

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The school comprises 36 classrooms complete with educational facilities.

RO 1.6 MILLION NEW SCHOOL COMES UP IN MAHOUT

MAHOUT: A new school named January 11th Basic Education School for grades 1-4 was completed and handed over to the Ministry of Education in the Wilayat of Mahout, Al Wusta Governorate, at an overall cost exceeding RO 1.6 million.

The school comprises 36 classrooms complete with educational facilities, as well as activity halls, learning resources, a multi-purpose hall, teacher and administration rooms, playgrounds, canopies, a canteen, a guard room and other facilities.

The school is also equipped with a clean energy system powered by solar panels, reflecting the ministry’s commitment to environmental sustainability and rationalising energy consumption.

ARABIAN CHAMELEON FACES HABITAT THREATS



The Arabian Chameleon is found in urban areas and agricultural lands

SALALAH: The Arabian Chameleon, a rare and distinctive creature in the Dhofar Mountains, though not endangered, faces local threats due to habitat loss, pollution and poaching, according to the Environment Authority.

EA said it is strictly prohibited to capture, harm or transport the Arabian Chameleon, or any living creature from its natural habitat, which is a violation of environmental laws, and the perpetrator is subject to legal accountability under the provisions of the Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Law.

The distinguishing features of the Arabian Chameleon are that its eyes move 360 degrees, its long, sticky tongue enables it to capture prey, its limbs resemble pincers for grasping branches, and its long tail helps it balance and cling.

The Arabian chameleon is a species of chameleon native to the southern Arabian Peninsula, and during the monsoon season, it turns green. The Arabian Chameleon moves slowly and cautiously, vibrating to mimic the movement of leaves for camouflage.

It changes colour for camouflage, regulates its body temperature and expresses emotions such as anger and fear. It feeds on insects (grasshoppers, flies, beetles, spiders) and lays their eggs inside a hole in moist soil. They hatch after an incubation period of 6 to 10 months. It is found in urban areas and agricultural lands.

Creativity, culture a driver of transformation

OMAN is increasingly recognising the vital role of creative and cultural industries in supporting the knowledge economy and driving sustainable national development.

These sectors contribute significantly to the country’s GDP, diversify income streams and reinforce cultural identity, aligning with Oman Vision 2040’s focus on investing in heritage, culture and the arts.

Dr Salim bin Mohammed al Hinai, Assistant Professor at the University of Nizwa’s College of Arts and Sciences, highlighted that creative industries encompass innovation-driven sectors such as traditional crafts, visual arts, literature, music, cinema, design and digital media.

“Notable progress has been made in producing Omani daggers, silver jewellery, and traditional textiles, especially in Nizwa and Suhar,” he said. “Additionally, graphic design and digital content are growing rapidly on social media platforms, and Omani cinema is gaining both local and international recognition.”

Cultural events like the Muscat International Book Fair and the Muscat International Film Festival underscore the sector’s contribution to strengthening national identity and boosting the economy.

Dr Al Hinai emphasised that creative industries generate valuable employment for Omani youth, promote sustainable economic models, and enhance cultural tourism by linking heritage with modern industries. They also open avenues in the digital economy through e-platforms for global marketing at relatively low investment costs.

Badriyah bint Mohammed al Fooriyah, Director of Entrepreneurship at Riyada,



Creative cultural industries as a driver of knowledge transformation

Creative industries generate valuable employment for Omani youth and promote sustainable economic models

stressed the agency’s commitment to empowering creative entrepreneurs through training, mentorship, incubation and financial support.

Riyada fosters strategic partnerships with cultural and educational institutions to maximise investment in Omani intellectual heritage and create contemporary cultural content.

“Creative industries offer promising opportunities for income generation, job creation and competitiveness, provided they are supported by a strong legislative framework and skilled workforce,” she said.

Murtadha bin Abdulkhaliq al Lawati, Director-General of the Museum of Place and People, praised Omani traditional industries as a rich civilisational legacy, combining functionality with

artistic expression. He warned against innovation that erases the core identity of local crafts, advocating for the preservation of their cultural and economic values to sustain heritage and promote cultural tourism.

Khalid bin Sulaiman Ambusaidi, owner of Manazil Inn in Nizwa, added that authentic restoration projects like preserving the Omani heritage without alteration, showcasing national identity and enhancing Oman’s global cultural image.

To develop creative industries amid digital transformation, experts call for specialised restoration professionals and collaborative efforts to use modern technologies for heritage documentation and promotion — ensuring Oman’s culture remains a sustainable resource for future generations. — ONA

Over 1,000 human rights cases received in 2024

FROM PAGE 1

The celebration focused on appreciating the role of older persons and their contributions to building society, highlighting Oman’s efforts to protect their rights, ensuring their access to necessary services, and enhancing their social standing through legislation and laws that protect them from neglect or abuse. The celebration also aimed to raise community awareness about the rights of older persons and ensure their active participation in various aspects of life.

In a statement to the Observer on the progress made by the committee in caring for the elderly in foster families, Dr Rashid said: “Regarding the rights of the elderly

in the Sultanate of Oman, the committee visited the elderly centre in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq and organised a special symposium on the services provided to the elderly in which issued a set of recommendations. Oman is distinguished by its policies that preserve the social fabric, and fostering families are one of the measures that preserve society’s cohesion and social integrity.”

Furthermore, the committee conducted a number of field visits to the Central Prison and the detention departments of the Royal Oman Police to assess the services provided to inmates and detainees and ensure that they are provided in accordance with a level befitting human dignity. Within the framework of the 2024 amnesty for inmates,

a number of Royal orders were issued ordering the release of a group of inmates from the Central Prison convicted in various cases. The total number of inmates included in the Royal amnesty reached approximately 704 inmates, both citizens and residents.

In the area of freedom of expression, the committee noted that Oman has advanced 18 places in the 2024 Press Freedom Index, issued by Reporters Without Borders, compared to 2023. This index assesses 180 countries annually and uses five criteria to assess press freedom, including the political context, the legal framework, the economic context, the social and cultural context and safety.

While for the healthcare

field, the committee also held several field meetings with institutions working in the field of the right to healthcare, including the Royal Hospital and Khoula Hospital, to discuss challenges and opportunities in improving the quality of services and ensuring accessibility for all, especially persons with disabilities. It also conducted a field visit to the Duqm Industrial Zone, examining the services and labour care provided to workers in the Duqm Special Economic Zone. It examined adherence to protection standards and a suitable work environment, and the general compliance of the facilities used with occupational safety and health measures and international standards for workers’ housing.

RO 123m invested in 7 water and sanitation projects in Bausher

MUSCAT: Nama Water Services is moving forward with its strategic projects to integrate essential services and enhance the infrastructure system across Oman’s governorates and wilayats.

These projects include the sanitation sector, which covers sewage networks, treatment plants and pumping stations, as well as treated water networks.

Among the most prominent projects currently being

implemented in Muscat Governorate are a package of seven sanitation network projects in the Wilayat of Bausher, with a total cost of RO 123 million.

Eng Jaafer bin Muhanna al Hadrami, Project Manager for the Second Unit in Muscat Governorate, explained that the ongoing projects in Bausher include main and sub-lines for sanitation networks, totalling 311 kilometres in length. This also includes a 34-kilometre



Eng Jaafer bin Muhanna al Hadrami, Project Manager

potable water network and other project components and annexes.

In a statement to ONA, he said that the construction of a sanitation network in Bausher Heights is currently underway at a cost of RO 17.5 million. The project, which will benefit 60,000 people, is expected to be completed in 2028 after a four-year implementation period. It includes 68 kilometres of sanitation networks, 1,100 inspection chambers, and 6,850 household connections. He noted

that the project is currently 10 per cent complete.

He added that a sanitation network construction project is also being implemented in South Al Athaiba at a cost of RO 5.6 million. This project will benefit 13,000 people and is expected to be completed in 2027 over a three-year period. It involves 49 kilometres of sanitation networks, 1,714 inspection chambers, and 722 household connections, with a completion rate of 12 per cent. — ONA



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SHORT TAKES



The agreement seeks to enhance the capabilities of relief systems

PACT WITH OMIFCO TO SUPPORT RELIEF FUND

SUR: The Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South on Monday signed a cooperation agreement with Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) in a bid to support the preparedness of emergency systems.

The agreement seeks to enhance the capabilities of relief systems and raise their operational efficiency, notably by consolidating resilience of institutions and communities in addressing emergencies.

It also aims to develop vital infrastructure and services to ensure their sustainability and groom national competencies that are capable of professionally managing risks. This is in addition to enhancing public-private sector partnerships for supporting national initiatives that have a sustainable impact. — ONA

SHABAB OMAN II DOCKS IN CUXHAVEN ON GLOBAL VOYAGE



RNO vessel Shabab Oman II at the Port of Cuxhaven

CUXHAVEN: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) vessel Shabab Oman II arrived on Monday at the Port of Cuxhaven, Germany, as part of its international voyage ‘Glories of the Seas’.

This marks the vessel’s seventh international voyage, carrying its noble mission of fostering bonds of friendship and brotherhood between the Sultanate of Oman and nations around the world. At each international stop, Shabab Oman II showcases authentic Omani culture, maritime heritage and its rich, centuries-old traditions. — ONA

NIZWA VARSITY LAUNCHES FIRST LITERARY CREATIVITY COMPETITION

NIZWA: Nizwa University, represented by its College of Sciences and Arts, has launched the first edition of the ‘Creativity Competition’ in the field of short stories, targeting students of higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. The competition aims to showcase young literary talents and promote noble human values through the written word.

Through this initiative, the university seeks to encourage students to engage in literary creativity, refine their skills in writing short stories in classical Arabic and support young writers.

Additionally, the competition reinforces literature’s role in serving society and strengthening



cultural identity, contributing to the development of an educated generation attuned to the issues of their nation.

The organising committee has set November 10 as the deadline for submissions. Participants must be Omani students enrolled in a higher education institution in Oman, and their submitted work must be original, unpublished and not previously entered in any other competition.

Entries must be written in classical Arabic, align with Islamic principles and human values, and each contestant is allowed only one submission.

This initiative is part of Nizwa University’s efforts to nurture innovators, researchers, and creative minds by providing a stimulating environment that enhances skills and talents. — ONA

Volunteers boost khareef tourism with local support

KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

WITH the start of the khareef season in Dhofar, a dedicated group of volunteers has stepped up to promote the season and assist visitors free of charge, working closely with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism across key tourist spots in the governorate.

The Salalah Travellers Club, a vibrant community of travel enthusiasts from Dhofar and surrounding areas, goes beyond offering support by organising tourism-related quizzes and photography competitions throughout the khareef season. These activities not only engage tourists, but also showcase the natural beauty of the governorate.

“We see a steady influx of tourists from Muscat, other parts of Oman and the Gulf countries, all eager to experience the monsoon’s charm. We help visitors who face challenges finding directions or local amenities,” shared one volunteer.

The club hosts daily photography contests via three active WhatsApp groups, where over 3,000 members share their passion for travel and exploration. Each day, a winner is chosen from hundreds of stunning photographs submitted by tourists, with prizes sponsored by local supporters. At the season’s end, a grand prize is awarded to the top



These young volunteers continue to deepen their connection with the governorate and enhance the overall tourism experience

These reliable guides are the first responders to travellers in distress and have an extensive knowledge of Dhofar’s uncharted routes

contributor.

Members like Siraj Zidan, Siddique Babu, Farooq, Shihab Aladi, Usman Saiwan and Anas Pops are passionate weekend explorers who discover and share hidden gems around Dhofar through their social media channels. Visitors are warmly invited to join these excursions to experience the region’s mountains and plains firsthand.

Recognised by local authorities as reliable guides and first responders to travellers in distress, the club’s members possess an extensive knowledge of Dhofar’s uncharted routes. Their experience in trekking and driving has made

them invaluable in aiding tourists who get lost or face road mishaps.

Beyond khareef, the Travellers Club extends its social impact by assisting visitors with accommodation and car rentals. Their commitment to community welfare includes organising blood donation drives, football matches, and other social initiatives, fostering a spirit of solidarity among locals and visitors alike.

Fondly dubbed the ‘Google Map of Salalah’, these young volunteers continue to deepen their connection with the governorate and enhance the overall tourism experience through their passion and service.

Olive sector grows to 20,000 trees, 83 tonnes in annual yield

MUSCAT: Across the mountains, particularly in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and the Western Hajar range, olive trees thrive in a revitalised agricultural landscape that reflects the nation’s ambitious vision for food security and diversified income.

The journey began in the 1990s with the introduction of 10,000 saplings from various cultivars. Some varieties quickly adapted to local conditions, laying the groundwork for olive farming as a promising sector.

Today, success is not only in cultivation but also in production. In 2022, Oman produced over 83



PROF RASHID BIN ABDULLAH AL YAHYAI

the need to boost local output. Government bodies and institutions have supported farmers through free sapling distribution, training programmes and modern olive mills, increasing the number



of trees to 20,000. Omani olive oil is now gaining regional and international recognition for its high quality and distinctive flavour.

Sustainable growth, however, demands overcoming challenges — a mission championed by Prof Rashid bin Abdullah al Yahyai of the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences. His project identifies optimal cultivation areas based on climate and water resources, introduces high-yielding varieties, and promotes best practices in pruning, irrigation and fertilisation.

Innovation is also driving the sector forward. By-products such

as olive leaves and pomace, often discarded, are being explored for transformation into value-added nutritional and functional products. Research aims to enhance processing efficiency and create sustainable economic solutions for operational hurdles.

These efforts form a clear road map — not just towards self-sufficiency, but towards positioning Oman as a significant player in the regional olive market. In doing so, Oman enhances food security and bolsters its economy by fostering an innovative and sustainable agricultural sector.

SPOTLIGHT

MINISTRY SETS CLEAR
SAFETY STANDARDS
FOR BACKPACKS

WARNS OF
SEVERE
HEALTH RISKS

MEASURES
INTRODUCED TO
REDUCE DAILY
SCHOOL BAG WEIGHT

EXPERTS WARN
OF PHYSICAL,
PSYCHOLOGICAL
RISKS

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

WITH the new school year just around the corner, students and parents are busy preparing for a fresh start filled with learning, growth and limitless possibilities.

Among the many essentials, a school bag ranks as one of the most important items on every back-to-school checklist. However, with a vast array of options available, selecting a backpack that is both reliable and suitable can often feel overwhelming.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) is dedicated to the integrated development of students at all educational levels.

In line with this commitment, the ministry has drawn attention to the serious issue of heavy school bags, particularly for younger students in grades 1 to 4, due to their significant impact on children's health and learning.

Scientific research has established that carrying a heavy backpack can lead to a variety of health problems. These include spinal deformities, muscle strains, sprains and gait disturbances that increase the risk of falls or injuries.

The physical discomfort caused by heavy bags often results in mental distraction and aversion to studying, with psychological and academic consequences that can affect students well into adulthood.

