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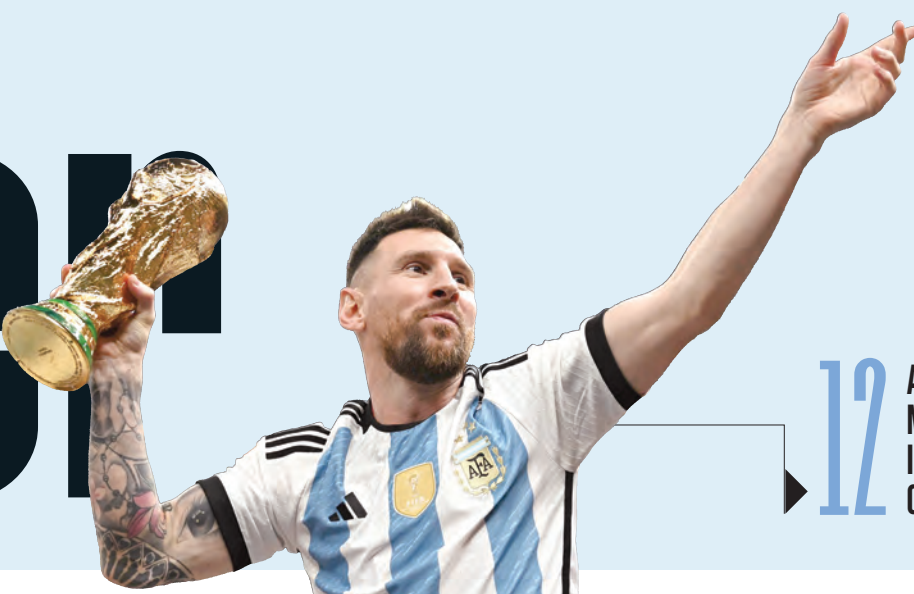
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ARGENTINA'S MESSI ENDS INTERNATIONAL CAREER



OMAN SECURES 11 GULF SMART INVESTOR AWARDS

RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman garnered 11 awards in the fourth season of the Gulf Smart Investor Award, organised by the securities market regulatory authorities of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states, during the award ceremony held in Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The fourth season of the award saw extensive participation, exceeding 300,000 entries from across the GCC, and featured four main competition tracks, namely writing, photography, drawing, and video production, targeting three categories: school students, university students, and individuals. Outstanding Omani entries secured 11 awards across the various tracks and categories. In the writing track, four positions were achieved. Rawd al Farsi claimed first place in the school category, Duja al Ma’ani secured third place in the university category, while Sarah al Kalbani achieved first place and Saiyya al Ismaili secured second place in the individuals category. In the photography track, Tasneem al Sabahi won first place and Al Yaqeen al Salmi secured third place in the school category, while Mawada al Salmani achieved first place in the university category, and Alia al Abri won first place in the individuals category. In the drawing track, Mariya al Sudairi secured first place in the university category. In the video track, Salim al Yaqoubi won first place and Zaha al Masoudi secured fourth place in the school category. The Gulf Smart Investor Award falls within the framework of Gulf financial and investment awareness and literacy initiatives. — ONA

IN BRIEF

HM GREETINGS TO SLOVAKIA AND UZBEKISTAN

TRUMP VOWS TO HIT IRAN ‘HARD’

US vows to keep economic pressure on Iran as G20 finance talks begin

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of greetings to President Peter Pellegrini of the Slovak Republic on his country’s National Day. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his best wishes to President Peter Pellegrini and the Slovak people for continued stability, growth and prosperity. His Majesty also sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Shavkat Mirziyoyev of the Republic of Uzbekistan on his country’s Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sentiments and sincere wishes of abundant health and happiness to President Dr Shavkat. His Majesty also wished further progress and prosperity to the Uzbek people, wishing President Dr Shavkat success in achieving further achievements and aspirations across various fields. — ONA

NEPAL FLOODS DEATH TOLL RISES TO 939



Nepal police personnel carrying bodies of flood victims on Monday. — AFP

Devastating floods near the border with China have killed at least 939 people in Nepal, while the number of missing in the country dropped to 3,925, its disaster authority said on Monday, as rescue efforts entered a sixth day. Chinese state media earlier confirmed 16 dead and 546 people missing in Tibet, taking the overall toll to 955 dead and 4,471 missing. Nepal’s list of the missing includes 592 foreigners. But the number of missing workers on hydropower projects - which took the full force of the torrent - dropped to 639 on Monday from an earlier count of 933. SEE ALSO P6

DONALD TRUMP threatened to hit Iran ‘hard’ after the two foes traded fire for the first time in over a month, while Iran’s president warned that more fighting with the US was not in his country’s interest. After six months of war, the foes remain at an impasse, with Iran keeping the strategic Strait of Hormuz closed and the US persisting with a naval counter-blockade of Iran. The United States said it had carried out strikes on an Iranian island in the Strait of Hormuz, with Tehran quickly retaliating by attacking US military targets in the Middle East.

