

OMAN
Observer
DAILY

SUNRISE 05:48 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:31 AM

DHUHR 12:12 PM

ASR 03:40 PM

MAGHRIB 06:31 PM

ISHA 07:43 PM

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12

DJOKOVIC, ALCARAZ INTO US OPEN LAST 16 AS SABALENKA AVENGES DEFEAT

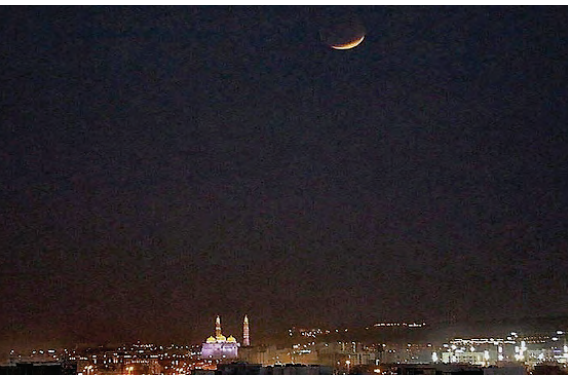
INBRIEF

HM GREETS
KYRGYZSTAN,
MALAYSIA, TRINIDAD
AND TOBAGO

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Sadyr Japarov of the Kyrgyz Republic on the occasion of his country's Independence Day. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to the president and further progress and prosperity for the friendly people of Kyrgyzstan. His Majesty the Sultan has sent a cable of greetings to Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, on the occasion of his country's National Day. His Majesty the Sultan has also sent a cable of greetings to President Christine Congallo of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the occasion of her country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the president, wishing her success in realising her people's aspirations and further stability and growth for the government and people of this friendly country.

TOTAL LUNAR
ECLIPSE ON SEPT 7

The Sultanate of Oman will witness a total lunar eclipse on Sunday, September 7. The eclipse will be visible across most continents. The Oman Society for Astronomy and Space (OSAS) said that it is preparing to observe the lunar eclipse in cooperation with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the governors' offices and Muscat Municipality. Salem bin Saif al Siyabi, a member of the Board of Directors of the OSAS and Director of the Total Lunar Eclipse Observation Project, said that observing this phenomenon contributes to highlighting the Sultanate of Oman as one of the most prominent global destinations for observing and documenting astronomical events. It also enhances the country's presence in international forums in addition to its role in achieving direct and indirect economic benefits for the tourism sector and various related activities in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. — ONA



The eclipse will be visible across most continents.

854,540 students to start
new academic year today

THE NEW academic year (2025/2026) begins on Sunday in public and private schools across the country. The total number of students has reached 854,540 students enrolled in various schools across the Sultanate of Oman's directorates of education.

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, congratulated the students and teachers on the occasion of the new academic year.

The minister delved into the ministry's plan for the next phase, saying: "The priorities of the upcoming plan will focus on several educational areas to improve the quality of education, as follows: Improving teacher performance: This goal can be realised through qualification and training programmes that contribute to developing teachers' capabilities, enhancing their professional competence, consolidating their academic and educational standing, and supporting the building of effective professional learning communities that enable the exchange of experiences and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Curriculum development: This will enhance students' national identity and equip them with future skills that enable them to adapt to contemporary developments and compete regionally and internationally, thus contributing effectively to the national development process.

Developing educational assessment: This will build a comprehensive framework for assessing student learning for grades 1-12, aligned with the latest Omani curricula and international standards, while also building capacity in educational assessment."

The Ministry of Education seeks to complement digital transformation in schools and provide digital infrastructure enablers according to a comprehensive phased plan covering all schools, such as mobile labs, interactive whiteboards, improving the efficiency of school communications infrastructure, and providing interactive digital content, the minister said.

Given the fact that artificial intelligence has become one of the most prominent transformational tools of this era, the ministry is keen to utilise AI applications to enhance student learning and enhance their cognitive horizons. This is achieved through clear governance, policies, and ethical frameworks that ensure its use as a learning tool without compromising the core values of the education system, she said.

The ministry continues to expand vocational and technical education by offering



The Ministry of Education seeks to complement digital transformation in schools.

First private school in Sultan Haitham City

Construction work on the first private school in Sultan Haitham City with a capacity of more than 1,400 students has begun. This forms a milestone in the educational scene of the city, where the school includes 90 classrooms, 8 science laboratories, and 6 technical and technical classrooms, in addition to integrated sports facilities, all designed to provide a modern learning environment that meets academic needs and sports and artistic activities, and opens wide horizons for innovation and creativity.

The Sultan Haitham City includes an integrated educational system, where the first phase includes 3 modern educational complexes, each complex includes 3 schools with a capacity of more than 2,300 students, distributed so that it is not more than ten minutes from residential neighbourhoods, and these complexes provide vibrant educational environments that include academic and extra-curricular activities together, and distributes playgrounds, green squares, swimming pools and creative spaces. **DETAILS ON P2**

a travel and tourism major in a number of schools in the governorates of Dhofar and Al Dakhiliyah, in addition to the existing majors in this track, namely: engineering and industrial majors and information technology and business administration. This brings the number of vocational majors in the vocational and technical education track to nine, the minister said.

As the ministry of education strives to achieve its strategic goal of developing an integrated educational governance system and evaluating it according to national

and international standards, this year, the ministry will launch a qualitative phase in evaluating school education. This phase will start by the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education implementing the National School Performance Evaluation System as a first phase, on 100 public and private schools in the governorates of Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Batinah South, according to precise standards and indicators. This phase also includes the continued construction of new schools and expansion of existing ones.

Dhofar waves goodbye to Khareef season, welcomes ‘Sarb’

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 30

The mist is lifting, the drizzle is easing and Dhofar is quietly swapping grey for gentle gold. In about 23 days — around September 22 — the governorate will ease into Sarb, the local spring that follows khareef. It's the moment when valleys breathe again, streams run clearer and families step back into the sunshine. Sarb isn't a comedown after the monsoon. It's a handover. The land has drunk its fill; grass is thick, and wild flowers start to dot the slopes. Days grow warmer without the sting of summer. The air feels light. It invites short hikes, unhurried picnics and a little fruit-picking where orchards allow. One place captures that shift better

Camping is part of the rhythm here. Authorities have set aside designated zones so the experience stays safe and the environment is protected. Clear signs, waste points and basic facilities make a difference — especially for families trying camping for the first time.



Sarb is the moment when valleys breathe again and streams run clearer.

than most: Jibjat, in the Dhofar range under the Wilayat of Taqah. Over recent years, it has earned the nickname "Star of Sarb"— a high, open landscape of soft ridgelines and long views, close enough for day trips yet far enough to feel still. People come for the quiet: a rug on the grass, a thermos, a breeze and a sky that keeps clearing as the season settles. Camping is part of the rhythm here. Authorities have set aside designated zones so the experience stays safe and the environment is protected. Clear signs, waste points and basic facilities make a difference — especially for families trying camping for the first time. By night, the thinner cloud cover brings stargazing back into focus; by day, short trails suit those who prefer a scenic wander to a demanding hike.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri addressing the Suva Asia-Pacific Environment Ministers' Forum

OMAN TAKES PART IN ASIA-PACIFIC ENVIRONMENT MINISTERS' FORUM

SUVA: The Sixth Asia-Pacific Environment Ministers' Forum concluded on Friday in Fiji, following four days of discussions on sustainable environmental solutions and regional cooperation. Topics included coastal and marine protection, pollution control, waste management, reducing single-use plastics, and combating climate change and desertification.

Oman participated as President of the Seventh UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) session, with a delegation led by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority.

In his speech, he highlighted the urgency of addressing global environmental challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and waste, noting the rising frequency and severity of extreme weather events in the past year.

Dr Al Amri said the forum aims to shape regional consultations ahead of UNEA-7 in Nairobi, Kenya, next December, themed 'Promoting Sustainable Solutions for a Resilient Planet.'

He reviewed regional progress on the Paris Agreement, noting 98 countries submitted first transparent progress reports, with six regional countries submitting their nationally determined contributions.

He urged focus on four priorities: harnessing science for action, supporting comprehensive cooperation, mobilising resources and partnerships, and building circular and resilient systems. — ONA

MOH DENIES VIRUS SPREAD IN DHOFAR, WARNS AGAINST RUMOURS

SALALAH: The Ministry of Health (MoH) is monitoring a social media video claiming the spread of a virus causing fever and requiring hospitalisation in Dhofar Governorate.

The ministry confirmed that the health situation in the governorate is stable, with no indications of virus transmission.

Reassuring citizens and residents, the ministry said its specialised teams are continuously monitoring the situation. It has referred the matter to the competent authorities to take legal action against those responsible for publishing or circulating false information.

The ministry urged the public not to be swayed by rumours and to rely on official channels for accurate health updates.

Citizens and residents were also reminded to act responsibly when sharing health-related news, avoiding content that could cause unnecessary concern.



DR SHAMSA BINT AHMED AL HARTHIYAH

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUG 30

The Ministry of Health (MoH), through the School and University Health Department, is rolling out an integrated plan for the 2025-2026 academic year aimed at promoting student health in schools and universities.

Part of the Comprehensive Readiness for Schools and Universities initiative, the plan focuses on early disease detection and raising health awareness to create safe, healthy learning environments that support both academic achievement and quality of life.

Dr Shamsa bint Ahmed al Harthiyah, Acting Director of the School and University Health Department, said that school and university health services are vital for public health, providing students with the knowledge and skills to adopt sustainable, healthy lifestyles.

Gobhanu Korisepati of the Wharton &

Huntsman Programme at the University of Pennsylvania, who spoke to Observer, highlighted that integrated health plans succeed when early screening is paired with clear referral pathways and proper student data protection.

“Success should be judged by how many students receive timely care and how much illness-related absenteeism falls. Every day in school compounds learning, so regaining even one lost day can change a student's trajectory,” Korisepati said.

Sayed Salman, Chairman of the BoD at Indian Schools, emphasised the importance of

addressing both physical and mental wellness. “Disease identification should include a mental health component. Schools must implement an exhaustive plan covering the holistic wellbeing of students,” he said.

Jameela Ashfaq, Principal of Brilliant Youth Private School, stressed monitoring children's junk food intake and educating families to shape a healthier society.

She added: “With increasing reliance on processed foods, sedentary lifestyles, and constant exposure to digital screens, young people face health risks earlier than ever.”

Construction begins on first landmark school in Sultan Haitham City

CONSTRUCTION HAS commenced on the first school in Sultan Haitham City, District 9, designed to accommodate more than 1,400 students and become a landmark in the city's educational landscape.

The school will feature 90 classrooms, eight science laboratories, six art and technology rooms, and integrated sports facilities—providing a modern environment that fosters academics, sports, arts, innovation, and creativity.

Sultan Haitham City follows an integrated educational model. The first phase includes three modern educational complexes, each housing three schools with a combined capacity exceeding 2,300 students.

These schools are strategically located within a ten-minute radius of residential areas and offer vibrant environments that merge academics with extracurricular activities, including playgrounds, green spaces, swimming pools, and creative zones.

Designed as extensions of the local community, the complexes include shared spaces such as cafeterias, multipurpose rooms, and break areas. Sustainability is also central, with green rooftop gardens serving as outdoor learning and recreational areas, enhancing thermal insulation while providing a healthy and engaging environment for students.



The school accommodates over 1,400 students, a modern learning environment and state-of-the-art sports facilities

Faten bint Hamoud Al Harthi, urban planner and architectural designer at the Executive Office for Future Cities at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, emphasized that Sultan Haitham City aims to create next-generation educational environments that transcend traditional school buildings, integrating schools into the city's urban fabric.

She added: “These educational projects, implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, offer an integrated model for public and private

school complexes.” “With the first private school now under construction and two others in preparation, a new educational experience is taking shape—one that will eventually extend across governorates in the Sultanate, making schools a central element of modern urban development.”

As the new academic year begins, Sultan Haitham City exemplifies an integrated urban model that redefines education in Oman, with modern schools and complexes designed to meet future aspirations and place students at the heart of the learning experience. — ONA

Rustaq Fort restoration project to extend until November 2027

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) is advancing a comprehensive restoration of Al Rustaq Fort, one of Oman's oldest and most significant forts, to preserve its unique architectural heritage and underscore its cultural value.

Scheduled to continue until November 2027, the project aims to enhance the fort as a cultural and tourist destination, promote local craftsmanship and attract investment in heritage tourism.

Al Rustaq Fort's walls reflect a rich history, dating back to the pre-Islamic era, with significant expansions during the Yaaribi dynasty and the reign of Imam Ahmed bin Said al Busaidy. Recently, the fort was inscribed on the Islamic Heritage List in recognition of its cultural significance and exceptional architectural features.

Implemented by the ministry, the restoration follows a multi-stage plan. Key efforts include rebuilding cracked walls using traditional stones and materials, treating damaged exterior cladding with 'sarooj,' maintaining historic wooden and metal windows and restoring towers, most notably the 'Devils' Tower,' which was reconstructed after a partial collapse

Al Rustaq Fort's walls reflect a rich history, dating back to the pre-Islamic era, with significant expansions during the Yaaribi dynasty and the reign of Imam Ahmed bin Said al Busaidy. Recently, the fort was inscribed on the Islamic Heritage List in recognition of its cultural significance and exceptional architectural features.



The project aims to enhance the fort as a cultural and tourist destination

using traditional techniques faithful to the original design.

Engineering teams have also documented important architectural evidence, such as traditional rammed-earth layers, leaving portions exposed for scientific study.

On the western façade, restoration work - including surface cleaning, treatment of damaged layers, and new cladding—has been completed. Historically significant architectural openings discovered in this phase are currently under study.

Inside the fort, courtyards and interior façades have undergone cleaning, crack treatment and

application of initial cladding layers, with final layers pending completion of electrical installations.

Re-roofing and structural reinforcement have been completed for 24 rooms, with roofing underway on an additional 25 rooms. Most of the fort's four façades have been restored, with discovered architectural remnants preserved and documented.

Restoration of the outer wall is in progress in collaboration with relevant authorities, reinforcing Al Rustaq Fort's status as a prominent symbol of Oman's historical and cultural heritage.

MoH urges schools to prioritise student health and wellbeing

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2,048 SHOOTERS TAKE PART IN DHOFAR KHAREEF TRADITIONAL WEAPONS TITLE

SALALAH: The Dhofar Digital Health Transformation Forum, organised by the Ministry of Health, concluded with a comprehensive set of recommendations to accelerate healthcare digitalisation and strengthen cybersecurity, supporting Oman Vision 2040. The forum emphasised the importance of innovation and technology in enhancing healthcare services across Oman. Titled 'Digitising Health and Innovation for Advanced Care and Sustainable Health', the two-day forum brought together administrators, medical and nursing staff, military and security personnel, and private sector representatives. Discussions focused on implementing advanced technologies, improving healthcare efficiency and safeguarding sensitive data against cyber threats.

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SHORT TAKES

Discussions also focused on safeguarding sensitive data against cyber threats

DIGITAL HEALTH TRANSFORMATION FORUM CONCLUDES

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Key recommendations included forming director-general-level digital transformation teams in governorates, attracting specialised national talent, integrating modern medical technologies and conducting awareness campaigns on cyber risks. Participants emphasised regular field visits by central digital teams to monitor progress, identify challenges and facilitate knowledge exchange between governorates.

The forum also highlighted cross-institutional integration, ensuring that digital transformation initiatives are consistent across all health facilities. Discussions covered best practices from both Oman and international contexts, aiming to create a robust, sustainable and integrated digital healthcare system. — ONA

RIYADA LAUNCHES OMANI HANDICRAFT HOUSE OUTLET

SALALAH: The Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (Riyada) launched the Omani Handicraft House outlet at Al Hafa Beach Market, Salalah, providing a platform for SMEs and local artisans to showcase and sell their products. The initiative supports entrepreneurship and strengthens the visibility of Omani handicrafts in local and international markets.

The launch event was sponsored by Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, and attended by Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of Riyada.

The outlet features a wide variety of products, including handicrafts, perfumes, incense, fashion items, accessories, jewellery and cosmetics. An online platform complements the physical outlet, enabling broader consumer reach without registration fees or sales commissions.