To combat these challenges, student health authorities have outlined clear specifications for safe school bags. Such backpacks should be made from comfortable, durable and safe materials, lightweight when empty, and must not exceed 10 per cent of the student's body weight when loaded. They should feature wide, soft-padded shoulder straps that distribute weight evenly and reduce pressure on the shoulders. Adjustable straps allow the bag to fit each student's size properly. Multiple compartments help distribute weight more evenly, and the bag's size should cover only

The physical discomfort caused by heavy bags often results in mental distraction and aversion to studying, with psychological and academic consequences



PROTECTING KIDS' HEALTH AND LEARNING

KEEPING SCHOOL BAGS LIGHT

the upper back down to the ribs without extending beyond the waist to prevent undue strain. The MoE has also adopted practical measures to reduce the overall burden on students. These include limiting the number of textbooks carried daily by using

shorter books and coordinating assignments between teachers to prevent overloading. The promotion of e-books and digital learning resources provides students and parents with easy access to study materials. Additionally, schools have begun

providing lockers in classrooms for storage, and materials for skill-based subjects are kept on-site to reduce what students carry home. For many children, the ideal school bag might be colourful and adorned with favourite cartoon characters, but for parents, safety, quality, proper size and affordability are paramount. Health experts in Oman emphasise that the effects of heavy school bags extend beyond physical health; they also influence students' mental well-being and academic performance. Carrying excessive weight often leads to increased fatigue, poor concentration, heightened anxiety and stress. International organisations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and the World Health Organization support these concerns. They recommend reducing the weight of school bags and raising awareness among parents and educators to safeguard the health and future of students.

SHORT TAKES



The event is part of an ongoing effort to foster a culture of volunteerism

VOLUNTEERS UNITE TO KEEP WADI DARBAT CLEAN

SALALAH: The lush landscapes of Wadi Darbat became the focus of a major community clean-up and awareness drive, as the Taqah Charity Team partnered with Taqah Sports Club to host the ‘Preserved Nature’ event.

The initiative sought to protect one of Dhofar’s most visited natural sites while inspiring visitors to take an active role in safeguarding the environment.

Volunteers of all ages joined forces for a large-scale clean-up across multiple points in the valley, collecting waste and restoring the area’s natural charm. Children and visitors also enjoyed an interactive quiz on the environment and wildlife, with small prizes given to encourage eco-friendly habits.

Organisers noted that the event is part of an ongoing effort to foster a culture of volunteerism and strengthen the community’s sense of responsibility for Dhofar’s natural heritage. — ONA

A PERSIAN BOOK ON DHOFAR’S NATURE AND HISTORY

TEHRAN: The Iranian publishing house ‘Ishtar’ in Tehran has recently released a new book titled ‘Oman Through the Window of Salalah’, which explores the tourism, culture and history of Dhofar Governorate.

Authored by Iranian writer Hossein Molla Hassani, the 400-page book invites readers on an exploratory journey through Dhofar, with a particular focus on the city of Salalah.

In the book’s introduction, the author describes the breathtaking natural landscapes, including lush green pathways, coconut and banana trees, mountain mists, and the fragrant aroma of frankincense, presenting Salalah as a hidden treasure and enchanting land where history blends with culture.

The writer explains that the book’s primary aim is to unveil the beauty of nature and the promising economic opportunities of Dhofar Governorate and Salalah, encouraging readers to discover this inspiring and unforgettable destination.

Molla Hassani notes that the book helps adventurers explore new destinations, with its detailed descriptions and vivid imagery sparking readers’ curiosity and motivating them to embark on this captivating journey.

Those interested in Omani culture and history will find significant coverage of Salalah and Dhofar’s historical and cultural aspects. This book stands as a valuable and insightful work for anyone seeking inspiration to explore rich heritage and stunning tourist destinations. — ONA

‘DHO FAR: A NATURAL HISTORY WONDER’ EXHIBITION OPENS

SALALAH: An exhibition titled ‘Dhofar: A Natural History Wonder’ was inaugurated on Sunday at the Museum of the Frankincense Land in Salalah. The exhibition is organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in cooperation with the Natural History Museum in Muscat and the Museum of the Frankincense Land in Dhofar Governorate.

The exhibition was opened under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment



The exhibition showcases the mountain and marine environments of Dhofar

Authority, and will run until August 31.

Osama bin Mohammed al Rawas, Director of the Museum of the Frankincense Land, stated that the exhibition, launched by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, aims to enhance environmental protection awareness, highlight the importance of conserving natural resources, and provide an educational and recreational platform for visitors of all ages. — ONA

Children Cultural Centre reaches 39,383 beneficiaries

THE Children Cultural Centre, affiliated to the Directorate-General of Knowledge and Cultural Development at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, continues its efforts to enhance digital projects aimed at children.

This initiative aligns with a vision to develop digital awareness and instil concepts of creativity and interactive learning among young people. The Centre’s approach reflects its commitment to aligning cultural and educational programmes with modern demands, opening new horizons for children to acquire future skills and empowering them to engage positively with technology through innovative digital content that combines entertainment and knowledge.

In 2024, the number of beneficiaries of the Centre’s events and activities reached 35,603, while from January to July 2025, the figure rose to 39,383 beneficiaries.

Salwa al Rashdi, Director of the Children Cultural Centre, stated that the goal of these projects goes beyond visual presentation or technical entertainment. Instead, it aims to build a sustainable cognitive relationship between children and their cultural identity by revitalising Omani heritage as a living, interactive experience.

She explained that, in line with



The Centre continues to launch a series of interactive digital projects that blend authenticity with innovation

The goal is to build a sustainable cognitive relationship between children and their cultural identity

the Centre’s vision to reinforce Omani cultural identity and enhance young people’s awareness of their civilisational heritage, it continues to launch a series of interactive digital projects that blend authenticity with innovation. These projects, she said, utilise virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence (AI) and electronic gaming applications — effective tools for connecting new generations to their cultural roots in a contemporary and engaging manner.

She noted that these projects align closely with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the national cultural strategy, particularly in fostering a creative society, national identity, digital transformation and innovation-based education.

The Centre aspires to serve as a cultural knowledge platform, enabling children to become active contributors in shaping their country’s future.

She added that these projects are utilised in events and activities both within and outside Oman related to Omani cultural identity. Combining entertainment and education, they introduce young people to their historical and cultural roots. Among these projects — spanning culture, sports and technology — are two initiatives centred on the traditional Omani games Al Anbar and Al Sayyad. — ONA

‘EJADA WEEK’ KICKS OFF IN SALALAH

SALALAH: The ‘Ejada Week’ officially began on Monday in the Wilayat of Salalah, organised by Dhofar Municipality in partnership with the Dhofar Governor’s Office and the Ministry of Labour. The event runs until August 14, featuring participation from more than 15 government agencies and three private sector entities.

Held under the theme ‘Partnership in Performance and Excellence in Results’, the programme highlights efforts to develop and enhance the Ejada system, share successful experiences and showcase best practices. It aims to



The programme highlights efforts to develop and enhance the Ejada system

foster a culture of quality and excellence, improve the efficiency of national talent and support the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghasani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, described

‘Ejada Week’ as a platform for strengthening public-private partnerships, exchanging expertise, and encouraging innovation and continuous improvement in individual and institutional performance.

Mohammed bin Mubarak

al Kalbani, Director-General of the General Directorate of Development and Quality Assurance at the Ministry of Labour, said the activities are designed to develop methodologies and processes for implementing the ‘Ejada’ system, which will enhance institutional competitiveness over the long term.

The week’s agenda includes specialised workshops, panel discussions and interactive presentations. Monday’s sessions focused on ‘The Ejada System for Measuring Individual Performance’ and ‘The Institutional Excellence System’ with its related indicators. — ONA

Omani-Bahraini expo in Salalah to feature 53 exhibitors

SALALAH: The fifth edition of the Omani-Bahraini Products Exhibition opened on Sunday in Salalah. The exhibition is organised by the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Association in cooperation with the embassy of Bahrain in Oman and the Dhofar branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). The exhibition will continue for ten days.

The exhibition aims to provide an opportunity for entrepreneurs from small and medium enterprises

and productive families to showcase their products and improve their quality. 53 exhibitors from Oman and Bahrain are participating at the Salalah Gardens Mall as part of the Khareef Dhofar Season.

The exhibition features a wide range of exhibits, including handicrafts, pottery and traditional costumes.

Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi, Ambassador of Bahrain to Oman, emphasised that organising the fifth



The exhibition provides a platform for exchanging expertise between owners of SMEs

edition of the exhibition reflects the successes achieved by previous editions.

Radina al Hajri, Chairwoman of the Omani-Bahraini Friendship Society, said: “The exhibition is part of a series of events and exhibitions aimed at strengthening trade and investment relations between the two brotherly countries, and providing a platform for exchanging expertise and establishing partnerships between

owners of small and medium-sized enterprises.”

Naif bin Hamed Fadhel, Chairman of the Dhofar Branch, OCCI, explained that the exhibition embodies a pioneering model of economic and commercial cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain, contributing to enhancing trade and investment exchange, thus adding qualitative value to bilateral relations. — ONA

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



American, S Korean officials attend the press briefing at the Defence Ministry in Seoul. — AFP

NORTH KOREA WARNS US-SOUTH KOREA DRILLS

SEOUL: North Korea will react with “resolute counteraction” in the event of provocations from upcoming joint military drills between South Korea and the United States, its defence chief said in a state media dispatch on Monday. The warning comes as Seoul and Washington are set to carry out their annual Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises, aimed at containing the nuclear-armed North, from August 18 to 28.

North Korea has always been infuriated by US-South Korean military drills, decrying them as rehearsals for war. “The armed forces of the DPRK will cope with the war drills of the US and (South Korea) with thoroughgoing and resolute counteraction posture... at the level of the right to self-defence,” North Korean defence chief No Kwang Chol said in a statement carried by the Korean Central News Agency.

The US stations around 28,500 troops in South Korea and the allies regularly stage joint drills they describe as defensive in nature.

Seoul and Pyongyang have recently appeared to be heading towards a thaw in relations, with the two sides removing propaganda loudspeakers along the border. — AFP

IRAN’S TOP SECURITY CHIEF HEADS TO IRAQ, LEBANON



Iraqi PM Mohammed al Sudani(C) looks on as Iraq’s Qasim al Araj and Iran’s Ali Larjani sign documents in Baghdad. — Reuters

TEHRAN: Iran’s top security chief, Ali Larjani, was in Iraq on Monday ahead of a visit to Lebanon. Iranian state television said Larjani, the head of the National Security Council, had departed on the three-day trip, his first since being appointed.

Larjani signed a bilateral security agreement in Iraq before heading to Lebanon, where he will meet senior Lebanese officials and figures, state TV said. There were no immediate details on the security deal. In Iraq, Larjani met with National Security Adviser Qassem al Araj and discussed “the implementation of the security agreement” as well as the situation in the Gaza Strip, according to a statement from Araj’s office.

A top Iraqi government official said that the aim of the visit was to discuss the agreement and inform Iraq “about Iran’s position on the latest developments regarding the conflict with the United States and Israel”. Iranian state television later said Larjani and Araj signed a “joint security memorandum of understanding”. — AFP

AFFIRMING JUSTICE

Syria vows accountability for Sweida killing



Syria’s interior ministry on Monday said it would hold accountable those responsible for the apparent killing of an unarmed man at a hospital during violence last month in Sweida province, after a purported video of the incident emerged. “We condemn and denounce this act in the strongest terms and affirm that the perpetrators will be held accountable and brought to justice... whatever their affiliation,” the ministry said in a statement. — AFP

NIGERIAN MILITARY KILLS MORE THAN 100 ‘BANDITS’ IN NORTHWEST RAID

KANO: The Nigerian military killed more than 100 members of a criminal gang in an air and ground raid over the weekend, according to a conflict monitoring report produced for the United Nations on Monday. Armed groups called “bandits” by locals have for years been terrorising communities in northwest and central Nigeria, raiding villages, kidnapping residents for ransom and burning homes after looting them.

The military raid in the restive

northwestern state of Zamfara was launched “in the early hours” on Sunday in the Bukkuyum local government area, where fighter jets in coordination with ground troops pounded a gathering of more than 400 bandits in their Makakkari forest camp.

The military’s attack “may have occurred in response to consecutive banditry, especially kidnapping, in the state in the previous month”, the report said, noting a link between a recent decrease in military

operations in the state and a spate of bandit attacks. Bukkuyum’s Adabka village was the scene of a bandit attack that saw residents kidnapped and 13 security personnel killed. Bandits had been planning an attack on a farming village when “air and ground troops ambushed a bandit camp... killing over 100”, the report said.

Nigeria’s “banditry” crisis originated in conflict over land and water rights between herders and farmers. — AFP

Gazans mourn journalists killed by Israeli strikes

GAZANS gathered on Monday for the funeral of five Al Jazeera staff members and a sixth reporter killed in an Israeli strike, with Israel calling one of them affiliated with Hamas. Dozens stood amid bombed-out buildings in the courtyard of Al Shifa hospital to pay their respects to Anas al Sharif, a prominent Al Jazeera correspondent aged 28, and four of his colleagues, killed on Sunday. A sixth journalist, Mohammed al Khaldi, who worked as a freelance reporter, was also killed in the strike that targeted the Al Jazeera team, according to the director of Al Shifa Hospital, Dr Mohammed Abu Salmiya.



Mourners march with the bodies of the journalists from Al Shifa hospital, in Gaza. — AFP

The UN human rights agency condemned Israel’s targeted killing of six journalists in Gaza as a “grave breach of international humanitarian law. Israel must respect and protect all civilians, including journalists”

a “grave breach of international humanitarian law”. The office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said on X that the Israeli military had targeted a tent housing five staff from Qatari broadcaster Al Jazeera. “Israel must respect and protect all civilians, including journalists,” Turk’s office added, noting that at least 242 Palestinian journalists have been killed in Gaza since the war started in the Palestinian territory in October 2023. “We call for immediate, safe and unhindered access to Gaza for all journalists,” it said.

Journalists (CPJ) called in July for his protection, accusing Israel of a “pattern” of labelling journalists militants “without providing credible evidence”. It said the Israeli military had levelled similar accusations against other journalists

in Gaza earlier in the war, including other Al Jazeera staff.

Al Jazeera called the attack that killed Sharif “a desperate attempt to silence voices exposing the Israeli occupation”, as it described Sharif as “one of Gaza’s bravest journalists”. It also said it followed “repeated incitement and calls by multiple Israeli officials and spokespersons to target the fearless journalist Anas Al Sharif and his colleagues”.

Reporters Without Borders says nearly 200 journalists have been killed in the war so far. International reporters are prevented from travelling to Gaza by Israel, except on occasional, tightly controlled trips with the military.

The strike on the journalists came with criticism mounting over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s decision to expand the war in the Gaza Strip. — AFP



JAPAN URGES EVACUATIONS AFTER RAINS

TOKYO: Japanese authorities on Monday urged residents to evacuate their homes after heavy rains unleashed floods and landslides in the country’s southwest, leaving several people missing. Television footage from various communities in Kumamoto prefecture showed houses, stores and vehicles submerged in about a metre of water.

Surging rivers swept away

vehicles and damaged roads. More than 40 centimetres of rain fell over 12 hours in Kumamoto prefecture’s hardest-hit Tamana city, a record for the area according to the Japan Meteorological Agency.

By Monday morning, evacuation advisories and warnings were issued to more than three million residents in the southwestern regions.