The exchange raised fears of a return to major hostilities, with the US president vowing to respond. “We’re going to hit them hard,” Trump said, according to a Fox News reporter who spoke to him briefly. “There will be a response.” The United States said it attacked Iranian rocket launchers on the island of Larak to prevent Tehran from planting mines in the key shipping lane. Iran responded with missile and drone attacks aimed at Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, saying they targeted US forces there, but President Masoud Pezeshkian later on Monday called for dialogue. “We continue to strive for a path of agreement and understanding, and we believe that continuing the war is neither in our interest nor in the interest of the region,” he said at a summit in Kyrgyzstan, adding “the solution to the existing problems is dialogue and cooperation”. State media reported that two



Vessels near the Strait of Hormuz on Monday. — Reuters

President Donald Trump’s administration is working to rally G20 partners to ramp up economic pressure on Iran during the talks in Asheville, North Carolina, through Tuesday - amid a renewed exchange of fire with Tehran.

people were killed in the US attack on Larak, with several others wounded. Iran’s powerful Revolutionary Guards, the ideological arm of its military, said the ballistic missile attack on two US air bases in Jordan caused “heavy damage”. Jordan’s army said it had intercepted eight missiles, without stating their origin. Trump also told Fox that all the missiles fired at US forces had been shot down, except for one that was determined not to pose a threat. Iran also said it targeted US personnel at an air base in the UAE and shot down an American drone over Hormuz. Abu Dhabi said it intercepted a drone over the country’s waters, but dismissed claims that Al Minhad

Air Base had been targeted as “baseless”. Meanwhile, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent vowed on Monday to persist with economic pressure on Iran, saying a turning point could be near as G20 finance leaders opened talks clouded by war and trade tensions. “We are going to continue exerting pressure, and we’ve had very good discussions here already,” Bessent told reporters before starting meetings with Group of 20 finance ministers and central bank governors. He said a turning point in this US pressure campaign could come “within weeks or months,” adding that Iran’s economy need not collapse in the Middle East war to achieve this. — AFP

75.7 million tourists visit GCC countries in 2025

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

The GCC Statistical Centre convened in Muscat on Monday the eighth Regional Workshop on Innovation in Tourism Statistics, under the theme ‘Innovation in Tourism Statistics: Data Integration and Trend Analysis.’ Hosting the two-day meeting underscores Oman’s role in strengthening Gulf cooperation on statistical collaboration in the field of tourism statistics, as the country works to align its tourism sector with Vision 2040 goals.

More than 30 specialists and officials from GCC statistical authorities are attending the workshop, which focuses on moving beyond single-source data to build a more complete picture of tourism across the region. Discussions centred on integrating data from hotels, airports, border crossings, payment systems and digital platforms. Participants are mapping tourism data sources, assessing their quality, and reviewing legal and technical requirements for secure data exchange. The goal: better linkage,



calibration and reconciliation so that GCC statistics are more consistent and comparable. Intisar bint Abdullah al Wahaibi, Director-General of the GCC Statistical Centre, said tourism has become a key pillar of GCC development plans and that reliable statistics are now essential for policy and investment decisions. She highlighted strong regional performance. The tourism sector’s economic contribution in GCC countries grew at an average annual rate of 7.3 per cent between 2019 and 2025, outpacing the global

average of 6.7 per cent. In 2025 alone, GCC states welcomed approximately 75.7 million tourists. Inbound spending reached about \$131.9 billion, with the sector’s total economic contribution estimated at \$254.7 billion. GCC countries now account for roughly 5 per cent of global tourist movements and 6.9 per cent of worldwide tourism receipts — a sign that the region is attracting higher-value travel. Progress towards the Gulf Tourism Strategy 2025 stands at 73.8 per cent.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The contestants will take part in 7 levels for the contest.

Quran contest preliminary rounds begin in Barka

MUSCAT: The preliminary rounds of the Sultan Qaboos Holy Quran Competition's 34th edition kicked off on Monday in the Wilayat of Barka, Al Batinah South Governorate.

The competition is organised by the Sultan Qaboos Higher Center for Culture and Science at the Diwan of Royal Court.

Rashid bin Humaid al Dughaiishi, Chairman of the committees supervising the preliminary and final rounds, said the preliminary round panel listened to the readings of 756 male and female contestants from the wilayats of Al Seeb, Bahla, Samayil, Al Suwaiq, Al Rustaq, Salalah and Taqah.

The contestants take part in the competition's 7 levels, which are:

Level 1: Memorising the entire Holy Quran; Level 2: Memorising 24 consecutive parts of the Holy Quran; Level 3: Memorising 18 consecutive parts; Level 4: Memorising 12 consecutive parts (contested by those born in 2001 or later); Level 5: Memorising 6 consecutive parts (contested by those born in 2012 or later); Level 6: Memorising 4 consecutive parts (contested by those born in 2016 or later); and Level 7: Memorising 2 consecutive parts (contested by those born in 2019 or later). — ONA

SQU team wins IBA innovation excellence award in Houston



MUSCAT: A student team from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has won the 2026 IBA Technical Innovation Excellence Award at the finals of the Imperial Barrel Award Global held in Houston, US. The team qualified to represent the Middle East Region after securing first place regionally.

The Imperial Barrel Award Global, organised by the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG), is one of the most prominent international awards for earth and petroleum science students. It aims to develop the students' abilities in analysing geological and geophysical data, evaluating oil and gas reservoirs, and making technical decisions related to exploration operations.

79,518 VISIT ‘EMPOWERMENT AND EXCELLENCE’ EXPO IN DHOFAR

SALALAH: The second edition of the ‘Empowerment and Excellence’ exhibition, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), represented by its Small and Medium Enterprises Committee, attracted approximately 79,518 visitors during its run at the Al Gharf project in Dhofar Governorate.