Since its initial launch in Muscat in 2022, the Omani Crafts House service has registered 90 merchants offering 907 products, highlighting Riyada's commitment to digital transformation, SME growth and the promotion of Omani cultural heritage nationally and abroad. — ONA

2,048 SHOOTERS TAKE PART IN DHOFAR KHAREEF TRADITIONAL WEAPONS TITLE

SALALAH: The Dhofar Khareef Traditional Weapons Shooting Championship concluded on Friday, organised by Dhofar Municipality in Raysut as part of the annual khareef season celebrations. The championship, a highlight of the cultural calendar, draws participants and spectators of all ages, promoting Oman's rich heritage of traditional sports.

In the Saktoun Targets Competition, Mohammed bin Nasser al Qanouni won the general category, Said bin Khamis al Muqbali took the junior category, and Muslim bin Mohammed Jaboub topped the senior category. In the heavy rifle target competition, Said bin Ramis al Mahri secured first place, while the Al Murab team won the heavy rifle plate

The championship promoted Oman's rich heritage of traditional sports

shooting event. Ittihad Musayyib B emerged victorious in the saktoun plate shooting, and Muslim bin Mohammed Jaboub also clinched the heavy rifle target competition with scope for seniors. In the Challenge Cup, Mohammed bin Ahmed al Maashani was the

winner. The award ceremony was graced by Salim bin Musallam Qatan, Vice-President of the State Council and sponsor of the event, who honoured all first-place winners for their remarkable achievements.

The championship, held over five days, saw participation from more than 2,048 shooters competing in six main events, including skeet target competitions (general, junior and senior categories), heavy rifle target shooting, heavy rifle and skeet shooting, and heavy rifle target competition with scope for seniors.

Through events like this, Dhofar Municipality continues to preserve cultural traditions while fostering intergenerational engagement in traditional sports. — ONA

Oman launches travel and tourism major in schools

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 30

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION has launched a Travel & Tourism vocational-technical major in public schools for the first time, starting in Dhofar and Al Dakhiliyah governorates in the 2025-26 academic year.

Dr Maysoon al Shahri, Director-General of Education in Dhofar, said Khawla bint Hakim Basic Education School in Salalah will enrol 50 female students in the programme, while Al Saeediyah School will enrol 50 male students.

"This major aligns with the needs of Oman's tourism governorates and equips students with practical skills for the travel and hospitality sectors. The rollout begins this year in Al Dakhiliyah and Dhofar, with plans to expand based on results," she said.

The programme, part of the vocational and technical education track, covers applied subjects such as guest services, tour operations, travel-office management, and destination marketing, preparing graduates for employment in hotels, travel companies, and experience-based attractions across the governorates.

Officials highlighted that the initiative

The programme will be part of the vocational and technical education track

supports Omanis in taking value-added roles in the growing travel and tourism sector, particularly in Dhofar, where seasonal demand and events are expanding.

Al Shahri noted that school selection was based on infrastructure and staffing readiness, with balanced intakes of boys and girls. The first-year evaluation will guide

phased expansion to other schools.

By embedding Travel & Tourism in the school curriculum, the ministry aims to strengthen service culture, encourage tourism-linked small enterprises, and enhance students' practical competencies, supporting Oman's broader economic diversification goals.

Workshop proposes sustainable national plan to combat parthenium in Oman

SALALAH: A three-day scientific workshop on managing the invasive parthenium plant concluded in Salalah with recommendations to establish a comprehensive national strategy for controlling the pest from 2026 to 2030. Experts highlighted the serious threat posed by the plant to agriculture, biodiversity and public health, emphasising the need for coordinated national action.

Organised by Dhofar Municipality, the workshop brought together local and international scientists, government officials and environmental specialists to discuss research findings and practical solutions for parthenium management. Participants stressed the importance of a multi-faceted approach, combining biological, chemical, and cultural methods, backed by strong community

International scientists, government officials and environmental specialists took part in the workshop

involvement. Some of the key recommendations included using the 2026 national survey as a baseline to monitor the plant's spread and creating a digital monitoring database.

Others include strengthening traditional control measures while registering selective pesticides to

avoid harming native flora.

Developing a national road map for biological control, including the introduction of natural predators and restoration of local vegetation.

Launching awareness campaigns to educate communities about the plant's dangers, including its allergenic effects and impact on soil

and crops.

Establishing a unified digital application for monitoring and reporting outbreaks, supported by a trained national network of volunteers and environmental monitors.

The workshop's final day featured three sessions on biological management, non-biological methods (physical, cultural, and chemical), and a showcase of Oman's best practices in invasive plant management. International experiences were shared to inform a unified national vision for effective parthenium control.

The seminar concluded with participant recognition, reinforcing Oman's commitment to a science-driven, sustainable approach to protecting its environment and agricultural resources. — ONA

OMAN

‘Let’s Walk’ initiative promotes healthy lifestyle

AHMED AL KAABI

PART of the Summer Sports Days 2025, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth organised the ‘Let’s Walk’ initiative on Thursday at Muscat Grand Mall, attracting around participants from across the community. The event aimed to encourage walking as a simple, effective way to maintain physical and mental well-being.

Ahlam al Khamisi, Physical Activity Specialist and event supervisor, said the initiative was designed to motivate mall-goers and company employees to adopt regular physical activity. The event welcomed hiking teams, athletes, senior citizens and children, highlighting walking as a beneficial activity for fitness, mental comfort and community bonding. “Through this initiative, we aim to embed a walking culture across society, making it accessible to all and strengthening social ties,” she said.

This year marked the second edition of the initiative, following the success of the first held at Muscat Mall, which drew over 400 participants from 15 entities. Moving the event to midweek and collaborating with Muscat Grand Mall allowed organisers to adapt indoor walking routes, a practical



Participation extended beyond individuals, with several institutions, sports clubs and community groups joining.



— Photo by Hussein Al Muqbali

adjustment given high outdoor temperatures and limited suitable outdoor spaces. Al Khamisi added, “Future editions aim to expand across other governorates, making walking a cornerstone of a healthy lifestyle nationwide.”

Participation extended beyond individuals, with several institutions, sports clubs and community groups joining. Among them was the Omani Women’s

Association.

Ghadir al Zadjali, Vice-Chair of the Association’s Sports Committee, said: “Walking is one of the simplest and most beneficial activities, and our participation reflects our commitment to promoting sports and encouraging exercise across society.”

The event also included side activities such as raffles, creating a lively atmosphere for families and

participants of all ages.

Al Zadjali emphasised the Association’s role in supporting women’s engagement in sports, including training courses, hiking trips, fitness programmes and trainer development initiatives. She concluded: “We hope our involvement raises awareness about the importance of physical activity, especially among women, benefiting the health of the entire community.”

Ayoob al Raisi, head of the Oman Mountain Champions Hiking Team, praised the initiative’s societal impact. “Events like ‘Let’s Walk’ restore energy and vitality, motivating people to move instead of remaining sedentary,” he said, highlighting the positive health and social benefits of such initiatives. “We hope these events continue regularly to enhance the health and well-being of the community.”

SalamAir Continues Expansion with 15th Aircraft “Barr Al Hikman”

SalamAir Oman’s low-cost airline, proudly announces the arrival of its 15th aircraft, a brand-new Airbus A321neo, named “Barr Al Hikman” after the famous coastal area located in the Sultanate of Oman, often referred to as the Maldives of the Middle East, known for its natural beauty and abundant wildlife.

Mohamed Bin Abdullah Al Khonji, Chairman of SalamAir, said: “We are delighted to welcome Barr Al Hikman, our 15th aircraft, to our expanding fleet. SalamAir is committed to making air travel more affordable while supporting Oman’s aviation and tourism goals. This newest addition to our fleet marks the start of executing our strategic plan to reach 25 aircraft by 2028. SalamAir continues to support the aviation ecosystem in advancing Oman Vision 2040 by increasing tourism levels and contributing to the Sultanate’s economic diversification. We underscore the importance of public-private collaboration and complementarity to grow tourism for the benefit of Oman.”

“Part of SalamAir’s strategy since 2024 has been to focus on unserved routes”, said Mohamed Al Khonji. “We firmly believe that Vision 2040 will be achieved through ambitious, forward-looking growth. For example, the United Arab Emirates operates more than 560 aircraft with a population of around 11 million, while Qatar operates about 230 aircraft with a population of around 3 million. By comparison, both Omani airlines combined operate no more than 46 aircraft with a population of around 5 million, which shows Oman’s substantial headroom for growth. By working together through codeshare and other forms of cooperation, seeking to complement rather than compete, both Omani airlines can be part of the growth story. With our 15th plane delivered, we are inaugurating a new phase in our growth journey.”

“With our fleet now of 15 aircraft, the airline can begin to expand that demand further while opening new markets, including our long-term plan to establish a base for two to three aircraft in Salalah. A Salalah base supports balanced regional development, bringing more visitors to Dhofar and stimulating year-round tourism and employment.”

Adrian Hamilton-Manns, Chief Executive Officer of SalamAir, commented: “This new aircraft will enable SalamAir to expand its network by increasing frequencies to Nairobi; launching new services to Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia; strengthening our presence in the Kingdom of



Saudi Arabia via Abha; resuming Beirut; and launching service to Medan in Indonesia. With a growing list of previously unserved destinations across the region, SalamAir plays a key role in supporting the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to expand transport links, making it easier for people to travel to Oman and for residents to have direct access to more destinations.”

“Our 15th plane is a launchpad for growth. It will be used to open new routes and to add more seats to high-demand destinations like Salalah. SalamAir’s OMR 9.99 domestic fare, launched in November 2024, has proven to be hugely popular and has stimulated new travel demand. Over the past year, the airline has transformed into a leading low-cost airline in the region, and this growth will continue.”

“This expansion will allow SalamAir to offer more competitive fares, add new routes, and expand flights in line with market demand. It will also create 182 jobs, increasing our workforce by 24% over the next 12 months, taking the company from 750 employees today to higher levels that further strengthen our contribution to the national economy.”

With this addition, SalamAir further cements its role as a key pillar of the Sultanate’s aviation and tourism sectors, expanding its route network, strengthening Oman’s position as a regional travel hub, and opening wider opportunities for tourism, trade, and cultural exchange. These initiatives align with Oman Vision 2040 by diversifying the economy, empowering the private sector, and positioning Oman as a connected and sustainable regional hub.

CONDOLENCES

With deep sorrow, the management and all employees of

Target LLC

express their sincere condolences to our Deputy General Manager

FADI MOUSAED

on the sad demise of his beloved Mother.

We pray to the Almighty to grant eternal peace to the departed soul and grant him and his bereaved family members the strength and courage to bear this irreparable loss.



SHORT TAKES



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres (3rd L) speaks during a bilateral meeting with China's President Xi Jinping (5th R), in Tianjin. — AFP

CHINA’S XI WELCOMES LEADERS AHEAD OF SUMMIT

TIANJIN: Chinese President Xi Jinping began welcoming dignitaries including United Nations chief Antonio Guterres and Egyptian Premier Moustafa Madbouly, on Saturday before a summit attended by leaders from more than 20 countries. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation gathering will be held in the northern port city of Tianjin on Sunday and Monday, days before a massive military parade in nearby Beijing to mark 80 years since the end of World War II. North Korea's Kim Jong Un will be among some 26 world leaders slated to attend the parade. Xi began welcoming leaders including Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and Egyptian Premier Moustafa Madbouly.

The SCO comprises China, India, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus. Sixteen more countries are affiliated as observers or “dialogue partners”. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi have used the organisation, along with China and Russia, to deepen ties with Central Asian states. Other leaders including Iranian and Turkish presidents Masoud Pezeshkian and Recep Tayyip Erdogan will also attend the bloc’s largest meeting since its founding in 2001.

Multiple bilateral meetings are expected to be held on the sidelines of the summit. The Kremlin said on Friday that Putin will discuss the Ukraine conflict with Erdogan on Monday. Türkiye has hosted three rounds of peace talks between Russia and Ukraine this year that have failed to break the deadlock over how to end the conflict, triggered when Moscow launched its attack on its pro-European neighbour in February 2022. Putin will also talk about Tehran’s nuclear programme on Monday with his Iranian counterpart Pezeshkian, a meeting that comes as Iran faces fresh Western pressure.

Britain, France and Germany, known as the E3, triggered a “snapback” mechanism on Thursday to reinstate UN sanctions on Tehran for failing to comply with commitments made in a 2015 deal over its nuclear programme. Russia’s foreign ministry warned that the reimposition of sanctions against Iran risked “irreparable consequences”. Tehran and Moscow have been bolstering political, military and economic ties over the past decade as Russia drifted away from the West. Relations between them grew even closer after Moscow launched its offensive against Ukraine. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi touched down in the Chinese city of Tianjin on Saturday evening, Indian TV networks showed, a day before a summit that will be attended by leaders from more than 20 countries. Modi’s visit comes after a trip to Japan, and is his first to China since 2018. — AFP

ANCIENT TOMBS UNEARTHED IN IRAQ DUE TO DROUGHT

KHANKE: Archaeologists in drought-hit Iraq have discovered 40 ancient tombs after water levels in the country’s largest reservoir declined, an antiquities official said on Saturday. The tombs, believed to be over 2,300 years old, were unearthed at the edges of the Mosul Dam reservoir in the Khanke region of Duhok province in the country’s north. “So far, we have discovered approximately 40 tombs,” said Bekas Brefkany, the director of

antiquities in Duhok, who is leading the archaeological work at the site. His team surveyed the area in 2023 but only spotted parts of a few tombs. They were only able to work on the site when water levels dropped “to their lowest” this year, Brefkany said. In recent years, archaeologists have uncovered ruins dating back thousands of years in the same area, as a result of droughts that have plagued Iraq for five consecutive years. “The droughts have a

significant impact on many aspects, like agriculture and electricity. But, for us archaeologists... it allows us to do excavation work,” Brefkany said. The newly discovered tombs are believed to date back to the Hellenistic or Hellenistic-Seleucid period, according to Brefkany. He added that his team is working to excavate the tombs to transfer them to the Duhok Museum for further study and preservation, before the area is submerged again. — AFP

Red Cross warns against evacuation of Gaza City

THE RED CROSS warned on Saturday that any Israeli efforts to evacuate Gaza City would put residents at risk, as Israel’s military tightened its siege on the area ahead of a major planned offensive. After nearly 23 months of devastating war, Israel is under increasing pressure to end its offensive in Gaza, where the United Nations has declared a famine and the majority of the population has been displaced at least once. But despite the calls at home and abroad for an end to the war, the Israeli army is readying itself for an intensified operation to seize the Palestinian territory’s largest urban centre and relocate its inhabitants.

“It is impossible that a mass evacuation of Gaza City could ever be done in a way that is safe and dignified under the current conditions,” International Committee of the Red Cross President Mirjana Spoljaric said in a statement. The dire state of shelter, healthcare and nutrition in Gaza meant evacuation was “not only unfeasible but incomprehensible under the present circumstances”.

An Israeli military statement on Friday declared Gaza City a “dangerous combat zone”, adding that daily pauses in fighting intended to allow limited food deliveries would no longer continue. The military did not call for the population to leave immediately, but a day earlier, COGAT, the Israeli defence ministry body that oversees civil affairs in the Palestinian territories, said it was undertaking preparations “for moving the population southward for their protection”.

A journalist on the northern edge of Gaza City reported he had been ordered to evacuate by the army, adding conditions had become increasingly difficult, with bombardments coming closer to his position and gunfire and explosions heard nearby.

The UN estimates that nearly a million people currently live in



It is impossible that a mass evacuation of Gaza City could ever be done in a way that is safe and dignified under the current conditions. Evacuation was not only unfeasible but incomprehensible under the present circumstances

MIRJANA SPOLJARIC



Displaced Palestinians fleeing south ride in a truck with their belongings, in central Gaza. — AFP

Gaza governorate, which includes Gaza City and its surroundings. The territory’s civil defence agency reported intense Israeli strikes in Gaza City’s Sabra and Zeitoun districts, and an “escalation” in the Shaikh Radwan area north of the city centre.

Abu Mohammed Kishko, a resident of the northern Zeitoun area, said that the bombardments the previous night had been “insane”. “It didn’t stop for a second, and we didn’t sleep all night,” the 42-year-old said. “We also couldn’t breathe properly because of the smoke bombs — we were suffocating,” he added. Kishko explained that he, like many other residents, had not followed the Israeli evacuation orders because there was nowhere safe to go.