— AFP

COURT TESTIMONIES

Bangladesh hears graft case against Hasina



A court in Bangladesh on Monday heard cases brought by the anti-corruption organisation against ex-leader Sheikh Hasina and her family, including her daughter, who has served as a top UN official. Three officials from the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) read out testimonies in three separate cases over an alleged land grab of lucrative plots in a suburb of the capital Dhaka. Hasina has been named in six corruption cases. — AFP

MONSOON FLOODS

7 die while fixing water channel in Pakistan



A mudslide in northern Pakistan swept over a group of villagers attempting to fix a water channel damaged in recent monsoon rains, killing seven people, officials said. Volunteers had been working through the night in the northern city of Danyor, in mountainous Gilgit-Baltistan, to fix a man-made water channel when part of the group was buried under a mudslide, the region’s disaster agency said. Seven bodies were recovered. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



US President Trump participates in the signing with Armenia's PM Pashinyan (R) and Azerbaijan's President Aliyev (L). — Reuters file photo

AZERBAIJAN, ARMENIA PUBLISH INITIALLED PEACE AGREEMENT

TBILISI: Armenia and Azerbaijan published the text of a US-brokered peace agreement on Monday, pledging to respect each other's territorial integrity and formally put an end to nearly four decades of conflict. The deal was struck in Washington last Friday, when Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with US President Donald Trump in the White House.

The text of the agreement, published by both countries' foreign ministries, says Yerevan and Baku will relinquish all claims to each other's territory, refrain from using force against one another and pledge to respect international law. "This agreement is a solid foundation for establishing a reliable and lasting peace, the result of an agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan that reflects the balanced interests of the two countries", Pashinyan wrote on Facebook.

At the White House meeting on Friday, the United States gained exclusive development rights to a strategic transit corridor through the South Caucasus that the Trump administration said would boost bilateral economic ties and allow for greater exports of energy. — Reuters

FIRE WHIRLS GRIP NORTHERN SPAIN



Extreme heat and strong winds caused "fire whirls" as a blaze burned several houses and forced the evacuation of hundreds of people from near a Unesco-listed national park in northern Spain, authorities said on Monday. Thirteen fires broke out in the north of the Castile and Leon region, with about 700 people told to abandon their homes in half a dozen villages. Four fires were still live, Juan Carlos Suarez-Quinones, chief of environment for the regional government, said on Monday morning. Firefighters had extinguished the other nine. High temperatures had caused the so-called fire whirls near Las Medulas park, forcing firemen to retreat and burning some houses in the nearby village, according to Suarez-Quinones. — Reuters

FINLAND CHARGES SHIP CAPTAIN OVER BALTIC CABLE SABOTAGE

HELSINKI: The captain and two officers of a ship believed to belong to Russia's so-called shadow fleet have been charged with sabotage for cutting five Baltic Sea cables in December, Finnish prosecutors said on Monday. The captain and first and second officers of the Cook Islands-registered oil tanker Eagle S are alleged to have dragged the ship's anchor on the seabed for around 90 kilometres, damaging five undersea cables in the Gulf of Finland. They have been charged

with "aggravated criminal mischief and aggravated interference with communications", the office of Finland's Deputy Prosecutor General said in a statement. The office did not disclose the nationalities of the suspects. The criminal investigation was launched after the EstLink 2 submarine power cable and four telecommunications cables connecting Finland to Estonia were damaged on December 25. "The owners of the cables have suffered a

total of at least 60 million euros in immediate damage in the form of repair costs alone", the statement said. The Eagle S is believed to belong to the Russian shadow fleet — old tankers used to skirt restrictions on Russian oil exports. As a result of the disrupted electricity transmission and telecommunications, the event "is also suspected to have caused a serious risk to energy supply and telecommunications in Finland". — AFP

Ukrainian drone attacks kill three, target Moscow

THREE people were killed in overnight Ukrainian drone attacks on Russia's Tula and Nizhny Novgorod regions, a senior Russian regional official and the defence ministry said on Monday. Two people died and two were hospitalised following an attack before midnight on Sunday on the Tula region that borders the Moscow region to its north, Tula Governor Dmitry Milyaev said on the Telegram messaging app. One person was killed and two others were hospitalised following a Ukrainian attack targeting an industrial zone in the Nizhny Novgorod region in western Russia, Gleb Nikitin, the governor of the region, said on the Telegram.

A Ukrainian security official said that Ukraine had targeted a Russian plant producing missile components in the Nizhny Novgorod region in the drone attack. At least four drones struck the Arzamas Instrument-Making Plant, which produces control systems and other components for Russia's Kh-32 and Kh-101 missiles, the official said. Russian air defence units destroyed a total of 59 Ukrainian drones overnight, including 12 over the Tula region, the Russian Defence Ministry said. The ministry only reports how many drones its units shoot down, not how many Ukraine launches. Seven drones were downed en route to Russia's capital overnight and on Monday morning, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said. Both sides deny targeting civilians in their strikes on each other's territory. Nevertheless, thousands of civilians have died in the full-scale war that Russia launched in Ukraine in February 2022. Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer supports US President Donald Trump's efforts to end the war with Ukraine, but Kyiv must be involved in any settlement about ending the fighting, his spokesperson said on Monday. US President Donald Trump will meet his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in Alaska on August 15 and Ukraine fears that the two leaders may try to dictate terms for ending the three-and-a-half-year-old war. "We will never trust President Putin as far as you can throw him, but we will support Ukraine and President



Rescuers and police officers work at the site of an air strike, in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. — Reuters

Trump and European nations as we enter these negotiations", Starmer's spokesperson told reporters. "Any peace must be built with Ukraine, not imposed upon it and we will not reward aggression or compromise sovereignty. Ukraine will decide its own future and we will support it every step of the way". Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said that the US had pledged to consult with Europe ahead of a summit with Russia's Vladimir Putin, as European ministers prepare for discussions amidst fears Washington may dictate unfavourable peace terms to Ukraine. European Union foreign ministers were due to hold a video conference on Monday afternoon to discuss their support for Kyiv and the upcoming meeting. "The American side has promised that it will consult with European partners on its position before the meeting in Alaska", Poland's Tusk told a press conference. "I will wait... for the effects of the meeting between Presidents Trump and Putin — I have many fears and a lot of hope", he said. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Monday that concessions to Moscow would not persuade it to stop fighting in Ukraine and that there was a need to ramp up pressure on the Kremlin.

European officials have sought to influence the White House's positioning ahead of the Alaska talks, emphasising the need to safeguard Ukraine's sovereignty, provide security guarantees and allow Kyiv to choose its own path. US Vice President JD Vance met European and Ukrainian officials over the weekend and European leaders are expected to conduct more outreach to Washington in the coming days. "Any deal between the US and Russia must have Ukraine and the EU included, for it is a matter of Ukraine's and the whole of Europe's security", EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said. European leaders have also underscored their commitment to the idea that international borders cannot be changed by force, as EU capitals fear a deal forced on Kyiv could create a dangerous precedent. "Regarding territorial issues, the Russian position is framed as a territorial swap, but it appears as a rather one-sided swap", a European Commission official said. "In the context of these talks, the US administration has been very involved and has shown interest in aligning positioning with Europe", the official said. "The most robust security guarantee would be that there are no limitations on Ukraine forces and third countries' support to Ukraine". — Reuters

Colombian presidential hopeful Uribe dies 2 months after shooting

BOGOTA: Colombian Senator and presidential hopeful Miguel Uribe, who was shot in the head at a campaign event two months ago, died in the early hours of Monday at the age of 39, the hospital treating him said. Uribe, a member of a prominent political family and a lawmaker for the right-wing opposition, was shot in Bogota on June 7 where he was speaking to try to secure his party's nomination for 2026 elections. His wife, Maria Claudia Tarazona, announced his death on social media. "I ask God to show me the way to learn to live without you", she wrote. "Rest in peace, love of my life, I will take care of our children". The capital's Santa Fe Foundation hospital — where supporters held regular vigils during Uribe's treatment and repeated operations — said over the weekend his condition had worsened because of a hemorrhage in his central nervous

system. On Monday, it said he had died at 1:56 am. Former President Alvaro Uribe, the leader of the senator's Democratic Centre party and no relation to the deceased lawmaker, wrote on X that "evil destroys everything; they killed hope". "May Miguel's fight be a light that illuminates Colombia's right path", added the former president, who was sentenced by a judge earlier this month to 12 years of house arrest for abuse of process and bribery of a public official. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio wrote on X he was deeply saddened by the news. "The United States stands in solidarity with his family, the Colombian people, both in mourning and demanding justice for those responsible". Six people are under arrest over the shooting, including two men that the attorney general's office



An image of Colombian Senator Miguel Uribe Turbay is displayed, in Bogota. — Reuters

says met in Medellin to plan the assassination. A 15-year-old accused of carrying out the shooting was arrested within hours of the crime, but police have said they are pursuing the "intellectual authors" of the attack. In a video of the boy's June arrest,

independently verified by Reuters, he can be heard shouting that he had been hired by a local drug dealer. Defence Minister Pedro Sanchez vowed on Monday to catch those responsible. "We will not allow the violent to intimidate or silence political

voices needed in our democracy", he wrote on X. His ministry has said there is a 3 billion peso (about \$740,000) reward for information leading to the identification and capture of the culprits and that the United States, Britain and the United Arab Emirates are helping with the investigation. The death of Senator Uribe, a father and stepfather, adds further tragedy to his family's fraught history. His mother, journalist Diana Turbay, was killed in 1991 during a botched rescue mission after she was kidnapped by the Medellin Cartel, headed by drug lord Pablo Escobar. Uribe himself enjoyed a rapid political rise, as a lawmaker for the right-wing Democratic Centre party and presidential hopeful known for his sharp criticism of leftist President Gustavo Petro's administration. — Reuters

OPINION

Planned Gaza occupation sparks global condemnation



THE Sultanate of Oman has strongly condemned and rejected Israel’s decision to continue its military occupation of the Gaza Strip, viewing it as a clear violation of international law and a disregard for resolutions of international legitimacy. This position is in line with a broader international rejection of Israel’s plans for complete military control over Gaza. Israel’s security cabinet recently approved a plan by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the occupation of Gaza City, which means the Israeli military will take control of Gaza City while providing humanitarian aid to the civilian population outside the combat zones. This occupation represents a significant escalation by Israel, potentially leading to the forced displacement of tens of thousands of Gaza residents who are facing famine conditions due to Israel’s humanitarian aid blockade. Oman has consistently supported the rights of the Palestinian people, calling on the international community, especially the member states of the United Nations Security Council, to fulfil their legal and moral obligations to stop the aggression and help Palestinians regain their rightful rights and end the Israeli occupation of lands within the pre-1967 borders.

The recent condemnation from Oman comes amidst widespread international opposition to Israel’s stated intention to assume full military control of Gaza. This decision to occupy violates international law, seeks to legitimise illegal occupation and goes against relevant international legitimacy decisions. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Arab League Ministerial Committee (Gaza Contact Group) issued a joint statement unequivocally rejecting Israel’s plan for full military occupation of Gaza, describing it as ‘against international law, a serious escalation and a continuation of the occupation’. They also highlighted ongoing atrocities in Gaza and the Palestinian territories, warning that these violations could amount to crimes against humanity. Oman has been calling for an end to what they describe as Israel’s ‘genocidal war’ on the Gaza Strip, urging the urgent delivery of humanitarian aid and emphasising the need for a complete and permanent ceasefire, an end to the oppression of Palestinians, and a halt to the ‘genocide being committed by Israeli occupation forces in Gaza and across the Palestinian territories’. International organisations and leaders have echoed these concerns. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres criticised

The growing recognition of Palestine by Western nations reflects mounting concerns over the Gaza humanitarian crisis and increasing frustration with Israel’s handling of the conflict

Israel’s plan to take control of Gaza City, labelling it as ‘a dangerous escalation’ that would result in the forced displacement of Palestinians. European leaders, including Germany, the UK, Spain, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Finland, have also criticised Israel’s decision, warning of exacerbated humanitarian crises and some, like Germany, have halted military exports that could be used in Gaza. On a positive note, a large group of UN members plan to recognise Palestinian statehood, including Australia, France, Canada and Britain, in addition to several nations that have already done so. This shift in recognition among Western countries is widely seen as a response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and frustrations with Israel’s conduct of the war, resulting in numerous Palestinian casualties and widespread suffering. It also reflects a growing international consensus that a two-state solution is the only viable path to peace, a solution that Israel’s current government has largely rejected. While recognition alone may not immediately alter the situation on the ground, it is considered by supporters as a crucial step towards building momentum for a two-state solution and realigning global diplomacy with international law and principles of self-determination.

NEPAL WAIVES FEES FOR 97 REMOTE PEAKS

GOPAL SHARMA

Nepal will waive climbing fees for nearly 100 peaks in the remote northwestern Himalayas for the next two years to try and lure more mountaineers to the less developed region bordering China, an official said on Monday. The country has opened 491 of its peaks, but climbers typically focus on around 25 in the northeast and central parts of Nepal, including the world’s highest peak Mount Everest, which hundreds scale every year. Tourism Department official Himlal Gautam said the decision to waive permit fees to 97 peaks, ranging from 5,870 metres to 7,132 metres in Nepal’s Karnali and Far Western provinces, was aimed at promoting mountaineering on smaller mountains in remote areas. “The idea is to encourage climbers to go to unexplored yet scenic areas and mountain peaks,” Gautam said. Nepal has just increased the fees it will charge from September for permits to \$350 for a smaller mountain, from a previous \$250, to \$15,000 for Everest from \$11,000. Gautam said the permit fee waiver would help promote tourism and improve economic conditions for people in the least developed areas of Nepal. Mountain climbing and trekking are the main attractions for tourists and a key source of income and employment in the cash-strapped nation. The most tragic mountaineering incidents and the challenges include an avalanche at Kang Guru in 2005. This was a devastating powder-snow avalanche that struck a French expedition’s base camp, killing all 18 people present — seven French climbers and eleven Nepalese staff. Rescue efforts recovered only a few bodies initially; others were retrieved months later. This remains one of the deadliest avalanche incidents in Nepal. Earlier in 2014, the Annapurna-Dhaulagiri Snowstorm was triggered by Cyclone Hudhud, a fierce snowstorm and avalanches killed at least 43 people, including trekkers and locals. The disaster exposed gaps in early warning systems and preparedness among trekkers. A record-breaking blizzard on May 10–11, 1996, resulted in eight climbers dying during descent, making it the deadliest Everest season at that time. It sparked widespread debates about the commercialisation of Everest expeditions. — Reuters

Empowering Omani people with disabilities

IN 2024, the government in Oman took a decisive step towards building a more inclusive society with the introduction of a comprehensive welfare system under the new Social Protection Law. Among its many reforms, the provision of a monthly disability allowance of RO 130 has had a profound impact on the lives of people with disabilities across the country. This measure, administered by the newly established Social Protection Fund, represents a significant policy shift, aligning with both Oman Vision 2040 and international calls for universal social protection. Interviews conducted with 19 Omanis with physical disabilities, many of whom are well-known social media and community influencers, reveal the transformative effect of this policy. All participants spoke positively of the allowance, describing it as a lifeline that fosters dignity, autonomy and social participation. They highlighted how the monthly support enables them to address mobility challenges, whether through hiring drivers, purchasing assistive devices, or covering the costs of participating in social and cultural life. For many, it is not simply about financial assistance; it is about regaining control over their lives and feeling more fully included in the fabric of society. The law’s broader framework also introduces universal old-age pensions, child benefits, and other forms of targeted support for vulnerable groups. However, for people with disabilities, the allowance stands out as an empowering recognition of their



