

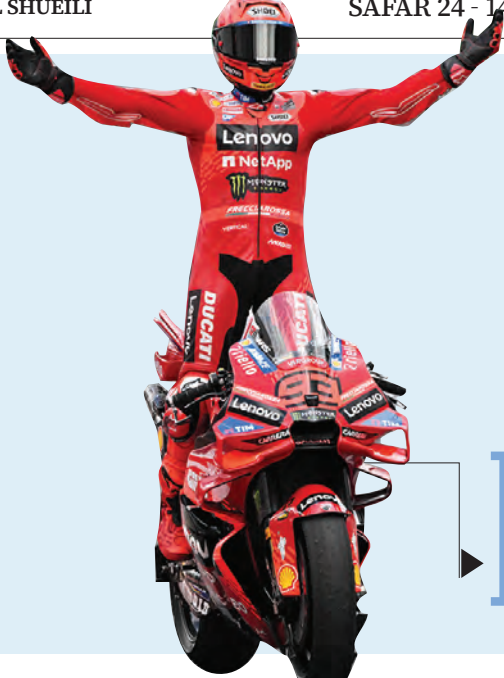
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PAGES 20 BAISAS 200

SUNRISE 05:44 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 04:24 AM
DHUHR 12:16 PM
ASR 03:42 PM
MAGHRIB 06:43 PM
ISHA 07:57 PM


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12
MARQUEZ WINS AUSTRIAN GP
FOR FIRST TIME TO EXTEND
MOTOGP CHAMPIONSHIP LEAD

INBRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO
GABON PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Brice Oligui Nguema of the Republic of Gabon on the occasion of his country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to the Republic of Gabon in realising further achievements. His Majesty also wished the cooperation and partnership relations between the two countries further growth and expansion on all spheres.

HM’S CONDOLENCES
TO PRESIDENT OF
PAKISTAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Asif Ali Zardari of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the victims of the flash floods and landslides which hit several provinces in Pakistan. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt condolences to President Asif, the families of the victims and the people of Pakistan. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed souls in peace in paradise and to grant their families the fortitude to bear the loss, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

OVER 150,000 VISIT
AL JABAL AL
AKHDHAR FESTIVAL



The Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival 2025 has attracted more than 150,000 visitors from within Oman and abroad since its launch on August 1 till 15, with expectations that the total number will exceed 300,000 by the festival’s conclusion at the end of August. The festival aligns with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which aims to diversify the national economy, boost the tourism sector’s contribution and support local content. The event features an integrated programme designed to revitalise Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, promote the natural and cultural assets of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, and empower the local community. This includes the participation of 65 small and medium enterprises (SMEs), 10 farmers, and the creation of 60 temporary job opportunities through diverse activities that enrich the tourism experience and stimulate economic activity.

Public debt falls to RO 14.1 billion by second quarter

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman’s public debt decreased by the end of the second quarter of this year to reach RO 14.1 billion compared to RO 14.4 billion by the end of the corresponding period in 2024. By the end of the second quarter, the Ministry of Finance had paid over RO 749 million to the private sector, received through

the financial system with complete documentation. This reflects the ministry’s commitment to settling fully documented private sector dues within an average of five working days. Public revenue by the end of Q2 2025 totalled RO 5,839 million, reflecting a 6-per cent decrease from RO 6,197 million recorded during the same quarter of 2024. The decline is

largely due to a fall in hydrocarbon revenue. Furthermore, net oil revenue amounted to RO 3,018 million as of the end of Q2 2025, representing a 10 per cent decrease from RO 3,362 million collected during the same quarter of 2024, due to lower average oil prices and production. Net gas revenue reached RO 884

million as of the end of Q2 2025, reflecting a 6-per cent decline from RO 943 million recorded in the same quarter of 2024. Meanwhile, current revenue totalled RO 1,928 million as of the end of Q2 2025, indicating a 2-per cent increase, from RO 1,882 million collected during the same quarter in 2024. **DETAILS ON P13**

ISRAEL
KILLS
18
AS HAMAS
REJECTS GAZA
RELOCATION
PLAN



A man carries a flag of Palestine during the funeral of Hamdan Abu Alia, who was killed a day earlier in a reported Israeli raid in Al Mughhayyir village, in Ramallah. — AFP

GAZA’S civil defence agency said Israeli strikes and gunfire killed at least 18 Palestinians on Sunday, including seven people shot dead while waiting to collect food aid. Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal said that seven people were killed in an Israeli drone strike that hit a hospital courtyard in Gaza City, in the territory’s north. Witnesses said the victims were members of a Hamas unit, which a source from the Palestinian group described as responsible for distributing aid and “fighting thieves”.

There was no comment from the Israeli military, which is preparing a broader offensive in Gaza City and has sent ground forces to the city’s Zeitun neighbourhood in recent days. After more than 22 months of war, UN-backed experts have warned of widespread famine unfolding in Gaza, where Israel has drastically curtailed the amount of humanitarian aid it allows in and convoys have been repeatedly looted. Witnesses on Sunday reported Israeli air strikes across the Gaza Strip overnight and into the morning. Bassal said four people were killed in a strike that hit

a tent sheltering displaced Palestinians in the southern area of Khan Yunis. Meanwhile, Hamas said on Sunday that Israel’s plan to relocate residents from Gaza City constitutes a “new wave of genocide and displacement” for hundreds of thousands of residents in the area. The group said the planned deployment of tents and other shelter equipment by Israel into southern Gaza was a “blatant deception”. The Israeli military has said it is preparing to provide tents and other equipment starting from Sunday ahead of its plan to relocate residents from combat

zones to the south of the enclave “to ensure their safety”. Hamas said in a statement that the deployment of tents under the guise of humanitarian purposes is a blatant deception intended to “cover up a brutal crime that the occupation forces prepare to execute”. Israel said earlier this month that it intended to launch a new offensive to seize control of northern Gaza City, the enclave’s largest urban centre. The plan has raised international alarm over the fate of the demolished strip, which is home to about 2.2 million people. — Agencies

Razat Farm launches first dedicated agri-tourism project

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 17

Razat Farm in Salalah, one of the largest and most established farms in the Sultanate of Oman, has launched a pioneering educational tour programme that opens its gates to visitors to explore its crop and livestock operations and modern production techniques. The initiative aligns with Oman Vision 2040 and aims to broaden the country’s tourism offering



The farm expects growing interest from domestic and international visitors in this style of agri-tourism.

while promoting hands-on learning. The two-hour programme includes a 30-minute bus segment accompanied by specialist guides who explain each stop along the route and answer questions as well. The experience begins at a dedicated reception area, where visitors complete entry procedures, receive safety guidance and a route map, before moving through stations covering modern farming, greenhouses,

live-stock and research and innovation labs. Along the route, visitors are introduced to organic agriculture and its value chains, with highlights such as organic turmeric, alongside outlets selling fresh farm produce. The programme offers practical activities suitable for families and children, combining enjoyment with learning and positioning the farm as a platform for awareness and knowledge transfer.

TURN TO P3

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SHORT TAKES



The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. — ONA

‘KHAREEF DHOFAR EXPLORER’ PROJECT LAUNCHED

TAQAH: The ‘Khareef Dhofar 2025 Explorer’ project was launched this evening at Darbat Park in Dhofar Governorate.

The initiative aims to enhance the experience of visitors of Khareef Dhofar (monsoon) season through an interactive digital platform that documents their participation in events. It also supports digital transformation in event management, provides accurate data on visitor patterns and distribution, encourages family participation, and reduces reliance on paper materials.

The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

Sumayyah bint Abdullah al Ramadhaniyah, CEO of Elif Entrepreneurship, the project’s implementing company, stated that the launch of the “Explorer” represents the first digital experience of its kind in Oman. It combines entertainment, exploration and digital transformation during tourism seasons and enables small and medium-sized enterprises to participate in the rich and diverse tourism landscape.

Mohammed bin Mohsin al Maamari, an investor at Darbat Park, noted that the project is a qualitative addition to the Khareef Dhofar season. He said it promotes sustainable tourism by integrating technology and entertainment, opening up new horizons for domestic tourism. — ONA

‘TAAWON’ PROGRAMME OFFERS INSPIRATION



MUSCAT: The Omani Network for Volunteers ‘Taawon’ concluded the ‘Shaghaf’ summer programme, which was designed and developed under the vision of its founder, Yahya Rahi. The programme aimed to offer youth a distinctive and creative experience that combined knowledge, practice and inspiration, transforming the summer break into a rich space for learning and skill development. The programme featured a variety of tracks and activities, most notably the ‘Afaq’ dialogue sessions track, which included four sessions across different fields in volunteer work. These sessions, inspired by the book ‘New Horizons in Volunteering’, attracted around 80 participants and achieved nearly 800 volunteer hours.

The training track also included nine specialised workshops with approximately 190 participants, recording close to 4,275 volunteer hours.

The programme further included the ‘Young Volunteer Workshop’, which targeted 10 children with the participation of five trainers, achieving 100 volunteer hours. In addition, a shooting workshop was held under the ‘Talents’ track, with 15 participants, recording 22.5 volunteer hours.

MOJLA, ONEIC TIE UP FOR PRINTING LAWYERS’ CARDS

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs (MoJLA), in cooperation with the Oman National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC), launched a pilot service for printing lawyer and expert cards alongside other electronic services, via ONEIC’s self-service kiosks.

The service will allow beneficiaries to print out cards immediately upon completion of registration or renewal procedures and send text message notifications confirming the completion of the service. The kiosks also provide 24/7 technical support with direct contact numbers for support teams displayed on the service screens.

The kiosks will be available at



The service will allow beneficiaries to print out cards immediately upon completion of registration.

multiple locations across the Sultanate of Oman, including the headquarters of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs and other locations across the

governorates ensuring that the service is easily accessible to lawyers and experts.

Ibrahim bin Said al Hosni, Director-General of Judicial Affairs at the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, explained that the service marks a qualitative leap in developing the judicial work environment. He stressed that the kiosks will improve procedures and facilitate services provided to lawyers and experts. He noted the ministry continues to provide innovative digital solutions that save time and effort and keep pace with current and future requirements, positively impacting the speed of transaction completion and achieving customer satisfaction.

CDAA calls for caution after Al Jabal Al Akhdhar accident

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

THE Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) has urged motorists to adhere to the speed limit and wear seat belts when driving in mountainous areas.

CDAA had earlier warned that people should be careful when travelling on dangerous roads and in adverse weather conditions to ensure the safety of themselves as well as others.

The new statement by CDAA came in the wake of an accident that killed three people on Al Jabal Al Akhdhar mountains on Friday evening.

It was reported that the Rescue and Ambulance teams from the CDAA in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate responded to a vehicle rollover accident in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, resulting in the deaths of three people.

Speaking to the Observer, a CDAA official said that a car crashed into a mountainside while coming back from Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, resulting in the deaths of three people and multiple injuries.

The driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle while attempting to navigate a steep turn. The authority stated that the brakes failed to respond in time, causing the car to crash into the mountain.



Recently, a car crashed into a mountainside while coming back from Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, resulting in the deaths of three people and multiple injuries.

“Apparently, from what we could gather from the preliminary assessment, the driver did not realise he was approaching a sharp, steep turn, which caused him to lose control. However, an investigation has been launched to identify the cause of the accident,” the official said.

“Take precautions before and during driving through difficult terrains and in adverse weather conditions by being alert about the vehicle conditions as well as the terrain to safeguard yourself, the passengers,

and the people in other vehicles,” the statement further said.

Official data suggests that the number of road accidents has reduced, with as many as 586 people losing their lives and 1,936 injured in Oman road crashes in 2024. However, it was noted that the number of road accidents in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar has increased in recent years due to the steep terrain and winding roads, caused by reasons such as reckless driving, lack of vehicle fitness, among others.

Sadah Festival opens with focus on heritage, culture

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 17

Sadah, a coastal district east of Salalah, has opened its annual tourist festival for the Khareef Dhofar Season, running through August 30. The programme is designed to introduce visitors to the area’s heritage, culture and everyday life — while giving local families and artisans a platform to earn from their craft.

Events take place daily at the Sadah Sports Centre from 5 pm to 11 pm. The line-up mixes traditional folk performances with poetry and music evenings and includes a dedicated children’s stage with games and competitions.

The festival also turns to the sea — the heartbeat of Sadah’s history.

A marine-themed showcase features handicrafts and artefacts, and a heritage



Events take place daily at the Sadah Sports Centre from 5 pm to 11 pm.

market highlights the region’s long seafaring tradition and traditional fishing tools. In Hasik (a sub-district of Sadah), the “Empowering Local Productive Families” fair runs until August 30th, allowing home-based businesses to present local foodstuffs and crafts. The initiative supports household incomes and encourages community-led

enterprise.

A centrepiece of the programme is the two-day Mazaayin Al Hiran contest—an Omani camel-calf beauty show organised by the district’s Camel Racing Committee. Twelve rounds feature the finest bikar (young female camels), assessed under precise standards that reflect a living heritage cherished across Dhofar.

Ahmed bin Ali al Dari, Wali of Sadah, said, “These activities promote the wilayat’s natural and heritage attractions and stimulate tourism during the khareef season. Active community participation helps make the programme a success and showcases the area’s cultural identity.”

Salim al Amri told Oman Observer: “The Sadah Heritage Festival is a national occasion where the fragrance of history meets the achievements of the present. A key objective is to affirm and root our heritage identity so it remains vivid for future generations.”

He added: “The festival plays a leading social role by supporting productive families — ceramics, palm-frond weaving, pottery, leatherwork and more. For many families, it has become a source of income by marketing their hand-made crafts to large visitor numbers.”

WEATHERCONDITIONS



On Monday, continuous cloud advection and chances of isolated rain are expected.

ISOLATED RAIN OF VARYING INTENSITY EXPECTED

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, AUG 17

The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre issued the latest updates and analysis on the weather conditions expected in the next few days.

The analysis indicates that the Sultanate of Oman is affected by a trough of upper air, which will result in the continuation of cloud advection with chances of isolated rain of varying intensity and occasional thunderstorms over the governorates of Al Wusta, Dhofar, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Sharqiyah North and parts of Al Dakhiliyah.

The expected rainfall is predicted to range between 10-20 mm, which may lead to the flow of some wadis. Fresh downdraft winds with speeds ranging between 10-25 knots (20-50 km/h) may lead to the movement of unstable objects and poor horizontal visibility during thunderstorms, as well as rising dust due to downdraft winds.

Rough seas are also expected along the Arabian Sea and Oman Sea coasts, with a maximum height of four metres.

On Monday, continuous cloud advection and chances of isolated rain, occasionally accompanied by thunderstorms, are expected over the governorates of Al Wusta, Dhofar, Al Sharqiyah South, Al Sharqiyah North and parts of Al Dakhiliyah. According to the weather forecast, the rainfall will intensify over the governorates of Al Wusta, Dhofar and Al Sharqiyah South.

Sea waves with a height of four metres are expected to continue during the upcoming days along the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea and the Oman Sea.

According to the Oman Met Office, fresh downdraft winds are expected to progressively increase in speed, ranging between 15-35 knots (28-65 km/h) by Tuesday until Thursday, August 19-21, 2025, with continuous cloud advection and chances of isolated rain, occasionally accompanied by thunderstorms, expected over the governorates of Al Wusta and Dhofar.

RAZAT LAUNCHES FIRST AGRI-TOURISM PROJECT

FROM PAGE 1

Bookings are available through a user-friendly website, with prices being affordable and accessible, ensuring a flexible experience for visitors during the tourism season. The site also serves as a key destination for students, researchers and agriculture enthusiasts, particularly those interested in organic farming and its applications.

In a televised statement to the Al Nas wal Khareef programme on Oman TV, Mohammad bin Alawi Ibrahim, Director of Razat Farm, said: “We are pleased to launch an educational tour that showcases our agricultural and livestock systems and modern techniques. The tour lasts two hours and includes a 30-minute bus segment with specialist guides. It starts at the reception area with safety guidance and a map of the route. We present organic farming and the varieties developed at the farm, including organic turmeric, with fresh products available at dedicated outlets. Bookings via the website are simple, prices are within everyone’s reach, and we will continue to expand the route with new interactive stations, God willing.”

The farm expects growing interest from domestic and international visitors in this style of agri-tourism, which is gaining traction worldwide, and says the route will be upgraded in phases to add new stations and experiences that reinforce Dhofar’s position as a leading destination for sustainable tourism and applied agricultural learning.