Sheikh Radwan resident Mariam Yassine said the non-stop shelling had kept her children up all night. “My husband went a few days ago to find us a place (to relocate to), but he couldn’t find anything, and we don’t know what to do. We have no place to go,” the 38-year-old said.

“We are living in daily misery here in Gaza, as if the world doesn’t hear us or see us.”

On Friday, Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN’s Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA, warned that there were “nearly one million people between the city and the northern governorate who basically have nowhere to go, have no resources even to move”. Critics of the war inside Israel have urged against pursuing the planned Gaza offensive, warning it could claim the lives of more soldiers and endanger the safety of hostages taken during Hamas’s October 7, 2023, attack.

The Israeli army, whose troops have been conducting ground operations in Zeitoun for several days, said Saturday that two of its soldiers had been injured by an explosive device “during combat in the northern Gaza Strip”. Israel’s retaliatory offensive has killed at least 63,025 Palestinians, most of them civilians, according to figures from the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza that the UN considers reliable.

Indonesia protest blaze kills 3 as anger erupts over driver’s death

MAKASSAR: A fire started by protesters at a council building in eastern Indonesia killed at least three people, a local official said on Saturday, after the death of a man hit by a police vehicle sparked widespread demonstrations. Southeast Asia’s biggest economy was rocked by protests in major cities, including the capital Jakarta, on Friday after footage spread of a motorcycle taxi driver being run over by a police tactical vehicle during an earlier rally against low wages and financial perks for lawmakers.

The protests are the biggest and most violent of Prabowo Subianto’s presidency, a key test for the ex-general less than a year into his rule. Protests in Makassar, the biggest city

on the eastern island of Sulawesi, descended into chaos outside the provincial and city council buildings, which were both set on fire as demonstrators hurled rocks and Molotov cocktails.

Three people were killed as a result of Friday’s Makassar city council fire, its secretary Rahmat Mappatoba said. “They were trapped in the burning building,” he said, accusing protesters of lighting the blaze. “Usually, during a demonstration, protesters only throw rocks or burn a tyre in front of the office. They never stormed into the building or burned it.”

In footage, smouldering debris was seen falling from the roof of the city council building surrounded by palm trees as flames still flickered



Demonstrators throw stones toward riot police, in Jakarta. — Reuters

in charred cars. Protesters inside lit several fires as parts of the building collapsed, while others smashed glass and chanted “revolution”. The building was a blackened wreck by Saturday, with dozens of

charred cars around it, as Makassar residents inspected the scene, media footage showed. Windiyatno, South Sulawesi’s military chief, said in a statement on Saturday that the situation in Makassar had “now returned to normal”.

Protesters on neighbouring Lombok island stormed a council building in the provincial capital Mataram and set it on fire, despite police attempts to stop them with tear gas. Hundreds of students in Surabaya also rallied outside the East Java police headquarters.

In Jakarta, hundreds had massed on Friday outside the headquarters of the elite Mobile Brigade Corp (Brimob) paramilitary police unit, which they blamed for motorcycle gig driver Affan Kurniawan’s death

the day before. Protesters threw firecrackers as police responded with tear gas. Police said they had detained seven officers for questioning in connection with Affan’s death. National police chief Listyo Sigit Prabowo, who is not related to the president, told a news conference on Saturday that the officers would face an ethics trial that could take a week.

President Prabowo has urged calm, and ordered an investigation into the driver’s death and that the officers involved be held accountable. He said on Friday the government was “committed to guaranteeing the livelihood” of the driver’s family, posting images on social media with them at their home. — AFP

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Andriy Parubiy

UKRAINIAN FORMER PARLIAMENTARY SPEAKER PARUBIY SHOT DEAD

KYIV: Ukrainian former parliamentary speaker Andriy Parubiy was shot dead in the western city of Lviv on Saturday, and a search was underway for the killer. The Prosecutor General’s office said a gunman had fired several shots at Parubiy, killing him on the spot. The attacker fled and a manhunt was launched, it said.

Parubiy, 54, was a member of parliament, had been parliamentary speaker from April 2016 to August 2019, and was one of the leaders of protests in 2013-14 calling for closer ties with the European Union. He was also secretary of Ukraine’s National Security and Defence Council from February to August 2014, a period when fighting began in eastern Ukraine and Russia annexed the Crimea peninsula.

Officials gave no immediate indication whether the murder had any direct link to Russia’s war in Ukraine. “Minister of Internal Affairs Ihor Klymenko and Prosecutor General Ruslan Kravchenko have just reported on the first known circumstances of a horrific murder in Lviv. Andriy Parubiy has been killed,” President Volodymyr Zelensky wrote on X. He sent his condolences to Parubiy’s family and loved ones, and added: “All necessary forces and means are engaged in the investigation and search for the killer.”

National police said the shooting in Lviv was reported at around noon. Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyi said finding the killer and establishing the circumstances of the attack was of utmost importance. “This is a matter of security in a country at war, where, as we can see, there are no completely safe places,” he wrote on Telegram.

Tributes poured in from colleagues in parliament and the government, praising Parubiy’s contribution to Ukraine’s fight for sovereignty and independence as one of the leaders of what became known as the Euromaidan protests in 2013-14. Former president Petro Poroshenko said on Telegram that the killing of Parubiy, who was a member of the parliamentary committee on national security, defence and intelligence, was “a shot fired at the heart of Ukraine.” “Andriy was a great man and a true friend. That is why they take revenge, that is what they are afraid of,” he said, lauding Parubiy’s contribution to building out the Ukrainian army.

In a statement on Telegram, Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha described Parubiy as “a patriot and statesman who made an enormous contribution to the defence of Ukraine’s freedom, independence and sovereignty. He was a man who rightfully belongs in the history books.” Ukrainian law enforcement provided no information on the killer’s identity or motives. Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko called for a prompt investigation of the murder, calling it “a profound loss” for the country. “You always remained a patriot of Ukraine and made a great contribution to the formation of our state,” she wrote on X.

— Reuters

THAILAND’S RIVAL CAMPS JOSTLE TO FILL POWER VOID AFTER PM’S OUSTER

BANGKOK: Thailand’s political rivals jockeyed for power on Saturday after a court sacked the prime minister, with two camps declaring they were ready to form the next government but with no indication when that might happen. The Constitutional Court’s dismissal of Paetongtarn Shinawatra on Friday for an ethics violation triggered a burst of dealmaking. Her ruling alliance put on a united front, while a party that quit her coalition sought to rally support to

fill the vacuum. Paetongtarn, 39, was the sixth premier from or backed by the billionaire Shinawatra family to be ousted by the military or judiciary in a tumultuous two-decade battle for power and patronage among Thailand’s rival elites. The once-dominant Pheu Thai party, founded by Paetongtarn’s father Thaksin Shinawatra, has a mountain to climb to shore up a coalition that has haemorrhaged public support, opening the door to its former

alliance partner Bhumjaithai to woo other parties and seek defections. Bhumjaithai’s leader, Anutin Charnvirakul, stole the spotlight from Paetongtarn on Friday, as a phalanx of media livestreamed his every move as he shuttled between parties offering pledges that included calling an election within four months. The process to elect a prime minister could be protracted, as the constitution provides no deadline. — Reuters

Russia strikes Ukraine as peace talks flounder

RUSSIA launched “massive” strikes across Ukraine overnight, rescue services said on Saturday, a new blow to peace efforts that drew a fresh appeal from President Volodymyr Zelensky for US and European help. Despite a recent flurry of international efforts to broker a truce in the three-and-a-half-year conflict, led by US President Donald Trump, there have been no signs of a let-up in fighting on the ground. Ukrainian rescue services said on Telegram that overnight strikes on the southern city of Zaporizhzhia had killed at least one person and wounded at least 25. Three children aged between nine and 16 were admitted to hospital. Russia confirmed it had launched overnight attacks, saying they were against “military” targets. Zaporizhzhia regional governor Ivan Fedorov said residential buildings were hit and scores of homes left without gas or electricity. The cities of Dnipro and Pavlograd in the central region of Dnipropetrovsk also came under attack early on Saturday, causing fires, regional governor Sergiy Lysak wrote on Telegram, warning residents to take cover. Since Russia launched its full-scale attack on Ukraine in February 2022, Dnipropetrovsk had been largely spared from intense fighting. Ukraine’s air force said the Russian army had launched 582 drones and missiles overnight, most of which it had downed. Zelensky, who has been pushing



Local residents embrace each other next to a damaged residential building, in Zaporizhzhia. — AFP

Ukraine’s air force said the Russian army had launched 582 drones and missiles overnight, most of which it had downed. Zelensky said that a total of 14 regions had been targeted overnight

for a peace summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, said a total of 14 regions had been targeted overnight. He accused the Kremlin of using “the time meant for preparing a leaders’ level (peace) meeting to organise new massive attacks”, and called for more international sanctions on Moscow and its backers. Ukraine’s army general staff, meanwhile, said its forces had hit two oil refineries in Russia, which it

said were supplying fuel to Russian military units. It said they had struck the Krasnodarsky refinery in Krasnodar Krai and the Sizransky refinery in Samara, causing a fire near the latter. Russia, for its part, said its forces had taken a new village, Komyshevskaya, in the eastern Donetsk region. The latest strikes by both sides followed a Russian attack on Kyiv on Thursday, in which at least 25 people died, including four children. — AFP

TARGETING OFFICIALS

Ansar Allah leader killed in Israeli strike



Yemen’s Ansar Allah leading official was killed in an Israeli air strike along with others earlier this week. Ahmed Ghaleb Nasser al Rahawi is the most senior official known to have been killed in a series of Israeli strikes. “We announce the martyrdom of the fighter Ahmed Ghaleb Nasser al Rahawi... along with several of his ministerial colleagues, as they were targeted by the treacherous Israeli criminal enemy,” a statement said. — AFP

ESCAPING VIOLENCE

At least 13 drown fleeing gunmen in Nigeria



At least 13 people died and more than 20 were missing in northwestern Nigeria’s Zamfara State after the boat they crowded aboard to escape an attack by armed men sank in a river, officials said. Zamfara is an epicentre of attacks by armed men, known locally as bandits. The assailants stormed two communities in Birnin Magaji ward, sending locals fleeing towards a nearby riverbank that had a single boat. — Reuters

SECURITY FORCES

US Lake Erie warship enters Panama Canal



A US guided missile cruiser, USS Lake Erie, was seen crossing the Panama Canal from the Pacific to the Caribbean, after the Trump administration deployed warships near the coast of Venezuela. Journalists saw the naval vessel passing through one of the canal’s locks and navigating east towards the Atlantic. The United States has said the deployment to the southern Caribbean, near Venezuela’s territorial waters, was an anti-drug trafficking operation. — AFP

The New York Times

Ways hurricane forecasts have changed since Katrina



JUDSON JONES

The author is a meteorologist and reporter covering extreme weather

HURRICANE Katrina struck the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005, with wind gusts exceeding 130 mph and a surge of water taller than a two-story building. The water left the coast in ruins and swelled through the broken levees of New Orleans as a wave that left 80 per cent of the city flooded for days. Nearly 1,400 people died. Two days earlier, Max Mayfield, then the director of the National Hurricane Center, had made a call to the city’s mayor. Mayfield said he recalled that after they had hung up he turned to a person next to him and expressed concern: “He doesn’t get it.”

Days before the storm hit the Gulf Coast, forecasters at the Hurricane Center knew where Katrina would go and how strong it was likely to be. They knew it would follow nearly the exact same path that Hurricane Camille — still one of the most intense hurricanes on record — had in 1969. But Mayfield said he and others had trouble persuading people in the storm’s path to take it seriously. “If you don’t communicate that forecast to the right people effectively, it’s no good,” he said. “If people don’t respond, it is wasted effort.”

Michael Brennan, the current director of the hurricane center, said that since Katrina, meteorologists and other emergency officials had learned crucial lessons not just about how to forecast hurricanes but about

communicating the dangers they pose. Katrina wasn’t the first hurricane to hit the city, and won’t be the last. Here’s what’s different now. Forecasting got a major funding increase after Katrina. Since Katrina, “everything’s changed,” Brennan said. After that season, Congress created the what’s now known as the Hurricane Forecast Improvement Program, which expanded the number of staff members at the hurricane center in Miami.

The programme also made significant investments into hurricane-specific computer modelling. Technological advances have increased the quality and the amount of data that goes into a model in the early stages of a storm, which gives forecasters a leg up on knowing where it’s likely to go next.

Both Brennan and Mayfield said that given the tools available in 2005, the forecast for Katrina had been unusually good, though it wasn’t perfect. The satellites that tracked Katrina were at the cutting edge then, able to capture an image of a storm every five minutes. But they had a critical flaw: Their solar-powered batteries ran low when they passed through the Earth’s shadow. The day before landfall, the satellites went dark for two hours right as the storm was intensifying.

Newer satellites, in operation since 2016, can provide high definition images every minute, without the lengthy downtime. Katrina’s forecast track initially indicated that it would move into the Florida Panhandle,

Technological advances have increased the quality and the amount of data that goes into a model in the early stages of a storm, which gives forecasters a leg up on knowing where it’s likely to go next

but by Aug. 27, the track had shifted to Louisiana. At that point, Mayfield thought the storm might intensify, but forecast models then were notorious for not accurately predicting the rapid intensification that occurred with Katrina the next day.

Today, errors in forecast tracking have dramatically decreased, and the specialized forecast models, while still not perfect, give a much better indication of whether a storm is likely to intensify, Brennen said. But meteorologists can still be surprised by a storm, he warned. He recalled Hurricane Otis in 2023, which formed as a tropical storm on Oct. 24 and made landfall a day later near Acapulco, Mexico, as a Category 5 hurricane. The models had failed to predict what Otis would do and how quickly it would do it, and more than 50 people were killed.

Climate change may not be leading to more hurricanes, researchers have found, but it is most likely causing some storms, similarly to Katrina, to intensify more quickly. There’s a better understanding of storm surge now. One of the deadliest parts of Hurricane Katrina was the storm surge, the wall of water pushed inland by the storm. It was the surge that broke the levees and flooded New Orleans, and immediately after the storm, it was the subject that most baffled some experts. They struggled to identify how high the surge had even been because the gauges that would have measured it had been washed away.

Trump’s sweeping tariffs invalidated by appeals court



ANA SWANSON

The writer covers trade and international economics

A FEDERAL appeals court ruled on Friday that many of President Donald Trump’s most punishing tariffs were illegal, delivering a major setback to Trump’s agenda that may severely undercut his primary source of leverage in an expanding global trade war. The ruling, from the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, affirmed a lower court’s initial finding in May that Trump did not possess unlimited authority to impose taxes on nearly all imports to the United States. But the appellate judges delayed the enforcement of their order until mid-October, allowing the tariffs to remain in place so that the administration can appeal the case to the Supreme Court.

The adverse ruling still cast doubt on the centerpiece of Trump’s trade strategy, which relies on a 1970s law to impose sweeping duties on dozens of the country’s trading partners. Trump has harnessed that law — the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, or IEEPA — to raise revenue and to pressure other countries into brokering favorable deals. The law has typically been reserved for sanctions and embargoes against other nations.

The loss proved especially stinging after the Trump administration told the court earlier on Friday that any weakening of its tariff powers could unleash economic chaos. Hours before the ruling, the president’s top economic advisers raised special concern about the fate of the trade agreements the United States had struck with other governments. Among the deals they cited was an agreement with the European Union, which made favorable concessions to escape even higher US taxes on its goods.

The president, who has spent months insisting that his tariffs would make America “rich again,” has invoked the specter of the Great Depression if his ability to impose levies is curtailed and if the country is forced to pay back billions of dollars in tariff revenue. In a social media post after the ruling on Friday, Trump blasted the court and its conclusions, and appeared to tee up a forthcoming appeal to the Supreme Court. “Today a Highly Partisan Appeals Court incorrectly said that our Tariffs should be removed, but they know the United States of America will win in the end,” Trump wrote. “If these Tariffs ever went away, it would be a total disaster for the Country.”

The appeals court ruling implicates a vast set of tariffs, some of which date back to the beginning of Trump’s presidency. They include some of his toughest duties on China, Canada and Mexico, and his so-called reciprocal tariffs, which Trump later revised and began collecting this month.