The exhibition, which concluded on Sunday, featured 50 small and



The session addressed financial management practices.

medium enterprises showcasing a diverse range of products and services, including perfumes and frankincense, fashion and textiles, Omani hospitality and food products, and traditional crafts and industries.

The closing ceremony featured interactive dialogue sessions, including ‘Entrepreneurs Talk’ and the ‘Role of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and

Industry in Empowerment’. The session addressed sound financial management practices and the importance of separating personal finances from business accounts to ensure accurate calculation of profits.

It also discussed requirements for accessing global markets and the need for entrepreneurs to approach regional challenges with confidence and optimism. — ONA

Muscat launches AI film festival to drive creativity

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

MUSCAT has announced the launch of the Muscat AI Film Festival (MAIFF), a new platform exploring the intersection of artificial intelligence, film-making and human creativity while supporting emerging film-makers and content creators in Oman and beyond.

The festival brings together film-makers, creatives, students, technology specialists, studios and audiences from Oman, the region and around the world, positioning Muscat as a meeting point for cinema, technology, culture and storytelling.

MAIFF is based on the principle that while artificial intelligence is transforming film production and storytelling, it remains a tool to support creativity, with people and stories at the centre of the creative process.

The festival is open to Omani film-makers, students and creatives, as well as participants from the region and around the world. Institutions and studios working in the film and content industries are also invited to participate.

The programme began with the official launch and media briefing on August 31, with film submissions opening on September 5, 2026. Creative labs and specialised workshops will be held in October, followed by public screenings in November featuring the festival's top five films at VOX Cinemas. The inaugural edition will conclude with a closing ceremony on January 19, 2027.

Beyond competitions and screenings, MAIFF aims to promote knowledge transfer, skills development and national talent in



MAIFF is supported by a network of strategic, media, technology, production and programme partners.

the creative and technology sectors.

The festival aims to train more than 1,000 Omanis in AI-assisted film-making and involve between 40 and 60 Omani small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the festival village.

Organisers are targeting a media reach of more than 10 million people across over 30 countries and a direct economic impact exceeding RO 100,000 during the first year.

rmz.ai is participating as the festival's founding partner for generative AI and innovation. The partnership will support access to AI tools, education and training, and explore new pathways for AI-assisted film-making in Oman and internationally.

Films submitted to MAIFF will be produced through the rmz.ai platform, allowing participants to experiment with generative AI tools at different stages of film-making.

The festival will offer main prizes totalling RO 20,000 across film-

making, storytelling, art direction and technological innovation.

The Best AI Film award carries a prize of RO 10,000, while Best Art Direction and Best Technological Innovation will each receive RO 5,000.

More than 13 additional awards will recognise achievements in creativity, storytelling, technology and artificial intelligence, as well as regional, emerging and special festival categories.

MAIFF is supported by a network of strategic, media, technology, production and programme partners, including the Ministry of Information, Mubashir, Thawani Pay, VOX Cinemas, rmz.ai, XPAND, DMS, Premagic, MIFU and Music Connections.

The inaugural festival aims to establish an international platform in Oman for the next generation of film-makers and creatives, while strengthening Muscat's position as a hub where cinema, technology, culture and innovation converge.

The Muscat AI Film Festival targets training 1,000 Omanis and offers RO 20,000 in prizes

Youth Ecothon empowers young innovators for environmental action

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SALALAH, AUGUST 31

Young innovators from across the Arab world gathered in Dhofar to turn environmental challenges into practical ideas and potential solutions as the second edition of the Talinko International Environmental Hackathon, Youth Ecothon 2026, concluded recently.

The hackathon brought together young talents around a common goal of empowering youth to become active contributors to a more sustainable and innovative future.

Speaking to the Observer, Eng Ahmed bin Said al Ghafri, Chief Executive Officer of Talinko Global for Talents and Innovations, said environmental challenges were no longer distant concerns but issues directly affecting economies, food and water security, energy and quality of life.

He highlighted the role of

technology and innovation in developing practical responses to these challenges while creating new economic opportunities and future jobs.

Al Ghafri said Youth Ecothon was conceived as more than a competition, providing an environment where ideas could be developed and innovators connected with experts, institutions and opportunities that could help transform their concepts into sustainable projects.

“The recognition platform should not be the end of an innovator's journey, but the beginning,” he said.

The second edition also introduced the Muscat University Award for Environmental Innovations, aimed at encouraging young people to develop solutions with scientific, economic and societal value. The award reflects Muscat University's focus on innovation and entrepreneurship and its efforts to help young people



EcoShield team claimed first place and a cash prize of RO 1,000 at the Youth Ecothon.

turn ideas into viable projects.

The international character of the hackathon was reflected in

its participation figures, with 193 participants from 22 Arab countries entering the initial selection

process. Following screening, 28 participants were shortlisted, with 20 advancing to compete for the top positions.

Talinko Global for Talents and Innovations operates as an international network connecting expertise, talent and innovation, with a database that includes scientists and specialists from across the Arab world. Its digital platform has attracted more than four million visitors and registered over 26,000 talented individuals and innovators.

At the conclusion of the hackathon, the EcoShield team claimed first place and a cash prize of RO 1,000, while Green Drop secured second place and RO 600. Magnbio took third place and received RO 400.