Reviving home farming boosts food security

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, AUG 17

ALTHOUGH people are living in an era where technology often dominates daily life, a quiet but meaningful eco friendly shift is taking root across Oman as increasing numbers of young Omanis are turning to home farming , not just as a hobby, but as a powerful personal and national statement.

Whether on rooftops, in backyards, or through vertical garden setups in urban apartments, young Omanis are reshaping how food, sustainability, and identity intersect in modern Omani society which reflects raising awareness too.

This grassroots revival comes in a time of growing awareness of food security, a critical concern in dry climate countries like Oman that rely heavily on imports.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, over 60 per cent of Oman's food is imported and a figure that has driven interest in local and homegrown alternatives.

Ali Salim, a 30-year-old from Ibri, began growing tomatoes and mint on his rooftop during the pandemic. “It started as a way to relax during lockdown, but it quickly became a passion. The Pandemic shows me the need to achieve food security,” he said.

“Now, I sell small batches to neighbours and teach others how to start their own mini farms. I believe every household can produce something, even if small and that’s a step toward food



Urban farming innovations are being integrated to encourage wider adoption.

Whether on rooftops, in backyards, or through vertical garden setups in urban apartments, young Omanis are reshaping how food, sustainability, and identity intersect in modern Omani society which reflects raising awareness too.

independence,” he added.

Environmental authorities see this movement as more than a lifestyle trend. Hamoud al Harrasi. emphasised its national value by saying: “Home farming may seem small scale, but collectively, it builds resilience. When households grow even a portion of their produce, it reduces pressure on supply chains, enhances food availability, and raises community awareness about sustainability.”

He also noted that urban farming innovations, such as hydroponics and composting, are being integrated into public awareness campaigns and school programmes to encourage wider adoption.

Rashid al Qutaiti, a school principal, commented: “We have conducted a project to attain good security and independence with the high school students. We grew some plants using

water(hydroponics) and we achieved a high score among the environmentally friendly schools projects. This was the start and then students started to spread the idea and do some individual projects at home.”

He added that such initiatives help in increasing food security by reviving home farming and raising awareness of such ideas in society.

Social media continues to accelerate this movement. Instagram accounts and local farming clubs share planting tips, seasonal guides, and videos showcasing progress under hashtags like #GreenOman and #FoodFromHome.

However, challenges remain including limited space, climate conditions, and lack of technical knowledge. But youth are responding with creativity and determination.



SHABAB OMAN II DEPARTS FOR NETHERLANDS

BREMERHAVEN: The Royal Navy of Oman vessel Shabab Oman II departed the port of Bremerhaven in the Federal Republic of Germany on Sunday, setting a course for the port of Ijmuiden in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. While sailing towards the Netherlands, Shabab Oman II will participate in the SAIL Amsterdam festival as part of its seventh international voyage, ‘Glories of the Seas 2025’. — ONA

Al Akhwars boost tourism during khareef season

TEXT & PHOTO BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Al Akhwars, which literally means the wetlands, are a part of Oman's natural heritage with environmental, economic and tourism values. Many creatures find refuge and a safe breeding ground in this environment.

Al Akhwars serve as safe breeding grounds for dozens of fish species, safe havens for resident and migratory birds and a natural breathing space for tourists.

The Sultanate of Oman is famous for its wetland areas, most of which were formed at the entrances of valleys. These areas are usually separated from the sea by sand or gravel barriers deposited by the valleys and then reshaped by the waves.

These areas were once a major source of salt production, with salt marshes scattered



The Sultanate of Oman is famous for its wetland areas, most of which were formed at the entrances of valleys.

along their banks. Traces of this can still be seen today, as is the case in Khor Qurayat. These creeks are tourist attractions, boasting beautiful sandy beaches, mangrove forests and a diverse range of birds seeking refuge there.

The waters of the wetlands in Dhofar Governorate host enormous numbers of fish and crustaceans, with mangrove

trees growing along its banks, hosting more than 156 species of resident and migratory seabirds. Common birds include gulls, terns, boobies, cormorants and herons.

The inhabitants of Dhofar Governorate have traditionally used these estuaries, rich in fish, trees and green plains, sustainably. They continue to graze livestock and fish, especially during the monsoon season when sea waves are high and climatic conditions make fishing unsafe.

In 1997, these Akhwars were declared a protected area known as ‘the Khawrs of the Dhofar Coast Wilderness Area’. This area includes nine wetland areas, with the most important being: Khor Al Mughsail, Khor Al Baleed, Khor Al Qurm, Khor Taqah, Khor Awqad, Khor Suli and Khor Rori.

In addition to their natural

resources, these khors are distinguished by their physical resources, such as water springs and archaeological sites, extending over an area of more than 100 hectares.

One of the most imperative sites is the archaeological site of Al Baleed, dating back to the Bronze and Iron Ages. This site was included on the Unesco World Heritage List in 2000, along with other sites such as Khor Rori (Samahram) and Wadi Dokah Reserve (Frankincense Tree Reserve).

Recently, these Akhwars have undergone significant improvements, providing numerous services that could benefit tens of thousands of visitors during the fall season.

Authorities are keen to promote these natural and archaeological sites in line with sustainable development and tourism policies.

SPOTLIGHT



BALQEES AL ORAIMI

BICYCLING offers numerous benefits, including physical activity, environmental friendliness and cost-effectiveness, but it also presents significant safety challenges, particularly for students. The primary dangers for student cyclists stem from interactions with motor vehicles and pedestrians, a lack of dedicated and continuous cycling infrastructure, and rider-related factors such as distraction and insufficient knowledge of traffic laws.

In a move aimed at ensuring a safe and secure learning environment, the Ministry of Education recently announced a ban on students bringing bicycles of all types – particularly unlicensed ones – onto school premises.

The decision comes in response to growing concerns over the increasing number of students using bicycles to commute to school, raising safety risks both inside and outside school grounds. The ministry confirmed that the ban applies to all types of bicycles – including pedal, electric and motorised – with strict monitoring measures to ensure compliance.

The ministry stressed that the primary objective of this measure is to prevent accidents and injuries

In a move aimed at ensuring a safe and secure learning environment, the Ministry of Education recently announced a ban on students bringing bicycles of all types. The decision comes in response to growing concerns over the increasing number of students using bicycles to commute to school, raising safety risks both inside and outside school grounds

IS CYCLING TO SCHOOL SAFE?

that could result from cycling in crowded school environments. “Schools must remain places dedicated to education and extracurricular development, away from activities that might put students at risk,” the statement noted.

The move also follows recommendations from safety committees highlighting the need for practical measures to reduce behaviours that may compromise student safety, especially given the rise in bicycle-related incidents among young people.

As part of its plan, the ministry will launch a comprehensive awareness programme in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police’s Traffic Safety Institutes. The programme will feature interactive activities and lectures to educate students on traffic laws and the dangers of unsafe bicycle use.

In addition, school councils across the governorates will host meetings with parents to raise awareness within the wider community and to promote the

importance of safe and regulated transportation for children.

Ahmed al Alawi, a Grade 9 student, said: “I used to ride my bicycle to school every day, but I noticed some students speeding near the gate, which was dangerous. Even though I will need to find another way to get to school, I think the rule is necessary for everyone’s safety.”

Mohammed al Saadi, an 11th grader, said: “Some students would use electric bikes to show off in the school yard, which caused a lot of chaos and worry among us. I believe the ban will make the school environment calmer and safer.”

Parents also expressed strong support for the ban. “I fully support this decision. I have heard of injuries among children caused by such bicycles. Now I have a strong reason to say no when my son insists on riding one,” Salem al Shukaili, father of a Grade 6 student, remarked.

Fatma al Hosni, mother of a primary school student, was of the view that safety comes first. “I think

schools and families should work together to provide safe transport alternatives, especially in remote areas,” she said.

Traffic safety experts warn that cycling near school grounds can lead to collisions and injuries, particularly if the bicycles lack essential safety features such as helmets and lights. Many younger riders also lack the road awareness and experience needed to avoid accidents.

The ministry stressed that the success of the ban depends on providing safe and reliable alternatives, encouraging parents to use school buses or supervised family transport. Discussions are underway to expand school transport services in some areas, particularly for students living far from school.

Schools have also been raising awareness among students about safe commuting practices, such as using pedestrian crossings and following safety protocols when boarding or alighting from buses.

The Ministry of Education is working to integrate road safety concepts into both curricular and extracurricular activities, through exhibitions, lectures and creative competitions.

Appropriate educational materials will also be distributed to ensure that students understand safety concepts relevant to their stage of development.

RESCUE EFFORTS



A worker in a raincoat pushes a trolley near the waterfront in Hong Kong. — AFP

9 DEAD, 3 MISSING IN NORTH CHINA FLASH FLOOD

BEIJING: A flash flood in Inner Mongolia killed nine people and left three missing, Chinese state media said on Sunday. A group of 13 people were camping outdoors in Inner Mongolia’s Urat Rear Banner when a flash flood occurred around 10 pm on Saturday, state news agency Xinhua said.

As of Sunday afternoon, one person had been rescued and over 700 workers were “urgently” searching for the missing, Xinhua added. The Ministry of Emergency Management has ordered full-scale rescue efforts, verification of the status of the missing, and dispatched a working group to the scene, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Natural disasters are common across China, particularly in the summer, when some regions experience heavy rain while others bake in searing heat. The death toll from flash floods and mudslides in northwest China in early August was at least 13, state media said previously.

Heavy rain in Beijing in the north also killed 44 people last month, with the capital’s rural suburbs hardest hit, and another eight people died in a landslide in nearby Hebei province. Scientists have shown that human-driven climate change is causing more intense weather patterns that can make destructive floods more likely. — AFP



People gather near a damaged vehicle and scattered debris after the road washed out following a flash flood in Mingora, the main city of Swat Valley, in monsoon-hit northern Pakistan’s mountainous Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. — AFP

Indian rescuers scour debris post rain

KISHTWAR: The latest deadly flood to crash through a Himalayan village killed at least 60 people and washed away dozens more. Torrents of water and mud driven by intense rain tore through Chisoti village in Indian-administered Kashmir, leaving dozens missing, including Hindu pilgrims who were visiting a shrine. It is the second major deadly flooding disaster in India this month. Officials said a large makeshift kitchen in Chisoti, where more than 100 people were, was completely washed away by what Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah reported was a sudden “cloudburst” rain storm.

Kishtwar district hospital head Yudhvir Kotwal said more than 100 people were brought in after the disaster. “Most of the injured had head injuries, fractured bones and ribs,” Kotwal said, adding that “dead bodies are still being retrieved from under the mud and rubble”. Heavy earthmovers were brought to the disaster area to dig through deep mud.

The army’s White Knight Corps said its troops, “braving the harsh weather and rugged terrain, are



A motorcyclist retrieves his bike stuck in a waterlogged street following heavy monsoon rain showers in Jalandhar. — AFP

engaged in evacuation of injured”. Emergency supplies, including ropes and digging tools, were being brought to the disaster site, with the army supporting other rescue teams.

Floods and landslides are common during the June-September monsoon season, but experts say climate change, coupled with poorly planned development, is increasing their frequency, severity and impact. Floods on August 5 overwhelmed the Himalayan town of Dharali in India’s

Uttarakhand state and buried it in mud. The likely death toll from that disaster is more than 70 but has not been confirmed.

The UN’s World Meteorological Organization said last year that increasingly intense floods and droughts are a “distress signal” of what is to come as climate change makes the planet’s water cycle ever more unpredictable. Roads had already been damaged by days of heavy storms in Kishtwar district. — AFP

Hopes wane after Pakistan flooding kills hundreds

PAKISTANI rescuers dug homes out from under massive boulders on Sunday as they searched for survivors of flash floods that killed at least 344 people, with more than 150 still missing. Torrential rains across the country since Thursday have caused flooding, rising waters and landslides that have swept away entire villages and left many residents trapped in the rubble.

Most of the deaths, 317, were reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where monsoon rains that are only expected to intensify in the days ahead drove flooding and landslides that collapsed houses. More than 150 people are missing in the hardest-hit Buner district, where at least 208 people were killed and “10 to 12 entire villages” were partially buried, officials said. “They could be trapped under the rubble of their homes or swept away by floodwaters,” said Asfandiyar Khattak, head of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Provincial Disaster Management Authority. “Separately, in Shangla district, dozens of people are also reported missing,” Khattak added.

The spokesman for the province’s rescue agency said that around 2,000 rescue workers were involved across nine districts, where rain was still hampering efforts. “The operation to rescue



Volunteers carry food, medical and other supplies for flood victims, in Buner district. — AFP

Most of the deaths, 317, were reported in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where monsoon rains that are only expected to intensify in the days ahead drove flooding and landslides that collapsed houses

people trapped under debris is ongoing,” said Bilal Ahmad Faizi. “The chances of those buried under the debris surviving are very slim,” he added. Journalists in Buner saw half-buried vehicles and belongings lying strewn in the sludge, with mud covering houses and shops.

After days without power, the electricity supply was restored on Sunday afternoon. A grave digger, Qaiser Ali Shah, said that he dug 29 burial places in the last two days. “I have also dug six graves for children. With each grave, it felt as though I was digging it for my own child,” he said. “For the first time,

my body simply refused to carry me through. That’s why today I apologised and said I cannot do this work anymore.”

Flooded roads hampered the movement of rescue vehicles, as a few villagers worked to cut fallen trees to clear the way after the water receded. “Our belongings are scattered, ruined and are in bad shape,” shopkeeper Noor Muhammad said as he used a shovel to remove mud. “The shops have been destroyed along with everything else. Even the little money people had has been washed away,” he added. The provincial government has declared the severely affected mountainous districts of Buner, Bajaur, Swat, Shangla, Mansehra and Battagram as disaster-hit areas.

On Saturday, hundreds gathered for mass funerals, where bodies wrapped in blood-stained white shawls were laid out on the village ground. Fallen trees and straw debris were scattered across nearby fields, while residents shovelled mud out of their homes.

Pakistan’s meteorological department has forecast “torrential rains” with monsoon activity “likely to intensify” from Sunday onwards.

Iran said it stood ready to provide “any cooperation and assistance aimed at alleviating the suffering” in neighbouring Pakistan, while Pope Leo XIV addressed the flooding with prayers “for all those who suffer because of this calamity”. — AFP

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Advertisement No. (28/2025)

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Tender Number	Description of Tender	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE/24/144	Construction of Hay Al Salam Park at Bousher (Re-Call)	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/24/267	Protection works at Midinat Al Sultan Qaboos	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/24/290	Supply Trolley and Supply & Installation of Tow Hitch Hook on (2-Tone) Tripper for Muscat Municipality (Re-Call)	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/083	Material Testing for Muscat Municipality Projects (Re-Call)	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/109	Consultancy Services for Supervision Services for Muscat Municipality Projects (Unit Rate Basis)	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/110	Maintenance Works for Flag Pole at Al Khuwair	24/08/2025	01/09/2025
PRE/25/111	Development & Beautification Works at Sarooj Beach	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/112	Cybersecurity Consultancy Services & ISO 27001 Certification for Muscat Municipality (Stage One)	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/113	Supply of Pesticides (Re-Call)	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/114	Consultancy Services for Detailed Design for Seeb Fish Market & A'Seeb Central Souq	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/115	Supply & Installation of Gypsum Ceiling Panels at Ghala Warehouse	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/116	Design,supply, & Installation of Lighting on the road leading to the cemetery at Al Amerat	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/117	Construction of Multiple Roads & Junctions at A'seeb	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/118	Consultancy Services for Development of Industrial Area at Al-Mabelah	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/119	Renovation Works at Ghala Warehouse	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/120	Entrtprise Mobile Management Solution	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/121	Network Detection & Response (NDR) Solution	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/122	Identity & Access Management (IAM) Solutioin	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/123	Supply & Installation of GPU Infrastructure & Backup Licences	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/124	Remedial Works For Bridges at Muscat Governorate (Package 2)	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/125	Consultancy Services for Design of Storm Water Drainage System in Al Ghubra North Area	04/09/2025	25/09/2025
PRE/25/126	Management, Maintenance, Leasing and Rent Collection of Muscat Municipality Properties	04/09/2025	25/09/2025

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WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A man rides a motorcycle past a destroyed car, following deadly clashes in Sweida. — Reuters

SYRIAN PRESIDENT STRESSES UNIFYING COUNTRY PEACEFULLY

DAMASCUS: Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa has said the battle to unify his country after years of civil war “should not be with blood”, rejecting any partition and accusing Israel of meddling in the south. His remarks, released by state TV on Sunday, came as hundreds demonstrated in south Syria’s Sweida province, denouncing sectarian violence last month and calling for the right to self-determination for the province.