To impose the duties, Trump leaned on IEEPA, a decades-old economic emergency law that does not even mention the word tariff. The president invoked its powers to combat what he described as a widening set of threats, from persistent trade deficits to the flow of fentanyl into the United States.

Without IEEPA, the president would be limited in the duties he could apply, and the manner and speed in which they could be imposed. Otherwise, he could seek to enact tariffs with the support of Congress. The administration has no guarantee of success at the Supreme Court. Many leading conservative and libertarian lawyers and scholars have argued that the president’s



President Donald Trump departs Lehigh Valley International Airport in Allentown.

The ruling, from the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, affirmed a lower court’s initial finding in May that Trump did not possess unlimited authority to impose taxes on nearly all imports to the United States

duties were issued illegally. Trump’s claims of seemingly unlimited trade power have elicited legal challenges from small businesses and states, which said they were harmed financially by taxes on foreign goods that the president had no right to issue. In May, a federal trade court agreed, invalidating many of the president’s duties on grounds that the law did not grant him “unbounded authority” to wage his global trade war.

The Trump administration quickly appealed, and the court at first allowed the president to maintain his tariffs while the judges considered the legality of Trump’s actions. In its 7-4 ruling, issued late on Friday, a majority on the court determined for a second time that the breadth of the tariffs the president had imposed was illegal.

Jeffrey Schwab, the director of litigation at the Liberty Justice

Center, which represented small businesses that brought one of the lawsuits, said the decision underscored that the president “doesn’t have the authority under IEEPA that he claims he has.” No president before Trump had invoked the economic emergency law to tax imports. During Trump’s first term, his own advisers raised questions about whether IEEPA, which is typically used to issue foreign sanctions, could be used to levy broad tariffs.

Upon his return to the White House, however, Trump and his advisers took a more expansive interpretation, concluding that an economic emergency could be declared in response to a wide variety of concerns, including the trade deficit. They came to see IEEPA as a tool that would enable them to “move quickly,” said Ted Murphy, an international trade expert at the law firm Sidley Austin.

OPINION

Can meditation be bad for you?



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

FOR MANY YEARS, meditation was presented as a universal solution for a wide range of psychological and physical issues, from managing work-related stress to healing from trauma and alleviating chronic pain. Medical professionals, wellness influencers and even major corporations have presented meditation as an essential component of mental well-being. However, more people are sharing personal experiences of having negative reactions to meditation. A doctor who used meditation to manage his stress initially experienced a sense of calmness, but over time, he became withdrawn, emotionally numb, and began experiencing depression, hallucinations and panic attacks. Other users experience loss of touch with reality and difficulties in performing regular tasks. Mindfulness is a type of Buddhist-based meditation in which you focus on being aware of what you’re sensing, thinking and feeling in the present moment. It has been featured in several Hollywood movies, such as “Eat, Play, and Love”, in which the protagonist, Julia Roberts, plays the role of a

middle-aged woman who lost her purpose in life after her divorce and found her soul by travelling to Italy, India and Indonesia. While in India, she joins a religious society and practices yoga and meditation every single day. The American psychologist and author Daniel Goleman dedicated a huge part of his personal and professional life to studying the lifestyle of Buddhist monks who are masters of meditation and mindfulness. His books and lectures played a significant part in promoting it to western societies. Recent evidence suggests that those who advocate for the use of meditation often fail to acknowledge its potential downsides. The meditation market size was valued at \$5,295.07 million in 2023 and is expected to reach \$20,532.44 million by 2031. This financial growth led some critics to label it “capitalist spirituality”, which is a modified version of a deeply rooted spiritual tradition, stripped of context and marketed irresponsibly. There are several smartphone applications that offer quick, accessible meditation routines. Headspace alone has over three

There are several smartphone applications that offer quick, accessible meditation routines and promise calm, clarity and improved mental health

million users and is valued at more than £25 million. These apps promise calm, clarity and improved mental health, yet few provide clear warnings about potential negative effects such as increased anxiety or emotional detachment. This raises a serious ethical issue: should developers of meditation platforms bear responsibility for informing users about potential psychological risks? In my opinion, the short answer is yes. Just like medications come with a leaflet explaining the potential side effects and how to manage them, the same should be provided by meditation apps so users are well informed about what to expect. While meditation can be profoundly helpful for many, it is not a one-size-fits-all remedy. As with any psychological intervention, individual responses vary, and users deserve transparency about possible side effects. Greater awareness, more research and ethical accountability are essential as meditation continues to expand in popularity. It’s time we view mindfulness not only as a path to healing but also with the caution it rightly deserves.

FLOATING SOLAR ON TRIAL IN MOROCCO

ISMAIL BELLAOUALI

Sun-baked Morocco, grappling with its worst drought in decades, has launched a pilot project aimed at slowing water evaporation while simultaneously generating green energy using floating solar panels. At a major reservoir near the northern city of Tangier, thousands of so-called ‘floatovoltaic’ panels protect the water’s surface from the blazing sun and absorb its light to generate electricity. Authorities plan to power the neighbouring Tanger Med port complex with the resulting energy, and if it proves a success, the technology could have far wider implications for the North African kingdom. According to official figures, Morocco’s water reserves lost the equivalent of more than 600 Olympic-sized swimming pools every day to evaporation between October 2022 and September 2023. Over that same period, temperatures averaged 1.8°C higher than normal, meaning water evaporated at a higher rate. Alongside other factors like declining rainfall, this has reduced reservoirs nationwide to about one-third of their capacity. Water ministry official Yassine Wahbi said the Tangier reservoir loses around 3,000 cubic metres a day to evaporation, but that figure more than doubles in the hot summer months. The floating photovoltaic panels can help cut evaporation by about 30 per cent, he said. The water ministry has said the floating panels represent “an important gain in a context of increasingly scarce water resources”, even if the evaporation they stop is, for now, relatively marginal. Assessment studies are underway for another two similar projects in Oued El Makhazine, at one of Morocco’s largest dams in the north, and in Lalla Takerkoust near Marrakesh. Similar technology is being tested in France, Indonesia and Thailand, while China already operates some of the world’s largest floating solar farms.

Since the Moroccan pilot programme began late last year, more than 400 floating platforms supporting several thousand panels have been installed. The government wants more, planning to reach 22,000 panels that would cover about 10 hectares at the 123-hectare Tangier reservoir. Once completed, the system would generate roughly 13 megawatts of electricity - enough to power the Tanger Med complex. Authorities also have plans to plant trees along the banks of the reservoir to reduce winds, believed to exacerbate evaporation. Climate science professor Mohammed-Said Karrouk called it a “pioneering” project. He noted, however, that the reservoir is too large and its surface too irregular to cover completely with floating panels, which could be damaged with fluctuating water levels. — AFP

True success comes from living authentically

SOMEONE ONCE said that when you’re 20, you care what everyone thinks. When you’re 40, you stop caring what everyone thinks. When you’re 60, you realise no one was ever thinking about you in the first place. The relentless pursuit of others’ approval creates a life of perpetual performance, where every decision is filtered through the question: “What will others think?” It transforms authentic human beings into actors playing roles they never auditioned for. Living for others’ approval is exhausting because the audience never stops changing. The colleague who praises you today may criticise you tomorrow. The social media followers who validate your posts are strangers whose opinions shift with trends. When your self-worth depends on such unstable foundations, you’re building your life on quicksand. This approval-seeking behaviour also robs you of authenticity. You begin making choices based on what looks good rather than what feels right. You pursue careers that sound impressive rather than fulfilling. You maintain relationships that drain you because they appear successful from the outside. You lose touch with your own values, preferences and dreams in the process of trying to meet everyone else’s expectations. Of course, there’s an important distinction between strategic conformity and life-defining conformity. Certain situations require us to adapt our behaviour, such as job interviews, formal events and professional settings. These moments serve practical purposes and don’t require sacrificing your core identity. The problem arises when conformity becomes your default mode of living, when you consistently prioritise fitting in over standing out or pleasing others over honouring yourself. We are constantly bombarded with images of luxury cars, designer clothes and picture-



perfect lifestyles, and we’ve lost sight of what success truly means. We’ve been conditioned to believe that happiness comes from accumulating possessions and earning the approval of others. But this pursuit is not just misguided — it’s a guaranteed path to emptiness and dissatisfaction. The material objects we chase offer only temporary satisfaction. Like sugar rushes, they provide brief moments of pleasure often followed by crashes. Research consistently shows that beyond meeting basic needs, additional wealth and possessions contribute remarkably little to long-term life satisfaction. Consider the wealthy individuals who struggle with depression, the celebrities who battle addiction despite having everything money can buy or the executives who achieve every material goal yet feel profoundly unfulfilled. The problem isn’t prosperity itself, but the belief that prosperity equals purpose. When we define ourselves by what we own rather than who we are, we become prisoners of our possessions. We work longer hours to afford things we don’t need, sacrificing time with loved ones, personal growth and meaningful experiences. Real

success can be found in the depth of your relationships, in your contribution to something beyond yourself and in your capacity for growth and resilience. This kind of success is sustainable because it comes from within. It doesn’t depend on market conditions, others’ opinions or maintaining a certain image. It grows stronger with time rather than requiring constant maintenance and validation. Once you stop chasing others’ approval and accumulating possessions for their own sake, you discover freedom. The freedom to pursue work that energises you, relationships that nourish you and experiences that expand you. This doesn’t mean living recklessly or ignoring practical considerations. It means making conscious choices based on your own values rather than giving in to social pressure. True success is about becoming the person you want to be and doing what you want to do. It’s measured not in possessions accumulated or approval earned, but in living authentically. Your life is too precious to spend trying to impress people you don’t even like or with things you don’t actually need. True success requires the courage to walk your own path.



KARIM
EASTERBROOK

The writer is a former Cambridge School Principal and Author

Blissful entitlement may be all we deserve...



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

OUR PLANET is the most diverse of environments, from its oceans and seas to its rivers and lakes, to its incredible diversity of habitats, its arid deserts, its arctic wastes, its tropical forests, to its amazing mountain scenery; it's a truly wonderful world.

And then we came along... and let's just look at some of the situations we mere mortals, in the face of such God-given beauty and life, have chosen to do. We don't deserve this beauty, this grandeur, this remarkable home, of which the ill-fated Anne Frank wrote, "The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be." Yet we must wonder, daily, whether we deserve this haven when we see the behaviour of those who should know better, the arrogance and entitlement of those who lead, or would be our examples and inspirations, and who, so frequently, let us down from the perspectives of right and wrong, good and bad.

Now, I'm no admirer of President Donald Trump, but putting that aside, he, on August 25, informed Lisa Cook, a Governor of the United States Federal Reserve, that she was being 'removed from office' for "deceitful and criminal conduct." While that may

appear to smack of pot, kettle, and black, you would think... fair enough, especially when the circumstances are revealed in the letter. It appears Cook, seeking more favourable mortgage interest rates, identified two separate homes, in two separate states, as being her primary residence.

You would think that's cut and dried, and the president is right to 'fire' Cook. But no! She says he doesn't have the power, and she's not going! Can you imagine if Joe Bloggs, the man in the street, had done what she has? Yet Cook does not address her deceit, rather railing loud and long that this is a political move so Trump can replace her on the Federal Reserve Board with an acolyte, favourable to the president's economic views. In this, she may be right, but that doesn't exempt her from the illegality, maybe criminality, of her spurious mortgage applications... and her sense of entitlement.

The United Kingdom's Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner has also ruffled feathers last week, also in respect of real estate. You see, already the owner of a significant £650,000 property in Ashton-Under-Lyme, near Manchester, the occupier under 'grace and favour', in other words 'free', of a spectacular Admiralty Arch flat walking distance from Parliament House, she has reportedly shelled out £800,000 for what has been described as a 'superior Victorian flat

The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quiet, alone with the heavens, nature and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be

with a sea view,' in Brighton-Upon-Hove's 'poshest' quarter. This at a time when the UK's pensioners have had winter fuel allowances withdrawn, and pensions cut... Talk about blissful arrogance.

Also in the UK, Newcastle United footballer Alexander Isak, currently halfway through a £65-million, 6-year contract, has 'gone on strike', and is refusing to play because he was "promised an increased contract" and didn't get it. Currently paid £120,000 per week, that's half a million pounds each month... and in his petulance, it's not enough! I wonder, does Isak know just how little, or how much, most of his adoring (before this season) fans, who would pack out St James Park and roar his name, applaud his every move, and celebrate his goals as if they were the best thing since sliced bread? And given his stance now... does he care? Entitlement and arrogance are both evident as he bites the very hand that feeds him!

Entitlement is defined as a sense of, or a belief that we deserve, or have earned the right to something, usually without having earned it, some even displaying more intense narcissistic or antisocial personality disorders... and yet we still elect to high offices those we would never have in our homes, and put on exaggerated pedestals film, television and sports stars... so maybe, in seeking such vicarious escape, we are getting exactly what we deserve, hmmm?

TRUMP USES FIRINGS TO TEST PRESIDENTIAL LIMITS

TREVOR HUNNICUTT AND JEFF MASON
US President Donald Trump is pushing for more control over everything the federal government and its agencies do, and a string of firings will test how far he might be able to take his quest. Over three days this week, the Republican president moved to terminate Federal Reserve Governor Lisa Cook, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Susan Monarez and railroad regulator Robert Primus.

The actions underscored Trump's desire for influence in sectors normally seen as independent from overt political control and could have major implications for financial markets, health policy and public trust in institutions.

The firings could undermine confidence in agencies that are meant to inform the private sector and provide expertise for the president while operating above any one party's politics, according to experts in presidential authority. If allowed to stand, the independence of other institutions may also be at risk.

"It is something that is novel, in a bad way, and represents a significant power grab by the president," said Max Stier, president of the Partnership for Public Service, an advocacy group. "The president has a lot of power, but there are limits... You have a president today that does not recognise any of those limits."

White House officials said the president was acting within his legal authority to deliver on the agenda he was elected to enact. The administration has said Monarez and Primus were dismissed because they did not align with Trump's agenda.

Monarez, sworn into her job less than a month ago, had resisted changes to vaccine policy that she believed contradicted scientific evidence, a close associate said. Primus' social media included posts that could be read as critical of Trump administration policies unrelated to railways.

The administration has accused Cook of mortgage fraud, which she denies. But Trump made clear another motivation for her removal, telling a Cabinet meeting last Tuesday that he would soon have a majority of loyalists on the Fed's board of governors, which helps set the interest rates that Trump wants lowered. Cook has sued Trump and the Fed, saying an unsubstantiated claim of mortgage fraud does not provide legal authority for her removal. Monarez had refused to resign. Primus said his termination was legally invalid.

Most US presidents steer clear of commenting about the Federal Reserve, let alone influencing monetary policy or knocking members off the board of governors. Independent central banks around the world are seen as key to maintaining a stable global economy, but Trump has often challenged norms.

"If this... removal at the Federal Reserve is allowed to stand, then all of the rest of the dominoes are going to fall," said Jane Mannors, associate professor at the Fordham School of Law and an expert on presidential powers. — Reuters

The agricultural fixes Africa needs

ACCORDING TO THE STATE OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION in the World 2025, a report recently released by the five leading United Nations agencies working on the issue, the number of people facing hunger globally declined from 688 million in 2023 to 673 million in 2024. But progress has not been equal, with Africa experiencing a slight increase in the number of undernourished people, from 296 million to 306 million. Worryingly, this pattern is set to continue: the report estimates that, even as global hunger declines, 512 million people will still be undernourished in 2030, nearly 60 per cent of whom will be in Africa.

But the continent's policymakers can avert this outcome. The most effective strategy would be to improve Africa's agricultural productivity and maintain progress against extreme weather events such as droughts and flooding. That will require governments to work with the African Union and key stakeholders in the agriculture sector, including universities, research institutions, development partners, NGOs, financial institutions and philanthropic organisations.

They should focus on five areas. First, there is an urgent need to mobilise investment in improving soil health and restoring Africa's degraded landscapes, which are a major cause of food insecurity and hunger. As much as 65 per cent of Africa's cultivated land is degraded, and the continent loses a staggering \$4 billion worth of soil nutrients each year to erosion. Continuous cultivation is particularly damaging to soil fertility and results in lower crop yields across the continent.

