecting the finest ingredients has never been more critical in determining the success of a restaurant, especially those vying for or holding Michelin stars. Michelin’s assessment extends beyond aesthetics or service; the organisation’s inspectors place significant emphasis on the quality of ingredients used, recognising that supreme produce forms the foundation of remarkable dishes.

This shift towards ingredient-driven excellence has led chefs worldwide to seek out unique, high-grade produce to craft memorable, authentic and innovative dishes. It’s within this context that Oman is emerging as a noteworthy player, thanks to its rich culinary larder rooted in pristine seas, fertile lands and traditional harvesting techniques.

The recent collaboration hosted by Mandarin Oriental Muscat vividly showcased this potential — combining Portuguese and Italian culinary traditions with the unique, high-calibre ingredients sourced from Oman, highlighting their place on the international gastronomic stage.

The event, a four-hands dinner featuring Chef José Barroso of Dubai’s Michelin-starred Tasca by José Avillez and Essenza’s own Chef Davide Borin, was more than just a celebration of Mediterranean flavours; it was a testament to Oman’s rising prominence as an ingredient hotspot. The five-course menu, which masterfully fused Portuguese and Italian culinary influences with local Omani produce, demonstrated how Oman’s ingredients could elevate dishes from simple to spectacular, earning their rightful place in high-end, globally recognised cuisine.

The collaboration bridged two culinary traditions that, while geographically close, are distinct in their flavours and ingredients. Portuguese cuisine is distinguished predominantly by its love of seafood — salted cod (bacalhau), sardines and shellfish — highlighting Portugal’s maritime history and the Atlantic coast’s bounty. Its dishes typically balance sweet, sour and savoury elements; ingredients like olive oil, garlic, citrus and dried herbs offer a rustic yet refined profile.

Italian cuisine, on the other hand, celebrates seasonal produce and regional diversity. Northern Italy cherishes butter, rice and cheeses, with dishes boasting subtlety and richness, while Southern Italy leans into bold, garlic-infused, spicy dishes often featuring seafood — an echo of its Mediterranean surroundings. The Italian approach emphasises simplicity and ingredient integrity, allowing fresh produce like tomatoes, basil and olive oil to shine.

The event’s exciting narrative lay in the seamless integration of these culinary philosophies, united through Oman’s exceptional ingredients — seafood, herbs and spices that poignantly framed traditional dishes from both countries. Here, Oman’s offerings proved not just compatible but pivotal to the experience.

THE SEAS OF A HIDDEN CULINARY POWERHOUSE

Oman’s geographical position endows it with some of the most pristine waters for seafood in the world. The Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean surrounding Oman provide a diverse bounty — lobster, octopus, king prawns, sardines and tuna — that are not only integral to local diets but also coveted globally. Omani seafood is renowned for its freshness, quality and distinctive

ingredients, often harvested from local farms or imported from the Indian Subcontinent, add depth and complexity to dishes, further raising Oman’s profile as an ingredient hub.

The culinary journey curated during the event was a reflection of Oman’s versatility. The five-course menu was an intentional “trifecta” — blending Portuguese marine staples, Italian rustic traditions and Oman’s fresh ingredients. Notable highlights included Omani lobster used in the pasta “Allo Scoglio”, showcasing how locally sourced seafood could elevate Mediterranean dishes. The Wagyu Picanha complemented with black beans and rice subtly integrated local produce into a Portuguese comfort-food classic.

Each dish showcased the distinct role of Oman’s ingredients, not merely as supplementary elements but as integral to the dish’s flavour profile and authenticity. The freshness of Oman’s seafood lent a richness and vibrancy that no imported or frozen produce could replicate; and homemade herbs and spices added layers of complexity.

MASTERING THE ART OF LOCAL INGREDIENTS

The chefs involved expressed great admiration for Oman’s produce. Chef Barroso highlighted the importance of sourcing local ingredients to truly capture authenticity.

For the chefs, working with Oman’s bounty isn’t just about ingredient quality; it’s a cultural experience.

This event showcased more than just fine dishes; it symbolised Oman’s growing status as a regional hub for high-quality ingredients that can compete on the world stage. While Oman has traditionally been recognised for its natural beauty and hospitality, its culinary sector is now poised for international recognition — provided the country continues to invest in quality sourcing, sustainable practices and culinary innovation.

To align itself with the global culinary elite, Oman can leverage its freshwater sources, strategic location and traditional fishing techniques to produce more export-quality ingredients. Building partnerships with local farmers, fishermen and artisanal producers can revamp the country’s reputation from a gastronomic perspective, much like its neighbouring Gulf countries that are increasingly becoming culinary hotspots.

The recent collaboration at Mandarin Oriental Muscat vividly demonstrated that Oman’s ingredients hold extraordinary potential for elevating the world’s most refined dishes. From the pristine waters spawning vibrant seafood to aromatic spices nurtured along historic trade routes, Oman provides a treasure trove of flavours that are both authentic and sophisticated.