“We still have another battle ahead of us to unify Syria, and it should not be with blood and military force... it should be through some kind of understanding because Syria is tired of war,” Sharaa said during a dialogue session involving notables from the northwest province of Idlib and other senior officials. “I do not see Syria as at risk of division. Some people desire a process of dividing Syria and trying to establish cantons... this matter is impossible,” he said. “Some parties seek to gain power through regional power, Israel or others. This is also extremely difficult and cannot be implemented,” he said.

At the protest in Sweida, some demonstrators waved flags and called for self-determination for the region. A week of bloodshed in Sweida began on July 13 with clashes between Druze fighters and Sunni Bedouin, but rapidly escalated, drawing in government forces, with Israel also carrying out strikes. Syrian authorities have said their forces intervened to stop the clashes, but witnesses, Druze factions and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights have accused them of siding with the Bedouin and committing abuses against the Druze.

Sharaa said that Sweida “witnessed many violations from all sides... some members of the security forces and army in Syria also carried out some violations”. The state is required “to hold all perpetrators of violations to account”, whatever their affiliation, he added. “Israel is intervening directly in Sweida, seeking to implement policies aimed at weakening the state in general or finding excuses to interfere in ongoing policies in the southern region,” Sharaa said.

Israel, which has its own Druze community, has said it has acted to defend the minority group as well as enforce its demands for the demilitarisation of southern Syria. Syria’s new authorities are also in talks with a semi-autonomous Kurdish administration that runs swathes of the country’s north and northeast and has called for decentralisation, which Damascus has rejected.

Implementation of a March 10 deal on integrating the Kurds’ semi-autonomous civil and military institutions into the state has been held up by differences between the parties. “We are now discussing the mechanisms for implementation” of the deal, Sharaa said. — AFP

DR CONGO PEACE PLAN SHARED WITH GOVT, M23: QATARI OFFICIAL

DOHA: A draft agreement to end fighting between the Democratic Republic of Congo’s army and the Rwanda-backed M23 group has been shared with the government in Kinshasa and the armed group, a Qatari official with knowledge of the negotiations said on Sunday.

The official involved in mediation efforts announced the “preparation and sharing of a draft peace agreement with both parties as part of the ongoing Doha process”, with Doha set to host “an important

round of negotiations” soon.

The Congolese government and the M23 signed a declaration of principles on July 19 in Qatar, aiming to ink a peace deal by August 18.

The Qatari official said that the timeline had not been met but “both parties have responded positively to the facilitator and expressed a willingness to continue negotiations”.

“We recognise the challenges on the ground and hope they

can be overcome promptly through dialogue and genuine commitment,” the official added.

Since taking up arms again at the end of 2021, the M23 armed group has seized swathes of land in eastern DRC with Rwanda’s backing, triggering a spiralling humanitarian crisis. A fresh surge of unrest broke out early this year when the M23 captured the key cities of Goma and Bukavu, setting up their own administrations.

— AFP

Hamas rejects Israel’s Gaza relocation plan

PALESTINIAN

group Hamas said on Sunday that Israel’s plan to relocate residents from Gaza City constitutes a “new wave of genocide and displacement” for hundreds of thousands of residents in the area. The group said the planned deployment of tents and other shelter equipment by Israel into southern Gaza was a “blatant deception”.

The Israeli military has said it is preparing to provide tents and other equipment starting from Sunday ahead of its plan to relocate residents from combat zones to the south of the enclave “to ensure their safety”.

Hamas said in a statement that the deployment of tents under the guise of humanitarian purposes is a blatant deception intended to “cover up a brutal crime that the occupation forces prepare to execute”. Israel said earlier this month that it intended to launch a new offensive to seize control of northern Gaza City, the enclave’s largest urban centre. The plan has raised international alarm over the fate of the demolished strip, which is home to about 2.2 million people.

The war began when Hamas attacked southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and taking 251 hostages, according to Israeli authorities.

About 20 of the remaining 50 hostages in Gaza are believed to be still alive. Israel’s subsequent military assault against Hamas has killed over 61,000 Palestinians, Gaza’s health ministry says. It



A man and young children push a cart carrying a water tank at the Bureij camp. — AFP

Hamas said in a statement that the deployment of tents under the guise of humanitarian purposes is a blatant deception intended to “cover up a brutal crime that the occupation forces prepare to execute”

has also caused a hunger crisis, internally displaced most of Gaza’s population and left much of the enclave in ruins.

Meanwhile, thousands of Israelis took part in a nationwide strike on Sunday in support of families of hostages held in Gaza, calling on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to reach an agreement with Hamas to end the war and release the remaining captives. Demonstrators waved Israeli flags and carried photos of hostages as whistles, horns and drums echoed at rallies across the country, while some protesters blocked streets and highways, including the main route

between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

Ahead of Sunday, some businesses and institutions said they would allow staff to join the nationwide strike, which was called by the hostages’ families. While some businesses closed, many also remained open across the country on what is a working day in Israel.

On Sunday, Netanyahu told the cabinet: “Those who call today for an end to the war without defeating Hamas are not only hardening Hamas’ position and delaying the release of our hostages. They are also ensuring that the horrors of October 7 will repeat themselves over and over again.” — Reuters



IRAQ STARTS WORK ON IS MASS GRAVE

BAGHDAD: Iraqi authorities have begun excavating the site of a mass grave believed to contain thousands of victims of the IS group near Mosul city, the project’s director said on Sunday. The first phase, which was launched on August 10, includes surface-level excavation at the Khasfa site, director Ahmed al Assadi said. A correspondent visiting the site in northern Iraq said the team unearthed human skulls buried in the sand. Khasfa is located near Mosul, where IS had established the capital of their self-declared “caliphate” before being defeated in Iraq in late 2017.

— AFP

AGGRESSIVE ATTACKS

Israeli strikes target energy site in Yemen



Israel said it targeted an energy infrastructure site in Yemen’s capital Sanaa. Al Masirah TV reported “an aggression targeting the Haziz power station” south of the city. There were no immediate reports of casualties. A photographer reported significant damage at the site. An employee of the power station said that “two aggressive strikes by the Israeli enemy” hit the site in the early morning, but there were no casualties. — AFP

FIRE BATTLEGROUND

250 flee as Turkish rescuers battle wildfire



More than 250 people were evacuated overnight as a wildfire raged on the Gallipoli peninsula flanking the Dardanelles Strait, where Turkish firefighters were battling to quench the blaze, officials said. “As a precaution, 251 residents from five villages were relocated to safe areas,” Canakkale governor Omer Toraman wrote on X. Footage showed the hillsides illuminated by bright flames while huge clouds of smoke poured into the night air. — AFP

SECURITY OPERATION

Iran forces kill seven gunmen in southeast



Iranian security forces on Sunday killed seven members of a group in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan. Deputy provincial governor Ali Velayatipour said the gunmen, all members of the Ansar al Furqan group, were killed in the early hours of Sunday. The militants “intended to attack sensitive centres and military and law enforcement bases”, Velayatipour said. On Saturday, gunmen killed a police officer in a shootout in the province. — AFP

SHORTTAKES



A man stands in front of a burnt house in ruins, northwestern Spain. — AFP

SPAIN PLANS ‘CLIMATE PACT’ FOR FIRE-HIT REGION

MADRID: Spanish leader Pedro Sanchez promised on Sunday a “national pact” to deal with the climate emergency, as he visited a western region battling devastating wildfires. Spain is entering its third week of heatwave alerts and firefighters are continuing to battle blazes in the northwest and west of the country, with army units deployed to help contain the flames.

France and Italy had earlier sent water bombers to an air base near Salamanca to help with the firefighting efforts. “The government of Spain will work now so that in September we can have the bases of this national pact to mitigate and adapt to the climate emergency”, said Prime Minister Sanchez during a visit to Ourense in the northwestern province of Galicia.

He said he wanted to do “everything possible and even more” to ensure victims of the fires returned to a normal life. The northwest and west of the country have been hard-hit by the fires, particularly the regions of Castile and Leon, Galicia, Asturias and Extremadura. — AFP

HURRICANE ERIN LASHES CARIBBEAN



Offshore Hurricane Erin was downgraded to a Category 3 storm early on Sunday, as rain lashed Caribbean islands and weather officials warned of possible flash floods and landslides. The first hurricane of what is expected to be a particularly intense Atlantic season, Erin briefly strengthened into a “catastrophic” Category 5 storm before its wind speeds. It is expected to lash several Caribbean islands with heavy rain and strong winds but not make landfall. Hurricane Erin was located about 225 kilometres north of San Juan, Puerto Rico, when it was gauged as a Category 3 storm with maximum sustained winds of 205 kilometres per hour. — AFP

AIR CANADA TO RESUME FLIGHTS AFTER GOVT DIRECTIVE ENDS STRIKE

TORONTO: Air Canada said it will resume flying after the country’s industrial relations board ordered an end to a strike by 10,000 flight attendants that effectively shut down the airline and snarled summer travel. The Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) “directed Air Canada to resume airline operations and for all Air Canada and Air Canada Rouge flight attendants to resume their duties by 14:00 EDT on August 17, 2025”, the airline said in a statement.

Canada’s flag carrier warned it would take “several days before its operations return to normal.” Some flights are still set to be cancelled over the next seven to 10 days, it added. Air Canada cabin crew walked off the job early on Saturday over a wage dispute. Canada’s labour policy minister, Patty Hajdu, invoked a legal provision to halt the strike and force both sides into binding arbitration.

“The directive, under section 107 of the Canada Labour Code

and the CIRB’s order, ends the strike at Air Canada that resulted in the suspension of more than 700 flights”, the Montreal-based carrier said. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), which is representing the workers, sought wage increases as well as to address uncompensated ground work, including during the boarding process. It had previously said its members would remain on strike until the government formally issued an order that they return to work. — AFP

EU leaders to join Zelensky in US for Ukraine talks

EUROPEAN

leaders will join Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky during his visit to Washington seeking an end to Moscow’s attack, after President Donald Trump dropped his push for a ceasefire following an Alaska summit with Russian leader Vladimir Putin. Securing a ceasefire in Ukraine, more than three years after the Kremlin ordered the attack, had been one of Trump’s core demands before the summit, to which Ukraine and its European allies were not invited. But after the meeting yielded no breakthrough, Trump ruled out an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine — a move that would appear to favour Putin, who has long argued for negotiations on a final peace deal.

Ukraine and its European allies have criticised Putin’s stance as a way to buy time and press Russia’s battlefield advances. The leaders heading to Washington on Monday to try and bend Trump’s ear on the matter include British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Nato Secretary-General Mark Rutte. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who is also going to the White House, said on X she would welcome Zelensky on Sunday for a meeting in Brussels, the other European leaders would join by video.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen hailed US President Donald Trump’s proposal to offer Nato-style security guarantees to Ukraine, as she hosted Ukraine leader Volodymyr Zelensky ahead of a key meeting in the White House the next day. “We welcome President Trump’s willingness to contribute to (Nato) Article 5-like security guarantees for Ukraine and the coalition of the willing, including the European Union, is ready to do its share”, von der Leyen said.

Also heading to Washington will be Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Finnish President Alexander Stubbs, who get on well with Trump. The German government, which confirmed Merz was going, said it would try to emphasise “interest in a swift peace agreement in Ukraine”.



Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen attend a joint press conference in Brussels. — AFP

Trump had briefed Zelensky and European leaders on his flight back from Alaska to Washington, saying afterwards that “it was determined by all that the best way to end the horrific war between Russia and Ukraine is to go directly to a peace agreement which would end the war”. Ceasefire agreements “often times do not hold up”, Trump argued on his Truth Social platform.

But Zelensky has appeared unconvinced by the change of tack, saying on Saturday that it “complicates the situation”. If Moscow lacks “the will to carry out a simple order to stop the strikes, it may take a lot of effort to get Russia to have the will to implement (something) far greater — peaceful coexistence with its neighbours for decades”, he said on social media. European leaders for their part have expressed unease over Trump’s outreach to Putin from the outset.

Trump expressed support during his call with Zelensky and European leaders for a proposal by Putin to take full control of two eastern Ukrainian regions that Russia largely controls in exchange for freezing the frontline in two others, an official briefed on the talks said. Putin “de facto demands that Ukraine leave Donbas”, an area consisting of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions in eastern Ukraine, the source said.

In exchange, Russian forces would halt their offensive in the Black Sea port region of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia in southern Ukraine, where the main cities are still under Ukrainian control. Several months into its full-scale attack of Ukraine, Russia in September 2022 claimed to have annexed all four Ukrainian regions even though its troops still do not fully control any of them. “The Ukrainian president refused to leave Donbas”, the source said.

Trump notably also said the United States was prepared to provide Ukraine security guarantees, an assurance Merz hailed as “significant progress”. But there was a scathing assessment of the summit outcome from the European Union’s top diplomat Kaja Kallas, who accused Putin of seeking to “drag out negotiations” with no commitment to end the bloodshed. “The harsh reality is that Russia has no intention of ending this war any time soon”, Kallas said.

Senior US envoy Steve Witkoff on Sunday said he was “hopeful” of a “productive meeting” with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and European leaders. “I’m hopeful that we have a productive meeting on Monday, we get to real consensus, we’re able to come back to the Russians and push this peace deal forward and get it done”, Witkoff said. — AFP

Serbia’s president vows ‘strong response’ after days of unrest

BELGRADE: Serbia’s president on Sunday vowed a “strong” response to anti-government protests, after nearly a week of violent clashes involving his supporters, police and demonstrators across the country. Clashes have erupted in the capital, Belgrade and other cities for five nights in a row, with fireworks, stones, stun grenades and tear gas used.

More than 130 police officers have been injured so far, the right-wing president, Aleksandar Vucic, said at a press conference in Belgrade, with dozens of citizens also reporting injuries and seeking medical assistance. On Saturday, violence flared in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Valjevo, where a small group of masked men attacked and set fire to the empty offices of Vucic’s ruling Serbian Progressive Party.

“You will see the full determination of the Serbian state. We will use everything at our

disposal to restore law, peace and order”, Vucic said. He added that the government needed a few days to prepare “the legal and formal framework” for the response.

“It will be very different from what you have seen so far”, he added, without disclosing details, but said that declaring a state of emergency was not being considered. Vucic compared anti-government protesters with “terrorists”, a term he has frequently repeated since mass demonstrations began late last year.

Almost daily protests have gripped Serbia since November, following the collapse of a railway station roof that killed 16 people. The tragedy became a symbol of deep-rooted corruption in the Balkan nation, with demands for a transparent investigation growing into calls for early elections. At their peak, the protests drew hundreds of thousands onto the streets.



Demonstrators stand in front of riot police officers during a rally, in Valjevo. — AFP

The mostly peaceful demonstrations deteriorated earlier this week when large groups of pro-government supporters — attacked protesters. That sparked violent clashes, further fuelled by videos shared online showing police

striking unarmed demonstrators with batons. Police have denied allegations of brutality and accused demonstrators of attacking officers.

The European Union’s commissioner for enlargement, Marta Kos, earlier this week said

violence reported at protests was “deeply concerning”. Vucic said he had also received personal messages from other European officials recently, but did not provide further details. The protests were also being followed in Russia, which remains a close Serbian ally despite Belgrade’s declared path to the EU.

Russia’s foreign ministry issued a statement saying that it may offer further support to Vucic and describing the protests as “violent riots”. “Russia cannot remain unresponsive to what is happening in brotherly Serbia”, it said. While the protests have so far led to the resignation of the prime minister and the collapse of the government, Vucic has remained defiant. He has repeatedly rejected calls for early elections and denounced the demonstrations as part of a foreign plot to overthrow him, claiming that “billions of euros” had allegedly been invested in the scheme. — AFP

OPINION

AI in the classroom through students’ eyes



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

OVER the last couple of years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been the topic of heated debates among a number of groups: software developers, Human Resource departments in companies, and of course, teachers at every level. The one voice that seems to be missing is that of students.

Typically, the education sector is dealing with AI in two ways: excited about its potential as a learning tool and worried about its effects on the learning curve.

Factors like students not being able to think or write on their own are coupled with the perceived advantages of how learning can be individualised and curated for specific needs.

But a major gap in formal and informal research is the students’ voices. What exactly do they think AI can do to transform the way they learn, what they learn and how they learn?