African leaders are waking up to this crisis. In 2024, the AU convened a summit on fertiliser and soil health, bringing together a broad coalition of stakeholders to discuss strategies for improving Africa's crop productivity. Perhaps the most important outcome of the summit was an action plan for addressing soil health in all agricultural sectors, with an emphasis on fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships.



Africa is experiencing a slight increase in the number of undernourished people, from 296 million to 306 million.



ESTHER NGUMBI

The writer is Assistant Professor of Entomology and African-American Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Second, Africa must increase investment in agricultural research and development to unlock sustainable productivity gains. Currently, most African countries allocate less than 1 per cent of their agriculture sector's share of GDP to agricultural R&D. By increasing this share and mobilising private-sector capital, African governments could help drive innovations, from climate-resilient and high-yielding crop varieties to early warning systems for pests and diseases.

Third, African governments and all other stakeholders must ensure that farmers embrace existing and future technologies, such as climate-smart irrigation systems, real-time weather forecasting, and mobile-based platforms that deliver timely trainings, recommendations and support. Several countries are starting to recognise that encouraging and enabling the uptake of the latest advances is essential for improving agricultural efficiency and resilience. For example, earlier this year, Botswana launched its own satellite in part to provide real-time agriculture data. To accelerate the adoption of these innovations, governments must do more than improve access to them. They must also increase financial support for farmers, collaborate with universities to provide ongoing training, and invest in critical

infrastructure such as roads, electricity and digital connectivity. These efforts would empower farmers to become active participants in the transformation of African agriculture.

Fourth, special attention should be paid to women, who constitute an estimated 40 per cent of Africa's agricultural labour force but face systemic barriers that bar them from full and equal participation in the sector. Governments could develop capacity-building programmes and enact policies that address some of the challenges confronting female farmers, including limited land ownership, which would go a long way towards spurring rural development and reducing household hunger. Lastly, more must be done to engage with Africa's fast-growing youth population, which is projected to double by 2050. Young Africans possess the energy, creativity and entrepreneurial drive needed to strengthen food security, but remain underutilised largely because of limited access to financing and mentorship. To reduce hunger and create the conditions for long-term economic growth, African governments, the AU and other stakeholders must invest in the next generation of agricultural leaders and innovators, providing them with the resources and training to succeed.

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SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



The event was part of the OBA efforts to unify training curricula and concepts while enhancing the technical capabilities of coaches

OBA ORGANISES WORKSHOP FOR BASKETBALL COACHES

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 30

The workshop for coaches of basketball training centres, organised on Friday by the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, witnessed strong participation from 14 national coaches. The event was part of the association’s efforts to unify training curricula and concepts while enhancing the technical capabilities of coaches, ultimately reflecting positively on the performance of players across training centres in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The workshop opened with a speech by Abubakar al Jahwri, Vice-President of the Association and Chairman of the Supervisory Committee, who stressed that this workshop represents an important step within the association’s strategy to develop centers and prepare qualified coaching staff scientifically and practically. He emphasised that investing in coaches is a direct investment in the future of Omani basketball. Al Jahwri added that such workshops help unify operational approaches among different centres, address field practices and challenges, and create opportunities for exchanging experiences and strengthening communication with the technical administration, all contributing to raising the quality of work and building a strong foundation for the future of the sport. He also affirmed the association’s commitment to continuing training programmes and meetings with coaches as part of a comprehensive plan to develop and refine their skills.

For his part, Abdullah Mohammed Fouad, General Coach of the centres, explained that the workshop combined theoretical and practical aspects, enabling coaches to translate concepts into hands on practices on the court. This, he said, reinforces consistency in training methods and ensures integration between the different centres.

Arab clubs table tennis championship to kick off today

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 30

The actions of 36th Arab Clubs Table Tennis Championship will kick off today (Sunday) at the main indoor hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher by tight group fixtures. The championship, hosted by the Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) in cooperation with the Arab Table Tennis Federation (ATTF), will continue until Thursday, featuring 35 clubs including 24 men’s teams and 11 women’s teams.

All participating teams arrived in Muscat and majority of them took the advantage of having their final warm-up sessions in the main venue ahead of the group stage contests. Matches are being played across eight tables inside the main venue and the morning session will begin at 9 am and will run until late evening with scheduled breaks. Teams have been divided into groups, with the top two sides from each advancing to the knockout rounds.



The championship, hosted by the Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) in cooperation with the Arab Table Tennis Federation (ATTF), will continue until Thursday, featuring 35 clubs including 24 men’s teams and 11 women’s teams

SEEB IN FULL READINESS
Representing Oman in the Arabian event will be through Seeb, Ibri, and Salalah clubs who will begin their campaigns on Sunday, targeting strong performances to advance beyond the group stage. The three teams have undergone

extensive domestic training programmes to ensure full readiness. Hamid Shams Sharbabaki, a professional player with Seeb Club, affirmed that his team is well-prepared after a rigorous six-week camp that featured two

Ahli Sidab and Salalah set for Youth Hockey final

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 30

THE STAGE is set for a thrilling finale in the 2025 U-21 Youth Hockey League, with Ahli Sidab set to meet Salalah in an exciting showdown today (Sunday), at 6:30 pm on the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat, marking the conclusion of the championship.

The final rounds featured three intense matches that showcased the high technical level of the participating clubs: Ahli Sidab, Salalah, and Masirah. A total of 19 goals were scored in this stage. In the opening game, Ahli Sidab defeated Masirah 4-1. They then continued their winning streak with a thrilling 6-4 victory over Salalah. The third and final match ended in a 2-2 draw between Salalah and Masirah.

With these results, Ahli Sidab topped the standings with a perfect 6 points from two victories, securing the first spot in the final. Salalah, on the other hand, benefited from their draw with Masirah in the last game, raising their tally to one point and clinching second place on goal difference, which granted them the second ticket to the final. Meanwhile, Masirah exited the competition after losing to Ahli Sidab and drawing with Salalah.

The final promises to be an exciting clash, pitting Ahli Sidab the most consistent team with the strongest attacking line in the final rounds, against Salalah, who showed resilience and the ability to bounce back in critical moments. Fans of Omani hockey are eagerly awaiting this decisive match, as Ahli Sidab seeks to extend their winning run and claim the title, while Salalah aims to surprise their rivals and lift the trophy.

SALALAH INTO FINAL AFTER DRAW WITH MASIRAH

Salalah clinched their place in the final of the U-21 Youth Hockey League after a dramatic 2-2 draw against Masirah in the last round of the final stage, held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Al Amerat.

The match began cautiously, with Masirah relying on possession and short passes in midfield, while Salalah opted for quick counterattacks led by Hazaa al Balushi and Abdulaziz al Rasbi. Despite a few shy attempts, most notably a long-



Salalah benefited from their draw with Masirah which granted them the second ticket to the final

range shot by Nasser Masoud of Masirah, both goalkeepers stood firm, ending the first quarter 0-0.

The second quarter saw a slight improvement in pace, with Masirah pressing through Mahmoud Mohammed and Al Abbas Sulaiman, while Salalah remained dangerous on the break. However, solid defending at both ends kept the scoreline unchanged at halftime.

The real drama unfolded in the third quarter.

Masirah broke the deadlock in the 37th minute through Mundhir Abdullah from a well-executed penalty corner (1-0). But just two minutes later, Salalah responded with an equaliser as Hazaa al Balushi converted

a penalty corner (1-1). Masirah regained the lead in the 42nd minute when Al Abbas Sulaiman struck from another penalty corner, ending the quarter 2-1 in their favour.

In the final quarter, Salalah pressed relentlessly for an equaliser, while Masirah attempted to seal the game on the counter.

Their defence, however, eventually cracked. In the 60th minute, right before the final whistle, Hazaa al Balushi netted a dramatic equaliser after a well-organised attack, leveling the score at 2-2 and securing the precious point that guaranteed Salalah’s qualification to the final.



Ghassan al Ghassani Seeb player during training session

training sessions daily. “We are in best shape for this event despite the difficulty of this tournament as many Arab clubs include high-level professional players. It will not be easy, but we are determined to give our best and reach the advanced stages,

representing Seeb and Oman in the best possible way,” he said. Ibri’s head coach Mohammed Shoman echoed the sentiment, noting that his squad began preparations on August 18 with twice daily sessions focused on technical, tactical and fitness elements. “The championship is very strong, with most clubs having professional players. This will add to the excitement and competitiveness. Ibri signed Yemeni professional Ibrahim Jibrán, and we are confident that with his experience, alongside our local talent, we can achieve positive results,” he stated. Seeb will rely on the talents of Asaad al Raisi, Jihad al Riyami, Muhannad al Balushi, Ghassan al Ghassani, Haitham al Mandhari, Bilal al Rashdi, and Hamid Shams. Ibri’s squad included Ahmed al Riyami, Luqman al Farsi, Badr al Jassasi, Mohammed al Mutawa, and Nasser al Balushi. Salalah will be represented by Julanda al Kharousi, Mishaal al Shihi, and Maaath al Shihi.

SHORTTAKES



Netherlands' Xavi Simons celebrates scoring their third goal. — Reuters File

SPURS SIGN PLAYMAKER SIMONS FROM RB LEIPZIG

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur on Friday signed Xavi Simons from RB Leipzig in a boost for new manager Thomas Frank.

Spurs have been in pursuit of an attacking midfielder during the summer transfer window. They failed to lure Morgan Gibbs-White away from Nottingham Forest and their bid to sign Eberechi Eze was scuppered when the England international left Crystal Palace for Tottenham's arch north London rivals Arsenal.

That makes the arrival of the 22-year-old Simons all the more important to Spurs, who, together with Arsenal and reigning champions Liverpool, have won their opening two games of the new Premier League season.

Spurs said the Netherlands international had signed a "long-term contract", subject to international clearance and a work permit.

No fee was disclosed but British media reports suggested he had joined Tottenham in a deal worth an initial £51.8 million (\$69.9 million) with further add-ons included.

"I'm really happy and can't wait to get going," Simons told Spurs' website. "I've been dreaming of this for a long time. "It's a great club and when I met the head coach (Frank) I knew straight away that this was the right place for me.

"I will bring flair to the team but also hard work and discipline. I want to do everything I can to win, for the team and also for the fans."

Danish boss Frank added: "Xavi has proven his ability to get goals and assists, both from the number 10 position and left-wing. He also has a great eye for his team-mates in terms of unlocking defences, and I know he will come in and be part of a good team that is already working hard together."

Spurs lost James Maddison in pre-season to a serious knee injury, which will sideline the England international for most of this season, Dejan Kulusevski, who has played as a central midfielder, is also out with a knee problem.

A product of Barcelona's La Masia academy, the training ground for Lionel Messi and a host pf other stars, Simons moved as a teenager to Paris Saint-Germain in 2019 before starring with 22 goals while on loan to Dutch giants PSV Eindhoven during the 2022/23 season.

Simons spent the next two seasons at Leipzig and added 22 goals in 78 appearances before his move was made permanent earlier this year.

He is set to be introduced to the Spurs fans before Saturday's home league game against Bournemouth, He will wear the number seven shirt vacated by former Tottenham captain Son Heung-min. — AFP



UAE Team Emirates XRG's Juan Ayuso crosses the finish line to win stage 7. — Reuters

Ayuso wins Vuelta stage 7, Traen keeps red jersey

SPANIARD JUAN AYUSO powered to a solo stage seven Vuelta a Espana victory on Friday, securing a third straight stage win for Team UAE.

Torstein Traen of Bahrain Victorious held on to the leader's red jersey, finishing in a group along with general classification favourites Jonas Vingegaard and Joao Almeida.

Team UAE's Ayuso fell out of the running for the overall race on Thursday despite being among the pre-race favourites. Ayuso later said he had not planned to compete for the overall title anyway, and made an early attack here.

Ayuso, perhaps upset at not being chosen as his team's leader for the race behind Almeida, flexed his muscles on the mountainous 188-kilometre run from Andorra La Vella to Spanish village Cerler, one of the race's toughest stages.

He formed part of the day's break that contained stage six winner Jay Vine and Mads Pedersen among others, with 140 kilometres remaining.

The break stayed clear with Bahrain Victorious and Traen happy to let them stay up the road.

Two-time Tour de France winner Vingegaard, favourite to win the race, and his likely closest rival Almeida were content to hang back in the peloton.

Ayuso attacked with 11 kilometres remaining and although Marco Frigo bridged the gap, the Spaniard dumped the Israel



UAE Team Emirates XRG's Juan Ayuso celebrates on the podium after winning stage 7. — Reuters



Bahrain Victorious' Torstein Traen celebrates on the podium wearing the red jersey after stage 7. — Reuters

Premier Tech rider with a second burst. The 22-year-old crossed the finish line with his fingers in his ears. Frigo came in second, one minute 15 seconds behind Ayuso, while Arkea's Raul Garcia Pierna secured third.

Ayuso's stage win was his first in the race and a second in a Grand Tour, following a victory at the Giro d'Italia earlier this year.

"I think it was one of my best wins, considering the difficulty," said Ayuso, who foraged alone for the first hour, waiting for riders to join him to create the break. "I had to do the first hour of the race by myself... I think I was able to do a very good job and finish it off...

"It's amazing... to win a stage here in the Vuelta, it's my favourite race, I'll always remember it and I'm very proud."

Almeida made a bid to gain some time on his rivals but Vingegaard, Traen, 2023 Vuelta champion Sepp Kuss and others caught up with relative ease.

"It was a decent day in total, it was not an easy day. We want to still try to save our energy a bit, so we decided not to do anything today," said Visma-Lease a Bike's Vingegaard. "We want to save the team for the second and third week."

Traen holds a two-and-a-half minute lead on Vingegaard at the top of the general classification.

After back-to-back mountain stages riders will get some relief on Saturday as a relatively flat stage eight stretches 163.5 kilometres from Monzon Templario to Zaragoza. — AFP

Chelsea benefit from VAR controversy to beat Fulham

LONDON: Chelsea took advantage of VAR controversy to beat Fulham 2-0 as the visitors were left to rue a series of costly decisions awarded against them at Stamford Bridge on Saturday. Enzo Maresca's side were fortunate not to fall behind in the west London derby when Fulham were harshly denied a first half opener. Josh King's strike was ruled out after VAR deemed Rodrigo Muniz's accidental collision with Trevoh Chalobah was worthy of a foul. As if that wasn't infuriating enough for Fulham boss Marco Silva, Joao Pedro put Chelsea ahead beyond the scheduled eight minutes of stoppage time at the end of the first half. Adding to Silva's anger, Chelsea's second goal was also VAR influenced as Ryan Sessegnon

was adjudged to have handled a cross, leading to Enzo Fernandez converting from the penalty spot.

After drawing with Crystal Palace and routing West Ham 5-1, Chelsea's third successive Premier League clash with a London rival extended their unbeaten start to three games. Alejandro Garnacho watched from the stands at Stamford Bridge after the Argentine winger travelled to Chelsea's training ground on Friday to finalise his move from Manchester United.

Garnacho's impending arrival comes with Chelsea striker Nicolas Jackson set for a loan switch to Bayern Munich, while Christopher Nkunku signed for AC Milan on Saturday. Liam Delap, leading Chelsea's overhauled attack, lasted



Chelsea's Enzo Fernandez celebrates scoring their second goal. — Reuters

less than 15 minutes before he was forced off after appearing to pull his hamstring while chasing a long pass. The striker's exit was another blow for Maresca after Blues forward Cole Palmer was sidelined by a groin injury that will keep him out of England's forthcoming World Cup qualifiers. King thought he had broken the deadlock with his first professional goal in the 21st minute.

SILVA SEETHES

The 18-year-old forward had accelerated away from the Chelsea defence and slotted low past Robert Sanchez in composed fashion.

But, in the process of spinning away from Chalobah's tackle on the halfway line to launch the attack, Muniz made contact with the

Chelsea defender's foot.

Chalobah crumpled to the turf but play initially continued, allowing King to score.

Told to consult the pitchside monitor to review the incident, referee Rob Jones disallowed the goal for a "careless challenge".

Silva exploded at that explanation, berating the fourth official in a furious rant on the touchline.

Teenager Tyrique George, on for the injured Delap, almost made the breakthrough on the stroke of half time with a close range effort that Bernd Leno saved at his near post. From the resulting corner, Chelsea took the lead in the ninth minute of what should have been eight minutes of stoppage time.