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right to participate in society on equal terms. The participants stressed that this form of direct support moves beyond symbolic gestures, offering tangible, practical help that addresses the everyday barriers they face. Nevertheless, the interviews also revealed certain challenges that could limit the system’s reach. The lack of a clear, consistent definition of ‘disability’ in the early stages of implementation created uncertainty over who qualifies for the allowance. While the Social Protection Fund has since issued updated criteria — requiring, for example, an official disability card and meeting specific medical or functional conditions — these definitions, though necessary for transparency, risk excluding individuals whose needs are nonetheless significant. The application process itself was another concern. Several interviewees described it as lengthy and burdensome, involving extensive paperwork and waiting periods. Despite these difficulties, they unanimously agreed that the benefits ultimately outweighed the effort required to obtain them. In addition, recent adjustments to the regulations have introduced

periodic re-evaluations of eligibility, with the possibility of suspending payments if criteria are not met. While such reviews ensure that the system remains fair and sustainable, they can also create anxiety among beneficiaries who depend on the allowance for daily living expenses. The participants suggested that simplifying the process and providing assistance with applications could help mitigate these concerns. What emerges from these conversations is a strong sense of gratitude towards the Omani government for introducing a policy that directly addresses the needs of people with disabilities. The allowance has brought about real change, not only by improving mobility and access to essential tools, but also by reinforcing a sense of self-worth and independence. For a country committed to inclusive development, such reforms mark an important milestone. Looking ahead, there is room for further refinement. Clearer eligibility guidelines, streamlined application procedures and expanded outreach efforts could ensure that the system benefits all who need it. Engaging the very influencers who have benefited from the policy to raise awareness and guide others through the process could also strengthen its impact. By recognising the right of people with disabilities to lead independent, dignified lives, the government has taken a meaningful step towards social inclusion. With continued commitment and targeted improvements, this initiative can serve as a regional model of how policy, when grounded in empathy and vision, can transform lives.

One Earth and all of us



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

WE can debate whether our planet is green or blue because that is what we do when we have a mind - an entitlement of opinion.

And if we think that all people are the same, we could be mistaken. Our sentiments vary, and so do our needs. Approximately 476 million people across 90 countries are considered indigenous, representing over 5,000 distinct groups and a majority of the world's languages.

In order to raise awareness of the needs of the indigenous population groups, every August 9, the world commemorates the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. This date was adopted in December 1994 by UN General Assembly resolution 49/214, and it marks the date of the first meeting of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights held in Geneva in 1982. It was that long ago. It has played a crucial role, as one way or another, we learn more about the Indigenous people of the world. They make sacrifices to keep their identity and preserve their ancient wisdom.

This year's theme also caught up with the current trend: "Indigenous Peoples and AI: Defending Rights, Shaping Futures."

Sometimes it can leave us confused. What makes this set of people be defined as indigenous?

One of the first aspects is that they have historical continuity because they have a

long-standing connection to their ancestral lands and territories.

What also stands out is their distinct identity. This is because they maintain unique languages, cultures and social structures.

Experts point out that they are usually a non-dominant sector, as they often form a minority group within the broader society.

The fascinating part is that the indigenous peoples possess specialised knowledge about their environments and ecosystems, but they are also vulnerable, and they often face marginalisation, poverty and human rights abuses in some parts of the world.

What studies show us is that they play a vital role in managing and conserving significant portions of the world's land and natural resources. According to Unesco, the indigenous peoples live in all regions of the world and own, occupy, or use some 22 per cent of the global land area. Unesco states that, "Numbering at least 370-500 million, Indigenous Peoples represent the greater part of the world's cultural diversity. They speak an overwhelming majority of the world's estimated 7,000 languages and represent 5,000 different cultures."

Despite their cultural differences, indigenous peoples from around the world share common problems related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples. Many indigenous peoples continue to be confronted with marginalisation, extreme poverty and other human rights violations.

The reality is that indigenous peoples live

In order to raise awareness of the needs of the indigenous population groups, every August 9, the world commemorates the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

in all regions of the world, from the Americas to the Arctic, Africa, Asia and Australasia.

The question is, how do they keep the traditions intact with so much modernisation around them?

The question is even more important when we realise land is often challenged. Indigenous peoples often experience displacement from their ancestral lands due to development, resource extraction, and other factors. It also makes us wonder, then, about the status of the indigenous population of Palestine and in all other war zones. And not to forget about other tribes that might have been scattered and erased.

The world today is a global village, and a trend that we have seen from that is how we are becoming more and more similar. We seek a common identity to merge together, and the life on the World Wide Web has made it possible. We even shop online together for the same products from popular and established online stores.

Amongst all this globalisation, the indigenous people maintain their identity, even though they often suffer from marginalisation and discrimination, especially exclusion from decision-making processes. Such circumstances lead to other challenges such as poverty and access to basic services such as health and education. Should they be left behind?

Human rights violations have been recorded throughout history. It is amazing that we are still able to experience the cultures.

FOUR DAYS LEFT TO CRAFT GLOBAL PLASTIC TREATY

Countries remained at loggerheads on Monday over how to tackle plastic pollution, with only four days left to craft a landmark global treaty on reining in the ever-growing scourge.

While plastic has transformed modern life, plastic pollution poses an increasing threat to the environment and the human body - and every day the garbage accumulates on land and in the oceans.

The 184 countries meeting at the United Nations to sculpt a first international accord setting out the way forward return to the negotiating table after a day off on Sunday to reflect on their differences.

Isabel Malsang, and Robin Millard

The first week of talks in Geneva fell behind schedule and failed to produce a clear text, with states still deeply divided at square one: the purpose and scope of the treaty they started negotiating two and a half years ago.

Last week, working groups met on technical topics ranging from the design of plastic to waste management, production, financing for recycling, plastic reuse, and funding waste collection in developing countries.

They also discussed molecules and chemical additives that pose environmental and health risks. A nebulous cluster of mostly oil-producing states calling themselves the Like-Minded Group - including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Russia, Iran and Malaysia - want the treaty to focus primarily on waste management.

The United States and India are also close to this club. At the other end of the spectrum, a growing faction calling themselves the "ambitious" group want radical action written into the treaty, including measures to curb the damage caused by plastic garbage, such as phasing out the most dangerous chemicals.

Plastic pollution is so ubiquitous that microplastics have been found on the highest mountain peaks, in the deepest ocean trench and scattered throughout almost every part of the human body. The ambitious group wants a clause reining in plastic production, which is set to triple by 2060.

The club brings together the European Union, many African and Latin American countries, Australia, Britain, Switzerland and Canada.

It also includes island micro-nations drowning in plastic trash they did little to produce and have little capacity to deal with.

Palau, speaking for 39 small island developing states (SIDS), said the treaty had to deal with removing the plastic garbage "already choking our oceans".

"SIDS will not stand by while our future is bartered away in a stalemate," and "this brinkmanship has a real price: a dying ocean," the Micronesian archipelago said. — AFP

Is Trump winning on economic policy?

SIX months into his second term, it is fair to say that US President Donald Trump has swept the board when it comes to economic policy - at least by the standards he set for himself. In fact, he has imposed his will to a degree no other post-World War II president, with the possible exception of Ronald Reagan, has been able to achieve.

For starters, Trump got his One Big Beautiful Bill Act passed, despite a razor-thin majority in the House of Representatives and credible projections that his signature tax and spending package will add more than \$3 trillion to the federal deficit over the coming decade (barring a miraculous AI-driven economic boom). And the southern US border is now more tightly controlled than it has been in decades.

On tariffs in particular, Trump got what he wanted. Europe and Japan effectively capitulated - agreeing to eliminate their own trade barriers while accepting a 15 per cent US tariff on their exports. Given these humiliating terms, it was more than a little absurd to see European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen hail the deal as a success simply because Trump backed down from his initial threat of a 30 per cent tariff.

Both the European Union and Japan also committed to invest hundreds of billions of dollars in the US economy, with Trump exerting significant influence over where that money would be directed. His self-styled "Tariff Man" persona clearly rattled world leaders, many of whom failed to recognise that his threats were unsustainable in the long run. In retrospect, they would have been better off calling his bluff. Instead, last Thursday, an emboldened Trump announced new tariffs on nearly every country in the world.

While European policymakers were busy mitigating the impact of American tariff threats, Trump pushed through legislation aimed at bringing cryptocurrencies into the



Trump has faced more public scrutiny for withholding the Jeffrey Epstein files than for his crypto dealings.



KENNETH ROGOFF

The writer is a former chief economist of the International Monetary Fund, is Professor of Economics and Public Policy at Harvard University and the recipient of the 2011 Deutsche Bank Prize in Financial Economics

mainstream financial system with minimal oversight. Astonishingly, despite the Trump family's multi-billion-dollar crypto holdings, Congress has shown little interest in investigating the president's glaring conflict of interest. In fact, Trump has faced more public scrutiny for withholding the Jeffrey Epstein files than for his crypto dealings.

To be sure, the GENIUS Act does contain some worthwhile ideas. One provision, for example, requires that stablecoins - cryptocurrencies pegged to a traditional currency or commodity, usually the dollar - be backed by safe, liquid assets. But overall, instead of laying out clear guidelines for taming the crypto Wild West, the GENIUS Act amounts to little more than a regulatory skeleton.

As several critics have noted, Trump's stablecoin framework bears striking similarities to the free-banking era of the 1800s, when the United States did not have a central bank. At the time, private banks issued their own dollar-backed currencies, often with disastrous consequences such as fraud, instability, and frequent bank

runs. With thousands of stablecoins expected to flood the market, similar problems are bound to emerge. That said, some criticisms may be overstated, as today's leading issuers are generally more transparent and better capitalised than their nineteenth-century counterparts.

A more urgent and underappreciated problem is that the new legislation will make it far easier to use dollar-based stablecoins for tax evasion. While large-denomination paper currency presents similar challenges, the scale of the threat posed by stablecoins is much greater. And yet, despite these risks, Trump once again got exactly the legislation he wanted.

Fortunately, the US economy has remained resilient amid the uncertainty and chaos unleashed by Trump's tariff war. Although growth appears to be slowing, and the July jobs report was soft - a hard reality that Trump's firing of the technocrat in charge of producing the data will not change - second-quarter data show that the country is not yet in a recession. @Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

GULF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE



Al Nahda were recently crowned champions of a four-team friendly tournament in Salalah.

AL NAHDA CLUBBED WITH AL RAYYAN, AL SHABAB AND HADHRAMOUT

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 11

Oman’s Al Nahda are clubbed alongside Al Rayyan (Qatar), Al Shabab (Saudi Arabia), and Tadhamon Hadhramout Club (Yemen) in Group B of 2025-26 AGCFF Gulf Cup Champions League. The draw was organised by the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF) on Monday in Doha, Qatar. Group A comprised Zakho Club (Iraq), Al Ain (UAE), Sitra Club (Bahrain) and Al Qadsia Club (Kuwait). The official group draw will mark the much-anticipated return of the prestigious Gulf club competition following a long absence from the regional football calendar. The championship, which is scheduled to kick off in October 2025 and conclude in April 2026, will feature eight elite clubs nominated by their respective national football associations of the GCC member states. The participating teams are divided into two groups of four, with the top two from each group advancing to the semifinals. Al Nahda, recently crowned champions of the four-team friendly tournament in Salalah, following their win over Oman Olympic team in the final clash by 4-3 in penalties after the regulation time ended at 1-1 draw. They will hope to deliver top performance in the Gulf League and eye a spot in the semifinals despite the expected tough challenge. For the Al Buraimi-based club, this campaign will present a significant opportunity to make an impact against some of the region’s top clubs. With their strong domestic record and competitive spirit, the Omani side will be aiming to advance deep into the tournament. Shabab Al Ahli (UAE) has won the title three times, alongside Saudi Arabia’s Al Ahli and Al Ittifaq. The last edition saw Iraq’s Duhok Club crowned champions after defeating Kuwait’s Al Qadsia Club in a thrilling two-legged final, sealing the win with a 2-1 result in the second leg.

Ittihad Daghamar crowned Amateur League champs

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 11

THE Ittihad Daghamar Football Team, representing Muscat Governorate, were crowned champions of the Amateur League after an exciting victory over Al Muladah, representing Al Batinah South Governorate, in a penalty shootout that ended 3-1, following a 2-2 draw in regular time. The final, hosted at the Seeb Sports Stadium in front of a large official and public turnout that filled the stands, was held under the auspices of Sayyid Suleiman al Busaidy, Chairman of the Oman Football Association. The match kicked off at a fast pace and with great enthusiasm, as both teams exchanged attacks from the opening minutes, each creating genuine chances to score. Al Muladah came close with a dangerous effort by Ayoub al Busaidy that went just wide, while Daghamar responded with an attempt by Abdullah al Ghamari, which was brilliantly saved by the goalkeeper. The deadlock was finally broken in the 40th minute when Daghamar were awarded a free kick near the goal. Abdullah al Ghamari met it with a precise header into the goalkeeper’s right corner, giving his team a 1-0 lead that they maintained until half-time. In the second half, Al Muladah altered their approach, applying sustained pressure on Daghamar’s defence with numerous crosses and shots, eventually equalising in the 66th minute through Ayoub al Busaidy, who capitalised on a defensive mix-up to score. The momentum then swung in Al Muladah’s favour, and in the 78th minute, Youssef al Saadi rose to meet a corner kick, heading the ball into the net to put his side ahead. However, Daghamar responded strongly, launching forward and levelling the score in the 83rd minute with a powerful long-range strike that found the back of the net. The closing minutes were filled with tension, as Ali bin Dhahi nearly clinched the win for Al Muladah with a fierce shot from outside the box, but the outstanding goalkeeper Abdullah al Ghamari made a superb save, turning it into a corner. The match ended 2-2, sending both sides to a penalty shoot-out. Al Ghamari once again shone, saving three spot-kicks, while his teammates converted three penalties compared to only one for Al Muladah, securing



Ittihad Daghamar players celebrate with their trophy.

Photos by **Abdulwahid al Hamadani**



Al Muladah with their silver medals.



Hadri Bilad players with their bronze medals.

Daghamar’s first-ever Amateur League title amid jubilant celebrations from players and fans.

HADRI BILAD THIRD
In the third-place playoff of the Amateur League, Hadri Bilad, representing Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, claimed a

2-1 victory over Al Ghashbah, representing Al Batinah North Governorate, in a match marked by balanced play from both sides. Mohammed al Rasbi opened the scoring for Hadri Bilad in the 14th minute, before Hamad al Alawi doubled the lead in the second half. Al Ghashbah pulled one back in the 90th minute when Al Alawi inadvertently scored an own goal. Despite Al Ghashbah’s late push for an equaliser, Hadri Bilad held on to secure third place. After the final whistle of the Amateur League championship match, the patron of the event, the OFA chairman, honoured the match’s referee and administrative teams, as well as the standout players of the league. Qais bin Azan of Hadri Bilad, representing Al Sharqiyah South, received the Top-Scorer award, while Ayman bin Darwish of Al Muladah was named Best Player. Ittihad Daghamar goalkeeper Abdullah al Ghamari won the Best Goalkeeper award after leading his team to their historic title win. The awards ceremony followed, with Hadri Bilad players receiving bronze medals for third place, Al Muladah players receiving silver medals for second, and Daghamar players receiving gold medals and the championship trophy, celebrating their first-place triumph.