The winning projects reflected participants' efforts to develop innovative and practical approaches to addressing environmental challenges.

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SHORT TAKES



The children's return encompassed the Association's eight rehabilitation centres.

361 CHILDREN JOIN PROGRAMMES FOR 2026-27 REHAB YEAR

MUSCAT: Oman Association for Children with Disabilities on Monday welcomed 361 children as the 2026-2027 rehabilitation year commenced, marking the start of a new cycle of rehabilitation, education, and empowerment programmes.

The children's return encompassed the Association's eight rehabilitation centres located in Athaiba, Seeb, Barka, Al Musannah, Saham, Yanqul, Dhank and Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan. At these centres, the Association provides specialised rehabilitation and educational services and programmes aimed at developing the children's abilities and skills, while enhancing their independence and self-confidence.

A number of the Association's centres accommodate students at the pre-vocational stage, contributing to their preparation and skill development in accordance with their capabilities, and equipping them for more advanced phases of independence and social integration. — ONA

NDC CHIEF HOLDS TALKS WITH INDIAN NDC DELEGATION



Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi with Air Vice Marshal Manish Vasantkumar Patel. — ONA

MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC) at the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, received at Bait Al Falaj a delegation from the National Defence College of the Republic of India, led by Air Vice Marshal Manish Vasantkumar Patel, Senior Directing Staff at the National Defence College of the Republic of India.

Oman tightens mobile number rules, bans retention offers

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

New regulations governing mobile number portability in Oman are set to impose stricter controls on telecom operators, including a ban on contacting customers to influence their decision or make retention offers once a number transfer request has been initiated.

Issued by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), the new framework is aimed at ensuring greater neutrality in the portability process and strengthening

competition based on service quality, pricing and customer experience rather than last-minute efforts to retain subscribers.

A key feature of the regulations is the introduction of a centralised system under the TRA to manage number portability procedures. The system is expected to streamline transfers between operators, reduce direct intervention by the operator a customer is leaving and strengthen regulatory oversight.

Under the new rules, once a subscriber has formally requested to transfer their number, the losing



The move represents a shift in how telecom operators compete for customers.

operator cannot contact the customer for the purpose of influencing the decision or offering special incentives designed to prevent the transfer.

The move represents a shift in how telecom operators compete for customers. Instead of relying on retention offers when a subscriber decides to leave, operators will be encouraged to maintain competitive prices, strong network performance, reliable services and effective customer support throughout the customer relationship.

The framework also sets fees for completed number transfers.

A charge of RO 1.5 applies to each successfully completed number transfer involving the parties specified under the regulations.

Mobile number portability is an important component of competition in the telecom sector because it allows subscribers to change service providers without having to give up their existing mobile numbers.

The ability to retain a number removes one of the key barriers to switching and enables customers to compare operators more freely on price, network coverage, connection speeds, reliability and service quality.

Oman, Uzbekistan discuss documentary, scientific cooperation

TASHKENT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), discussed prospects for documentary and scientific cooperation, as well as opportunities for conducting joint studies and research on aspects of historical communication with Central Asian regions, and utilising documents, manuscripts, and

historical sources to document these ties and highlight their extension across ages.

This came during a visit by a delegation led by Dr Hamed bin Mohammed al Dhawyani, Chairman of the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), and in the presence of Wafa bint Jabr al Busaidi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to

the Republic of Uzbekistan, to archival, scientific, intellectual, and cultural institutions in the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent.

The visit included the Imam Al Bukhari Center, the Document Archive Branch in Samarkand, Bukhara State University, the Abu Rayhan Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies, the Islamic Civilisation

Center, and the National Archives of Uzbekistan.

The Authority discussed with the concerned institutions ways to develop cooperation in the fields of document and manuscript preservation, maintenance, restoration, digitisation, microfilming, scientific research, publishing, and capacity building. — ONA

Salalah plans next phase of flood-control works

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 31

SALALAH is preparing to launch the second phase of stormwater drainage works as Dhofar Municipality steps up efforts to strengthen flood resilience across the city, where rapid urban development has increased the concentration of homes, roads and infrastructure exposed to heavy rainfall and runoff.

Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed Baowain, Director-General of Projects and Technical Affairs at Dhofar Municipality, said Salalah currently has between 450 and 460 stormwater culverts, including around 130 pipe culverts and 320-330 box culverts.

Individual culvert structures have between one and 39 openings, reflecting varying drainage requirements across the city.

Speaking at the Water Resources Sustainability: Water and Climate Change seminar in Salalah, Baowain said preparations were under way for the second phase of stormwater drainage works in the Wilayat of Salalah. The cost and implementation timetable for the next phase were not disclosed.

The municipality is increasingly incorporating side drainage into new road projects to reduce surface-water accumulation and improve the flow of runoff away from carriageways.

It is also moving towards automated pumping systems in areas prone to water accumulation. Under the approach outlined by



Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed Baowain addressing the seminar in Salalah.

Baowain, pumps would activate automatically once water reaches predetermined levels, reducing reliance on manual operation during periods of heavy rainfall.

The wider strategy includes drainage channels and corridors, collection basins, storage and detention dams, smart pumping stations, nature-based solutions and early-warning systems.