The answers are complex, much like everything else. The Harvard School of Education declares that “the world is

changing – that is the big takeaway from a new report on teen and young adult perspectives on AI ...”.

In their paper, students admitted that they used AI to write their papers, at times entirely, or in parts. However, they also admitted to doing much more with it.

Often, senior secondary and tertiary level students said that they used AI to help them to start an essay, or as a personal tutor to help them understand a topic better.

Students of literature say that they use AI to understand literary history as well as terms and theories, before or after a class. Similarly, translation students used it to look up culturally appropriate terms.

Another study found that only 4 per cent of students of 14-22 years used AI on a daily basis. 53 per cent of respondents said that they used AI to access information and 51 per cent to brainstorm. Young adults are said to use AI to seek answers they are too nervous to ask their parents or other adults.

In fact, this has become a cause for concern as another young adult said that

Bullying and disinformation are seen by students as being the biggest challenges of using AI and technology in general

adults need to be aware that AI provides all kinds of reliable and non-reliable answers to confused teenagers.

The creative use of AI is one of the most important positive uses. Young adults use it for editing pictures, making music and creating digital art.

Bullying and disinformation are seen by students as being the biggest challenges of using AI and technology in general. This is because of the possibility of creating morphed images and deep fakes which are then circulated, causing distress and disrepute to the subjects of such images.

We tend to think of Gen Z as children navigating a turbulent world. But they actually need to be seen as responsible adults whose voice deserves to be heard and followed upon.

We also know that Artificial Intelligence is now a force for good and evil, but we are less aware of the views of those who are actually growing up with AI around them.

It is, in fact, their voices which need to be heard, and their solutions to be implemented.

STUDY URGES ACTION TO PRESERVE FADING HERITAGE

ON warm desert nights, when the air is thick with the scent of frankincense and the stars burn bright above the palm groves, Omani folktales come alive. They travel on the lips of elders, in the pauses between sips of kahwa, in the gentle rise and fall of voices telling of cunning foxes, enchanted trees, and lions turned to stone. These tales are not just entertainment — they are the memory of a people, stitched into words, passed from one generation’s heart to the next.



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Yet today, those voices are growing faint. The steady hum of digital screens threatens to replace the crackle of fireside storytelling. Children are more likely to meet Cinderella than the Lion of Izki, to wander Little Red Riding Hood’s forest before setting foot in the deserts or wadis of their own imagination.

Fearing that this rich heritage might slip away, my colleagues, Fatema al Rubaiey and Gerard Dineen, and I — a research team at SQU embarked on a research journey to trace the fate of Omani folktales. With the generous support of SQU, we set out to answer a question that has grown more urgent with each passing year: are our stories still being told in their true voice, or are they slowly being reshaped, diluted, and forgotten in the rush of modern life?

Using Hasan El Shamy’s tale-type index, we examined dozens of Omani folktales published in English, tracing their origins, themes, and cultural markers. Many remained firmly rooted in the Omani landscape — stories of sacred places, tribal rivalries, and supernatural interventions that could only have been born here. ‘The Lion of Izki’ tells of a predator turned to stone through the power of faith. ‘The Cunning Fox’ reimagines the universal trickster with the sly resourcefulness of desert life. These narratives carry the scent of palm groves, the sound of falaj water, and the resilience of those who live between mountains and sea.

But we also found tales altered beyond recognition or lifted from far-off lands: An Omani Cinderella and the escapades of Abu Nawas transplanted into unfamiliar villages. Even Little Red Riding Hood, far from her European forest, now roams Omani classrooms. Cultural exchange can enrich, but it becomes harmful when borrowed narratives crowd out our own.

More troubling still, Omani folktales have no place on Unesco’s list of intangible cultural heritage. Without official recognition or a systematic approach to collecting and classifying them, they remain unprotected.

Beyond survival: Tackling poverty’s true challenge

SOME countries have done it. They have ticked the box. Extreme poverty? Handled, done, and dusted. Or at least, that’s what the stats say. And yes, that is a massive achievement.

When people finally have clean water, electricity that works, schools that function, hospitals that treat you without asking for your life savings, and jobs that pay more than a bus fare; that is real progress. But getting out of extreme poverty does not mean you are done. It just means you are not drowning anymore. You are on dry land. That’s great, but the real journey starts after poverty ends. Because “not poor” is not the same as “doing well.” It is just step one.

Poverty comes in many forms. Absolute (or extreme) poverty is the most visible, lacking access to basic needs like food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Relative poverty, on the other hand, refers to those who may not be starving but are excluded from a decent standard of living compared to others in their society. Then there is multidimensional poverty, which goes even further, looking at things like years of schooling, sanitation, access to clean water, and healthcare. Globally, over 1.1 billion people are poor in multiple ways, and more than half of them are children.

Poverty is most intense in areas where healthcare systems are fragile, education is poor, and basic infrastructure is weak or non-existent. In many regions, poverty goes hand in hand with prolonged conflict, political instability, or environmental degradation.

Child poverty remains exceptionally high in areas with limited access to quality schooling, food, and healthcare, and it exists across both rural and urban zones in many parts of the world.

Climate change is now one of the leading threats to poverty reduction. According to the World Bank, climate-related disasters could



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Child poverty remains exceptionally high in some areas. — Reuters file photo

push between 32 and 132 million additional people into extreme poverty by 2030. People who already lack access to savings, insurance, or reliable infrastructure are the least able to recover from floods, droughts, or other environmental shocks.

The consequences of poverty reach far beyond empty wallets. It fuels child mortality, school dropouts, malnutrition, chronic illness, and long-term unemployment.

It limits social mobility, fuels inequality, and can even destabilise entire societies. Once families fall below the line, it can be incredibly hard to break the cycle. Poverty traps form when education, health, and employment opportunities are so limited that even basic progress becomes impossible without external support.

Global goals exist, but progress is too slow. The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals aim to end extreme poverty by 2030, yet projections show over 600 million people may still be living in poverty by then. Between 2024 and 2030, only 69 million people are expected to move above the extreme poverty threshold, less than half the number who did in the six years before the pandemic.

One of the most effective solutions is simple: direct, unconditional cash transfers. Giving

families regular financial support (without hoops to jump through) has been shown to improve school attendance, boost health, and reduce hunger.

Social protection programmes that focus on children have also shown long-term impact, helping reduce intergenerational poverty and supporting development in critical early years. When debt relief is offered to low-income governments, they can redirect those funds toward building schools, hospitals, and sustainable infrastructure.

In 2024, a global anti-poverty alliance was launched by over 80 countries, aiming to lift 500 million people out of poverty through food programmes, maternal care, agricultural support, and education. But at the same time, some high-income governments have started cutting foreign aid, despite decades of evidence showing that well-managed aid works.

The bottom line is that poverty is not a technical problem; it’s a moral and political one. We know what causes it, we know how to reduce it, and we know which programmes make a real difference. What’s missing is the urgency to act. Because in the end, poverty is not just about what people lack; it’s about what society has chosen not to provide.

Empowerment is not just a hashtag...



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The writer is author,
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communications
professional

THERE is always a storm in the soul of youth — not a storm that destroys, but one that clears the sky. A wild and necessary force that sweeps away the dust from the windows of a world grown too comfortable with silence. Around the globe, young people are breaking barriers. Their voices are loud, their ideas are fresh and their determination is unshakable.

We often refer to youth as “future leaders.” It sounds visionary and inspiring, doesn’t it? But here is what we miss: young people are not waiting to lead; they are already leading. They are not confined to theory, but they are living its consequences. They are not reading history, but they are writing it, right now.

It is time to drop the slogans and speak the truth. Recognising the potential of youth is not enough as they need real empowerment which must be active, intentional and inclusive. Empowerment is not merely inviting youth to the table; it is letting them redesign it. It is not offering a seat at the table, or a one-off workshop, or a catchy campaign slogan.

True empowerment means giving youth the microphone not just the questions. It means funding their ideas not just retweeting their speeches. Empowerment is more

than encouragement; it is giving access to quality education, meaningful opportunities, essential resources and influential platforms. It means cultivating environments where young people can lead, make decisions and fully participate in society.

Empowerment is no longer a gift handed down from a podium; it is a promise fulfilled through action. It is about building systems where youth voices are not only heard, but respected; where their ideas don’t merely echo, but evolve.

To empower youth is to break economic barriers, so they can launch businesses — not just search for jobs. It means including them in leadership — not just in hashtags. And it is not the responsibility of governments alone. Empowering youth is a shared responsibility to be shouldered by educators, families, communities, the private sector and civil society.

Adults must become partners working to dismantle systemic barriers and uplift youth-led initiatives. Mentorship, inclusion and genuine collaboration are essential as well. When young people are trusted and equipped to lead, they do not disappoint.

Observing the International Youth Day is more than a date on the calendar. It is a call to action — a moment to listen to the thunder in young voices. It is a mirror that asks us: What have we done with the dreams

Recognising the potential of youth is not enough as they need real empowerment which must be active, intentional, and inclusive

they trusted us with?

Every year on August 12, the world pauses to recognise the energy, creativity and potential of youth. But beyond celebration, this day marks a reminder of the critical role young people play in shaping our shared future and the responsibility we all bear in empowering them to do so.

This year’s theme, “Green Skills for Youth: Towards a Sustainable World”, underscores a critical truth: the climate clock is ticking, and it is youth who will turn it back. They are not waiting for change — they are creating it. They are planting it, coding it, designing it and demanding it. In both villages and cities, young people are learning how to turn waste into energy, farm sustainably and innovate in harmony with the Earth.

But if we truly want a sustainable planet, we must invest in sustainable skills and empower youth at every level. So let the world not only applaud young people, but stand beside them. Fund their innovations, share seats at decision-making tables, and welcome their challenges and leadership. The world is not theirs someday; it is theirs now.

To all young people: You are not just seeds of change. You are the storm, the soil and the sunlight. You are not the “hope for tomorrow”, you are the answer to today. Hence, keep dreaming, keep disrupting and demanding more.

BOLIVIAN RIGHT EYES RETURN IN ELECTIONS MARKED BY ECONOMIC CRISIS

CLARE BYRNE

Polls in Bolivia opened on Sunday for presidential and congressional elections marked by a deep economic crisis that has seen the left implode and the right eyeing its first shot at power in 20 years.

The Andean country is struggling through its worst crisis in a generation, marked by annual inflation of almost 25 per cent and critical shortages of dollars and fuel.

Polls show voters poised to punish the ruling Movement towards Socialism (MAS), in power since Evo Morales was elected Bolivia’s first Indigenous president in 2005.

More than 7.9 million Bolivians are eligible to vote, choosing between eight presidential candidates as well as electing 166 members of Bolivia’s bicameral legislature.

Oscar Hassenteufel, the head of the Bolivian Supreme Electoral Tribunal, officially kicked off voting, which will run until 4:00 pm local time (2000 GMT). Centre-right business tycoon Samuel Doria Medina and right-wing ex-president Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga are the favourites to succeed Morales’s unpopular successor, Luis Arce, who is not seeking re-election.

Polls showed Doria Medina, 66, and Quiroga, 65, neck-and-neck on around 20 per cent, with six other candidates, including left-wing Senate president Andronico Rodriguez, trailing far behind. A run-off will take place on October 19 if no candidate wins an outright majority. The two frontrunners have vowed radical changes to Bolivia’s big-state economic model if elected.

They want to slash public spending, open the country to foreign investment and boost ties with the United States, which were downgraded under the combative Morales, a self-described anti-capitalist anti-imperialist.

Analysts say the election resembles that of Argentina in 2023, when voters dumped the long-ruling leftist Peronists and elected libertarian candidate Javier Milei in a bid to end a deep crisis.

“What people are looking for now, beyond a shift from left to right, is a return to stability,” Daniela Osorio Michel, a Bolivian political scientist at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies, said. Unlike Milei, who was a political newcomer, Doria Medina and Quiroga are both on their fourth run for president.

Doria Medina, a millionaire former planning minister, made a fortune in cement before going on to build Bolivia’s biggest skyscraper and acquire the local Burger King franchise.

Seen as a moderate, he has vowed to halt inflation and bring back fuel and dollars within 100 days, without cutting anti-poverty programmes.

The tough-talking Quiroga, who trained as an engineer in the United States, served as vice-president under Hugo Banzer and then briefly as president when Banzer stepped down to fight cancer in 2001. — AFP

In high-stakes summit, Trump, not Putin, budes

DONALD

Trump wanted to go bold - a high-pomp, high-stakes summit with

Vladimir Putin to test whether the Russian leader would compromise on the Ukraine war.

In the end, it looks like it was Trump, not Putin, who budged.

Putin, visibly delighted as he stepped foot in the West for the first time since ordering the 2022 war, made no apparent concession at the talks at an Alaska air base.

In a brief joint media appearance with Trump, who unusually took no questions, Putin again spoke of addressing the “root causes” of the Ukraine war and warned Kyiv and Europeans against disrupting “emerging progress” with the United States, the top defender of Ukraine under Trump’s predecessor Joe Biden.

Trump, who bills himself as a master negotiator, acknowledged there was “no deal” but said there were “very few” areas of disagreement, although he was vague on what they were.

But posting hours later on his Truth Social account, Trump said he wanted Russia and Ukraine to “go directly to a peace agreement, which would end the war” and not a ceasefire.

Trump’s own administration had been pushing a ceasefire for months, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signing on after intense pressure from Trump. Putin had repeatedly rejected truce offers and kept up attacks on Ukraine, seeking to maximise battlefield advantage.

Trump had vowed to be firm with Putin after wide criticism of the US president’s cowed appearance before him at a 2018 summit in Helsinki.

But Putin again found ways to flatter and trigger Trump, who in his second term constantly speaks unprompted about his many grievances.

Putin told Trump before the cameras that there would have been no war - which Putin himself launched - if Trump were president in 2022 rather than Biden, a frequent



US President Donald Trump shakes hands with Russian President Vladimir Putin, as they meet to negotiate for an end to the war in Ukraine, at Joint Base in Alaska, US, last Friday. — Reuters



SHAUN TANDON

The writer covers State Department for the international news agency AFP

Trump talking point.

Trump bemoaned the effect on ties with Putin of what he again called the “hoax” of the findings by US intelligence that Russia meddled in the 2016 election to help him.

In an interview with Fox News host Sean Hannity after the summit, Trump said that “one of the most interesting things” Putin told him was about... the US voting system.

Trump said approvingly that Putin - who has held power in Russia since 2000 and was declared the winner of elections last year with 88 per cent of the vote - told him of the risks of mail-in ballots and said of Trump’s 2020 loss to Biden, “You won that election by so much.”

US election authorities and experts have found no evidence of wide-scale fraud from mail-in ballots in the 2020 election, which Trump, uniquely in US history, refused to concede.

Trump’s Democratic rivals voiced outrage that the summit secured no breakthrough and said it only served to normalise Putin, who faces an arrest warrant from the

International Criminal Court.

Experts said it was too early to write off the summit completely, as much is not known about what was discussed behind closed doors. Trump will meet Zelensky on Monday at the White House.

Jennifer Kavanagh, director of military analysis at Defence Priorities, which backs US restraint, said that Trump’s critics have been proven wrong in saying he would “give Ukraine to Putin or force Kyiv to accept surrender.”

“His focus has been and remains getting Putin to the negotiating table. Mr Trump deserves credit rather than condemnation for his efforts so far,” she said.

But Kristine Berzina, a senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund, said an initial read was that “Putin scored a victory by showing up, and Trump’s limited words and tense demeanour left Putin to control the narrative.”