Registration opens for 14th edition of Musannah Race Week

MUSCAT: Registration is now open for the 14th edition of Musannah Race Week, presented by Asyad. To be held from October 15-21, 2025, at Barcelo Musannah Resort, the event will bring together over 100 sailors from around the world for a week of coaching, camaraderie and competition in Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, ILCA 7, Hansa 303 and the inclusive RS Venture Connect class. The Musannah Sailing School, operated by Oman Sail, has been designated a Category A High Performance Centre by the Asian Sailing Federation (ASAF), and is also the base for Oman’s national sailing teams, giving the young sailors the chance to experience international standard facilities as they take the next step on their journey in sailing. Conditions in Musannah are also expected to be ideal for sailing once again this year to give some of the region’s top sailing talent the perfect platform to showcase their skills. During the event, Oman Sail coaches will also hold daily community ‘Try Sailing’ sessions to introduce people from the local community to the sport and experience the feeling of being on



SHAIMA
AL ASMI



ABDULAZIZ
AL SHIEDI



the water with a qualified instructor. The initiative aims to inspire the next generation of Omani sailors and show how accessible sailing can be at Oman Sail’s Musannah Sailing School, based at Barcelo Musannah Resort. Abdulaziz al Shiedi, Acting Sailing Director at Oman Sail, said, “The standard of sailing [within the region] is improving year on year, so we are

excited to welcome a high calibre of athletes, along with their coaches and families, to Al Musannah in October for a week of racing, learning and mutual understanding. The event promises to be a celebration of the sport as well as a chance for young sailors to interact, grow as athletes and individuals, and gain experience in the high level

regatta environment – all in the spirit of friendship and sportsmanship.” Shaima al Asmi, Oman Sail’s Operations Executive and Musannah Race Week Project Manager, added, “Musannah Race Week has always been known as a festival of sailing that goes beyond racing to promote friendship, inclusion and mutual understanding. This year marks the 14th edition of the event, which is an undeniable success story for sailing in Oman and Oman Sail, and we are looking forward to welcoming the next generation of sailing stars to our shores for another wonderful week on the water.” Competition at Musannah Race Week will begin after three practice days, where 12 races in each class – no more than three per day – will decide the winners. Prizes will be awarded for the overall top three in each class, as well as the Junior top three for sailors under the age of 12, and the girls top three, as well as the overall Team Racing competition. Oman Sail and the Barcelo Musannah Resort will also host a BBQ night for all sailors, staff and families to offer a unique opportunity to experience authentic Omani hospitality.

12TH TITLE



Justin Rose reacts during the final round of the FedEx St Jude Championship golf. — [Imagn Images](#)

ROSE TOPS SPAUN IN PLAYOFF TO WIN PGA ST JUDE

WASHINGTON: Justin Rose reeled off four straight back-nine birdies to force a playoff then birdied the third hole of sudden death to beat JJ Spaun for the St Jude Championship on Sunday as Tommy Fleetwood endured more PGA Tour agony.

England’s Rose, the 2013 US Open champion, had six birdies over his last eight holes including the playoff — climbing up the congested leaderboard with birdies at 14, 15, 16 and 17 in regulation. His final-round 67 pulled him level with reigning US Open champion Spaun on 16-under par 264 at TPC Southwind — where overnight leader Fleetwood had a two-shot lead with three holes remaining but faltered with a bogey at 17 in a one-under 69 that left him tied for third with Scottie Scheffler on 15-under 265.

Spaun carded a five-under 65 in the final round, posting back-to-back birdies at 16 and 17 — where he rolled in a 20-foot putt — to put himself in the playoff. “That was an amazing last 90 minutes, really,” said Rose, who was runner-up to Rory McIlroy in playoff at the Masters in April. “Played unbelievable golf coming down the stretch.”

Rose claimed his 12th US tour title, and his first since Pebble Beach in 2023.

Rose started the day one shot off the lead and was two-over for the day through nine holes. His challenge seemed stalled after he followed a birdie at the 10th with a bogey at 12, but a 15-foot birdie at the 14th launched his comeback.

He drained a 10-foot birdie at 15, got up and down from a greenside bunker for birdie at 16 and curled in a 22-foot birdie putt at 17. His 13-footer for the outright win at the 72nd hole just missed and he and Spaun returned to 18 for the playoff.

Both two-putted for par — Rose after a tee shot that nearly found the water. They posted matching birdies the next time around — Spaun drilling a 30-foot putt and Rose making his seven-footer. They returned to 18 again, this time with a new hole location, and after Rose rattled in his 11-footer, Spaun sent his seven-foot birdie attempt past the cup. — [AFP](#)

Seeb, Ahli Sidab set for U18 League final showdown

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 11

THE 2025 Under-18 Hockey League will conclude on Tuesday at the Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat, where Seeb Club will face Ahli Sidab Club in the final match at 8 pm in a highly anticipated showdown to decide the title. Preceding the final will be the third-place play-off between Masirah Club and Al Ittihad Club at 6 pm.

Seeb secured their spot in the final after a thrilling 3-1 penalty shoot-out victory over Al Ittihad in a closely contested and exciting encounter. The match began cautiously in the first quarter with both teams exchanging possession. The best chance came from a shot by Abdulkarim al Balushi that went just wide, while Al Ittihad responded with a dangerous attempt led by Yaseen Medhat, which the goalkeeper brilliantly saved. The second quarter saw a rise in attacking tempo from both sides, but the deadlock remained unbroken. In the third quarter, Al Ittihad increased the pressure, countered by Seeb’s quick counterattacks, but rushed finishes kept the score level.

The real drama came in the final quarter, with Al Yazan al Balushi opening the scoring for Seeb in the 51st minute with a powerful strike. Al Ittihad quickly responded through Moatasem Awad, who equalised in the 55th minute, ending regular time 1-1. In the penalty shoot-out, goalkeeper Issa al Raisi was the hero for Seeb, saving three spot kicks. Goals from Mohammed al Shibli, Muhannad al Balushi and Alwaleed al Raisi sealed the win, while Al Ittihad’s only successful penalty came from Salem Ahmed.

AHLI SIDAB DOMINATE

As for Ahli Sidab, they reached the final after a commanding 5-0 victory over Masirah in a match they controlled from the start. Said al Fazari opened the scoring in the 11th minute, followed by Anas al Siyabi’s goal in the 14th to end the first quarter 2-0.

At the start of the second quarter, Masirah pushed forward in an attempt to reduce the deficit, but their efforts were met by a solid defence. Ahli Sidab soon reasserted dominance, with Abdullah al Hosani scoring in the 27th minute and Iyad al Alawi adding another just a minute later, finishing the quarter with a comfortable 4-0 lead.

In the third quarter, Iyad al Alawi struck again in the 41st minute for the fifth goal.



Seeb and Al Ittihad players fight for the ball.



Match referees pose before the match.

The final quarter saw a quieter pace, with the match ending in a deserved 5-0 win for Ahli Sidab.

After the match, Seeb’s coach, Hani al Kulaibi, stated that their goal from the outset was to reach the final, noting that

earlier setbacks in the competition did not affect the team’s morale since those games were primarily for points and placement. He added that the coaching staff worked to correct mistakes and improve performance ahead of the semifinal, which paid off with the victory and qualification. Al Kulaibi concluded by affirming that their ambition now is to win the title.

Meanwhile, Ahli Sidab’s coach, Ayman al Kathiri, described the semifinal as a strong and spirited contest from both teams, acknowledging that Masirah showed great competitiveness and made many attempts to score despite the five-goal defeat. He praised his players for executing the agreed-upon tactics precisely, which helped secure the result. Al Kathiri congratulated the players and club management on reaching the final, emphasising that the team will give their utmost to win the title and retain it as defending champions.

OSSC arranges ice hockey training camp for youth in Russia

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 11

The Oman Skating Sports Committee (OSSC) continues its efforts to develop ice hockey in the Sultanate of Oman by organising a training camp for the youth age group in the city of Kazan, Russian Federation, from August 9 to 16, in cooperation with the Islamic Ice Hockey Federation. The camp aims to refine the skills of young players and enhance their technical and physical readiness as part of a comprehensive strategic plan to prepare a new generation capable of competing in regional and international championships.

The camp serves as a key preparation stage ahead of Oman’s participation in the International Federation Championship, scheduled to be held in the United Arab Emirates in September. This upcoming event will feature intense competition with teams representing various schools of play and tactical styles.

Oman’s delegation includes eight players: Fares al Aufi, Yousuf al Mahrouqi, Turki al Balushi, Abdullah al Ali, Abdullah al Sulaimani, Mohammed al Haddabi, Hamdan al Abri and Aya al Mahrouqi. The team is coached by international trainer Ibrahim



The camp is hosted by ‘Ak Bars’ Club, one of the most prestigious teams in the Russian Ice Hockey League.

Mohammadi, managed by Khalil al Waili.

The camp is hosted by ‘Ak Bars’ Club, one of the most prestigious teams in the Russian Ice Hockey League, renowned for its major achievements and modern infrastructure. The players undergo an intensive daily training programme that combines theoretical and practical sessions, focusing on shooting accuracy, quick passing, tactical movement, as well as collective defensive and

offensive strategies. The programme also includes physical conditioning to improve endurance, fitness and on-ice speed, utilising the city’s state-of-the-art skating facilities.

COACH’S VISION

Coach Ibrahim Mohammadi described the camp as “a qualitative leap” in the journey of Oman’s youth teams, given the direct interaction with highly experienced coaches and players, and the opportunity to train

in a professional environment equipped with advanced facilities. He added that the players are showing great enthusiasm and noticeable improvement in their skills, reflecting their readiness to represent Oman with pride.

Mohammadi noted that the camp benefits from a variety of advanced ice rinks, providing an ideal environment that combines intensive individual training with group practice alongside academy and club peers. This, he emphasised,

positively impacts each player’s individual performance as well as their teamwork. He further highlighted that the camp extends beyond technical development, fostering self-discipline, teamwork and the ability to make quick decisions under pressure, essential traits for any professional ice hockey player.

Khalil al Waili explained that this camp is part of the committee’s plan since the introduction of ice hockey in Oman in 2014, which focuses on building a strong player base through international partnerships. He affirmed the committee’s ambition to establish an international-standard ice rink in Oman, enabling the country to host world-class tournaments and boosting its standing on the global sports map.

Al Waili concluded by saying that this experience not only equips the players with technical skills, but also broadens their horizons.

Through these well-planned steps, the Oman Skating Sports Committee continues its journey towards solidifying Oman’s position in ice hockey and preparing a new generation of champions capable of raising Oman’s flag at global sporting events, in line with Oman Vision 2040.

SPORTS

ALCARAZ BATTLES AS SHELTON, ZVEREV ADVANCE



CARLOS ALCARAZ fought through a second-set slump to post a “rollercoaster” 6-1, 2-6, 6-3 victory over Damir Dzumhur in his opening match on Sunday at the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Open.

The Spaniard, playing his first tournament since losing to Jannik Sinner in the Wimbledon final, raced through the first set but completely lost his way in the second, dropping his serve twice against the 33-year-old Bosnian.

Alcaraz regained his intensity and cut down his errors in the third as a seventh ace took him to a match point that was converted when Dzumhur fired wide.

“It was just a rollercoaster,” said the second seed, who was winning his 12th straight match at the Masters 1000 level after taking the titles in Monte Carlo and Rome.

“Lots of good feelings, bad feelings, back to the good ones. I am happy to get the win at the end. I know that I have chances to do better.”

Alcaraz committed 44 unforced errors and said conditions in Cincinnati, where he was runner-up in 2023, were always tricky.

“The ball flies a lot, goes super fast,” he said. “You have to be ready to be in a good position for each shot and that is really difficult to do.”

Third seed Alexander Zverev found things more straightforward, winning 6-3, 6-3 against US wild card Nishesh Basavareddy in the night session.

Zverev needed just 66 minutes to get past Basavareddy, a 20-year-old ranked 109th in the world.

The German put 41 of his 50 first serves in play and didn’t face a break point. Basavareddy saved one match point with a blistering service return but Zverev secured the win with his 12th ace.

American Ben Shelton, coming off his first Masters 1000 title in Toronto, eased through 6-3, 3-1 when Camilo Ugo Carabelli retired with a knee injury.

Shelton’s early night was a boon after a draining Toronto tournament which only ended on Thursday night.

“It’s not easy to play a couple of days after winning any title,” Shelton said.

“I feel for Camilo and it’s obviously not the way that you want to go through. I hope that he has a quick recovery.”

Asked about the tape on his own right thigh, Shelton said he has “a few muscle things” going on.

“The legs take a lot of force,” he said.

Sixth seed Alex de Minaur of Australia, the Washington champion, lost to American Reilly Opelka 7-6 (8/6), 6-4.

But another Australian, Adam Walton, secured a first top-50 win of his career with a 6-7 (0/7), 6-4, 6-1 upset of former world number one and 2019 Cincy champion Daniil Medvedev of Russia.

GAUFF SCRAPES THROUGH
In the women’s draw, French Open champion Coco Gauff battled through a tough first set to beat China’s Wang Xinyu 6-3, 6-2.

Gauff, who lifted the trophy in Cincinnati in 2023 and went on to claim her first Grand Slam title at the US Open that year, had to grind her way through the first set.

But the number two seed steadied in the second to run out the winner in 71 minutes.

“It was a rough start,” Gauff said. “But it was about just trusting myself and the work we’ve done in practice.”

Third seed Jessica Pegula, runner-up last year to Aryna Sabalenka, defeated Kimberly Birrell 6-4, 6-3.

Seventh seed Jasmine Paolini, finalist last season at Roland Garros and Wimbledon, also advanced, beating Maria Sakkari of Greece 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/5). — AFP

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SHORTTAKES



The development of a ‘user-friendly digital platform for electronic ticket issuance’ was announced as part of the ministry’s ambitious plan to overhaul the transport- and logistics-related regulations.

MOTCIT INVITES FIRMS TO DISCUSS PUBLIC TRANSPORT E-TICKET PLATFORM

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, AUG 11

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has invited local and regional digital platform and smart application companies to an introductory consultative meeting on a planned digital platform for purchasing electronic tickets for public transportation.

In an online post, the ministry explained that the initiative is part of its broader efforts to enhance investment opportunities and strengthen private sector participation in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Scheduled for August 21, 2025, the meeting will be held at Al Midraja Hall, MoTCIT headquarters in Muscat, from 10:00 am to 12:00 noon. The meeting will introduce the project concept, discuss proposed platform components and gather market insights and feedback.

First unveiled in 2023, the development of a ‘user-friendly digital platform for electronic ticket issuance’ was announced as part of the ministry’s ambitious plan to overhaul more than 30 transport- and logistics-related regulations.