Protection of natural wadis is another key component. The presentation highlighted erosion-protection works covering six wadis, while Baowain cautioned that interventions described as wadi 'cleaning' could become counterproductive if they alter the natural width, capacity or behaviour of a watercourse.

Such changes can affect the movement of floodwater and potentially shift risks to surrounding areas, making the preservation of natural drainage corridors increasingly important in

urban planning.

The challenge is becoming more complex as Salalah expands. Baowain pointed to cases where buildings had been constructed below the level of adjoining roads, making them more vulnerable when rainwater accumulates.

The municipality is therefore working on an initiative to assess ground levels and filling requirements on a plan-by-plan basis, taking local topography and drainage conditions into account.

Baowain also used images of Salalah from the early 1970s to illustrate how the city's exposure has changed. Areas that once had limited development now accommodate multi-storey buildings, roads and other infrastructure.

While the underlying natural drainage landscape remains, considerably more residential, commercial and public assets now occupy the urban area.



IDRIS AL BALUSHI

RARE sightings of honey badgers, Arabian leopards and wolves have captivated the public, offering a fascinating glimpse into Dhofar's extraordinary biodiversity.

Dhofar has long been celebrated for its lush mountains, seasonal khareef landscapes and remarkable wildlife. But 2026 has offered residents and visitors an especially fascinating glimpse into the governorate's wilder side.

Photographs and videos of unusual animal sightings have circulated widely on social media, sparking curiosity and amazement among the public. Many have been surprised to discover the diversity of wildlife inhabiting Dhofar's mountains and wilderness areas.

Among the animals attracting attention is the honey badger, known locally in the Harsusi dialect as 'kamour'.

According to the Environment Authority, the honey badger is a powerful, stocky animal with a small, flattened head, short, sturdy legs and large, sharp claws. Its upper body is grey, while its lower body and legs are black.

The Authority said the honey badger is primarily nocturnal and is rarely seen during the day. It spends much of its time in dens, caves and rocky crevices and can become aggressive when threatened. Its thick skin and distinctive hair structure provide protection against snake bites, while it also has a natural immunity to snake venom.

The Environment Authority noted that the species is widely distributed across the mountains of Dhofar. Its diet includes carrion, fruits, plants, lizards, reptiles, rodents, birds and snakes.

However, the species faces several threats, including conflicts with beekeepers, habitat loss resulting from urbanisation and road accidents.

Abdulsalam al Salman, an environmentalist and member of the Sudair Green Association, said he had personally seen two honey badgers around Salalah, as well as in Saudi Arabia's King Abdulaziz Royal Reserve.

Another sighting that captured public attention was that of the Arabian leopard, one of the region's most elusive predators.

Nature and history enthusiast Zainab Khalid described its appearance in Dhalkout as a source of pride and a reflection of the exceptional ecological value of Dhofar's mountains.

The Environment Authority identifies Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve as the primary habitat of the Arabian leopard in Dhofar. This year, the species was also recorded in Khor Kharfot Nature Reserve, an area renowned for its mountains, rare trees and spectacular views of the Arabian Sea.



The appearance of Honey badger in Dhalkut is a source of pride and a reflection of the exceptional ecological value of Dhofar's mountains.

ZAINAB KHALID
Nature & history enthusiast

An image of the leopard released by the Environment Authority, accompanied by a warning that the protected area is home to predatory animals, further fuelled public interest in the elusive species.

Meanwhile, the Arabian wolf has been spotted repeatedly around Salalah this year, including the rare white-coated variety, whose striking appearance has drawn considerable attention.

Omani resident Mohammed al Kaf documented one such encounter, describing it as a 'rare documentation' of the Arabian wolf in Dhofar.

Together, these sightings offer a remarkable reminder that beyond Dhofar's celebrated green landscapes lies a thriving wilderness. Its mountains and protected areas provide habitat for some of Arabia's most elusive and fascinating creatures, underscoring the importance of protecting the governorate's rich natural heritage.



Honey badger is widely distributed across the mountains of Dhofar. The species faces several threats, including conflicts with beekeepers, habitat loss resulting from urbanisation and road accidents

DHOFAR'S RARE WILDLIFE



SHORT TAKES



NEPALI WORKER IN OMAN LOSES FAMILY IN FLOODS

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

It was a routine call for Shuresh Tamang, a Nepali citizen working for a private cleaning company in Oman, when he spoke to his family in Rasuwa district in northern Nepal on August 25.

Within days, the ordinary call had become his last memory of his parents, wife and two young children. It was only on Wednesday afternoon, when horrifying images of catastrophic flash floods began appearing on mobile phones, that Shuresh learned that five members of his family were missing and feared dead.

“I don’t have a house or any trace of my family members now. I was told that some villagers are trying to identify the bodies recovered from the mud, but they are beyond recognition,” Shuresh told the Observer.

The terrifying surge of mud and water tore through the mountainous Rasuwa district, particularly affecting Timure and Syabrubesi. The floodwaters arrived with such force that residents had only seconds to react. Many were swept from their homes and rooftops, while others were trapped as multi-storey buildings were rapidly buried under thick layers of river silt.

As Shuresh struggles to come to terms with the loss, officials at the Nepal Embassy in Muscat are working with his employer to arrange emergency leave so that he can return to Kathmandu.

The flood, which swept down the Bhotekoshi River in Gosainkunda Rural Municipality along the Tibet border, destroyed settlements, vehicles, roads, bridges, hydropower projects and entire market areas in Timure, Syabrubesi and Rasuwagadhi, along with several surrounding villages.