“For a man so attached to showmanship, Trump unusually allowed Putin to be the star of what should have been the Trump show,” she said. — AFP

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Barcelona's Yamal celebrates scoring their third goal with Gavi. — Reuters

Barcelona open Liga title defence, strolling past nine-man Mallorca

MADRID: Spanish champions Barcelona opened their Liga campaign on Saturday with an island cruise as they played almost an hour against nine men on their way to a 3-0 victory in Mallorca. Barcelona's second-half stroll did not please coach Hansi Flick. "They're three important points, but I didn't like the match," he told broadcaster Movistar. "After going two goals up and following Mallorca's two red cards, I think the team only gave 50 per cent and I didn't like that." "Playing at 50 or 60 per cent is not possible against nine players." Two of Barcelona's Ballon d'Or nominees combined to put the visitors ahead after seven minutes, Lamine Yamal crossing for Raphinha to head in. Yamal played a key role in the second goal after 23 minutes. Mallorca defender Antonio Raillo headed away the teenager's shot and then fell to the ground. As the referee waved play on and Mallorca failed to clear, the ball fell to Ferran Torres. He fired home from the edge of the box. "If I would be on the other side of the decision, I also would not be happy but I always say to my team until the referee stops the match we have to continue," said Flick, speaking in English at the post-match press conference. "The referee didn't stop the match so there you go. That they are unhappy with that decision, I can also imagine." Manu Morlanes was one of two Mallorca players booked for dissent as they told the referee he should have stopped the game. Ten minutes later, Morlanes received a second yellow for a challenge on the rampant Yamal and was sent off. — AFP

Al Nahda, Al Shabab kick off Elite League with victories

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 17

AL NAHDA Club kicked off their campaign in the Elite Football League with a comfortable 3-0 victory over their guests, Samayil, in a match held at Al Buraimi Sports Complex as part of the opening round of the competition.

Al Nahda entered the encounter with intensity, imposing their attacking style from the very first minutes. Their dominance was quickly rewarded with an early goal in the 9th minute, scored by Thani al Rashidi with a powerful header after a perfect cross from Ahed al Mushaikhi on the left side, registering the very first goal of the new season. Al Nahda continued pressing Samayil's defence and came close to doubling the lead on multiple occasions, but the visitors' goalkeeper and defenders stood firm. As the first half neared its end, Al Nahda were awarded a penalty after Hamad al Habsi was fouled inside the box by defender Ahmed al Jabri. Ahmed al Kaabi stepped up confidently and slotted the ball into the net in the 45+3 minute, giving his side a comfortable two-goal advantage at halftime.

In the second half, Al Nahda maintained their control on the field and managed to add a third goal in the 69th minute through Hamad al Habsi, who capitalised on a quick counterattack and calmly finished into the net, extending his team's lead to 3-0. On the other hand, Samayil tried to reduce the deficit but lacked the attacking solutions to truly threaten Al Nahda's goal. The match ended with a convincing 3-0 win for Al Nahda, securing their first three points of the season and sending a clear signal of their readiness to strongly compete for the league title. Meanwhile, Samayil left the match empty-handed after a performance that



As the first half neared its end, Al Nahda were awarded a penalty after Hamad al Habsi was fouled inside the box by defender Ahmed al Jabri.

fell short of matching last season's league runner-up. In another first-round match, Al Shabab's clash with Ibri ended in a 2-1 victory for the former, in a match hosted at Seeb Stadium. Al Shabab entered the match strongly from the opening minutes, with their players pressing Ibri's goal. However, the solid defending of Ibri denied an early breakthrough. On the other side, Ibri organised their play and came close to scoring on several occasions, most notably through Abdulrahman al Yaqoubi's strike

that hit the post in the 10th minute. Al Shabab responded with a dangerous effort when Al Ghafri's header also struck the post, before Ahed al Hudaifi finally broke the deadlock in the 15th minute, capitalising on a rebound from the goalkeeper inside the box to score Al Shabab's opener. Hatem al Rushdawi missed the chance to double the lead after failing to convert a penalty, as the first half ended 1-0 in Al Shabab's favour. In the second half, both sides continued exchanging attacks, with making tactical substitutions to refresh their squads. Al Shabab managed to add a second goal in the 77th minute through Mohammed al Ghafri, who exploited a defensive error and slotted the ball home. Ibri, however, clawed their way back into the match in the 86th minute when their foreign professional, Bisan Jakos, scored with a header from a set piece, igniting the final minutes of the game. Despite Ibri's heavy pressure, Al Shabab's defence held firm to secure the win. With this result, Shabab claimed their first three points of the league campaign, while Ibri left the match empty-handed.

U21 Youth Hockey League sees historic victories and rising competition

AHMED AL KABBII
MUSACT, AUG 17

The 2025 U21 Youth Hockey League witnessed an exciting round filled with goals. The last three matches resulted in a sweeping victory for Masirah over Sohar, a dominant win for Ahli Sidab against Saham, and an important triumph for Ittihad over Nasr. With these results, the total number of goals scored in the tournament has risen to 42 since its kickoff. Masirah Make History with an 18-Goal Win Masirah recorded a historic triumph over Sohar with an 18-0 victory at Sohar Sports Complex. The match began cautiously, but Masirah quickly imposed their attacking style, with Ahmed al Alawi opening the scoring in the 5th minute. By the second quarter, Masirah's frontline exploded, led by Abbas al Noufli, who netted a quick hat trick, closing the half with his team ahead 8-0. In the third quarter, Masirah



continued their dominance, adding five more goals courtesy of Abbas al Noufli, Ahmed al Alawi, and Al Baraa al Noufli, ending the period 13-0. The final quarter was a continuation of the goal festival, with five additional goals from Ahmed al Alawi, Fadhl al Noufli, Abbas al Noufli, Ahmed al Kathiri, and Nasser al Noufli. The referee's

whistle confirmed Masirah's record-breaking 18-0 victory. **AHLI SIDAB CRUSH SAHAM WITH 15 GOALS** In Group One, Ahli Sidab delivered a massive 15-0 victory over Saham at Sohar Sports Complex. The team opened aggressively, scoring four goals in the first

quarter through Anas al Siyabi, Mohammed al Alawi, Muthim al Wahaibi, and Laith al Wahaibi. They extended their dominance in the second quarter with goals from Badr al Maini, Abdullah al Dughaishi, and Laith Al Wahaibi, finishing the half 7-0. The third quarter saw a flurry of five more goals from Anas al Siyabi (two), Abdullah al Hasni, Ayad al Alawi, and Mohammed al Nasri, raising the tally to 12-0. In the fourth, Ahli Sidab capped their onslaught with three more goals from Anas al Siyabi (completing his hat trick), Said al Fazari, and Abdullah al Kathiri, sealing a crushing 15-0 victory. **ITTIHAD PREVAIL OVER NASR IN GROUP THREE** In Group Three, Ittihad secured a crucial 3-1 win over Nasr at the Sultan Qaboos Cultural and Sports Complex in Salalah. The first quarter ended goalless in a balanced contest. Ittihad broke the deadlock in the second

quarter with goals from Yassin Ibrahim and Awadh al Rawahi. In the third, Nasr pulled one back through Turki Barzgan, but Ittihad responded in the final quarter with a third goal from Mohammed Ghalib, ensuring their first three points of the tournament. With these results, Ahli Sidab top Group One with 3 points, while Saham remain without a tally. In Group Two, Masirah lead alone with 6 points from two big wins over Seeb and Sohar, while their rivals have yet to collect any points. As for Group Three, Ittihad and Salalah share the lead with 3 points each, while Nasr sit at the bottom with no points after two consecutive defeats. This round highlighted the dominance of Masirah and Ahli Sidab in Groups One and Two, while the competition remains wide open between Ittihad and Salalah in Group Three, promising more excitement in the coming rounds on the road to the final stages.

SHORT TAKES



Pakistan's Rizwan (L) and Azam during South Africa match in Cape. — AFP

AZAM, RIZWAN LEFT OUT OF PAKISTAN'S ASIA CUP SQUAD

LAHORE, Pakistan: Pakistan left out Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan from the T20 squad named Sunday for the Asia Cup and a warm-up tri-series beginning this month against Afghanistan and the United Arab Emirates.

Azam and Rizwan have been star performers in the shortest format in the past but have not played since December, which head coach Mike Hesson put down to other players performing well.

"We know what a fine player Babar (Azam) is," said Hesson.

"Babar has been asked to improve in certain areas, like taking on spin and in terms of his strike rate and he is working hard on these things.

"The players we have are performing well and having a positive impact," said Hesson.

Since Hesson took over as head coach in May, Pakistan have played three T20 series -- winning 3-0 at home but losing 2-1 away to Bangladesh. They then beat the West Indies 2-1 in the United States.

"Our focus is to win the tri-series and the Asia Cup and the aim is to peak from these pinnacle events," said Hesson.

All-rounder Salman Agha will lead the side which also sees the return of fast bowlers Mohammad Wasim and Salman Mirza.

Mirza took seven wickets in Bangladesh but was left out of the squad against the West Indies.

Opener Fakhar Zaman also returns after being injured for a one-day international series in the West Indies last week, which Pakistan lost 2-1.

The tri-series, which starts on August 29, and the Asia Cup from September 9 will both take place in the UAE.

PAKISTAN SQUAD: Salman Agha (captain), Saim Ayub, Fakhar Zaman, Sahibzada Farhan, Hasan Nawaz, Salman Mirza, Mohammad Haris, Mohammad Nawaz, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Hussain Talat, Sufiyan Muqeem, Abrar Ahmed, Khushdil Shah, Faheem Ashraf, Mohammad Wasim. — AFP



Sinner returns a shot against Terence during the Cincinnati Open. — Reuters

Alcaraz to face Sinner in Cincinnati ATP final

WORLD number one Jannik Sinner and hot rival Carlos Alcaraz will face off in a major final for the fourth time this season after both booked straight-set wins into the title match at the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Open on Saturday.

Defending champion Sinner ruthlessly subdued 136th-ranked qualifier Terence Atmane 7-6 (7/4), 6-2 while Spanish second seed Alcaraz defeated an ailing Alexander Zverev, who was suffering badly from the 32 Celsius heat and humidity, by 6-4, 6-3.

Alcaraz and Sinner have played for trophies this season in Rome, Roland Garros and Wimbledon, with the Italian winning their most recent at the All England Club last month.

Sinner, celebrating his 24th birthday, ended Frenchman Atmane's dream run and will now try to become the first man since Roger Federer in 2014-15 to win back-to-back titles in Cincinnati.

Sinner, tuning up for the US Open in his first tournament since winning Wimbledon, hasn't dropped a set en route to the final.

"It's a very, very tough challenge every time you play a new opponent," Sinner said. "In the later stages of the tournament, the pressure is on; they deserve to be there."

Alcaraz will also be playing in his second Cincy final after losing to Novak Djokovic in 2023.



Alcaraz in action during the Cincinnati Open at the Lindner Family Tennis Center. — Reuters

The Spaniard increased his ATP season match win lead to 53 in a year of five titles.

Alcaraz broke Zverev once in the opening set to claim it before the German, who is diabetic, began feeling poorly and took a medical timeout off court after the third game of the second set.

Zverev, who has retired in only two matches since 2014, came back out to finish what was a patchy match from Alcaraz, who double-faulted for times in the second game of the second set but won the last 12 points with Zverev running on fumes.

"We started well with good rallies, a good level," Alcaraz said. "All of a sudden, he felt bad and I was thinking more about how he was feeling instead of playing good tennis."

"It was tough and I just wish him all the

best." Alcaraz said he is keen to try and take his Wimbledon revenge on Sinner in the unorthodox Monday final.

"We always bring our best tennis. We raise each other's level. I'm ready to take the challenge," Alcaraz said.

"I will try and adjust my game better and correct what I did wrong in our last match. I want to be ready with my 100%. Mentally I'll be ready — I'm excited for Monday."

'PRESSURE WAS ON ME' Atmane gave birthday boy Sinner a Pokemon card shortly before they went on court, but he was in a less giving mood once they were underway.

But Sinner surrendered just three points in his first six service games as they went to the tiebreaker with neither man facing a break point.

Atmane double-faulted on the first point of the decider and Sinner was away, powering to a 5-2 lead and pocketing the set at his second opportunity.

"My experience helped in the first set," he said. "I'm very happy to go through to another final. "I tried to focus on myself, how I usually play, and then try to adapt a little bit to his game style," Sinner said. "And that's exactly what I did today."

"The pressure was on me. That's normal in the position where I am in — he was ready to fight." — AFP

Junior tennis team begins Arab U14 Championship in Tunisia

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 17

Oman's national junior tennis team will kick off their participation in the Arab Under-14 Championship, hosted by the Tunisian capital from August 17 to 23, with the participation of ten Arab countries competing for the title. The team will be represented by six players in both the boys' and girls' categories.

The tournament officially begins today following yesterday's draw for the opening rounds. Over the past two days, our players have completed their preparations through intensive training sessions held on the tournament courts. In addition, the squad benefited greatly from participating in a joint training camp in Egypt, organised by the Oman Tennis Federation. The camp, which lasted three weeks, included



a large group of Omani players from different age categories and featured numerous friendly matches and tournaments, providing valuable experience and technical readiness ahead of this championship.

The national team's delegation for the U14 competition includes: Ahmed al Balushi (Head of Delegation), Mohammed al Dairi

(Team Official), Sufiat Dube (boys' coach), Sergei Persikhin (girls' coach), along with players Moataz al Mazrouei, Abdulrahman al Rahbi and Azan al Busaidy, and female players Arin al Azkawi, Talia al Busaidy and Salma al Riyami. The ten participating countries are: Oman, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Lebanon,

Jordan, Syria and Iraq.

The matches will be played on clay courts at Marsa Club, presenting a new challenge for Omani players who are more accustomed to hard courts used in official competitions. Speaking about the preparations, Ahmed al Balushi, Head of Delegation, said, "This participation is very important for our U14 players, as this age group needs such opportunities to gain experience and collect international ranking points. We aim to achieve advanced positions in this championship. The players have prepared well through the Egypt camp, which lasted nearly three weeks, where they were trained and guided by specialists at the Smash Academy."

He added that the championship is crucial for helping players earn ranking points that will serve

them in future events. He praised the promising talent within this group and expressed hopes for their success, extending thanks to the Oman Tennis Federation for providing the necessary support and preparation, as well as to the Tunisian Tennis Federation for their cooperation and hospitality.

Player Abdulrahman al Rahbi said, "I am very happy to participate in this championship, which brings together a strong field of Arab players. Everyone is striving to achieve top positions and earn ranking points. We are well-prepared after the long camp in Egypt, which gave us strong technical benefits. Now it is up to us to give our best, achieve good results and gain valuable experience from this competition. We hope all players will work hard to deliver their best in this important tournament."

SPORTS



SIX-TIMES MotoGP champion Marc Márquez marked the 1,000th premier class race in history by winning the Austrian Grand Prix for the first time in his career to take a mammoth 142-point lead over his brother Alex in the championship.

Having won Saturday’s sprint from the second row, Márquez claimed the sprint-race double for the sixth Grand Prix in a row, with the Spaniard unbeaten since the British Grand Prix in May.

Not since 2014 had Márquez claimed six Grand Prix wins on the bounce as he inches closer to a seventh MotoGP crown with nine rounds left.

Gresini Racing rookie Fermin Aldeguer found late race pace to finish second while Aprilia’s pole sitter Marco Bezzecchi, who kept Márquez at bay for as long as he could, finished third. Alex Márquez finished 10th after serving a long-lap penalty.

“Super, super happy to finally take the first victory here in Austria,” Márquez said.

“I’m happy with six victories in a row, but (I need to) keep focus, next week we



Marc jumps on the podium as he celebrates after the Austrian MotoGP Grand Prix. — AFP

have another race.”

Bezzecchi had claimed his first pole with Aprilia on Saturday and despite finishing fourth in the sprint, this time he had the perfect launch to lead Francesco Bagnaia and Márquez into turn one.

The two Ducatis went side by side on lap one when Márquez briefly overtook his team-mate but Bagnaia did not relent and took the place back to stay in second.

However, Márquez made the same move on the next lap to take second and set his sights on Bezzecchi, waiting for the right opportunity to pounce.

“In the first part he (Bezzecchi) was super strong but then I just waited. I tried in the beginning but it was too risky, then I preferred to wait and attack in the end,” Márquez added.

Alex Márquez had a poor start and with a long-lap penalty to serve for causing a crash at the Czech Grand Prix, the younger Márquez sibling fell out of the top 10 when he rejoined the field.

MARQUEZ PRESSURE

Bezzecchi soaked up the pressure but the Aprilia rider was unable to shake off the red Ducati hunting him down.

Bagnaia was struggling with his bike and he eventually began fading, giving

way to KTM’s Pedro Acosta and Aldeguer as the two youngsters fought for third.

Bagnaia had been undefeated in Austria for three years but he was a shadow of the ringmaster who had dominated at the Red Bull Ring since 2022 as he was bumped down to eighth.

Márquez finally attacked on lap 19 and squeezed past the Aprilia but Bezzecchi put his head down and took first place back from the Spaniard, eager to deny him a first victory at the Red Bull Ring.

But Márquez was on the ascendancy and he finally broke Bezzecchi’s resistance on the next lap, using the Aprilia’s slipstream to dive into turn one and take the lead.