The reform agenda included a revamp of the Roads Law, the implementation of safety compliance protocols for road projects, and the rollout of a digital meter application for taxis to improve efficiency and transparency.

Additionally, the ministry outlined intentions to introduce new educational transport regulations, develop a strategy for land ports and logistics centres and establish international public transport rules.

The digital ticketing platform was among the initiatives designed to modernise the sector and now forms the basis of the upcoming consultative meeting. Interested parties can register for the meeting by August 17, 2025, via a registration link provided online.

OQGN eyes Ibri for carbon capture opportunities

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 11

PRESSING ahead with its carbon capture and CCUS ambitions, OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) – the majority state-owned operator of Oman’s gas transportation infrastructure – has identified the Ibri Power Project in Al Dhahirah Governorate as a promising candidate for carbon capture in partnership with Occidental (Oxy) Oman.

Carbon capture, utilisation, and storage (CCUS), along with green hydrogen transportation, form key pillars of the publicly traded company’s strategy to position itself as a leading player in advancing Oman’s Net-Zero goals.

“The company’s strategic stance towards energy transition continues to be a focus, specifically in hydrogen and CCUS,” OQGN stated in its Q2 2025 financial performance report. “As part of this work, OQGN has signed a cooperation agreement with (Belgian energy infrastructure player) Fluxys to jointly develop hydrogen transportation infrastructure in Oman.

On the carbon capture front, the Ibri Power Plant has been identified as a key priority, and OQGN has coordinated



OQGN is coordinating with Oxy Oman in jointly assessing carbon capture opportunities linked to Ibri Power Plant.

with Oxy on the way forward to jointly assess capture opportunities.”

The 1,509 MW combined-cycle gas turbine (CCGT) power plant in Ibri is one of Oman’s largest gas-fired projects and began operations in Q2 2019. It was developed by Ad-Dhahirah Generating Company, backed by a consortium that includes ACWA Power, Mitsui and DIDIC as its major shareholders.

Oxy Oman is among several local and international entities collaborating with OQGN to advance the Sultanate of Oman’s energy transition and decarbonisation goals.

In November 2023, the upstream energy company signed an MoU with OQGN to

jointly study and develop CCUS projects in Oman, particularly for enhanced oil recovery (EOR) and broader carbon management strategies.

Belgian energy infrastructure leader Fluxys is both a strategic partner and an investor, holding a 4.9% equity stake in OQGN. The two companies signed an MoU in October 2023 to collaborate on developing hydrogen and CO₂ infrastructure in Oman.

In May 2025, they advanced this partnership by signing a term sheet agreement under which Fluxys will serve as a minority shareholder and co-operator in developing Oman’s hydrogen transportation network.

In addition, OQGN has

joined a Memorandum of Cooperation with Oman’s Ministry of Energy and Minerals and other major energy players to form a “House of Expertise” tasked with developing the regulatory and strategic framework for CCUS technologies and blue hydrogen in support of Oman’s Net-Zero 2050 targets.

Likewise, in collaboration with Hydrom – the architect of Oman’s green hydrogen sector – OQGN is conducting technical feasibility studies on open-access pipeline networks for both green hydrogen and CO₂ transport, leveraging its existing natural gas infrastructure to support decarbonisation.

CBO DENIES ISSUANCE OF NEW RO 100 BANKNOTE

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has dismissed circulating reports claiming the introduction of a new RO 100 banknote, calling the information “false and inaccurate.” In a statement, the CBO clarified that the only valid denominations of banknotes currently in circulation are: 100 Baisa, half Rial, 1 Rial, 5 Rials, 10 Rials, 20 Rials and 50 Rials.

The bank urged the public to



rely solely on official sources for information regarding the issuance

or withdrawal of banknotes, warning against the spread of unverified news that could cause confusion.

This clarification follows recent social media posts and public discussions speculating about the launch of a higher denomination note. The CBO reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring the stability, credibility and transparency of the national currency system.

New rules boost Omani capital market growth

MUSCAT: The introduction of the Promising Companies Market Regulations marks a significant step in the Financial Services Authority’s (FSA) incentive programme to develop the capital market, in line with Oman Vision 2040’s goals for economic diversification and a strong investment climate, said Ahmed bin Ali al Maamari, FSA Deputy CEO.

The new rules offer a flexible regulatory framework enabling private, family-owned, emerging, and small and medium-sized



The new rules offer a flexible regulatory framework enabling private, family-owned, emerging and SMEs to access alternative financing in a transparent environment.

enterprises (SMEs) to access alternative financing in a transparent environment.

This opens diverse funding options for corporate growth and expansion.

The incentive programme has three main pillars, including establishing the Promising Companies Market as a sub-market on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Combined with the new regulations, it offers easier access to finance and helps companies advance towards greater institutional maturity and sustainable growth.

The regulations outline clear listing requirements, including

annual growth targets, minimum shareholder numbers and fixed fees, reducing entry barriers and improving corporate transformation.

Al Maamari urged eligible private firms to explore these opportunities. Haitham bin Salem al Salmi, CEO of the Muscat Stock Exchange, said the new market is a structural milestone, providing a specialised financing channel for SMEs, family businesses and private firms.

It follows phased regulatory controls, enabling a smooth

transition to the main market.

He added that the exchange will provide an integrated trading environment with advanced infrastructure, flexible disclosure models, and governance standards tailored to growth-stage companies, boosting investor confidence and market liquidity.

The initiative supports the exchange’s strategy to broaden the investor base, diversify investment tools, and raise institutional maturity, strengthening Oman’s competitiveness and private sector development. — ONA

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



A small team from the Nejd Desert has just completed another harvest at this Unesco World Heritage Site.

AMOUAGE
EARNS FAIRWILD
CERTIFICATION FOR
WADI DAWKAH

MUSCAT: In Southern Oman, as the seasonal monsoon — the Khareef Dhofar Season — arrives, the Frankincense trees of Wadi Dawkah are left to rest and regenerate. A small team from the Nejd Desert has just completed another harvest at this Unesco World Heritage Site. This year, the end of the harvest coincides with a historic moment.

Amouage is proud to announce that the team at Wadi Dawkah has received a ground-breaking recognition, a first of its kind in Oman: FairWild, an internationally respected standard providing third-party certification in the field of wild ingredient sourcing, has officially certified that the harvest at Wadi Dawkah is conducted in full compliance with the highest global standards for sustainability, ethics and transparency.

With this new certification, Wadi Dawkah becomes the first ingredient sourcing site to receive this recognition in the Arabian Peninsula, marking a significant step forward in the Frankincense industry and, more broadly, for the future of sustainable sourcing of natural ingredients for perfumery in the region.

“This prestigious recognition marks a major milestone for Wadi Dawkah and our national ambition to transform Oman into an internationally recognised source of some of the world’s most iconic natural ingredients”, says Matthew Wright, Head of Wadi Dawkah, “we have devised a unique framework for sourcing Frankincense — an emblematic symbol of Omani heritage and identity — that can now be applied across Southern Oman”.

AMOUAGE’S COMMITMENT TO RESPONSIBLE SOURCING

For Amouage, custodian of Wadi Dawkah since its partnership with Oman’s Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in 2022, this achievement represents a strong confirmation of its long-term vision.

Renowned for its High Perfumery, Amouage is now the sustainable producer of one of the natural ingredients that are at the heart of its fragrances — aiming to set a new standard in the industry.

This vision is reflected in every stage of the journey, from caring for the environment to supporting the people who benefit from the creation of employment opportunities within the community.

Recognising that positive change is achieved through care, but also through expertise, Amouage has brought together a team of highly specialised individuals from both within the country and abroad.

From Omani environmental specialists to international ingredient experts and with the recent establishment of the Wadi Dawkah Scientific Advisory Council, Amouage combines best-in-class knowledge to protect and respectfully develop the Unesco Site.

Universal Engineering Services hosts Power Train 2025 in Oman

MUSCAT: Universal Engineering Services LLC (authorised Cummins Power generation distributor for Oman) a Bahwan Engineering Group company, successfully hosted a two-day technical seminar — Power Train 2025 on August 5 and 6, at a hotel in Al Khuwair, Muscat.

The event drew an impressive turnout, with over 120 participants from various government and private sector organisations, reaffirming the company’s commitment to fostering knowledge



The seminar focused on the electromechanical aspects of diesel power generator systems.

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THE Lexus LC is a flagship coupe that represents the evolution of Lexus as a lifestyle brand. Experience exhilarating performance with ultimate luxury and make heads turn.

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The LC offers an exceptional in-cabin experience with premium leather interiors,

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman oil for October delivery reached \$67.98 on Monday.

The price of Oman oil on Monday decreased by 53 cents compared to last Friday’s price of \$68.51.

The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for August delivery reached \$69.37 per barrel, an increase of \$5.75 compared to the price for July delivery.

Meanwhile, international oil



prices were steady on Monday, after falling more than 4% last week, as investors looked ahead to talks between the US and Russia later this week on the war in Ukraine.

Brent crude futures were up 5 cents to \$66.73 a barrel at 10:03 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude futures were down 1 cent to \$63.99. — Agencies



The LC is equipped as standard with Lexus Safety System+.

13-seakers Mark Levinson audio systems, a 12.3-inch touchscreen display with Apple and Android compatibility, a head-up display for more intuitive control, smart access with push-button start/stop, an illuminated entry system, enhanced active noise control; and a panoramic view monitor, among a plethora of other advanced features.

The LC is equipped as

standard with Lexus Safety System+, an array of active safety features that can help the driver avoid an accident or help lessen the consequences of a collision.

The system includes advanced driver assistance functions such as pre-crash system (PCS), dynamic radar cruise control system (DRCC), lane-keeping assist (LKA) and automatic high beam (AHB).

Other safety features on the LC include Lexus parking assist (LPA), rear cross traffic alert (RCTA) system, designed to help prevent potential danger in parking situations; blind spot monitor, which detects and warns the driver of vehicles approaching or positioned in the adjacent lanes along with vehicle stability control (VSC); and anti-lock braking system.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com, subscribe to the YouTube channel “Lexus Oman”, or like Lexus Oman on Facebook or follow Oman.Lexus on Instagram.

Cantonese elegance meets Omani flavours

MUSCAT: Hakkasan Muscat’s “Cantonese Journey” is a tightly focused tasting that succeeds at two things: showcasing classic Cantonese technique and celebrating distinctly Omani ingredients. For RO 18.8 per head, you get a compact parade of textures and flavours that feels considered rather than rushed.

We began with the wild mushroom soup — a silky, gently umami broth where delicate white ear mushroom and a whisper of wolfberry lent an unexpected floral lift. It set an elegant, restrained tone.

The steaming tray that followed was the menu’s high point: the shumai was textbook — springy prawn, seasoned but not oversalted — while the Omani hammour dumpling cleverly put local fish front and centre, its clean brininess balanced by subtle aromatics.

The crab and Chinese chives dumpling delivered the sweet, saline pop you want from good crab.

The Szechuan mala beef croquant provided contrast: crisp edges from dried bean curd and lotus root, with a pleasantly numbing warmth that flirted with heat without overwhelming the palate.

Mains kept that dynamic going. The



For RO 18.8 per head, you get a compact parade of textures and flavours that feels considered rather than rushed.

charcoal-grilled Omani red snapper arrived smoky and flaky, its honey pepper glaze offering a bright counterpoint, while the lemongrass congee was soothing and well-seasoned — an excellent companion for the fish.

The crispy corn-fed chicken combined a satisfyingly crunchy exterior with a tender interior; the chilli-peanut crumbs added

texture and a nutty kick.

Vegetables were treated with care — the sugar snap and wood ear mushroom stir-fry was crunchy, aromatic with ginger and lily bulb; and the organic trio fried rice rounded out the meal with comforting, wok-hei-tinged grains.

The meal closed on a graceful note with the vanilla mirage infused with organic Omani honey.

Light yet indulgent, it offered a creamy sweetness lifted by the floral depth of the honey — a dessert that felt both comforting and refined, tying the journey together with a gentle, lingering finish.

Service by Sophon and Janice elevated the experience: both were knowledgeable about local ingredients, paced the courses perfectly and made thoughtful recommendations without hovering. Their attentiveness ensured each course arrived at just the right moment, enhancing the flow of the evening.

Overall, Hakkasan Muscat’s set is an excellent, reasonably priced introduction to refined Cantonese cooking with an Omani twist — great for seafood lovers or anyone who appreciates balanced technique, confident flavours and warm, polished service.

Mohammad Mushtaq — Territory Manager for Oman also represented the Cummins team from Cummins Dubai regional office. Their presentations covered a wide range of critical topics, including generator set sizing, noise reduction, fuel efficiency technologies, design aspects and all considerations for a diesel generator based power plant, best application practices and advancements in diesel generator technology.

Attendees included Industry-leading consultants, engineers and national engineers from government and private sector industries across Oman, including oil & gas, telecom, utilities, construction and infrastructure. The highly interactive sessions provided participants with valuable insights and interactions making the session a prefect platform for knowledge sharing into emerging technologies and practical solutions for optimising generator performance in challenging environments.

SHORTTAKES



The project features an advanced customs system that allows clearance from a single station at Khazaen Dry Port.

KHAZAEN PORT LINKS WITH SUHAR VIA CUSTOMS CORRIDOR

MUSCAT: Khazaen Dry Port, part of the Asyad Group, has been accredited as a terminal for receiving containers from international ports and has launched a secure customs corridor with SOHAR Port and Freezone to enhance integration across Oman’s port network and boost supply chain efficiency.

The corridor marks a major step in improving the import, export and re-export system for the private sector, enabling traders and investors to move goods more smoothly in a secure customs environment. This will reduce operational costs, improve logistics performance and give Omani firms easier access to global markets.

The project features an advanced customs system that allows clearance from a single station at Khazaen Dry Port, using a shipping agent’s lead instead of traditional sealing and accepting written guarantees. These measures save time and effort, improving the user experience.

This initiative reflects Asyad Group’s commitment to facilitating cross-border trade and aligning with global best practices, supporting growth in Oman’s commercial and logistics sectors.

Khazaen Dry Port CEO Saad Bait Naseeb said the development is a milestone in Oman’s logistics environment, offering greater efficiency and reliability for investors and reinforcing Oman’s role as a strategic trade gateway linking the region to the world.

He stressed that Khazaen Dry Port will continue innovating advanced solutions that support Oman Vision 2040 and create new opportunities for trade and investment growth. — ONA

OMAN’S SALE CONTRACT VALUES UP 12.4%

MUSCAT: The value of sale contracts in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 12.4% to RO 613 million by the end of June 2025, compared with RO 545.6 million during the same period in 2024.

Figures from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that total real estate transactions stood at around RO 1.36 billion by June 2025, down 3.5% from RO 1.41 billion a year earlier.

Fees collected from all legal transactions increased by 25.5%



Figures showed that total real estate transactions stood at around RO 1.36 billion by June 2025.

to RO 40.5 million, up from RO 32.3 million last year. However, the number of sale contracts fell

by 2.3% to 31,831 compared with 32,596 in the same period of 2024.