— AFP

SPORTS



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz hits a return to Italy's Luciano Darderi during their men's singles third round match on day six of the US Open tennis tournament. —AFP



Serbia's Novak Djokovic serves to Britain's Cameron Norrie during their men's singles third round match on day six of the US Open tennis tournament. —AFP

ALCARAZ, DJOKOVIC INTO US OPEN LAST 16 AS SABALENKA AVENGES DEFEAT

CARLOS ALCARAZ and NOVAK DJOKOVIC edged closer to a semifinal showdown at the US Open on Friday as Aryna Sabalenka avenged the memory of a bitter defeat to power into the last 16. Spanish second seed Alcaraz and Serbian legend Djokovic both booked their passage into the last 16 with comfortable victories and now stand just two wins away from meeting in the last four. Alcaraz breezed past Italian 32nd seed Luciano Darderi in emphatic fashion, winning 6-2, 6-4, 6-0 on the Arthur Ashe Stadium while Djokovic, who is chasing a record 25th Grand Slam singles title, took care of Britain's Cam Norrie 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 6-2, 6-3.

Alcaraz's one hour 44-minute victory sends the 2022 US Open champion into a meeting on Sunday against France's Arthur Rinderknech, who defeated compatriot Benjamin Bonzi 4-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-2.

Alcaraz needed a medical timeout while leading 5-4 in the second set for treatment on his right knee, but later said he had no injury concerns.

DJOKOVIC MILESTONE Djokovic, 38, meanwhile was clinical in his win over Norrie in the evening session, which sends him into a fourth round tie against German veteran Jan-Lennard Struff.

"Coming into any match you really want to win in straight sets without any drama but obviously that's not possible," said Djokovic after becoming the oldest man to reach the US Open last 16 since Jimmy



Belarus's Aryna Sabalenka serves to Canada's Leylah Fernandez during their women's singles third round tennis match on day six of the US Open tennis tournament. —AFP

Connors in 1991.

"It's good that I get tested," he added. "I'm still trying to find my rhythm and my groove on the court."

Djokovic's fourth round opponent Struff dealt a blow to American hopes of a first home US Open champion since 2003 with a 6-4, 6-3, 7-6 (9/7) defeat of popular 17th seed Frances Tiafoe.

"I don't know how to recover from this, to be honest with you," Tiafoe said. "I haven't been this down in a very, very long time."

Tiafoe's exit came after another disappointing loss for US fans, with big-serving Ben Shelton departing

US OPEN RESULTS

MEN 3RD ROUND

- Novak Djokovic (SRB x7) bt Cameron Norrie (GBR) 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 6-2, 6-3
- Jan-Lennard Struff (GER) bt Frances Tiafoe (USA x17) 6-4, 6-3, 7-6 (9/7)
- Tomas Machac (CZE x21) bt Ugo Blanchet (FRA) 7-5, 6-3, 6-1
- Taylor Fritz (USA x4) bt Jerome Kym (SUI) 7-6 (7/3), 6-7 (9/11), 6-4, 6-4

Adrian Mannarino (FRA) bt Ben Shelton (USA x6) 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 - retired

Jiri Lehecka (CZE x20) bt Raphael Collignon (BEL) 6-4, 6-4, 6-4

Arthur Rinderknech (FRA) bt Benjamin Bonzi (FRA) 4-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-2

Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x2) bt Luciano Darderi (ITA x32) 6-2, 6-4, 6-0

WOMEN 3RD ROUND

- Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x1) bt Leylah Fernandez (CAN x31) 6-3, 7-6 (7/2)
- Cristina Bucsa (ESP) bt Elise Mertens (BEL x19) 3-6, 7-5, 6-3
- Elena Rybakina (KAZ x9) bt Emma Raducanu (GBR) 6-1, 6-2
- Marketa Vondrousova (CZE) bt Jasmine Paolini (ITA x7) 7-6 (7/4), 6-1
- Jessica Pegula (USA x4) bt Victoria Azarenka (BLR) 6-1, 7-5
- Ann Li (USA) bt Priscilla Hon (AUS) 7-5, 6-3
- Barbora Krejcikova (CZE) bt Emma Navarro (USA x10) 4-6, 6-4, 6-4
- Taylor Townsend (USA) bt Mirra Andreeva (RUS x5) 7-5, 6-2

the Louis Armstrong Stadium in tears after being forced to retire after the fourth set of his match against French veteran Adrian Mannarino.

Shelton, 22, was leading 6-3, 3-6, 6-4 when he began to feel pain in his left shoulder. He played on but threw in the towel after Mannarino took the fourth set. "I'm not a guy who would retire if I could continue," said a dejected Shelton.

With Shelton and Tiafoe exiting, it was left to last year's beaten US Open finalist Taylor Fritz to lift home hopes, and the fourth seed delivered in an evening victory over Swiss qualifier Jerome Kym, winning 7-6 (7/3), 6-7 (9/11), 6-4, 6-4.

SABALENKA REVENGE In the women's draw, meanwhile, world number one and defending champion Sabalenka avenged her 2021 US Open semifinal defeat to Leylah Fernandez with a straight-sets victory over the Canadian 31st seed on Armstrong.

Sabalenka was left distraught after being upset by the unheralded Fernandez four years ago with a place in what would have been her first Grand Slam final there for the taking.

But the 27-year-old from Belarus made sure there was no repeat on Friday, seeing off Fernandez 6-3, 7-6 (7/2). Sabalenka's victory saw her extend her incredible winning streak in tiebreaks to 18.

"I wanted this revenge badly," Sabalenka said afterwards. "It was a tough lesson for me back then."

"I just wanted to prove to myself that the lesson was learned and that I developed as a player and I could get this win."

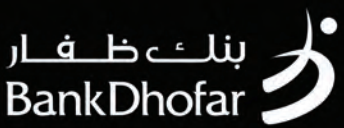
Sabalenka faces unseeded Spaniard Cristina Bucsa in the next round. Bucsa moved on Friday with an upset 3-6, 7-5, 6-3 win over Belgian 19th seed Elise Mertens.

There was another upset in the late game on Arthur Ashe, with Taylor Townsend bundling out Russian fifth seed Mirra Andreeva 7-5, 6-2.

Elsewhere, Kazakh ninth seed Elena Rybakina outclassed Britain's Emma Raducanu, winning 6-1, 6-2 to move into a last 16 tie against 2023 Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova, a 7-6 (7/4), 6-1 victor over Italian seventh seed Jasmine Paolini.

In other women's draw matches, American fourth seed Jessica Pegula comfortably defeated Victoria Azarenka 6-1, 7-5 to reach the fourth round, where she will face compatriot Ann Li. — AFP

BUSINESS



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SHORTTAKES



Surpassing the 5,000-point mark, the MSX Index highlights improved liquidity, deeper markets, and rising investor confidence in Oman

Fiscal sustainability and diversification initiatives boost investor confidence

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Economy (MoE) affirmed that the implementation of the economic diversification strategy; and financial and economic sustainability initiatives and programmes have achieved increasing results in consolidating investment confidence in the Sultanate of Oman and enhancing its position as an attractive investment destination in accordance with international best practices.

The Ministry noted that the Sultanate of Oman has made significant progress over the past years in implementing Oman Vision 2040, improving financial stability indicators, reducing public debt, raising the sovereign credit rating to investment-grade, maintaining good momentum for national economic growth and enhancing the performance of non-oil sectors.

It stressed that Oman has demonstrated a serious commitment to implementing initiatives and policies that stimulate investment and developing legislation regulating the business environment. This, in turn, will contribute to the continued improvement of the economy's competitiveness indicators and enhance the attraction of quality investments to the sectors targeted in the economic diversification strategy.

The Ministry emphasised that enhancing the efficiency and performance of the financial sector and the capital market represent a fundamental pillar for continued progress in financial and economic sustainability efforts and initiatives. This can be achieved by boosting the country's investment appeal, strengthening the role of the private sector, supporting the growth of small, medium and emerging enterprises; and increasing and diversifying the financing options available to these enterprises. This is part of national programmes aimed at accelerating the implementation of economic diversification targets during the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan 2021-2025.

According to the Ministry, the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development (Estidamah) has helped achieved key targets in its support for the Muscat Stock Exchange, placing it on a path that keeps pace with the positive growth of the Omani economy and enhancing the bourse's efforts to upgrade to an emerging stock exchange and expand its role in financing the private sector and entrepreneurs.

The Ministry explained that Estidamah initiatives contributed to advancing the implementation of the Muscat Stock Exchange's strategy to diversify the financial instruments available to investors, increase market depth and enhance the exchange's performance by creating activities such as market makers and liquidity providers, which contributed to increasing trading volumes.

The initial public offerings (IPOs) issued under the Oman Investment Authority's share allocation programme have validated the steady progress made in efforts to empower the private sector and provide investment opportunities in promising sectors such as oil and logistics. — ONA

Construction starts on Al Mudhaibi Industrial City

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 30

A JOINT venture of leading Omani contracting firm Al Sarooj Construction and Saudi firm Al Rawaf Contracting has secured a key contract to implement the infrastructure for the first phase of a major industrial city planned at Al Mudhaibi in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

Al Mudhaibi Industrial City is the latest in a wave of new manufacturing hubs being added to Oman's expanding portfolio of industrial cities administered by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) — part of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

Announcing the award, worth RO 17.4 million, in a post over the weekend, Al Sarooj Construction said: "This achievement marks another milestone in our commitment to building sustainable infrastructure that empowers Oman's industrial growth and future-ready cities".

As part of its brief, the JV will develop Phase 1 of the industrial city on a 134-hectare site in Al Mudhaibi. "The scope includes complete enabling works, such as roads, storm-water drainage,

The new manufacturing hub has already attracted industrial investments totalling around RO 12 m which include projects on electrical materials, electronics, home furniture, poultry processing among others



Phase 1 covers a 134-hectare portion of Al Mudhaibi Industrial City

potable and sewer water networks, irrigation, utility corridors, communication and power systems, along with associated buildings", Al Sarooj added.

Underscoring its investment appeal, the new manufacturing hub has already attracted industrial investments totalling around RO 12 million.

Included in these ventures are projects focusing on electrical materials, electronics, home furniture, poultry processing, disinfectant production; and industrial and cooking gases, among others.

Also envisioned within the industrial city is a complex for manufacturing startups

and a hydroponic agricultural investment.

Future phases will boost Al Mudhaibi Industrial City's size to around 9 million square metres, placing it among Madayn's largest hubs. It also benefits from its strategic location near the main highway connecting the Special Economic Zone at Duqm with the Sultanate of Oman's key ports and border crossings.

The city is a key component of the national strategic projects in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate and aligns with Madayn Vision 2040 in establishing world-class business cities in partnership with the private sector, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

OIA expands footprint with Burkina Faso pacts

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30

A series of strategic agreements inked with the West African state of Burkina Faso over the weekend effectively expand the global investment footprint of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and its subsidiaries.

In a press statement, the Authority added that the agreements diversify its foreign investments, enhance strategic partnerships and achieve sustainable returns for the Sultanate of Oman.

The pacts were signed during the visit of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), to Burkina Faso.

The agreements target key sectors such as energy, mining, agriculture, financial investment and food security, which are aligned with OIA's strategy to diversify its international investments and strengthen global partnerships.

OIA aspires to reinforce its reputation as a trusted investment partner,



The pacts were signed during the visit of Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of OIA, to Burkina Faso.

strengthen its subsidiaries' presence in international markets — especially in supply chains and logistics to contribute to food security — and create new opportunities for economic and investment cooperation with African nations.

The first agreement establishes a broad investment partnership with the Government of Burkina Faso in energy, minerals and agriculture, aiming to create

sustainable added value for both parties.

The second agreement, between Minerals Development Oman and National Mineral Participation Company of Burkina Faso (SOPAMIB), targets the establishment of a joint venture in gold mining sector with the highest standards of governance, safety and sustainability.

The third agreement, between Oman Food

Investment Holding Company and Burkina Faso's Ministry of Agriculture, aims to invest agricultural projects, including rice cultivation and other strategic crops.

President Ibrahim Traoré, President of Burkina Faso, welcomed the President of OIA, who conveyed the greetings and best wishes of progress, prosperity and stability from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President Ibrahim Traoré. In return, President Traoré conveyed his greetings and best wishes of good health and well-being to His Majesty.

OIA is mandated with managing, investing and growing the Sultanate of Oman's assets locally and internationally.

Its investment funds are geographically diverse, with investments on every continent and cover a wide range of sectors, including food and fisheries, energy, logistics, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), public services, financial and investment services, tourism, mining, manufacturing and aviation.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Since 2024, SalamAir has focused on under-served destinations

SALAMAIR UNVEILS A321NEO ‘BARR AL HIKMAN’

MUSCAT: SalamAir, the Sultanate of Oman’s budget carrier, has added a new Airbus A321neo aircraft to its fleet, named ‘Barr Al Hikman’ after the renowned coastal destination in Oman, celebrated for its natural beauty and environmental diversity.

Mohammed bin Abdullah al Khonji, Chairman of SalamAir, said, “The addition of this aircraft reflects our commitment to providing affordable air transport while supporting Oman’s aviation and tourism objectives”. He added that this marks the beginning of SalamAir’s strategic plan to expand its fleet to 25 aircraft by 2028, strengthening the national aviation system and contributing to Oman Vision 2040 by boosting tourism and diversifying the economy.

Al Khonji emphasised the importance of public-private partnerships to grow the tourism sector. Since 2024, SalamAir has focused on under-served destinations, recognising the strategic opportunity presented by growing regional and global travel demand.

He also highlighted cooperation between Oman’s national airlines through code-share agreements to create a shared success story for the Sultanate of Oman. The new fleet expansion allows SalamAir to base two to three aircraft in Salalah, supporting regional development, attracting visitors year-round to Dhofar and creating job opportunities for Omani youth.

Adrian Hamilton-Mans, CEO of SalamAir, said, “The fifteenth aircraft serves as a launchpad for growth, opening new destinations and increasing operational capacity on high-demand routes such as Salalah”.

Since introducing reduced domestic fares starting from RO 9.99 in November 2024, SalamAir has successfully stimulated domestic travel demand and strengthened its position as a leading low-cost airline in the region.

The new aircraft will allow SalamAir to expand its network, increasing flights to Nairobi, adding destinations in Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia, strengthening routes in Saudi Arabia, resuming Beirut and launching Medan, Indonesia.

This expansion will provide competitive fares, more destinations and an enhanced flight network, while creating 182 new jobs, a 24 per cent workforce increase, bringing staff beyond 750 employees and reinforcing its contribution to the national economy.

SalamAir currently operates a fleet of 15 Airbus A320/A321 aircraft, with more than 80 daily flights and expects to carry over 4 million passengers in 2025, a 25 per cent increase from 3.2 million in 2024. — ONA

DHOFAR, AL BATINAH SOUTH COMPLETE 27,600 DIGITAL TRANSACTIONS IN H1 2025

MUSCAT: The Governorates of Dhofar and Al Batinah South have achieved notable progress in digital transformation, completing more than 27,600 e-transactions during the first half of 2025.

Ibrahim bin Talib al Wardi, Assistant Director General of Digital Transformation at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said Dhofar Governorate launched several smart systems, including a temporary licensing platform, an AI-powered ‘Sahalah’ chat system and digital tools for building permit archiving.

These initiatives enabled the completion of more than 13,000 transactions, including 9,841 lease



Several smart systems, including an AI-powered ‘Sahalah’ chat system, were introduced

contracts and 3,645 building-related permits. In Al Batinah South Governorate, more than 14,600 digital transactions were processed alongside the launch of seven

new services, such as interview requests with officials, lamppost maintenance, camping site permits and marriage support fund applications.

The governorate also boosted awareness through workshops, social media campaigns and interactive exhibitions, while training digital transformation ambassadors.

The initiatives reflect Oman’s wider strategy to accelerate e-governance and reduce reliance on manual paperwork.

By cutting processing times and enabling online access, the services are designed to ease procedures for citizens, residents and investors alike. — ONA

Bank Nizwa introduces E-Mandate for direct debit

AS part of its ongoing commitment to delivering innovative and Sharia-compliant digital banking solutions, Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the launch of its Electronic Mandate (E-Mandate) for Direct Debit service.