As Bezzecchi made a futile attempt to reel Márquez in, Aldeguer then made a play for second place and the Gresini rookie made his move with five laps to go on turn one to slot in behind Márquez.

Márquez responded to the challenge and kept Aldeguer at bay to take the chequered flag but the rookie was over the moon with his best result in MotoGP.

“I’m super happy because at the end, Austria is not one of my favourite tracks like Le Mans,” he said. “Making two podiums on bad tracks for me is incredible.” — Reuters



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SHORTTAKES



Several new projects are slated for contract awards this year, including the Ibri 3 Solar Power Plant with a capacity of 500 MW, the Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Wind Power Plant at 100 MW, and the Dhofar 2 Wind Power Plant at 120 MW.

RENEWABLE ENERGY CONTRIBUTION SURPASSES 11%

MUSCAT: Renewable energy now accounts for 11.5% of electricity generation in Oman, up to May this year, as part of the country’s national strategy to reach 30% renewable energy by 2030 and 60% by 2040.

The General Directorate of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals highlighted Oman’s notable growth in renewable energy in recent years, driven by major solar and wind projects. Key initiatives include the Dhofar 1 Wind Power Plant, the Ibri 2 Solar Power Plant, and the Manah 1 and Manah 2 Solar Power Plants. These projects support the national energy transition and aim to increase the contribution of renewable sources to electricity production.

Several new projects are slated for contract awards this year, including the Ibri 3 Solar Power Plant with a capacity of 500 MW, the Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Wind Power Plant at 100 MW, and the Dhofar 2 Wind Power Plant at 120 MW.

Additional projects planned for the near future include the Sadah Wind Power Plant (90 MW), Mahout 1 and Mahout 2 Wind Power Plants (300–400 MW each), the Al Kamil Solar Power Plant (280 MW), and another solar facility producing 220 MW.

Renewable energy projects play a crucial role in Oman’s economic diversification plans and sustainable energy goals. By expanding renewable energy across its governorates, Oman aims to reduce harmful emissions, protect the environment and achieve a 30% renewable share of electricity generation by 2030. — ONA

New Oman green iron project eyes mid-2026 FID

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 17

UNDERSCORING its keen interest in setting up a major green iron project in Oman, Singapore-headquartered Meranti Green Steel (MGS) has set its sights on a mid-2026 target for a Final Investment Decision (FID), paving the way for the project’s full-scale development.

The facility, featuring a 2.5 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) Hot Briquetted Iron (HBI) plant in its first phase, is proposed to be established at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD).

Initially, the project will be powered by a calibrated mix of natural gas and green hydrogen, with the hydrogen share to be ramped up progressively in order to achieve lower-carbon green steel production. In a series of posts this week, Meranti confirmed steady progress on the Duqm project.

“The company plans to make a Final Investment Decision (FID) for the Duqm project by mid-2026, with construction to follow immediately thereafter.

“Commissioning of the facility is scheduled for mid-2029,” it stated.

Meranti added: “Our focus will be on utilising a natural gas/green hydrogen mix in line with Oman’s Energy Transition Plan.

“Over time, we will use up to 85% green hydrogen in our processes, reducing CO₂ emissions per ton of steel to below 200kg.

“Discussions with potential green hydrogen suppliers are already underway.”

Consistent with its strategy to



Commissioning of the Duqm project is scheduled for mid-2029

SEBASTIAN LANGENDORF

CEO of Meranti Green Steel.



The 2.5 million tpa capacity HBI plant is proposed to come up in Duqm SEZ. (Picture for illustration only)

decouple iron production from steelmaking, part of the low-carbon HBI output from Duqm will be shipped to a proposed green steel mill currently under early development in Rayong, Thailand. That project, with a capacity of 2.5 mtpa, is slated to become the first green flat steel plant in Southeast Asia.

The balance of HBI output is intended for European off-takers.

Sebastian Langendorf, CEO of Meranti Green Steel, said current market conditions make it logical to decouple iron production from steelmaking. Cost-competitive HBI production can be pursued where natural gas and hydrogen conditions are favourable, while electric arc furnace (EAF)-based steelmaking and downstream processing can be located in or closer to end markets, he noted in an interview with German steel magazine MBI Stahl Monitor.

Emphasising the significance of its Duqm investment to its broader strategy, Meranti stated: “The Oman green iron project plays a

pivotal role in Meranti’s integrated green steel value chain, supplying sustainable materials for our Thailand steel plant and meeting the growing demand for HBI in Europe. The Oman project will help Meranti achieve its goal of becoming a leader in green steel.”

Oman, it further noted, is a “perfect location for this project due to its competitive energy resources, including cost-effective natural gas and a rapidly advancing green hydrogen ecosystem.”

“The Special Economic Zone at Duqm provides a robust infrastructure for the plant, with industrial land, deep-water port access, and efficient regulatory frameworks that enable fast-track development and global distribution.

“Oman’s location also facilitates cost-effective shipping to Meranti’s steel plant in Thailand and to European off-takers seeking low-emission HBI, thereby reducing logistics costs and emissions,” the company added.

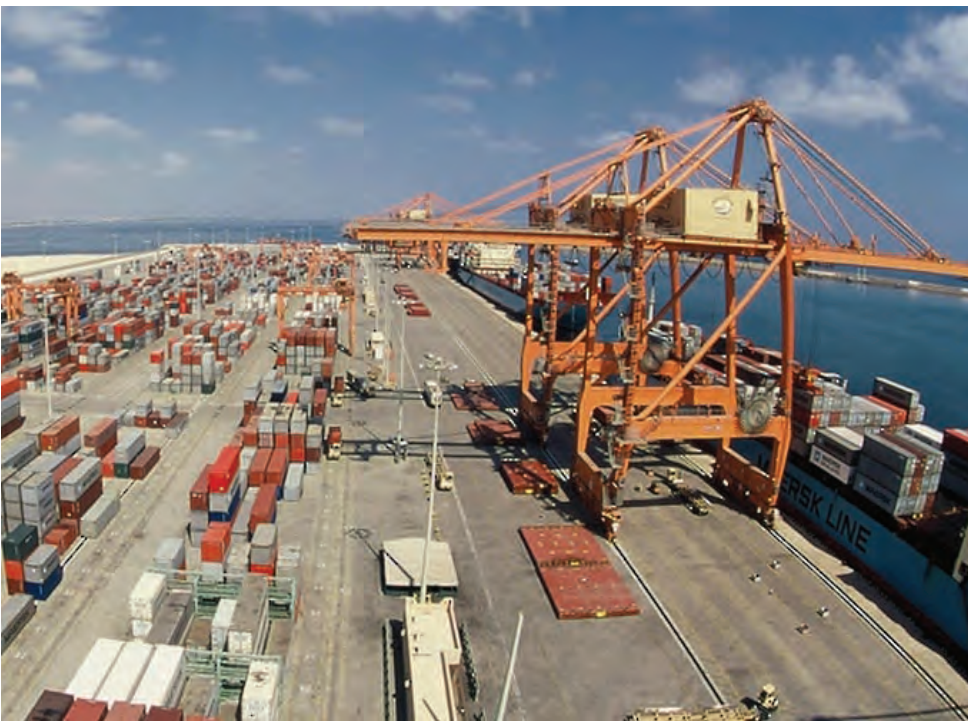
Public debt decreases to RO 14.1 bn by the end of Q2 2025

MUSCAT: Public debt of the Sultanate of Oman decreased by the end of Q2 2025 to reach RO 14.1 billion compared to RO 14.4 billion by the end of the corresponding period in 2024.

By the end of Q2 2025, the Ministry of Finance had paid over RO 749 million to the private sector, received through the financial system with complete documentation. This reflects the ministry’s commitment to settling fully documented private sector dues within an average of five working days.

Public revenue by the end of Q2 2025 totalled RO 5,839 million, reflecting a 6% decrease from RO 6,197 million recorded during the same quarter of 2024. The decline is largely due to a fall in hydrocarbon revenue.

Furthermore, net oil revenue amounted to RO 3,018 million as of the end of Q2 2025, representing a 10% decrease from RO 3,362



By the end of Q2 2025, public spending totalled RO 6,098 million, marking a 5% increase, i.e., RO 292 million, from RO 5,806 million recorded during the same quarter of 2024.

million collected during the same quarter of 2024, due to lower average oil prices and production.

Net gas revenue reached RO 884 million as of the end of Q2 2025, reflecting a 6% decline from RO 943 million recorded in the same quarter of 2024.

Meanwhile, current revenue totalled RO 1,928 million as of the end of Q2 2025, indicating a 2% increase, from RO 1,882 million collected during the same quarter in 2024.

By the end of Q2 2025, public spending totalled RO 6,098 million, marking a 5% increase, i.e., RO 292 million, from RO 5,806 million recorded during the same quarter of 2024.

This growth is primarily attributed to increased development expenditure compared to the same period in 2024.

Current expenditure amounted to RO 4,118 million as of the end of

Q2 2025, reflecting a 1% decrease, i.e., RO 53 million, from RO 4,065 million reported during the same quarter of 2024.

Development expenditure of the ministries and government units reached RO 688 million as of the end of Q2 2025, representing 76% of total development expenditure, i.e., RO 900 million, allocated for 2025, driven by the accelerated pace of work on ongoing development projects.

Contributions and other expenses totalled RO 1,161 million as of the end of Q2 2025, indicating a 7% increase, i.e., RO 73 million, from RO 1,088 million recorded in the same quarter of 2024.

Subsidy allocations included RO 339 million to the electricity sector, RO 289 million to the social protection system, and RO 44 million for oil products.

Furthermore, RO 200 million was transferred to the future debt obligations budget item. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Under the campaign, ahli Islamic credit cardholders earn 5% cashback in Pearl Reward Points on tuition payments, subject to a minimum spend of RO 500.

AHLI ISLAMIC OFFERS 5% TUITION CASHBACK TO SUPPORT BACK-TO-SCHOOL EXPENSES

MUSCAT: ahli Islamic has launched an exclusive ‘Back to School’ campaign, offering 5% cashback on tuition fee payments made with its Sharia-compliant credit cards.

Running until September 10, 2025, the initiative is designed in line with Islamic finance principles to help ease families’ financial burden during the academic season.

Under the campaign, ahli Islamic credit cardholders earn 5% cashback in Pearl Reward Points on tuition payments, subject to a minimum spend of RO 500.

Cashback is capped at RO 50 in Pearl Points per customer, with eligible points credited within 60 days after the campaign ends. Points can be redeemed for account or credit card cashback, travel bookings with select partner airlines, hotel stays, or purchases at a wide network of partner merchants.

Noora Sultan, AGM-Head of Retail Banking at ahli Islamic, said: “In line with our commitment to Islamic banking excellence, we continue to offer initiatives that bring meaningful value to our customers.

The ‘Back to School’ campaign supports families during important times of the year, while remaining fully Sharia-compliant. It reflects our purpose to provide relevant and rewarding financial solutions”. By integrating Islamic banking principles with innovative practices, ahli Islamic continues to meet the evolving needs of today’s customers with integrity and insight.

This campaign transforms seasonal education expenses into rewarding opportunities, allowing families to bank with confidence. Credit cardholders are encouraged to take advantage of this limited-period offer and experience values-based banking at its best.

DEAL SIMPLIFIES ACCESS TO PREMIUM MOTORCYCLES AND YACHTS

MUSCAT: OHI Marine & Motors has signed a strategic partnership with United Finance Company to make premium motorcycle and yacht ownership more accessible in Oman.

The collaboration introduces exclusive financing solutions tailored for Yamaha motorcycles, Finnmaster yachts and Oryx yachts, with flexible installment plans and customer-friendly repayment options.



Designed to empower lifestyle enthusiasts, the initiative combines OHI Marine & Motors’ expertise in premium products with United Finance Company’s innovative financial services.

The agreement marks the beginning of a phased rollout, ensuring customers enjoy a seamless experience in owning world-class marine and motorsport products across the Sultanate of Oman.

Experience elegance in motion with Ford Taurus

THE Ford Taurus combines modern luxury, advanced technology and exhilarating performance, designed for those who demand more from every drive.

From city streets to open highways, the Taurus transforms every journey into one of comfort, confidence and commanding style.

With a refined silhouette that exudes power and poise, the Taurus turns heads wherever it goes. Its 19-inch polished alloy wheels, dynamic chrome-accented grille, sleek hood and dual exhausts make a striking statement.

Signature LED auto high beams, a two-piece headlamp design and power-deployable door handles add both elegance and functionality.

Under the hood, the Taurus houses a 2.0-litre EcoBoost engine delivering 239 horsepower and 382 Nm of torque. Paired with an 8-speed automatic transmission and three selectable drive modes — Normal, Sport and Eco — it adapts effortlessly to your driving style. With fuel efficiency of up to 15.5 km/l, it delivers power without compromise.

Inside, the Taurus offers a serene, spacious cabin with 10-way power-adjustable driver seating, 6-way passenger adjustments, dual-zone climate control and ambient lighting in seven hues. Premium materials and sound-deadening technology create a quiet, refined ride, while the panoramic dual-panel moonroof lets you enjoy the outdoors from the comfort of your seat.

Safety and driver-assist technologies keep you confident



Under the hood, the Taurus houses a 2.0-litre EcoBoost engine delivering 239 horsepower and 382 Nm of torque.

on every journey. Features include Blind Spot Information System (BLIS), adaptive cruise control, lane departure warning, collision mitigation technology, front and rear cameras, parking sensors, six airbags and the SOS Post-Crash Alert System.

At the centre of the cabin, a 13.2-inch touchscreen powered by Ford’s SYNC® 4 infotainment system offers voice-activated controls, seamless smartphone integration, wireless charging and a premium six-speaker audio system for a fully connected and entertaining experience. The Ford Taurus is available in two refined variants, Ambiente and Titanium, each equipped to suit your lifestyle and preferences.

In Oman, Ford vehicles are available through Arabian Car Marketing Co LLC. Visit [www.fordoman.com](#) for more information.

Ooredoo launches Salalah Data Centre and Landing Station

Ooredoo has announced the launch of the Salalah Data Centre and Submarine Cable Landing Station, a landmark project set to position Oman as one of the region’s most important digital hubs.

Strategically located in Dhofar Governorate, Salalah is emerging as a critical node for international connectivity, linking Asia, Europe and Africa through its proximity to multiple global subsea cable systems.

The new facility is the first of its kind in southern Oman to combine class 3 compliance data centre with a submarine cable landing station.

Built to support the next generation of cloud, AI and edge computing services, the facility starts with space to house 125 full server racks and will grow to 500 in phases, setting a new benchmark for digital infrastructure in the country.

“The Salalah Data Centre and Landing Station is a catalyst for



The new facility is the first of its kind in southern Oman to combine class 3 compliance data centre with a submarine cable landing station.

Oman’s digital future”, said Saed al Ghafri, Director of Infrastructure at Ooredoo. “It reinforces our role in driving economic diversification, attracting global digital investment and enabling the next wave of cloud and AI innovation.

By creating a southern gateway for international connectivity, we are strengthening Oman’s position as a regional leader in the digital economy and unlocking long-term value for businesses, communities and the wider region”.

By creating a secure southern gateway for international cables, the project adds vital network resilience, reduces latency and opens up faster, more reliable connections.

It is expected to attract global operators, hyperscalers and cloud providers to Oman, boosting the local economy and creating new job opportunities. The facility’s advanced design supports

everything from enterprise IT hosting to cutting-edge digital services, giving businesses and governments across the region access to faster, more secure and locally hosted cloud and content delivery. The Salalah hub will also strengthen Ooredoo’s wider regional network.

Other Ooredoo operating companies can use the facility to land traffic, host cloud services and share digital infrastructure, creating synergies across the group and expanding its global digital footprint.

With its integrated design, future-ready technology and strategic location, the Salalah Data Centre and Submarine Cable Landing Station represents a major step towards achieving Oman Vision 2040 and reinforces Ooredoo’s commitment to driving innovation, resilience and customer-focused digital services across the Sultanate of Oman.

SHORT TAKES



Trade talks between New Delhi and Washington collapsed after five rounds of negotiations over disagreement on opening India's vast farm and dairy sectors and stopping Russian oil purchases.

— Reuters

US-INDIA TRADE TALKS SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST CALLED OFF

A planned visit by US trade negotiators to New Delhi from August 25-29 has been called off, a source said, delaying talks on a proposed trade agreement and dashing hopes of relief from additional US tariffs on Indian goods from August 27. The current round of negotiations for the proposed bilateral trade agreement is now likely to be deferred to another date that has yet to be decided, the source with direct knowledge of the matter said.