The value of mortgage contracts dropped by 13.4% to approximately RO 742.2 million for 10,647 contracts, against RO 856.7 million for 10,028 contracts last year.

Swap contracts also declined, with 596 agreements worth RO 4.8 million, compared with 671 worth RO 7.3 million a year earlier.

Meanwhile, the number of real estate titles issued rose slightly by 0.8% to 110,551, from 109,666 last year. — ONA

New telecom royalty rate to boost competitiveness

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUG 11

OMAN’S Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has confirmed that its decision to unify the royalty rate across mobile and fixed telecom services will be a game-changer for the sector — boosting competitiveness, attracting investment and creating a level playing field for all licensed operators.

“This decision will increase the competitiveness of the telecom sector and enhance Oman’s investment appeal”, the TRA said in an exclusive interview with the Observer. “It creates a level playing field for all telecom licensees, ensuring fair and equal treatment across the board”.

The move, which applies the revised royalty rate uniformly to all operator classes and licence types, removes long-standing disparities between mobile and fixed service providers. By eliminating regulatory bias, it opens the door to balanced infrastructure investment, greater innovation and higher service quality.

The TRA said the unified rate will simplify regulatory procedures, reduce administrative complexity and improve



The move removes long-standing disparities between mobile and fixed service providers, according to the TRA.

transparency — making Oman’s telecom market more efficient and attractive to local and foreign investors.

Lower financial burdens on companies are expected to free up capital for network expansion, advanced digital services and customer-focused innovations.

While the regulator noted that the reduction in royalty fees should, over time, enable providers to offer more competitive tariffs, it stressed that the actual impact

The TRA said the unified rate will simplify regulatory procedures, reduce administrative complexity and improve transparency — making Oman’s telecom market more efficient and attractive to local and foreign investors.

on end-user prices will depend on market competition, pricing strategies and operational costs.

The reform is also closely tied to Oman’s national ambitions.

“This aligns directly with Oman Vision 2040 and our digital economy goals”, the TRA said. “It strengthens the foundations for economic diversification, technological advancement and positions Oman as a regional hub for digital transformation”.

Industry analysts say the move signals a pro-investment regulatory environment at a time when the telecommunications sector is pivotal to Oman’s economic future.

By levelling the playing field and boosting investor confidence, the change is expected to accelerate the rollout of next-generation networks, expand digital access and reinforce Oman’s standing in the Gulf’s competitive telecom landscape.

Oman awards contract for Khor Grama marina tourism project

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 11

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has awarded Meridian Engineering Consultancy the design and supervision contract for the Khor Grama development, a strategically located marine tourism project roughly 22 kilometres east of the Wilayat of Sur in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

Meridian submitted the lowest bid for the consultancy package, quoted at RO 275,830.8, according to the public tender notices.

The consultancy brief is comprehensive. Meridian will be responsible for the detailed study and design of a marina capable of berthing about 75 luxury yachts and 20 excursion vessels, a dedicated fishermen’s bay, water-sports and entertainment zones; and support infrastructure



Khor Grama has been positioned in official planning as a potential marine-tourism hub.

including emergency and security facilities.

The scope also covers dredging of the marina channel and basin, levelling and landscaping of some 300,000 square metres,

external infrastructure and services, shaded car parking and fuel pump facilities; consultants must also prepare construction tender documents and provide full technical supervision during

delivery.

Khor Grama — Oman’s largest northern lagoon — has been positioned in official planning as a potential marine-tourism hub.

The scheme’s masterplan and vision were developed by Italian firm Giò Forma in collaboration with regional consultant F&M Middle East, which previously worked on the site’s broader planning and technical strategies.

The design emphasis, project literature says, is on enhancing local fishing communities while creating visitor amenities that leverage the lagoon’s calm waters and natural meanders.

The award follows an international tender process launched in August 2024 that attracted wide interest: authorities reported that 23 consultancy firms had purchased tender documents during the pre-qualification phase, underlining the project’s international appeal and the

strategic importance placed on coastal tourism and regional connectivity.

Project observers say timely delivery of the consultancy phase will be critical to keeping the development on schedule and to enabling the follow-on construction procurement.

Economically, Khor Grama is pitched to diversify local income streams and lift tourism footfall along the Ras Al Hadd-Sur corridor.

If delivery follows the masterplan, the marina and associated facilities are expected to create new maritime services and hospitality opportunities for local businesses while strengthening Oman’s coastal leisure offering to regional and international yachting markets.

Meridian’s appointment starts the technical pipeline for turning the masterplan into tender-ready construction packages.

TRADE PRESSURE

Trump pushes China for soybean surge



US President Donald Trump urged China to quadruple its US soybean purchases before a key tariff truce deadline, boosting Chicago soybean prices.

“Rapid service will be provided. Thank you President XI”, Trump wrote. Analysts, however, doubted the feasibility of such a dramatic increase, citing logistical and market constraints despite Trump’s push. — Reuters

EXPORT SETBACK

India faces 55% US tariff hit



India said around 55% of its merchandise exports to the US will be impacted by new tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump.

The additional 25% duty, raises total tariffs to 50% — among the highest for any US trading partner. The estimate, confirmed by junior finance minister Pankaj Chaudhary, accounts for an earlier 25% tariff already applied to Indian goods. — Reuters

MARKET CAUTION

Gold slips ahead of US-Russia talks



Gold prices fell as investors awaited US-Russia talks on Ukraine and July US inflation data. Spot gold dropped 0.6% to \$3,378.49 per ounce after touching its highest since July 23, while US December futures fell 1.4% to \$3,441.20.

Trump said he will meet Putin on August 15 in Alaska to discuss ending the war. Analysts expect tariffs to help push core inflation up 0.3%, keeping it above the Fed’s 2% target. — ONA

OPINION

The consequences of not banning AI in schools



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is
the founder of
Knowledge Oman.

I received an overwhelming amount of responses in the form of feedback via social media networks, instant messages (WhatsApp) and even direct calls in last week's article on banning AI in schools. I am truly grateful for the engagement that I received from the readers because this shows the importance as well as the alertness that the society has in store for the subject. Some shared their strong agreement and warned that unchecked AI could surely affect our children (the students) in schools. This includes but is not limited to their thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills, to name a few. Others, however, have expressed concern that banning AI in schools might limit their technological literacy, suggesting instead that schools should focus on teaching responsible and ethical use. My personal feedback that I continue to stand by is putting a framework and policy in place on the usage of AI in schools. This will help ensure AI is used correctly, potentially making it a powerful tool for personalised training. The situation today, however, is that there is not readily a policy and framework in place and hence, the impact is inevitable. Let me focus this week on the consequences of

banning AI in schools. First, the students' critical thinking skills will be impacted. Why? The student simply uses a generative AI app (like ChatGPT) by asking a question (in the form of a prompt) and the answer arrives instantly (merely in seconds). The student doesn't struggle or work hard but simply copies the answer/output and presents AI's work (not theirs). In the pre-AI era, a student would be required to critically think by searching and analysing different possibilities before finally presenting and solving a problem/question. Second, generative AI will be like a drug (an addiction) for the students. Without it, students will not be able to work on any assignment/problem due to being dependent on AI. Imagine tomorrow there is no connectivity and/or a plug is pulled off from ChatGPT and the like apps. Trust me, there will be zombies walking around the schools. Third, with dependency and addiction comes also a form of laziness. Students will see no reason to learn or work if AI can do everything for them. The mental resilience that the pre-generative AI era lived in will be shattered, trust me. Last but not least, originality (in terms of thoughts and creativity) will be lost. Outputs of

The situation today, however, is that there is not readily a policy and framework in place and hence, the impact is inevitable. Let me focus this week on the consequences of not banning AI in schools.

an AI app are generated based on patterns in and from existing data. Students that depend on AI will ultimately lose the ability to create original content. We will eventually find the same generic work submitted by everyone, for they all rely on the same source, the AI machine. To conclude my article this week, I would like to emphasise that if this matter is not taken seriously, then the majority of the students (and no thanks to the continuous advancement of AI) will graduate without ever having written an essay, solved a math problem on their own, or struggled through a difficult assignment. Students will not only not have the skills that are required to join the workforce but also not have the basic knowledge to operate as well. Mark my words, quality education built on hard work will be erased in schools gradually. Diplomas and degrees will lose credibility, as no one can be certain whether the work was produced by the student or by a machine. We will create a new generation of graduates that knows where and how to find information but cannot function without constant access to AI. Until we catch up again next week, stay positive and upbeat; and never be too reliant on AI, as it may replace or break you too.

CRACKDOWN ON US BANKS ENCOURAGES RISKIER BEHAVIOUR

STEPHEN GANDEL

A White House offensive against US banks will just tick another box off their deregulation wish list. To stop perceived, albeit unsubstantiated, discrimination against his supporters, President Donald Trump is instructing agencies to scrap "reputation risk or equivalent concepts" from the customer assessment equation. The baseless crusade will lead to less paperwork, which lenders will welcome, but make it harder to spot fraud. Trump has accused JPMorgan and Bank of America of rejecting his business after he left office and claims that other conservatives have suffered a similar fate. His executive order issued on Thursday says transactions with companies such as Cabela's and payments using terms like MAGA have been flagged despite lacking evidence of criminal conduct. It also directs Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to explore legislative or regulatory responses. Banks deny any systemic bias. Although there is no clear pattern of discrimination, crimes involving money in the age of cryptocurrency and artificial intelligence are on the rise. Americans lost nearly \$13 billion to financial fraud last year, up 25% from the previous year, the US Federal Trade Commission reported. Efforts to spot money laundering and other wrongdoing also have been growing, creating extra burdens for banks. The number of suspicious transaction reports sent to the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network from deposit-taking institutions has more than doubled to 2 million since 2017. Lenders worldwide are also on track to spend more than \$50 billion in 2026 to prevent fraud, up from \$28 billion in 2024, according to a Juniper Research study last year. Despite disliking the president amplifying allegations of discrimination, BoFA boss Brian Moynihan and his counterparts will embrace any policy that pares their hulking rulebook. There are good reasons to rethink ways of assessing credit risks, but it also would help if lenders were required to explain and document decisions to close accounts or turn away borrowers. Trump already has rolled back enforcement of all sorts of financial misdeeds. Further clearing the way for more of them is a far bigger threat than the fanciful idea that profit-seeking banks turn away good business on purely ideological grounds. — Reuters

Manufacturing: Building the economy of tomorrow

OMAN stands at a pivotal juncture in its economic journey — a moment that demands bold, strategic decisions to shape long-term prosperity. For decades, the nation's growth was anchored by its hydrocarbon resources, which provided essential revenue and enabled major infrastructure development. However, as global dynamics evolve — marked by shifting supply chains, digital disruption and the climate transition — it has become clear that a new engine is needed to drive sustainable development. Oman Vision 2040 provides that road map, emphasising economic diversification, resilience and international competitiveness. Among all sectors, manufacturing emerges as the most critical lever to deliver on these ambitions. It is not simply one industry among many; it is a force multiplier that catalyses growth across the economy, generates skilled employment, accelerates technology adoption and enables Oman to transform raw materials into high-value exports. In a world increasingly defined by strategic self-sufficiency and regional production hubs, Oman must fully commit to its manufacturing sector — not as an alternative, but as a national priority. The manufacturing sector has demonstrated significant growth and resilience, aligning with national strategic objectives. The sector's average growth rate of 7.35% during the tenth five-year plan, culminating in 2024, is a clear testament to this momentum. Notably, Manufacturing Value Added (MVA) at constant prices reached RO 3.624 billion in 2024, accounting for 8.3% of GDP. Foreign direct investment in the manufacturing sector increased in the first quarter of 2025 to reach RO 2.749 billion, a growth rate of 27.5%



These clusters promote scale, knowledge spillovers and supply chain efficiency — conditions that individual factories cannot create in isolation.



DR YOUSUF HAMED
AL BALUSHI

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The writer is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board adviser & business transformation mentor.

compared to the same period last year. This growth was in industrial sectors, most notably renewable energy technologies, as well as medical, food and others. This sustained growth reaffirms the sector's critical role in diversifying Oman's economy and enhancing national resilience. The consistency in MVA growth — 7.1% in 2021, 14% in 2022 and 8.3% in 2024, despite a temporary contraction in 2023 — demonstrates both resilience and scalability.

Simultaneously, industrial exports reached RO 6.232 billion in 2024, following a substantial 44% increase in 2022 driven by strong global demand for petrochemical and metal products. Foreign investments in the manufacturing sector have doubled over a short period, growing from RO 2.03 billion in 2020 to RO 4.575 billion in 2023, now constituting nearly 10% of total foreign investments. This increase indicates robust international confidence in Oman's industrial ecosystem and future prospects. The manufacturing sector is not only a driver of output and trade but also a catalyst for job creation. Its high economic multipliers ensure that for every 100 direct jobs created, hundreds more are supported across the value chain. This is particularly vital for Oman's youth and rural populations, where employment opportunities can be expanded through industrial integration with sectors like mining and fisheries. The approved national manufacturing strategy, accompanied by a clear implementation road map, lays out significant opportunities for the private sector. From high-value mineral processing to

sustainable marine production and localised supply chains, Oman offers fertile ground for innovation, investment and scalable enterprise-led growth. At the heart of Oman's manufacturing advantage lies its ability to integrate upstream sectors — particularly mining and fisheries — into higher value chains. Oman is rich in strategic minerals like copper, gypsum and limestone; and the country is finally beginning to move beyond extraction towards advanced processing and industrial transformation. The development of the green copper cathode facility in Al Duqm is a prime example. This project signals a shift from volume to value, from exporting ore to producing refined, sustainable materials with high market demand. The same holds true for fisheries. Long a traditional livelihood, the sector is now primed for industrialisation through cold chain development, product innovation (such as marine collagen and bio-based plastics) and international export logistics. Manufacturing is the backbone that will transform these natural advantages into sustained economic returns, connecting rural supply with global demand and embedding more of the final product value within the Sultanate of Oman's borders. To fully unlock this potential, four core enablers must be prioritised. First, Oman must accelerate the development of a skilled, adaptive workforce. The factories of the future demand technicians, designers, process engineers and digitally literate operators. These are not skills that can be imported at scale — they must be cultivated domestically through education reform, public-private training partnerships and a reimagining of Omanisation. This policy must evolve from a quota system into a strategy for building national industrial capacity.

BUSINESS

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has allocated RO 28.5 million in government treasury bills this week, according to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The issuance included three maturities. The 28-day bills totalled RO 5 million, with an average and minimum accepted price of RO 99.700 per RO 100. These carried an average discount rate of 3.91071 per cent and an average yield of 3.92248 per cent.

The 91-day bills were valued at RO 2.5 million, achieving an average accepted price of RO 98.944 and a minimum accepted price of RO 98.940 per RO 100. The average discount rate stood at 4.23560 per cent, while the average yield reached 4.28081 per cent.

The largest allocation was in 182-day

Treasury bills are short-term, government-backed financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance.



bills, worth RO 21 million, with an average accepted price of RO 97.926 and a minimum accepted price of RO 97.925 per RO 100. These carried an average discount rate of 4.15901 per cent and an average yield of 4.24709 per cent.

The CBO stated that the interest rate

on repurchase (repo) operations for these bills is 5.00 per cent, while the discount rate on treasury bills with the Central Bank is 5.50 per cent.