Designed to streamline recurring transactions and enhance the overall banking experience, the new service complies with the Central Bank of Oman’s (CBO) regulatory framework and advances its overarching goal of building a sustainable and resilient digital economy.

The E-mandate service for direct debit is a digital solution that enables both corporate and individual customers to efficiently manage their recurring financial commitments.

By automating a wide range of routine payments, such as monthly transfers, utility bills, rent and subscriptions, this service reduces paperwork and supports sustainability efforts, ensuring a smooth and convenient experience.

Customers can benefit from the flexibility to set up, modify, or cancel authorisations electronically as needed, with the option to



schedule payments at different intervals.

The E-mandate for direct debit service represents a solution aimed at improving operations and increasing efficiency through automations, managing cash flows and maintaining liquidity more efficiently through easy setup.

Companies can automate recurring payments, including payroll disbursements, rent payments, subscriptions and other expenses. This service offers a modern

banking experience that enhances efficiency in financial management.

Commenting on the service, Mohammed al Balushi, Assistant General Manager of Operations at Bank Nizwa, stated: “The E-mandate service for Direct Debit reflects our ongoing commitment to driving digital innovation in the Islamic banking sector and providing flexible, secure financial solutions that meet our customers’ expectations. It also comes in response to the rapidly increasing demand for automated payment services, particularly in light of the digital transformation underway in the Sultanate of Oman’s banking sector”.

“The launch of this service marks an important step in empowering our customers with a secure and convenient solution to manage their recurring financial obligations, without relying on paper-based or traditional mandates. This contributes to enhancing efficiency and reliability, promoting digital transformation in the financial sector, reducing operational costs and the use of checks and minimising transaction processing time — all of which help reduce risks and errors and increase the speed of fund transfers between various parties”.

Ahli Islamic offers back-to-school discount

As part of strengthening meaningful and rewarding partnerships for its customers and their families, ahli islamic partnered with global brand Babyshop, to offer credit cardholders with an instant 15 per cent discount, in celebration of the back-to-school season.

This offer reflects ahli islamic’s commitment to providing the best deals for its clientele, enhancing their Islamic banking experience.

Coinciding with preparations for a vibrant and energetic new academic year, the offer ran



from August 13 to 16, 2025. The initiative witnessed exceptional engagement across Babyshop outlets in

the Sultanate of Oman, with families making the most of discounted access to Babyshop’s Back to School Collection — a wide and diverse selection of over 3,000 products, including clothing, bags, feeding supplies, stationery, as well as arts and crafts materials, catering to the needs of both boys and girls of all ages.

It is worth noting that Babyshop is one of the most trusted retail brands, with products carefully designed using the highest quality materials to ensure they are

suitable for children.

Its network of branches operates within the Centrepoint group, in addition to its standalone stores spread across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

ahli islamic continues to offer banking solutions that seamlessly align with its customer’s daily needs and aspirations, in full compliance with Islamic Sharia principles.

The bank is committed to helping individuals navigate high-spend seasons with greater ease and flexibility.

Yangwang U9 track edition sets EV top-speed record of 472.41 km/h

Yangwang, BYD’s premium new energy vehicle brand (NEV), has set a new global electric vehicle (EV) top-speed record of 472.41 km/h at the ATP Automotive Testing Papenburg test track in Germany.

The feat was achieved with YANGWANG’s latest U9 Track Edition supercar on August 8, 2025, making it the world’s fastest EV.

Built using BYD’s futuristic technologies in its core, the high-performance EV will soon be available for sale for customers in Oman. Watch out for the space to explore the U9 and experience the innovation at your nearest BYD Flagship showroom in Al Wattayah, Al Mouj and Mall of Oman.

The YANGWANG U9 Track Edition is built upon the same e4



Platform and DiSus-X core technical architecture as the YANGWANG U9 currently on sale in China. On top of this, it features the world’s first mass-produced 1,200V ultra-high-voltage vehicle platform, paired with a thermal-management system optimised for extreme conditions. This combination of an existing technical footprint and ground-breaking enhancements elevates the YANGWANG U9 Track Edition’s performance to unprecedented levels.

Breaking world records demands both relentless power delivery and exceptional high speed stability.

The YANGWANG U9 Track Edition’s e4 Platform — the world’s first quad-motor system to feature 30,000 rpm high-performance

motors — delivers peak power of 555kW per motor, with a combined system output exceeding 3,000PS. This grants the vehicle an astonishing power-to-weight ratio of 1,217PS per tonne, placing it among the top tier in the global automotive industry.

Beyond this, the e4 Platform’s quad-motor independent torque-vectoring system continuously monitors road feedback, adjusting each wheel’s torque at an ultra-high frequency that exceeds 100 times per second.

In Oman, BYD, Yangwang and Denza vehicles are distributed by World Auto Business LLC. For more details, to check stock availability, or to schedule a test drive, call 72225925.

SHORTTAKE

OCCI TO HOST INTRODUCTORY MEETING ON OMAN TRADE OFFICE IN US

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 30



SHAIKH FAISAL
BIN ABDULLAH
AL RAWAS

Chairman of OCCI

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) is hosting three business forums, the Omani-Thai Business Forum, the Omani-Pakistan Business Forum, and the Omani-Estonian Business Forum, in addition to holding an introductory meeting on the Oman Trade Office in the United States of America. These events come within the

OCCI's efforts to strengthen its strategic directions aimed at improving the business environment and expanding the base of economic diversification, in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), stated that hosting these events reflects the OCCI's keenness to support the Sultanate of Oman's economic diversification approach. He pointed out that these events represent important platforms that will enable national companies to explore promising investment opportunities, exchange expertise and build sustainable trade partnerships that enhance the presence of the Omani private sector at regional and global levels, in line with Oman Vision 2040 goals.

He further explained that the business forums, in addition to opening new channels of cooperation with various countries, represent a valuable opportunity for Omani private sector institutions to showcase their products and services in new markets, explore external business and investment opportunities, expand exports; and encourage foreign investors to learn about the local investment environment.

The forums will also provide bilateral meetings between businessmen and investors from different countries to exchange experiences, establish joint projects and strategic partnerships; and open avenues for new contracts and agreements.

The first event will be held on August 31, with the Omani-Thai Business Forum, which aims to strengthen commercial and investment cooperation between Oman and Thailand. The forum will focus on three main sectors: perfumes and cosmetics, healthcare and food security, given the promising opportunities for cooperation in these areas between the private sectors of both friendly countries.

On, September 2, the OCCI will host the Oman-Pakistan Business Forum. The forum stems from the Chamber's keenness to enhance joint projects and commercial and investment exchanges between Oman and Pakistan, especially in projects that support economic diversification in both countries. This will be achieved by providing a supportive and attractive investment environment while exploring more opportunities fostered by Oman's appealing and stimulating investment climate.

On September 3, the OCCI, represented by the Oman Trade Office US, will hold an introductory meeting highlighting the vital role of the office and its mechanisms for supporting Omani companies in entering the US market and strengthening trade and investment partnerships between the two friendly countries. The meeting will review the services provided by the Oman Trade Office in Washington, which include offering consultations to companies on US laws and standards, assisting in identifying trade opportunities, facilitating communication with potential partners; and organising business meetings and economic delegations between Muscat and Washington DC.

— ONA

NCSI STATISTICS

Producer price index falls 2.7% in Q2 2025



Oman's Producer Price Index (PPI) dropped 2.7 per cent in the second quarter of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024, according to NCSI. Mining and quarrying prices rose by 1.2 per cent, supported by increases of 1.3 per cent in crude oil and natural gas; and 18.2 per cent in mineral ores, though stone and sand prices edged down 0.6 per cent. — ONA

STRONG GROWTH

Islamic banking assets surge to RO 9.2 bn



The total assets of Islamic banks and windows in Oman rose by 17.4 per cent, reaching approximately RO 9.2 billion by the end of June 2025. This accounts for 19.9 per cent of the overall banking sector's assets, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO). The CBO statistics further reveal that financing provided by Islamic banking entities increased by 13.1 per cent, reaching about RO 7.2 billion. — ONA

BOOSTING EXPLORATION

Egypt inks \$340m oil, gas exploration deals



Egypt has signed four agreements with international firms worth more than \$340 million to explore oil and gas in the Mediterranean and Nile Delta, the Petroleum Ministry said. The deals, signed by the state-owned Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS), provide for the drilling of 10 wells as part of the ministry's efforts to boost exploration and production. — Reuters

Workforce steady in July as pvt sector leads hiring

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUG 30

OMAN'S recorded workforce stood at 2,670,614 in July 2025, comprising 863,932 Omanis and 1,806,682 expatriates, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information's Monthly Statistical Bulletin (July 2025), based on Royal Oman Police data. Omanis accounted for 32.35% of the total and expatriates 67.65%.

Omani employment was broadly stable: up 0.6% year-on-year from July 2024, and fractionally lower than June. The private sector remained the main employer of nationals, hosting 411,257 Omanis, while 388,448 worked in government roles. A further 62,307 Omanis were in the household (family) category, with 1,907 in communal activities and 13 in "other".

Expatriate employment edged 0.11% higher from June and was little changed from a year earlier. Most expatriates worked in the private sector (1,406,059), followed by the household category (351,910) and government (40,874). Communal and other activities together accounted for 7,839 expatriate workers.

The geographic distribution underscores where demand is strongest. Among Omanis, Muscat Governorate led with 193,798 workers, followed by



Omani employment was broadly stable: up 0.6% year-on-year from July 2024

Al Batinah North Governorate (165,163) and Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (106,092). For expatriates, Muscat Governorate again topped the list with 673,181, ahead of Al Batinah North Governorate (273,050), Dhofar Governorate (220,501) and Al Batinah South Governorate (159,552).

The skills mix among nationals shows a sizeable base in clerical roles (209,557), alongside 138,425 specialists and 89,229 technician-level

jobs. Services counted 83,824, administration and managers 133,421, principal and auxiliary engineering 85,628 and industrial/food-processing 31,010.

Expatriate employment continues to be concentrated in a few large communities. Bangladeshis (624,153), Indians (508,772) and Pakistanis (309,320) together account for nearly four-fifths of foreign workers, with notable representation from

Egyptians, Myanmar nationals, Tanzanians and Sri Lankans.

Taken together, the figures point to a steady labour market with the private sector absorbing most jobs for both Omanis and expatriates. The modest government headcount and the concentration of employment in Muscat Governorate and Al Batinah North Governorate corridor align with fiscal consolidation and diversification efforts under Oman Vision 2040.

Oil prices drop on weak demand, supply boost

HOUSTON/LONDON: Oil prices fell on Friday as traders looked towards weaker demand in the United States, the world's largest oil market and a boost in supply this autumn from OPEC and its allies.

Brent crude futures for October delivery, which expired on Friday, settled at \$68.12 a barrel, down 50 cents or 0.73%. The more active November contract finished down 53 cents or 0.78% at \$67.45. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures settled at \$64.01, down 59 cents or 0.91%.

The market was in part shifting its focus towards next week's OPEC+ meeting, said Tamas Varga, analyst at PVM Oil Associates.

Crude output has increased from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, known as OPEC+, as the group has accelerated output hikes to regain market share, raising the supply outlook and weighing on global oil prices.



Crude oil tanker SCF Surgut, owned by Russia's leading tanker group Sovcomflot, transits the Bosphorus in Istanbul, Türkiye. — Reuters

"Overall, the bottom line is we're going to see a jump in supply feeding into a lacklustre demand market", said Andrew Lipow, president of Lipow Oil Associates.

The US summer driving season ends on Monday's Labour Day holiday, signalling the end of the highest demand

period in the United States, which is the largest fuel market.

"The market is beginning to wonder what effect the tariffs might have on the economic outlook next year", Lipow said, referring to tariffs imposed by the administration of President Donald Trump on US imports from many trading partners.

Crude supply increases have not made their way into the US market yet, raising the possibility supply and demand will be in a tighter balance, said Phil Flynn, senior analyst with Price Futures Group.

"The pessimism about demand, I'm just not seeing it", Flynn said. "Supply from OPEC is supposed to increase, but we're not seeing it in the US I think things are going to stay tight".

Prices rose earlier in the week due to Ukrainian attacks on Russian oil export terminals, but reports of talks between Ukraine's European allies about a possible ceasefire helped tamp down prices, Flynn said.

Data on US crude inventories for the week ending August 22 showed higher-than-expected draws, implying late-summer demand was still firm, particularly in industrial and freight-related sectors, analyst Ole Hvalbye at SEB bank said in a note. — Reuters

OPINION

Health sector focuses on local medical manufacturing



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

FOR more than five decades, the Sultanate of Oman has systematically been developing its health care system from a basic system into one of the most sophisticated in the region. These days, the country focuses not only on increasing the accessibility of the health care services but also on developing a self-sufficient health care industry through the local production of medical devices and pharmaceuticals.

THE HEALTHCARE EVOLUTION
Oman's health care system in 1970 consisted of a small number of hospitals and a handful of doctors. Oman now has an extensive health system including advanced tertiary care hospitals, regional hospitals and primary health care centres. Access to these services is free or heavily subsidised, which is a core component of the government's strategy since the nation's renaissance.

This achievement comes on the back of significant investment in health. Oman has controlled communicable diseases like polio and malaria, enhanced maternal and child health; and increased life expectancy. Oman's progress is repeatedly recognised by the World Health Organization as a model in the region.

Despite progress, emerging challenges remain. Diabetes, cancers and heart diseases are becoming the leading causes of death. To address the issue, the Ministry of Health has broadened the scope of specialised services, introduced prevention initiatives and modernised infrastructure, especially through telemedicine and electronic health records.

LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC
The global supply chain issues during the pandemic exposed Oman's vulnerabilities,

which hampered the country's access to essential medical supplies. The pandemic also emphasised the need to improve the country's infrastructure concerning the supply of essential medical and diagnostic tools, such as PPE and diagnostic kits.

As a result of the issues during the pandemic, Oman has accelerated the initiatives aimed towards the local manufacturing of medical equipment and pharmaceuticals. An official from the Ministry of Health stated that "Health security depends not only on hospitals and doctors, but also on the ability to manufacture essential supplies within our borders", during an industry forum.

LOCALISATION STRATEGY
The struggle to establish the medical industries is directly linked with Oman Vision 2040, the country's action plan for achieving economic diversification and resilience. As part of Oman Vision 2040, the plan also aims to improve local manufacturing capacity regarding the supply of medical products and equipment, including pharmaceuticals, vaccines and medical technologies.

The industrial areas designated for healthcare manufacturing include Suhar, Al Duqm and Salalah. These zones are managed by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), which offers attractive incentives for investment. Multinational companies are being partnered with to set up drug manufacturing plants in the Sultanate of Oman. Initially, the focus will be on manufacturing generic drugs.

There has also been a shift in the local supply chain. Small and medium-sized enterprises have entered the market and are now manufacturing consumables, including masks, gloves and testing kits, which were previously imported in full.

The struggle to establish the medical industries is directly linked with Oman Vision 2040, the country's action plan for achieving economic diversification and resilience

RESEARCH AND HUMAN CAPITAL
The Sultanate of Oman is also focusing on research and development to further its localisation strategies. Universities and research institutes are working with international collaborators in the areas of biotechnology, pharmaceutical sciences and clinical trials. These efforts not only drive innovation, but also ensure that the solutions and products are tailored to the precise requirements of the Omani people.

The creation of skilled human capital is equally imperative. To ensure that Omani nationals are equipped to take up positions in the new medical industry, the pharmaceutical, biomedical engineering and laboratory science training programmes are being augmented. This is important in lessening the dependence on foreign professionals and helps in establishing enduring employment opportunities for young graduates.

THE ROAD AHEAD
The healthcare journey of Oman reflects the remarkable progress made over the years as well as the ambition the country hopes to achieve. Faster to treat the entire populace rather than looking to the decentralisation of population, Oman is now focusing on securing the future of the population as well as making the country self-sufficient in upstream healthcare industries.

If successful, the Sultanate of Oman will address health issues as well as position the country as a leader in the region's medical manufacturing and innovation industries. In the face of unpredicted natural calamities and health crises, Oman's strategy of blending healthcare excellence and self-sufficiency through innovation alongside industrial independence may well prove crucial.

Better welding for stronger Gulf infrastructure?