The US embassy in New Delhi said it has no additional information on the trade and tariff talks, which are being handled by the United States Trade Representative (USTR).

India's trade ministry did not immediately reply to a Reuters email seeking comments.

Earlier this month, US President Donald Trump imposed an additional 25% tariff on Indian goods, citing New Delhi's continued imports of Russian oil in a move that sharply escalated tensions between the two nations.

The new import tax, which will come into effect from August 27, will raise duties on some Indian exports to as high as 50% — among the highest levied on any US trading partner.

Trade talks between New Delhi and Washington collapsed after five rounds of negotiations over disagreement on opening India's vast farm and dairy sectors; and stopping Russian oil purchases.

India's Foreign Ministry has said the country is being unfairly singled out for buying Russian oil while the United States and European Union continue to purchase goods from Russia. — Reuters

UK INFLATION EXPECTED TO RISE

LONDON: UK inflation is expected to have edged higher last month as summer spending pushed up flight and hotel costs, while food prices continue to climb.

CPI inflation is widely expected to have risen in July from the 3.6% recorded in June. Sanjay Raja of Deutsche Bank estimated CPI could have reached 3.8%, citing



higher airfares, rail costs, package holidays and a possible 9% rise in accommodation prices, partly due to Oasis's reunion tour.

Food prices also continued rising, driven by ingredients, labour and regulatory costs. The Bank of England projects inflation peaking at around 4% in September. — dpa

Non-oil sector in GCC adds \$1.513 trillion to economy

THE Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states recorded a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$2.143 trillion at current prices in 2023, marking a 2.7% decline from \$2.203 trillion in 2022.

According to the GCC Statistical Centre, gross disposable income — representing what is available for consumption and savings after taxes and other transfers — fell by 3%, reaching \$1.989 trillion compared with \$2.052 trillion the previous year.

The total value added by the non-oil sector reached \$1.513 trillion, while the oil sector contributed \$603.5 billion. As a result, the non-oil sector's share of the GCC economy rose to 71.5% in 2023, up from 65% in 2022, supported by an annual growth rate of 6.4%.

Over the past five years, mining and quarrying has consistently been the largest contributor to the GCC economy, averaging 28.3%, while manufacturing accounted for the largest share within the non-oil sector, averaging 11.7% of GDP.

Most sectors saw positive growth in 2023. Financial and insurance activities led with an 11.7% increase, followed closely by transport and storage at 11.6%, real estate at 8.1%, public



Gross disposable income fell by 3%, reaching \$1.989 trillion in 2023.

administration and defence at 7.9%, wholesale and retail trade at 7.6% and education at 5.5%. Mining and quarrying, however, declined 18.8%, while manufacturing fell slightly by 0.7%. Exports of goods and

services totalled \$1.259 trillion, contributing 59.5% to GDP, though down 7.1% from the previous year. Meanwhile, final consumption expenditure — covering household, non-profit and government spending on

goods and services — rose 7.5% to \$1.246 trillion. Gross capital formation, reflecting total investment in fixed assets and other capital, reached \$601.8 billion, growing 5.5% over the year. — ONA

Qatari Labour Ministry delegation reviews Oman's trade union system

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, AUG 17

Nabhan Ahmed al Battashi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the General Federation of Oman Workers (GFW), along with federation specialists, received a delegation from Qatar's Ministry of Labour.

The delegation was headed by Hamad Faraj Dalmuq, Assistant Under- Secretary for Expatriate Labour Affairs and Khamis Mohammed al Nuaimi, Assistant Under-Secretary for National Workforce Affairs in the Private Sector.

The visit aimed to review Oman's trade union framework and national labour regulations, as well as the GFW's mandates in key areas.

These include organising trade



The visit aimed to review Oman's trade union framework and national labour regulations, as well as the GFW's mandates in key areas.

union representation for workers, providing legal support and advocacy for labour claims while explaining relevant procedures and exploring the GFW's local and international partnerships to improve workers' conditions.

During the visit, two presentations were delivered.

The first provided an overview of Oman's trade union structures, covering the GFW, sectoral unions and trade unions.

It highlighted 2024 training programmes and awareness campaigns, along with the distribution of unions across governorates and economic sectors.

The presentation also addressed women's roles in trade union structures, the GFW's complaint-handling mechanisms, key updates to Oman's Labour Law

and Social Protection Law; and the GFW's contributions through its memberships in local and international councils.

Recent cooperation agreements aimed at improving workers' socio-economic conditions were also discussed.

The second presentation focused on several key aspects, particularly the right to unionise in Oman and the legal framework for trade union work. This included laws established by Royal Decree, ministerial decisions and statutes governing the GFW and sectoral unions and trade unions.

The presentation also covered the mandates of various trade union structures and highlighted workers' legal right to peaceful strikes under Oman's Labour Law and its regulatory conditions.

STOCK EXCHANGE

MSX Index closes 0.18 % lower



Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) "30" index closed at 4,921.33 points, down 8.7 points, or 0.18% from the previous session.

Trading value reached RO 18.26 million, a 16% decrease.

Market capitalisation fell 0.14% to RO 29.57 billion. Non-Omani net investment dropped by RO 252,000 (1.38%). — ONA

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar festival boosts tourism



Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival 2025 has drawn over 150,000 visitors, with numbers expected to exceed 300,000 by month's end. Aligned with Oman Vision 2040, the festival promotes local tourism, engages 65 SMEs and 10 farmers; and provides 60 temporary jobs, boosting economic activity and showcasing the region's cultural and natural attractions. — ONA

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

UK faces backlash over train fare hike



A potential 5.5% rise in England's train fares next year has been called "outrageous" by public transport groups.

July's retail prices index (RPI), often used to set fare increases, is due on Wednesday.

This year's 4.6% hike was above RPI; Investec forecasts July's RPI at 4.5%, meaning fares could jump 5.5%. — dpa

US tariffs cripple Indian exports and competitiveness



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at the marketing and management department of the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat.

THE Trump administration's trade negotiations with India aimed to secure better access to India's agricultural and dairy markets. The inconsequential outcome of the talks, India's Russian oil imports and the potential reduction of Indian exports to the US contributed to the escalation of the trade war. Initially, the Trump administration imposed a 25% tariff on goods imported from India, effective August 1, 2025.

In continuation of this development, on August 6, 2025, the US administration announced an additional punitive tariff of 25%, effective August 27, 2025, if no deal is reached.

This makes India the most heavily taxed trading partner in Asia. The trade tariffs were aimed at disrupting the India-Russia energy ties and isolating Russia in the Ukraine conflict.

The US is India's top export market, accounting for 18% of its exports. This development in the trade war is expected to impact \$87 billion in Indian exports and it is predicted that the country's GDP will decline to 6%. Indian MSMEs risk losing their global competitiveness to rivals, with tariffs on India at 50% compared to China's 30% and Vietnam's 20%.

The US has also issued a warning of new 'secondary tariffs' on countries trading with Russia. The tariffs aim to coerce India to diversify its 35% to 40% crude oil imports

from Russia. Several sectors, including engineering & automobiles, gems & jewelry and textiles & leather, will be severely affected and India faces a potential threat of supply chain shifts.

Semiconductors, critical minerals and the pharmaceutical sector are exempt from additional tax for now. It is estimated that Indian exports to the US will drop by 70% if tariffs reach 50%. The textile and apparel market is very vulnerable.

Already, many US companies have shifted orders to Bangladesh and Vietnam; and this could further trigger job losses for millions. India is the world's largest cut diamond industry, employing 2 million workers and generating exports worth \$10 billion.

Approximately 32% of Indian auto parts are exported to the US. The tariffs will make many products uncompetitive. India exports 40% of its seafood, mainly Shrimp, to the USA. The fears of tariffs have resulted in farmers halting sowings.

Labour-intensive industries, such as textiles, garments, automobiles and jewelry, face a significant threat of job loss. There is a major fear that 1,00,000 to 2,00,000 people in textile hubs alone will lose their jobs.

The sentiment is that most entrepreneurs are accelerating shipments before the tariff implementation date and exploring alternative diversification destinations, such as China, Russia and Japan. India also plans to shift towards being self-reliant and to

The US is India's top export market, accounting for 18% of its exports. This development in the trade war is expected to impact \$87 billion in Indian exports and it is predicted that the country's GDP will decline to 6%

diversify its exports. The Indian export-driven economy faces a significant challenge with the US tariffs imposed in August 2025. It has the potential to disrupt \$35 billion in annual losses, impact key industries such as seafood, gems and textiles; and collectively displace millions of jobs that significantly contribute to GDP growth.

In the broader context, it will impact the global competitiveness of many products, drag GDP into a downward trajectory and increase inflationary pressures.

India needs to focus on accelerating its market diversification and enhancing domestic manufacturing, while simultaneously pursuing diplomatic negotiations. India has taken a firm stand that these tariffs are unjustified and unwarranted.

India's energy imports are from 40 different countries, which are decisions based on market dynamics and should not be at the mercy of geopolitical escalations.

The tariffs have prompted India to expand and diversify its exports to maintain strategic autonomy. From a broader perspective, if the trade war is not de-escalated, it could significantly strain US-India bilateral trade relationships and affect defence ties, prompting India to strengthen its relationships with Russia, China and many other countries, thereby profoundly reorienting global power dynamics.

RESILIENCE IS A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

PEPUKAYE BARDOUILLE & MAHMOUD MOHIELDIN

Current macroeconomic frameworks rightly treat climate shocks as threats to fiscal stability, but do not recognise the economic benefits of investing in measures that mitigate their effects. To unlock concessional financing for adaptation, countries must update their methodologies to reflect these productive outcomes.

For EMDEs, investing in resilience is not a luxury; it is an imperative. Climate disasters and ecological degradation are impeding their economic prospects and straining their finances.

Perhaps more importantly, these shocks are exacerbating unsustainable debt burdens at a time

Existing macro-fiscal tools — such as debt-sustainability frameworks used by the IMF, the World Bank and credit ratings — account for climate- and nature-related risks but do not sufficiently recognise the economic benefits of reducing those risks.

when donor countries are slashing development aid, making it harder for EMDEs to finance investments in climate adaptation.

Over the past two decades, the 74 economies comprising the Climate Vulnerable Forum and the Vulnerable Group of Twenty have suffered more than \$525 billion in losses — equivalent to roughly 20% of their collective GDP — due to climate shocks. This

includes acute disasters like floods, hurricanes and droughts, as well as slower-moving events such as desertification and coastal erosion.

Meanwhile, the degradation of natural ecosystems through deforestation and biodiversity loss has aggravated food and water insecurity and increased climate risks by eliminating natural carbon sinks.

Existing macro-fiscal tools — such as debt-sustainability frameworks used by the IMF, the World Bank and credit ratings — account for climate- and nature-related risks but do not sufficiently recognise the economic benefits of reducing those risks.

Investments required to mitigate their effects are seen only as adding to the debt burden, rather than reducing losses or driving development of growth-enhancing strategic assets.

For example, flood-resilient infrastructure in Vietnam has reduced damage costs, boosted land values, improved public health and increased worker productivity.

With the IMF and World Bank reviewing their Debt Sustainability Framework for Low-Income Countries, EMDEs have an opportunity to update methodologies to reflect the benefits of adaptation measures. © Project Syndicate 2025

Taxes plunge business confidence in Britain

BUSINESS directors' confidence in the UK economy has plunged to a record low, with companies unconvinced by Chancellor Rachel Reeves' growth-focused policies as the impact of last year's tax hikes continues to bite.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer has repeatedly told MPs that business confidence is at a nine-year high, pointing to a single business survey compiled by Lloyds Bank. But fresh data from the Institute of Directors (IoD), which has around twenty thousand members, suggested UK firms were less optimistic about both the economy's prospects and their own organisations.

A survey of directors at 639 businesses showed that the net balance for pessimism deepened by 19 percentage points in July compared to the previous month.

Confidence in business prospects also slipped into negative territory after more positive data in June, marking the second-lowest reading for leaders' confidence in their own organisations since the indicators were introduced in mid-2016.

Export expectations likewise turned negative, despite the UK's recent trade deals with the United States and the European Union, which had briefly lifted business sentiment the previous month.

Firms also flagged concerns about higher costs squeezing profit margins. More worryingly for the UK jobs market, an increasing number of companies expressed pessimism about headcount expectations.

IoD chief economist Anna Leach said UK business leaders were grappling with immediate cost increases introduced by Rachel Reeves' £20 bn tax raid on employment last autumn, while improvements on rules and funding had been "slower". "Last year, damaging speculation around tax rises in the lead-up to the 2024 Budget caused many companies to pause investment and hiring decisions, contributing to



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Confidence in business prospects also slipped into negative territory after more positive data in June, marking the second-lowest reading for leaders' confidence in their own organisations since the indicators were introduced in mid-2016



A survey of directors at 639 businesses showed that the net balance for pessimism deepened by 19 percentage points in July.

six months of near-zero economic growth", Leach said.

"We are now living with the economic consequences of those tax hikes, even as uncertainty around future costs once again builds. With ripple effects through the economy from tax changes and signs of consumer retrenchment, many firms report struggling to plan amidst a cacophony of risk". Leach added: "The government must urgently quash rumours of further tax rises for business this autumn and accelerate planning reforms and deregulation to restore confidence and drive growth".

A separate IoD survey, which drew nearly 900 responses, suggested that just nine per cent of business owners believed government policy so far would succeed in driving growth. The top area in which businesses wanted to see "government action" was taxation, specifically reducing employment costs and slashing red tape.

The latest IoD findings contrast with more upbeat readings

from Lloyds Bank, which many economists view as an outlier. Lloyds' research primarily reflects sentiment among businesses with turnover above £250,000.

Another business indicator suggested negative sentiment has now persisted for 10 months, underlining that UK firms remain unconvinced by the government's industrial strategy and deregulation package announced under the "Leeds Reform" at a summit in Leeds on July 15.

Leeds, a major financial services hub, was chosen as the venue to unveil reforms designed to modernise capital markets, cut red tape and broaden access to investment in a bid to boost growth. A key element of the reforms involves deregulating certain areas of the financial sector to make it easier for businesses to operate.

Shadow business secretary Andrew Griffith said the gloomy IoD results were no surprise, arguing that Labour had "spent the last year attacking private enterprise with the zeal of a left-wing student union".

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INDIAN electrical engineer more than 20 years experience in “MEP” counstruction field in Oman seeks suitable job. Contact: 92919281

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ACCOUNTS/ Finance: Indian male (MBA Fin) having more than 19 years of experience in Oman accounts & finance looking for suitable placement, NOC available and can join immediately. Contact: 92076716

SIT. WANTED

INDIAN female BSC graduate and Internship Python. Presently in family visa. Seeks suitable placement as admin. Contact: 94942510

SIT. WANTED

PLANNING Engineer, PMP. Indian male 11 years experience in Construction Projects. Well versed with Primavera P6 Software, strong communication skills, Interpersonal skills, EDT Claims, Recovery schedules, project control. Having Omani Driving Licence. Contact: 78002582. Email: engineer4planning@gmail.com

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

SIT. WANTED

SRI LANKAN Male — (CGMA ACMA+ CPA+BBA) Asst. Finance Manager/ Chief Accountant, 12+ Experience in Oman & GCC, Expert in Finan. Reporting (MIS), VAT, Audit, Cashflow, Budget, AR AP Recon, IFRS, Payroll, Banking. Contact: 78773250. Email: ali.mohamedown@gmail.com

SIT. WANTED

EXPERIENCED Indian Female dentist with strong clinical and administrative background. Actively seeking any suitable role in the medical, dental or healthcare field, including insurance coordination and medical scribing. Holding a valid Oman Resident Card. Available for immediate joining. Ph:79424264, Email: nancydas055@gmail.com

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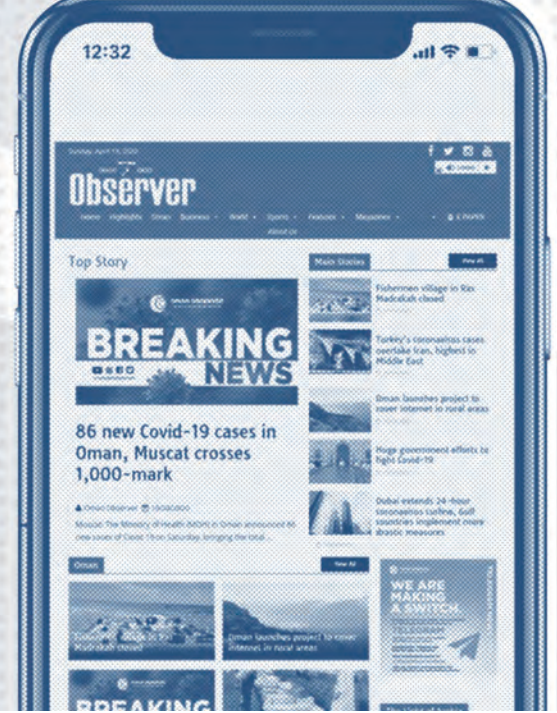
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ART/LIFE



ENTERTAINMENT

Taylor Swift sets October release for new album



TAYLOR SWIFT’S “The Life of a Showgirl” will be released on October 3, the star has revealed, as she showcased cover art and a tracklist for what is expected to be one of the biggest albums of the year.