Treasury bills are short-term, government-backed financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance. Managed by the CBO, they serve as secure investment avenues for licensed commercial banks. The bills offer rapid liquidity through discounting with the CBO or via repo transactions, and they can also be traded between banks in the interbank market.

Beyond providing an investment option for banks, treasury bills play a key role in shaping short-term interest rate benchmarks in Oman's financial market. — ONA

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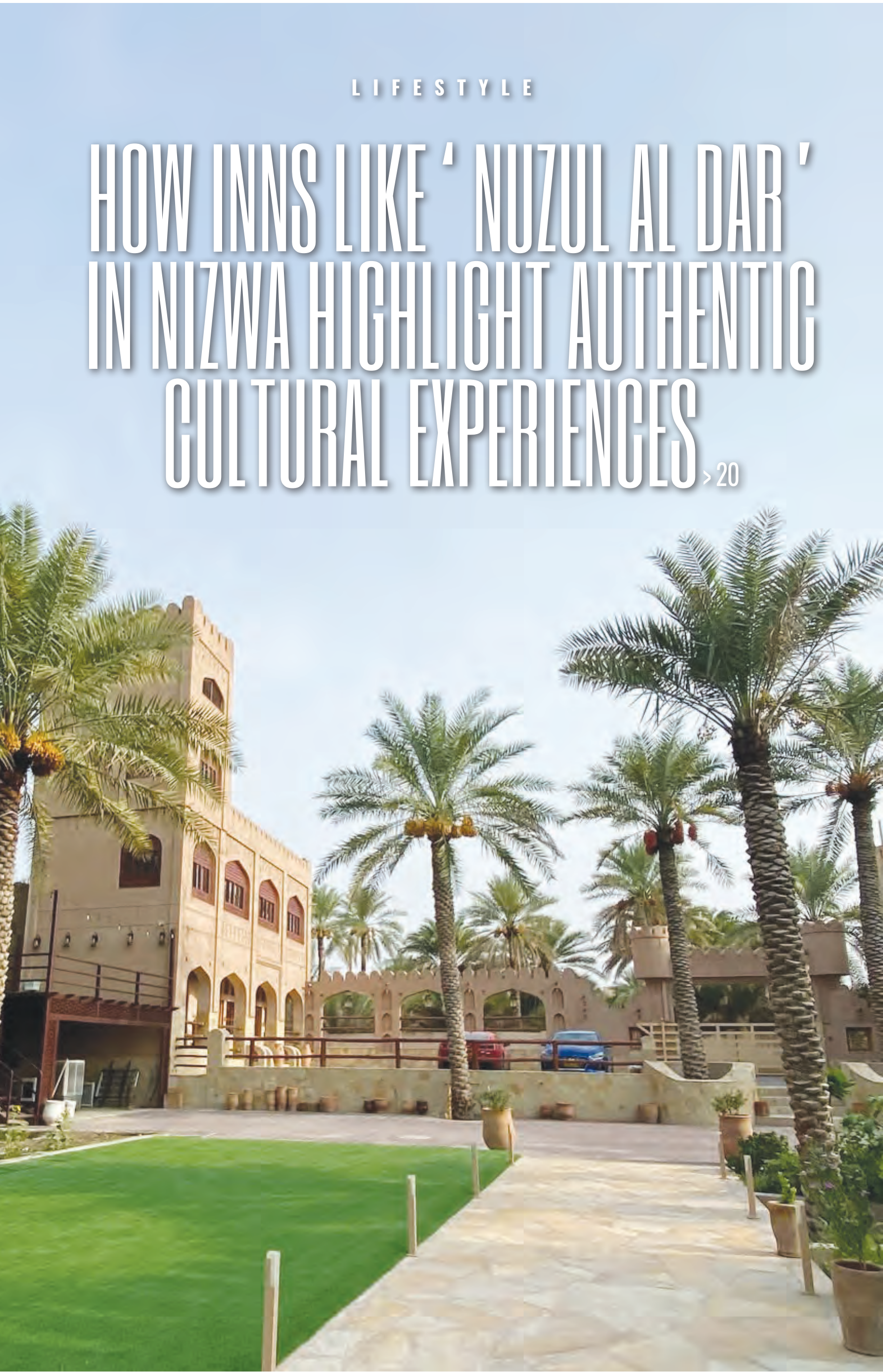
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ENTERTAINMENT

'Weapons' battles to top of North American box office



"WEAPONS", a new horror film about the mysterious disappearance of a group of children from the same school class, opened atop the North American box office with \$42.5 million in ticket sales, industry estimates showed on Sunday.

"This is an outstanding opening for an original horror film", analyst David A Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research said of the Warner Bros movie starring Julia Garner ("Ozark") and Josh Brolin ("Avengers: Infinity War").

Debuting in second place was Disney's "Freakier Friday" starring Lindsay Lohan and Jamie Lee Curtis, the much-anticipated sequel to the 2003 family film in which body-switching leads to amusing hijinks, at \$29 million, Exhibitor Relations said.

"This is an excellent opening. The estimated weekend figure is well above average for a comedy follow-up sequel and it's also well above the first film's opening 22 years ago", Gross said.

"The Fantastic Four: First Steps", Disney's debut of the rebooted Marvel Comics franchise, dropped to third place at \$15.5 million. Its overall take in the United States and Canada stands at \$230.4 million.

Actor-of-the-moment Pedro Pascal, Vanessa Kirby, Emmy-winner Ebon Moss-Bachrach and Joseph Quinn star as the titular team of superheroes, who must save a retro-futuristic world from the evil Galactus.

Universal's family-friendly animation sequel "The Bad Guys 2", about a squad of goofy animal criminals actually doing good in their rebranded lives, dropped to fourth, earning \$10.4 million.

Finishing out the top five was Paramount's reboot of "Naked Gun", a slapstick comedy starring Liam Neeson as Frank Drebin Jr, son of the bumbling police lieutenant from the original 1980s movie and related television series "Police Squad!"

The film, which co-stars Pamela Anderson, pulled in \$8.4 million in its second weekend in theatres.

Rounding out the top 10 were: "Superman" (\$7.8 million); "Jurassic World: Rebirth" (\$4.7 million); "F1: The Movie" (\$2.8 million); "Together" (\$2.6 million); "Sketch" (\$2.5 million). — AFP

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



ART

An Iranian examines a painting during an exhibit titled "In Women's Words", which showcases works by modern Iranian women artists, at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. — AFP



FILM

Spanish film star Antonio Banderas said in an interview published on August 10, 2025, for his birthday, that he has no plans to slow down now that he has reached 65. — AFP



HERITAGE

An Indonesian performer dressed in origami-themed costume takes part in a 3.6 kilometre parade during the Jember Fashion Carnival in Jember, eastern Java island. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Scientists find possible artefacts of oldest known Wallacean hominids in Indonesia



SCIENTISTS have found a series of stone tools on Indonesia’s Sulawesi island they say may be evidence of humans living 1.5 million years ago on islands between Asia and Australia, the earliest known humans in the Wallacea region.

Archaeologists from Australia and Indonesia found the small, chipped tools, used to cut little animals and carve rocks, under the soil in the region of Soppeng in South Sulawesi. Radioactive tracing of these tools and the teeth of animals found around the site were dated at up to 1.48 million years ago.

The findings could transform theories of early human migrations, according to an article the archaeologists published in the journal Nature in August. The earliest Wallacean humans, pre-historic persons known as Homo Erectus, were thought to have only settled in Indonesia’s Flores island and Philippines’ Luzon island around 1.02 million years

ago, as they were thought to be incapable of distant sea travel, proving the significance of the Sulawesi findings in theories of migration.

“These were artefacts made by ancient humans who lived on the earth long before the evolution of our species, Homo Sapiens”, said Adam Brumm, lead archaeologist from Griffith University in Queensland, Australia.

“We think Homo Erectus somehow got from the Asian mainland across a significant ocean gap to this island, Sulawesi, at least 1 million years ago”, Brumm said.

Wallacea is a region in Eastern Indonesia including several islands such as Sulawesi, Lombok, Flores, Timor, Sumbawa that lie between Borneo and Java and Australia and New Guinea. The region is named for the naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace who studied the fauna and flora of the area. — Reuters



In Cuba, Castro’s ‘influencer’ grandson causes a stir

CUBAN influencer Sandro Castro has chosen a very different path to his revolutionary grandfather Fidel, using his name to pursue online fame while occasionally poking fun at the island’s dire shortages of food, medicine, power and fuel.

It is a pastime some find entertaining, even fair commentary, but the 33-year-old is coming under increasing scrutiny from those loyal to Cuba’s communist project for disrespecting his ancestor’s legacy.

For others locked in a daily struggle for survival, the younger Castro’s high-flying lifestyle and apparent lack of empathy is offensive on a whole different level.

On his Instagram account, Sandro regales his 127,000 followers with images of him enjoying, at times with women, often with a drink in hand.

He is sometimes dressed as a monk or a vampire, sporting cat whiskers or the jersey of the Barcelona football club.

From time to time, he mocks the struggles engendered by the country’s worst economic crisis in three decades.

He also jokes about the power outages that have plagued the island, suggestively addressing a woman with the words: “If I caught you like the UNE (electric company), I’d get you every four hours, Monday to Monday”. The character entertains some, annoys others, but never fails to make a splash.

Castro’s followers jokingly refer to him as the “next president”, but voices aligned with the communist government are demanding he be silenced.

Loyalist historian and author Ernesto Limia complained on Facebook that Castro “does not respect the memory” of his famous grandfather, who led the revolution that toppled a dictatorship and installed a communist government.

“El Necio”, an online influencer, has argued that Sandro Castro “goes against the security of this country” and “against the ideals” of the



revolution.

Despite his famous name, some believe Castro may be pushing his luck.

Activists and critics in Cuba are often rounded up for sharing anti-government views and several are serving sentences for crimes such as “contempt” or disseminating “enemy propaganda.”

— ‘Little toys’ — Manuel Cuesta Morua, a dissident historian who has been detained multiple times for his democratic activism, said the Sandro phenomenon embodied “the distance of the grandchildren’s generation from the original revolutionary project”. It also put Castro in stark contrast to the rest of his family, who unlike him enjoy their privileged status “discreetly”, he said.

While Fidel Castro was alive, Cubans knew very little about his second wife Dalia Soto del Valle and their five sons — one of whom is Sandro’s father, Alexis Castro Soto del Valle, 63.

The family lived out of the public eye in Punto Cero, an extensive



wooded area west of Havana with access controlled by the military.

In 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic, Sandro came into the spotlight in a leaked video that showed him driving a luxurious Mercedes-Benz.

“We are simple people, but every now and then we have to take out these little toys we have at home”, he said in the clip that went viral and sparked public outrage, forcing him to apologise.

Three years later, he caused another stir by celebrating his birthday in the capital, burning massive neon lights and dancing on tables as the country reeled from the after-effects of a massive blackout. — AFP

FEATURES



HOW INNS LIKE ‘NUZUL AL DAR’ IN NIZWA HIGHLIGHT AUTHENTIC CULTURAL EXPERIENCES



BY SIHAM AL SAIDI

IN THE historic district of Nizwa’s Al Aqur neighbourhood, Nuzul Al Dar presents more than just a place to stay — it embodies the spirit of Oman’s heritage in every detail. Its thick clay walls, hand-carved wooden doors and traditional architectural elements carry visitors into a living snapshot of the past.

Entering the inn, you’re greeted by the scent of frankincense drifting through the air and the soft glow of lamps inspired by old Oman, creating an atmosphere that feels like stepping into a storybook. At the same time, modern touches—such as high-speed Wi-Fi, air conditioning and plush bedding — offer comfort that keeps pace with the demands of today’s traveller.

This is a place where the history of Oman isn’t confined to relics inside a museum but instead is woven into the fabric of everyday life. It’s an experience that invites visitors to not only observe but also participate in Oman’s cultural traditions. From traditional coffee rituals to bread making in a tannour oven, guests are encouraged to engage with the heritage that shaped the country’s identity. Surrounded by the bustling streets of Nizwa’s old town, where historical sites like the Nizwa Fort dominate the skyline, the inn offers a unique gateway to the country’s authentic past — yet it’s very much about living now.

The founder of Nuzul Al Dar, Dr Ishaq al Sharyani, speaks passionately about his vision. As a long-time resident of Al Aqur, he watched the old structures fall into disrepair and believed they needed more than preservation — they needed to be brought back to life.

“Heritage isn’t just something to look at in a museum”, he says. “It should be experienced fully, felt in the everyday and shared with others”. This conviction led him to create a guesthouse that would draw visitors into Oman’s cultural story rather than just tell it from a distance.

Bringing this concept into reality wasn’t without its challenges. Restoring the old buildings involved navigating complex regulations and sourcing authentic materials that reflected the original craftsmanship. Experts were brought in to ensure every detail was true to tradition, from the intricate woodwork to the lime plaster walls. The result is a space where the past doesn’t just get displayed — it is made part of the living environment.

Guests who stay at Nuzul Al Dar often remark on the sense of connection they feel when immersed in the environment. They have the opportunity to take part in traditional activities — bread baking, herb gathering, or storytelling sessions that reveal local poetry and history.

The inn’s approach isn’t superficial tourism; it’s about making visitors active participants in the ongoing story of Oman’s cultural identity. Local craftsmen and artisans are integral to the experience, leading workshops and offering handmade souvenirs that deepen the engagement.

In recent years, Oman has become a magnet for travellers with a taste for genuine connections. According to research by the World Economic Forum and other trusted sources, a new way of exploring the world is taking hold — one that prioritises meaningful encounters over typical sightseeing.

Visitors now seek experiences that foster understanding, respect and immersion in local life. Oman, with its untouched landscapes, ancient architecture and welcoming communities, has long been a prime candidate for this type of travel.

Its efforts to promote eco-tourism and sustainable development have only strengthened its appeal, highlighting small-scale businesses and cultural initiatives that encourage responsible visiting.

The country’s focus on cultural tourism is evident in places like Nuzul Al Dar, where the community’s heritage is a day-to-day reality, not just a story from the past. The inn actively involves local farmers, artisans and home-based businesses, creating a network of experiences that benefit the local economy and help preserve traditional crafts.

This holistic approach caters to a new generation of tourists who want their journeys to be both enriching and conscious — an antidote to the superficiality that often accompanies mass tourism.

The appeal of Nuzul Al Dar has gone beyond just craft circles and cultural festivals. An increasing number of ambassadors and international dignitaries have visited, drawn by its singular atmosphere.

One noted in the guestbook, “It felt like experiencing Oman a hundred years ago, yet I slept on a bed fit for today”. This encapsulates what makes the inn special: it offers comfort while remaining rooted in authenticity.

Guests like Rebecca from Malta speak highly of her stay, highlighting the cleanliness, welcoming staff and the prime location near Nizwa Fort. She notes, “The place was exceptionally comfortable and the staff made me feel like home. I’d love to come back”. Guests consistently remark on how these places allow for relaxation after exploring the historic sites or wandering the Old Town’s narrow streets. The gardens, pools and traditional decor contribute to a sense of peace, making it easy to unwind and reflect on the day’s discoveries.