Development projects to come up in Al Rustaq

A NUMBER of service and development projects are under implementation in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq with the aim of improving infrastructure, enhancing the efficiency of roads and public facilities, improving the urban landscape, and developing tourist sites, said Dr Yahya bin Sulaiman al Nadabi, Wali of Al Rustaq.

Among the most prominent of these is the project to design and pave 40 kilometres of internal roads in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, of which approximately 33 kilometres have been completed, with an overall completion rate of 80 per cent.

Also underway is a project to construct box culverts in several locations, with work completed at the Samiyah, Al Falaj Al Hadith and Al Hawqayn sites. The overall completion rate on the project currently stands at 90 per cent.

The City Walk project is another prominent urban development project in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, reflecting the government’s commitment to developing public facilities, enhancing quality of life, and creating a destination that combines social, recreational, service, and economic activities. The project has reached a completion rate of 50 per cent. As part of efforts to improve the entrances and urban landscape in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, work continues on the Aqabat Al Rustaq Gate Development Project with 60 per cent completion.

In the roads sector, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is continuing work on the rehabilitation of the existing road from Al Hazm village to Al Washil village, a distance of approximately 11 kilometres. Several other projects have been completed in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, including the development of the Al Hazm entrance, repairs to weather-related



The overall completion rate on the project currently stands at 90 per cent.



DR YAHYA
AL NADABI
Wali of Al Rustaq

The City Walk project is a prominent urban development project which reflects the government’s commitment to developing public facilities



damage, maintenance of the Al Rustaq Vegetable and Fruit Market, and the installation of internal lighting poles in Al Rustaq Public Park, in addition to installing lighting poles in several other locations across the wilayat.

The Wilayat of Al Rustaq has 50 government schools serving students at various educational levels carefully distributed across the wilayat. The school distribution system provides educational services near population centres, and reflects the size of the urban and geographical expansion of the wilayat, said the Wali of Al Rustaq.

At the level of health services, the Wilayat of Al Rustaq has 10 health institutions distributed across the wilayat, which enhances the provision of health services to the population and brings them closer to population centres.

The health system includes Al Rustaq Hospital, Wadi Al Haymali Hospital, Wadi Bani Ghafir Hospital, and Al Rustaq Health Complex, in addition to six health centres: Al Rustaq Health Centre, Al Hawqayn Health Centre, Al Razi Health Centre, Wadi Al Sahtan Health Centre, Balad Seet Health Centre, and Wadi Bani Awf Health Centre, he said.

HERITAGE PROGRAMME REVIVES MEMORIES OF OMANI WOMEN

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the Women's Sports Department, in cooperation with Bait Al Zubair Museum, organised ‘Journey Through Time... A Journey Through the Senses’ as part of the ‘Your Movement is a Blessing’ sports programme for elderly women.

The event brought together elderly women for an interactive cultural and social experience combining movement, engagement and memory, while highlighting Oman's cultural and social heritage and strengthening connections between generations.

Badriya bint Said Al Wahaibi, Head of the Community Programmes Section at the Women's Sports Department, said the initiative supports the programme’s objectives of promoting social interaction and helping elderly women reconnect with memories and past experiences.

She said the partnership with Bait Al Zubair Museum provided participants with a cultural and recreational experience combining physical activity, interaction and sensory engagement through activities inspired by traditional Omani practices.

The programme included a tour of Bait Al Bagh, where participants explored traditional customs, crafts and practices associated with Omani women, including incense making and mixing, weaving, pottery and palm-leaf handicrafts. Participants also had the opportunity to try some of these



The event brought together elderly women for an interactive cultural and social experience.

activities themselves, helping revive memories of traditional life.

Shaikha bint Rashid al Battashi of the Oman Women's Association in Sidab said the event brought back memories of her childhood, family life and Oman’s development during the era of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

“These activities brought back memories of our childhood and the old days we lived with our parents, families and siblings. They reminded us of Oman’s renaissance under the leadership of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. Those were joyful times, and we hope such activities continue so that we can remember the past and the celebrations of National Day,” she said.

She recalled National Day celebrations in Qurayat, where families gathered from dawn around the fort to watch traditional performances, followed by boat races and popular games near the sea. She also remembered her mother and neighbours collecting water

and firewood from palm groves, describing her childhood as a simple but memorable period when electricity was gradually being introduced.

Shaikha bint Jameel al Farsi of Ihsan Association recalled the simplicity of education during her childhood, particularly learning the Holy Quran in traditional neighbourhood settings. She described the discipline of her teacher, Mubarak al Souli, and how children later learned reading and writing in formal schools with Omani and expatriate teachers.

“Life was beautiful and simple. Because notebooks were not always available, the courtyard walls and ground became like a large notebook where we wrote, walked and memorised our lessons,” she said.

Zainab bin Sulaiman al Zadjali of Muttrah’s Jendaan area said the event took her back to childhood memories of climbing mountains, playing before sunset and enjoying close relationships with neighbours.

وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Internal Tender Announcement

Tender No.	123/2026/MHT/HQ-23	Tender Name	Design and Implementation of the AL-Hajar Geopark Visitor Centers in Nizwa (Birkat ALMuz) and Nakhal (WUKAN VILLAGE)
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	25R.O		
Tender Document Sales End Date	14/9/2026		
Last Date for Bid Submission	6/10/2026		
Grade	Second , Third		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents.
- The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid.
- All companies submitting bids for this tender are required to attach a valid and recently issued Omanization Compliance Certificate from the Ministry of Labour, provided that the certificate is not older than 30 days from the date of issuance.
- This certificate is considered a mandatory document, and failure to submit it — for any reason — shall result in the outright disqualification of the bid, without being evaluated technically or financially.
- The certificate must also demonstrate the company's compliance with the Omanization percentage required by the Ministry of Labour. If the required percentage is not met, the bid shall be automatically disqualified.
- The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids
- The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ptlc.gov.om or 2402244
For further information	Email : sotc@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Residents gather as fire is extinguished following an Israeli air strike that hit a vehicle in Gaza. — Reuters

ISRAELI FIRE CONTINUES TO HUNT PEOPLE IN GAZA

CAIRO: Israeli air strikes killed at least five Palestinians in the Gaza Strip on Monday, health officials said. Medics said two people were killed and several others wounded when one strike hit a crowd near the municipal public park in Gaza City, an area packed with displaced families. Later on Monday, another Israeli air strike hit a vehicle in the Tel Al Hawa neighbourhood in western Gaza City, killing at least three people, medics added.

At Al Shifa Hospital, the enclave’s largest medical facility, relatives and friends paid their last respects to two of the five men killed on Monday before carrying the white-shrouded bodies to the cemetery to bury them. “There is no ceasefire. There is not one good day in Gaza since October 7 (2023),” said Amjad Abu Abdo, a relative of one of the people who died in the first strike on Monday. “I swear, we do not sleep from the sound of drones. You sleep scared of being hit,” Abu Abdo added.

Hamas accuses Israel of violating the ceasefire and undermining efforts to implement a broader plan by US President Donald Trump to end the Gaza conflict, which also includes Israeli withdrawals and Hamas disarmament. — Reuters

INDONESIA AND US LAUNCH ANNUAL MILITARY EXERCISES



An Indonesian military personnel speaks with members of the Australian Defence Force during the opening ceremony of Super Garuda Shield in Bandung. — Reuters

BANDUNG: The United States and Indonesia launched their annual joint military exercises on Monday, the first since announcing a new defence partnership this year, with drills from tactical airborne jumps and missile firing to jungle training and cyber defence. “Super Garuda Shield”, held annually since 2006, will run until September 11 and include more than 4,700 personnel, with 13 other countries taking part including Japan, South Korea, Australia and Canada.

This edition comes after the two countries’ defence ministers signed a major defence cooperation partnership in April. “We are not just meeting for another annual training cycle. We are writing a historic new chapter in our bilateral relationship,” Major General Patrick Ellis, US Army Commanding General of the 4th Infantry Division, said.

Super Garuda Shield will also include humanitarian disaster relief efforts. Natural disasters like earthquakes and landslides are common in Indonesia, an archipelago of 17,000 islands and more than 100 active volcanoes that sits on “Pacific Ring of Fire”. — Reuters

IMPROVING AIR QUALITY

Malaysia eyes cloud seeding fight haze



Malaysia’s Sarawak state plans cloud seeding operations as smoke from fires in neighbouring Indonesia pushes air quality to hazardous levels. Sarawak Disaster Management Committee chairman Douglas Uggah Embas said that cloud seeding could be carried out between September 3 and 5. “Cloud seeding can only be carried out when suitable cloud formations and atmospheric conditions are present — it cannot create rain in the absence of suitable clouds,” Uggah said. — AFP

OUTBREAK STRUGGLE

DR Congo Ebola epidemic passes 6,000



The Democratic Republic of Congo has recorded more than 6,000 confirmed cases and nearly 3,000 deaths from the country’s worst Ebola epidemic ever, according to the Congolese authorities’ latest toll. According to the Congolese health authorities, 2,911 people have died, while 1,366 more have made a recovery out of the 6,041 cases confirmed since the epidemic began. The response to the epidemic has struggled to keep up with the explosion in cases. — AFP

UNDERWATER TRAGEDY

Nearly 20 still missing in Cyprus ferry capsizes



Nearly 20 people were missing on Monday after a ferry capsized off northern Cyprus, killing at least eight, as divers joined search teams scouring deep waters for any survivors. It was unclear if people remained trapped on the vessel, now lying on the seabed at a depth of more than 500 m. Officials gave differing estimates of the missing, with some saying 19, and others 18. Authorities have detained the captain and crew of the vessel for questioning. — Reuters

NEPAL DEATH TOLL SURGES AS RESCUERS STRUGGLE THROUGH DEBRIS



Nepal army personnel work during a search and rescue operation near the Trishuli Hydropower Project site in Rasuwa district, Nepal. — AFP

KATHMANDU RESCUERS struggled on Monday through mud and debris for a sixth day, as the number of missing people soared to nearly 5,000 since tsunami-like glacial floods roared down from the China-Nepal border, creating an “unimaginable” disaster. The latest confirmed death toll surged above 900, and the number of those unaccounted for is also climbing — with unidentified bodies buried in mass graves after DNA sampling. The huge wave of freezing water, rocks and debris that smashed into villages and towns on Wednesday killed at least 939 people in Nepal and in Tibet, in China, with at least 17 bodies pulled from rivers downstream in India.