The news came during Wednesday’s episode of the “New Heights Show”, a podcast fronted by her boyfriend, Kansas City Chiefs player Travis Kelce and his brother Jason.

It was also confirmed on Swift’s own social media accounts.

“And, that’s show business for you. New album The Life of a Showgirl. Out October 3”, she wrote on Instagram.

Swift’s official website shows four different CD versions, with a “sweat and vanilla perfume edition” also available on cassette and vinyl.

The album cover for that version shows the 14-time Grammy winner partially submerged in slightly grubby-looking water, wearing what appears to be a rhinestone-studded top.

Only the star’s mouth, nose, eyes and forehead and a blinged-out wrist are above the water.

The tracklist, which was also unveiled on Wednesday, shows 12 entries, including the title track which it says features Sabrina Carpenter.

Swift’s last major release, “The Tortured Poets Department” came in April last year.

Just hours after it dropped, the “Shake It Off” singer expanded it into a double album called “The Anthology” which dominated charts for the year.

The 35-year-old has recently wrapped up a nearly two-year world tour, with a \$2 billion dollar take that shattered records.

The 149 shows of the Eras Tour were typically more than three hours long, delighting fans who had shelled out big bucks for the chance to see one of pop’s biggest ever stars.

Though Swift is famed for singing about heartbreaks with her famous exes, her two-year relationship with Kelce, one of the NFL’s most bankable players, has further inflamed her celebrity.

However her endorsement of Democrat Kamala Harris in last November’s US presidential election, was not enough to tip the scales — though it did anger winner Donald Trump, who declared on social media “I HATE TAYLOR SWIFT”. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



FASHION

A model presents a creation from the Topshop Topman, Autumn-Winter 2025-2026 runway fashion show collection, at a special presentation in Trafalgar Square. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

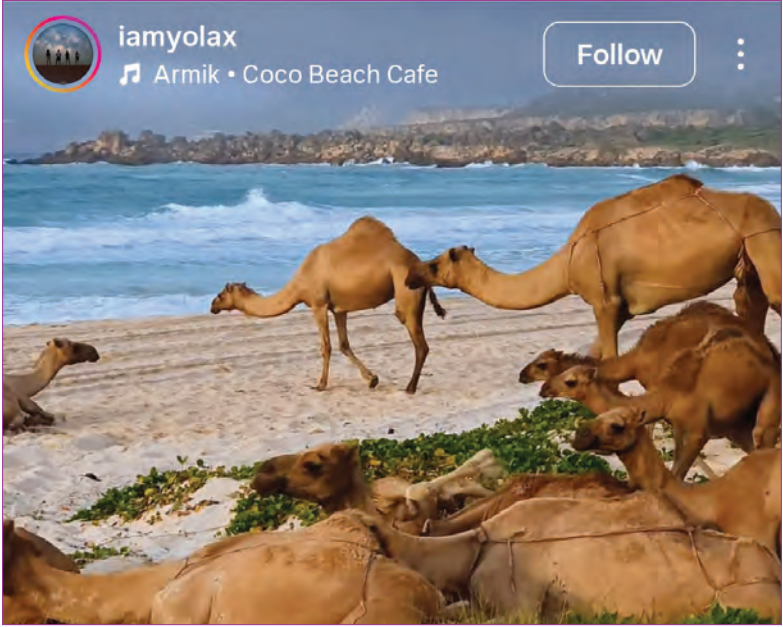
Bella Poarch attends the Los Angeles special screening of “Highest 2 Lowest” at Ted Mann Theatre at The Academy Museum. — AFP



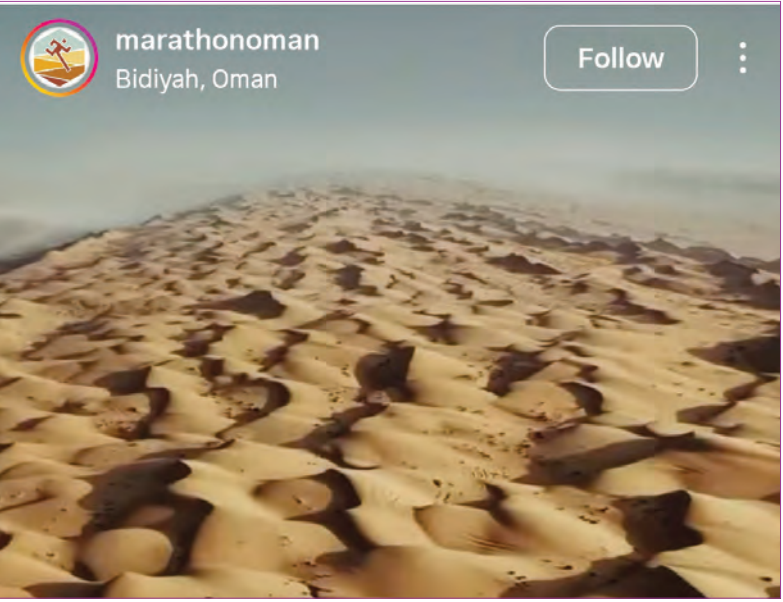
FILM

US actress and 2025 Hall of Fame Honouree US actress Viola Davis attends the Television Academy’s 27th annual Hall of Fame ceremony in Los Angeles. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Enjoying the Beach

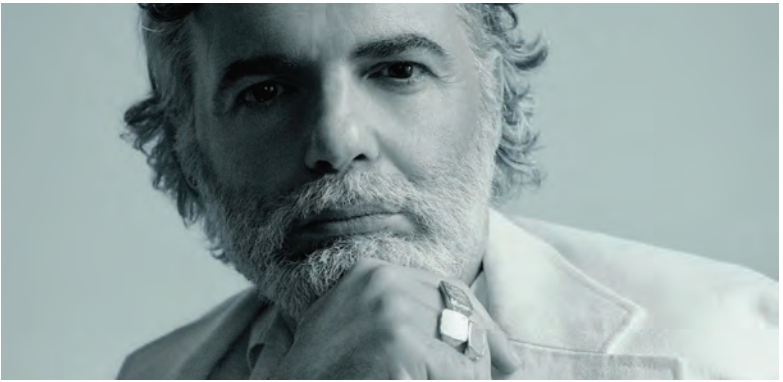


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Valentino CEO steps down for personal reasons, WWD reports



VALENTINO CEO Jacopo Venturini has stepped down from the Italian luxury house for personal reasons, Women’s Wear Daily reported on Thursday, leaving the Mayhoola- and Kering-backed business searching for a new leader to reboot sales and profit. Valentino and Venturini reached a mutual agreement to terminate his employment and board roles, WWD reported, with Valentino saying the executive “has decided to take a break for personal reasons”. Spokespeople for Valentino did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comment. Venturini, previously executive vice president of merchandising at Gucci, became CEO at Valentino in June 2020. Valentino had said in June that he was on sick leave, after media reports of his imminent departure from the business which reported declining revenue and profit last year. Creative director Alessandro Michele, who joined Valentino in March last year from Gucci, is staying on in his role, WWD said, citing sources.

Valentino, founded in Rome in 1960 by Valentino Garavani and Giancarlo Giammetti, is part-owned by French luxury conglomerate Kering, which bought a 30% stake in the label from Qatari fund Mayhoola for 1.7 billion euros in 2023, with a commitment to buy the rest by 2028. According to a LinkedIn post by fashion journalist Astrid Wendlandt, Valentino chairman and Mayhoola CEO Rachid Mohamed Rachid sent a memo to staff on Thursday announcing Venturini’s departure and saying he would share further updates on the appointment of a new CEO in due course. Reuters could not immediately verify the authenticity of the memo and Mayhoola and Kering did not immediately reply to requests for comment on the reports of Venturini’s departure. Mayhoola last month denied a newspaper report that the two shareholders were considering selling Valentino. Kering declined to comment at the time. — Reuters



After DJs and music festivals, Saudi pushes home-grown culture

FIRST, Saudi Arabia opened its doors to Western music festivals. Now it’s turning to Saudi traditions as it seeks to draw tourists and reshape its national identity. In “Terhal”, a stage show in Riyadh, an actor in a red-and-white headdress gallops on a white horse, exploring the kingdom’s heritage and top tourist sites. The move towards more wholesome, Saudi-inspired entertainment comes after raucous scenes at past music festivals in the capital. This year’s Riyadh Season entertainment programme, which still features MDL Beast, will be “almost entirely comprised of Saudi and Gulf musicians”, said Turki Alalshikh, chairman of the General Entertainment Authority. “The characteristic of Vision 2030 (Saudi Arabia’s economic and social reform project) is always to test the borders”, said Sebastian Sons of German think tank CARPO. Terhal — Arabic for journey — blends traditional Saudi songs, chants and national dress with cutting-edge light shows and hi-tech equipment. It tells the story of Saad, a young Saudi exploring his home country, with 55 Saudis among its troupe of 100 acrobats, trapeze artists and dancers.

‘REFRAMING AND REBRANDING’ Until recently, Saudi culture was not widely championed, as authorities focused on the kingdom’s status as the birthplace of Islam and home of its holiest sites. But it is now embracing its traditions to help shape a national identity that is less austere. “This reframing and re-branding of Saudi identity aligns modern arts and culture with traditional heritage and the legacy of Saudi Arabia”, said Sons.



Terhal “captures both the beauty of Saudi landscapes and the depth of its traditions, making them accessible to a broad audience”,

culture ministry spokesman Abdulrahman Almotawa said. Artistic director Filippo Ferraresi said he conducted “extensive research” into Saudi culture, collaborating “with Saudi consultants, professors and writers”. “I discovered the different regions, their traditions, their dances, their music”, he said. The opening-up under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has since brought Formula One races, concerts by stars such as Jennifer Lopez and an end to ban on women driving. The aim is to make Saudi Arabia more attractive to tourists and international business, helping the world’s biggest oil exporter reduce its reliance on crude. **‘UNTAPPED POTENTIAL’** Entertainment was “at the nexus of the social and economic components” of Vision 2030, said Kristian Coates Ulrichsen of the Baker Institute at Rice University in the United States. It is “seen as not only a sector of large untapped potential that can contribute to economic diversification but also as a way to showcase the changes under way in Saudi Arabia”, he said. “From a Western perspective, we often tend to dismiss such policies as mere art-washing. And of course, there is an element of instrumentalisation”, said Sons. “But there are many creative minds in the country who deserve respect for the work they do”. For Saudi dancer Talha Mas, 23, performing in Terhal was a “dream come true” — twirling with her hair flowing freely. Spectator Asser Saleh, 37, said he felt “proud” to see performances of this calibre in the Saudi capital. “Before, you had to go to Europe or the United States to see this type of show”, the Egyptian said. — AFP

FEATURES



AN UNEXPECTED
ENCOUNTER:
A LESSON
IN ETHICAL
WILDLIFE
WATCHING

BY ANNA VAILOCES

I WASN'T planning to swim with sea turtles when I headed to Oman — honestly, I just wanted to go scuba diving. But what happened on that day at the Dimaniyat Islands turned out to be one of the most memorable experiences I've ever had in the water. It was a perfect reminder that sometimes, the best wildlife encounters aren't about chasing after animals, but about respecting their space and letting nature take the lead.

My interest in Oman's underwater world started partly out of curiosity. I've heard about the country's stunning coral reefs and clear waters, but I'd never actually thought about scuba diving there until I spoke to some friends who worked in Muscat. They told me about the Dimaniyat Islands, a marine reserve not far

The main reason the snorkelling trip had taken us to this spot was the hope of seeing a turtle or two. The island nearby is a well-known nesting site, especially during July to October. But during nesting season, humans are strictly forbidden from going near the beaches to avoid disturbing the turtles.

On the day I was there, the water was calm and inviting. I kept an eye on the others, but decided to drift away from the crowd a little, aiming to explore a different part of the reef. I've encountered turtles before and I've learned that the best way to see them isn't to chase after them but to be patient and respectful.

So, I moved slowly, approaching gently and stayed a bit back from the turtles I saw. Thinking back to what I'd been told — that wildlife should be observed, not chased or grabbed — I made sure not to make any sudden movements.

And then, quite unexpectedly, I saw one turtle turn and start swimming towards me. It was curious. I froze and stayed still, just floating there as it slowly made its way closer. It was floating around me, calmly checking me out — not stressed, not bothered. That's when I realised the real beauty: if you're calm and respectful, animals often decide to come to you.



from the city, which is known for its healthy reefs and occasional visits from whale sharks and turtles.

When I managed to get back to Muscat for a short visit, I made sure to book a trip with SeaOman, a well-known diving outfit based at Al Mouj Marina. The area is quite fancy — a marina full of luxury boats, high-end hotels and super posh vibes. It's lovely if you like that kind of thing, although it can feel a bit out of reach financially if you're travelling on your own. Still, I managed to find a decent Airbnb that was not too pricey, so I could stay within the marina complex and not risk missing the boat.

Unfortunately, I didn't get to do the scuba dive I'd hoped for. When I arrived at the boat, the crew told us they'd switched all their trips to whale shark sightings because there had been recent reports of big sharks swimming around nearby. I was a bit disappointed — whale sharks are incredible, but I had already seen them in the Maldives and I was really looking forward to exploring the coral reefs and hopefully swimming with turtles.

Anyway, we set out and eventually, the boat stopped at the whale shark spot, but there was nothing there. No sharks. Our guide called it off and we headed to plan B — snorkelling around the island's turtle sanctuary.

I didn't know what to expect from the Dimaniyat Islands. I've snorkelled in coral reefs in Southeast Asia and the Maldives; and I've seen some pretty spectacular stuff. When I slipped into the water, I was stunned. The corals weren't bleached or damaged — they looked almost untouched. Bright pinks, browns, oranges and yellows covered the reef like a colourful carpet. Small fish darted around in schools and I could see larger surgeonfish foraging along the rocks. There was a real diversity of life, all thriving in a protected environment. It made me realise how vital these marine reserves are — no resorts fingered the islands and boats were limited, which clearly helped.

WHY BEING ETHICAL MATTERS

That encounter made me think about how important it is to observe marine wildlife ethically. Turtles, like many creatures in the ocean, can get really stressed if people bother them or try to touch them. Touching them disrupts their natural oils and protective mucus, which can cause infections. If animals get scared or annoyed, they might avoid their feeding or resting spots — which can lead to health issues or even affect their ability to reproduce.

Plus, these animals don't belong to us. We're visitors in their home and it's our job to leave as little impact as possible. Respectful, patient observation helps us appreciate wildlife without harming it — a principle upheld by marine conservationists around the world.

That turtle I came face-to-face with didn't swim away or ignore me. Instead, it continued to explore around me, seeming perfectly at ease. I stayed very still, watching it glide in the clear water, feeling a deep connection with this incredible creature. That moment made me realise how much richer and more authentic wildlife encounters are when done ethically. It's not about getting the perfect photo of a turtle, but about allowing nature to reveal itself in its own time, at its own pace.

The truth is, this experience wasn't just about seeing a turtle — it was about understanding that we are visitors in their world. Observing wildlife in a way that doesn't disturb them isn't just respectful; it's essential. As tourists and nature lovers, we have a responsibility to keep our impact minimal, helping conserve these fragile ecosystems for future generations.

By the end of the snorkel, I felt grateful for the opportunity. I'd been lucky to witness a healthy reef and to share a quiet, intimate moment with a turtle that chose to approach me. It struck me that if more people understood how to approach wildlife calmly and ethically, the oceans could remain vibrant and full of life.