NAJAH AL
RIYAMI

The writer is a Media and Communication Master's graduate

Welding is the invisible backbone of infrastructure. From pipelines and pressure vessels to bridges and marine platforms, welds hold the Gulf's energy and industrial ambitions together. But what happens when the welders behind those joints lack certification, proper training, or traceability?

In Oman and across the region, the subject has often been overshadowed by more visible infrastructure debates, yet welding quality determines safety and long-term integrity. "Welding is at the heart of quality, safety and asset integrity", says Eng Hussein al Salmi, Lead Welding & NDT Engineer at Petroleum Development Oman. "And right now, the sector needs urgent attention".

The shortage is not just in numbers but in skills. Many welders lack the qualifications to handle diverse materials, grades and processes. "We're facing a shortage not just in the number of welders" Al Salmi explains, "but in welders who have the range of qualifications to handle carbon steel structures, pipelines and pressure vessels". Those who are qualified often seek higher-paying roles abroad, creating a talent drain that leaves local projects dependent on third-party manpower. "We've seen welders arrive without proper verification and that leads to higher repair rates and defects. Without full traceability, we compromise not just on quality, but on safety".

The challenge begins in the classroom. Oman's universities and technical institutes, Al Salmi says, are not producing enough welding technicians, inspectors, or engineers to meet industry demand.

He warns that without strong NDT capacity, the region's projects are "flying blind".

"It's our final assurance that what we've built is safe. Without it, we risk catastrophic failures — loss of life, damage to assets, environmental harm".

"This isn't just about quality", Al Salmi concludes. "It's about cost savings, safety, faster execution and building a strong, self-sufficient industrial base in Oman and the Gulf".

Anchoring investments on infrastructure gains

TRANSPORT

Middle East 2025 opens in Salalah from Aug

31 to Sept 2, bringing port leaders, investors and technology suppliers together at Millennium Resort Salalah for sessions on inter-modal connectivity, terminal automation and green energy, hosted by the Port of Salalah.

The timing is strategic. Oman has spent the past few years building hard infrastructure and sharpening its policy tools. A new unified law for special economic and free zones took effect this year, modernising incentives and governance. Port and free-zone upgrades have expanded capacity, while operators push digitalisation to cut costs and emissions. The question now is simple: can Oman convert infrastructure and policy into anchored investment, sustained volumes and jobs?

Three tests should define success in Salalah:

Investment conversion. Announcements are not outcomes. The summit must help move MoUs to signed leases, ground-breaking dates and hiring timelines — particularly in port-centric clusters such as cold-chain, food processing, minerals and polymers. A public pipeline of tenants with construction milestones would signal credibility.

Green efficiency at scale. With global carriers under decarbonisation pressure, terminals that combine electrified equipment, smarter yard planning and reliable gate operations will win services. A phased "green terminal road map" for Salalah — covering equipment electrification, renewable sourcing and shore-power studies — should be tabled with costs, timelines and



Port of Salalah is a pivotal catalyst in fuelling Dhofar's economic growth



QASIM AL
MAASHANI

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

expected emissions cuts per move.

Connectivity and resilience. Salalah's Indian Ocean position is an advantage only if hinterland links, customs processes and free-zone services are fast and predictable. A logistics scorecard — berth productivity, truck turn-times, gate throughput, clearance times — updated quarterly, would keep operators and regulators aligned on performance.

Speakers from Omani authorities and international ports are due to set out case studies on capacity, safety and automation, with a technical visit to the container and general cargo terminals. That visit should showcase concrete post-upgrade gains — not just equipment, but the data discipline behind it.

There are risks. A post-upgrade spike in throughput can flatter the numbers, but sustaining it requires

disciplined concessions, time-bound permitting under the new zones law and genuine Omanisation and SME participation in maintenance, logistics tech and value-add services. Execution, not events, builds reputation.

There is also a clear opportunity. If, by next Khareef Dhofar Season, Salalah can point to new tenants under construction, measurable cuts in emissions per move, and a throughput run-rate above last year's levels — with published scorecards to prove it — the summit will have marked a turning point: from vision and venues to verifiable delivery.

Oman's logistics story is shifting from "build and announce" to "operate and account". Salalah can lead that shift — if this summit ends with a 12-month action sheet, not just a group photo.

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ART/LIFE



ART

Banksy's 'Piranhas' moved into storage ahead of London Museum display



BANKSY'S "Piranhas" artwork has moved into protective storage ahead of its display at the London Museum's new location.

The artwork, which depicts fish spray-painted on a police sentry box, made headlines last summer when it appeared as part of the street artist's animal-themed collection in the capital, which concluded with a gorilla seemingly lifting a shutter on the entrance to London Zoo.

The "Piranhas" piece is now in the care of the London Museum and will be kept in secure storage before it becomes accessible to the public as part of a permanent exhibition at the museum's Smithfield location, opening in 2026.

Before it was painted to resemble a fish tank, the sentry box had stood in London's Ludgate Hill since the 1990s.

Following confirmation from the reclusive artist that he was responsible, the box was temporarily relocated by the City of London Corporation to Guildhall Yard, where thousands of visitors viewed it from behind safety barriers. It was later moved to Guildhall's South Ambulatory.

Banksy's London animals collection consisted of nine works, including a rhino seemingly mounting a silver Nissan Micra, two elephant silhouettes with their trunks stretched out towards each other and three monkeys that appeared to be swinging on a bridge.

Some of the works, which also included a howling wolf on a satellite dish, were removed, covered up, or vandalised after being painted across the city from 5 to 13 August.

Policy chairman of the City of London Corporation, Chris Hayward, said: "Banksy stopped Londoners in their tracks when this piece appeared in the Square Mile — and now, we're making it available to millions". "By securing it for the London Museum, we're not only protecting a unique slice of the City's story, but also adding an artwork that will become one of the museum's star attractions". "This work by one of the world's most iconic artists now belongs to Londoners and will continue to make waves when it goes on display next year in the Museum's new Smithfield home". London Museum's London Wall site opened in 1976 and closed in December 2022 in preparation for the move to Smithfield. London Museum Docklands remains open. — PA Media/dpa

QUICK FEATURES



ENTERTAINMENT

Lead singer of British rock band Oasis Liam Gallagher performs on stage at Soldier Field in Chicago during the band's reunion tour. — AFP



FILM

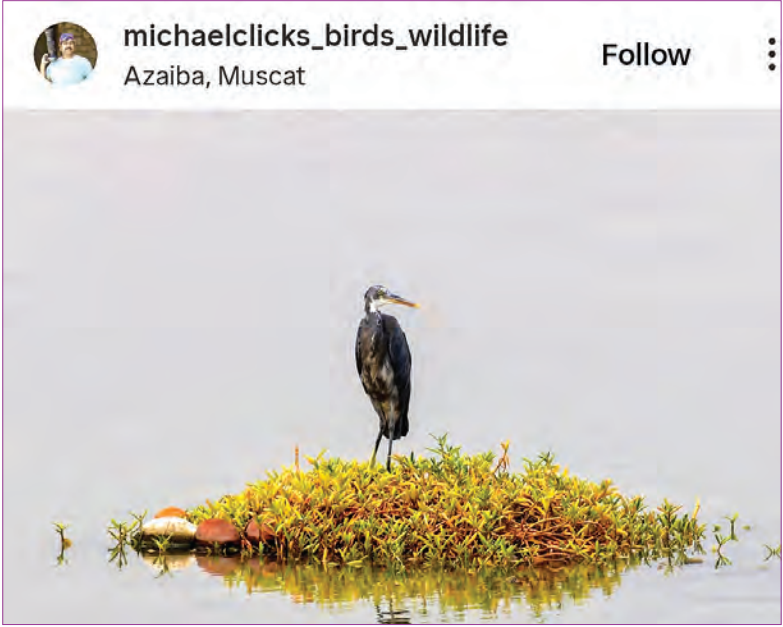
British actress Tilda Swinton attends the photocall of the movie "Broken English" presented out of competition at the 82nd International Venice Film Festival. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A woman looks on during the 'Battle of Outfits' in Caracas. — AFP

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Billie Eilish launches signature Uno deck with Mattel



US SINGER Billie Eilish has launched a signature Uno deck with toy manufacturing company Mattel. The “Bad Guy” singer, 23, is one of Uno’s “biggest fans” according to the entertainment company, which is also the manufacturer of Barbie. A description on Eilish’s website says the music artist designed the deck, which features “colours, symbols and numbers that showcase her artistic aesthetic, printed on 300-gramme premium card stock”. Eilish posted a photo on Instagram of her with the deck and wrote: “Weeeeee, my own UNO”. The music artist, known for chart-topping hits including “No Time To Die” and “Guess”, with Charli XCX, has spoken about her love for playing Uno beforehand.

In an interview with presenter Amelia Dimoldenberg, she admitted “it gets a little bit violent” when she plays the game and added: “Uno just announced some rubbish about, ‘Oh you can’t stack pluses’. Sorry, the game’s not fun then?” Eilish also had a number one song in the UK with “What Was I Made For?” from the Barbie movie soundtrack, which follows the Mattel doll, played by Margot Robbie, as she contemplates her purpose and worries about her mortality. The singer’s Uno set is comprised of 112 orange, green, yellow and blue cards in a deck that integrates her Blohsh logo. The Billie Eilish Uno deck is available to buy from November 14 for £21. — PA Media/dpa



Nigerian designer pushes ‘Afro-lux’ onto the global fashion scene



ITS modern architecture complemented by latticework inspired by local Yoruba textiles, Alara, west Africa’s first fashion and design “concept store”, is an imposing sight in Lagos, Nigeria’s bustling economic capital. Founder Reni Folawiyo is now 10 years into forging what she calls “Afro-lux”, Alara serving as a homebase for designs that “play between tradition and modernity”, while working to elevate African fashion both at home and abroad. Inside, clothing from upscale western brands, decorative art and books, part of Folawiyo’s mission to put design from the continent on equal footing with established giants. The lattice on the building’s exterior is based on adire textiles, popular among the Yoruba ethnic group in southwest Nigeria. “A lot of the beautiful things that people were making in different parts of Africa were not celebrated in the way that I thought they should be celebrated”, the 60-year-old said of the rural handiwork that often inspires the work on display. “I felt very strongly in my belief that these objects and these people had value”.

MUSIC STARS AS STYLE AMBASSADORS West African design is having a moment, Folawiyo said in an interview in Lagos, wearing sunglasses with bright pink lenses. In May, Nigerian music stars Burna Boy, Tems and Ayra Starr graced New York’s Met Gala, dressed by British-Ghanaian designer Ozwald Boateng. But for Folawiyo, it is not enough to just occupy the occasional runway. “At the moment, the best way to platform designers outside Africa is to partner and collaborate with institutions that are of repute”, she said, pointing to her recent pop-up store and exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum as well as a collaboration with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Taking notes from her own Yoruba culture — with its rich textiles, bright colours and lavish ceremonies — she’s also found inspiration in the “rugged” design of Senegal and the “certain sophistication” found in Ivory Coast. Alara is “my own idea of what a celebration of Africa looks like”, she said. CULTURE THROUGH CUISINE Behind the boutique lies the NOK restaurant, whose executive chef is Pierre Thiam, the Senegalese chef who has led the charge in bringing

the region’s food scene to the United States. While still high end, NOK’s prices are more affordable than Alara’s wares — a tricky balancing act in a country like Nigeria, home to wealthy one-percenters in the tech and oil industries, a middle class battered by inflation and millions of informal workers. Among Alara’s austere interior of black walls and white concrete, a green dress from the Nigerian brand Eki Kere retails for 325,000 naira (about \$210), while a table from Senegalese-Nigerian studio Salu Iwadi can fetch up to 10 times the price. Folawiyo herself comes from Lagos’s elite, as the wife of business magnate Tunde Folawiyo and daughter of former Western Region attorney general Lateef Adegbite. Yet getting others — including potential business partners — to see her vision of African-born luxury was a struggle when she first attempted to launch Alara, she said. “But I was very committed to it and I had great belief in myself and my idea”, she said. Now, firmly planted in Nigeria, Folawiyo organises fashion shows abroad, including at Barbados’s CARIFESTA XV this month. But the industry’s success, she said, ultimately relies on “passing on knowledge to future generations”. — AFP

FEATURES



FROM RUSTIC,
EVERYDAY
COMFORT FOODS
INTO MODERN
PRESENTATION

BY KABEER YOUSUF

IN THE lively kitchens of Muscat, where pots clang and the air fills with the heady scent of spices, a quiet change is taking hold. It's being driven by a woman whose unwavering passion for Oman's flavours goes beyond mere craftsmanship: she's on a mission to redefine her country's culinary identity and showcase its richness to the world.

Omani cuisine, with its fragrant spice blends and hearty dishes, is often overlooked beyond its borders. For centuries, it has been a cornerstone of community and hospitality, offering comfort and familiarity to Omanis. Yet, despite its depth and diversity, it struggles to find recognition on the global culinary stage. Many see it as rustic or simple, a reflection of everyday life rather than a cuisine worth celebrating in fine dining venues recognised worldwide.

Masooma al Balushi's journey is changing that perception. Her aim is nothing less than to elevate traditional dishes — like Harees, Arsiya and Shuwa — from comforting home staples to artful expressions that command respect and admiration. She approaches this by infusing freshness and refinement into each dish, carefully preserving their authentic essence while presenting them with modern flair. Her culinary philosophy hinges on support for local producers; she champions sourcing from within Oman, believing that truly authentic flavours come from the land itself.

Her leadership in launching 'Sabla Night' has become a cornerstone of this movement. Held at a charming boutique venue known for its bespoke hospitality, the event dedicates an entire weekend to exploring Oman's

Across the world, people are looking to reconnect with their roots through food and Masooma's work exemplifies this trend. She is a trailblazer, fostering a sense of pride that goes beyond nostalgia, reinforcing that Oman's unique cuisine has a rightful place on the international stage.

Recognition for her work has come in awards at national competitions and medals at global culinary festivals, but what fuels her is a desire to make a lasting impact. She dreams of opening her own restaurant — one where tradition meets innovation and each dish tells the story of Oman's land, its people and its history. Yet, her greatest achievement isn't trophies or accolades; it's the spark she's igniting in others — the growing confidence among local chefs and home cooks



rich food heritage. Masooma's influence shines through every detail — through carefully curated menus prepared with local ingredients, elegantly plated and designed to surprise even seasoned gourmets. These dinners aim to show that Oman's cuisine is more than just comfort food; it's a vibrant, sophisticated tradition that deserves global recognition.

Sabla Night acts as a catalyst, helping to reshape perceptions by transforming familiar dishes into memorable, contemporary culinary experiences. It's an immersive celebration of history, culture and taste, inviting both Omanis and visitors to connect deeply with their roots. The success of these evenings has ignited excitement and curiosity, drawing attention to the country's culinary potential and encouraging a new sense of pride.

However, the path has not been without its difficulties. Sourcing authentic ingredients remains a challenge — local spices, grains and herbs are vital to capturing real Oman flavour but are not always easily available. Many ingredients are imported, often of inferior quality, which dilutes the authenticity of traditional recipes. Masooma strongly advocates for a shift towards local sourcing, supporting farmers and producers to ensure that the heart of Oman's cuisine remains rooted in its land. She believes that embracing locally grown ingredients sustains the environment, boosts the economy and preserves cultural integrity.

Her efforts are part of a broader global movement — recognising the importance of local ingredients and traditional recipes as symbols of cultural identity.



eager to celebrate their culinary heritage.

Some of her accolades include the 'First place in a competition held by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in 2024', 'Winner of the 2024 Oman Chef title', 'HORECA 2024: Bronze medal in the Cold Food category', 'HORECA 2023: Gold medal in the Omani Cuisine category' and 'HORECA 2022: Gold medal in the Omani Cuisine category'.

Her influence extends far beyond the kitchen. She is inspiring a cultural shift — an awakening that sees Oman's rich ingredients and recipes as vital treasures worth guarding and sharing. Her work at Sabla Night and other initiatives has begun turning traditional dishes into symbols of national pride, ensuring they are celebrated, respected and reinterpreted for new generations.

Looking ahead, Masooma's vision is simple yet ambitious: to ensure Oman's culinary stories are told with authenticity and creativity; and that her country's food culture continues to evolve while honouring its roots. She believes that food is more than nourishment — it's a powerful form of storytelling, one that fosters pride, preserves history and connects communities.