Nepali Prime Minister Balendra Shah in a statement on Sunday called the disaster “unimaginable and heartbreaking”. Rescue teams are in a race against time in treacherous conditions to free around 100 hydropower workers believed trapped in multiple tunnels — digging, drilling and blasting through debris in a non-stop effort supported by teams from China, India and South Korea.

So far, three dead bodies have been pulled out of two tunnels, and the teams have found routes blocked with mud. An Indian army officer deployed as part of a specialised tunnel rescue team said rescuers were digging through “sludge”. He said that he was “still hopeful that there are six survivors inside” the tunnel where he was stationed.

Amid the horror, there has been some hope; a six-year-old pulled out of the mud four days after the disaster on Friday was reunited with her parents after police found her crying for her mother. “Her body was trapped in mud, but her head was outside,” Nepali Armed Police spokesman Netra Bahadur Karki said. “She is out of danger and recovering at a hospital and has reunited with her family.”



People salvage belongings from their homes following flash floods in Nepal’s Nuwakot district. — AFP

The huge wave of freezing water, rocks and debris that smashed into villages and towns killed at least 939 people in Nepal and in Tibet, in China, with at least 17 bodies pulled from rivers downstream in India

The disaster was sparked by a glacial collapse, the US Geological Survey said. While the exact cause of that collapse is unclear, climate change is causing glaciers to melt worldwide, raising the risk of such disasters. Nepali Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal said: “The people of Nepal are one of the major victims of the changing climate and its impact.”

Scientists say the Himalayas, the world’s highest mountain range, are melting faster as global temperatures rise. Aid needs are enormous. Entire communities have been swept away, leaving families homeless in heavy rain or sheltering in temporary facilities. “This is an unfolding disaster,” UN children’s fund official Abiodun Banire said, adding the needs of the tens of thousands impacted were vast.

Roads have been washed away, power plants destroyed and dozens of bridges smashed. “There are too many challenges,” said E. Hawadi, a police officer coordinating rescue efforts in the badly-affected Nuwakot district.

“There are no roads, they have all

been washed away, and many areas are just not accessible,” he said on Monday.

With mortuaries overflowing with the dead, Nepal has begun burying some of the hundreds of bodies recovered after taking DNA samples so families can later retrieve them. Kathmandu has appealed for international support, saying Nepal needed “more than a thousand” freezer units to store bodies.

Distraught families, desperate for news of missing relatives, are watching images of bodies on screens at community centres in a bid to identify the dead. Shobha Adhikary, in the southern Nepali city of Bharatpur, told a local coordinator she believed one image showed her childhood best friend.

“It looks like him, for sure,” she said, showing a photograph of a smiling, middle-aged man. Among Nepal’s list of the missing are 592 foreigners, including tourists who had come for trekking in its mountains, as well as Hindu pilgrims seeking spiritual peace at Tibet’s sacred Mount Kailash. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Spain's National Police officers stand as migrants wait on the sidewalk before being registered in Loma Colmenar district of Ceuta. — AFP

ITALY, SPAIN EXTEND BORDER CHECKS FOR 15 DAYS IN MIGRATION ROW

ROME: Italy and Spain announced on Monday a 15-day extension of reciprocal border checks imposed in a spat over a migrant rush last month into the Spanish north African territory of Ceuta. The Italian interior ministry said in a statement that the extension was “due to the continued relevance of the assessment factors that led to their introduction on August 1”. Italy said it was “taking into account the initiatives already launched by Spain, together with the European Union, so that the situation in that area may move towards normalisation in the near future”.

Spain's interior ministry, which put in place border checks for travellers arriving from Italy for one month from August 8, responded by announcing a reciprocal 15-day extension. Italy and Spain do not share a land border, but passengers arriving on flights now go through passport checks, which is normally not the case because both countries are members of the Schengen free-travel zone.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Monday the rush of migrants was still under investigation, though he ruled out any responsibility on the part of Moroccan authorities. Although the vast majority of migrants returned to Morocco within hours, thousands remain in Ceuta. — AFP

FLOODING FEARED AT GRAND CANYON



Storms forecast could trigger new flash floods in the Grand Canyon, the National Weather Service said as crews looked for around 15 people missing in a flood that claimed at least one life. The floods hit the Bright Angel Canyon and Phantom Ranch area, forcing dozens of people to evacuate and damaging the sole water pipeline serving the park, one of the most popular national parks in the United States. The National Weather Service said that rain and thunderstorms are expected again. Video footage taken by hikers showed a torrent of muddy water rushing by trails and under footbridges. — AFP

ICELAND TO SEEK NEW PARTNERSHIPS AFTER VOTERS REJECT EU TALKS

REYKJAVIK: Iceland needs to find new ways to strengthen its security after voters rejected restarting accession talks with the EU, the country's foreign minister said on Monday, including by seeking bilateral cooperation and deepening ties with the bloc.

The comments came after Icelanders on Saturday voted to reject a government push to reopen EU membership talks. US President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly said he wants to acquire neighbouring Greenland and has cast doubt on Washington's commitment to Nato, has

sharpened the security debate in Iceland in recent months.

“We didn't vote away the geopolitical situation, it's still there and we will have to find other ways to increase our security,” Thorgerdur Gunnarsdottir said in parliament after meeting the foreign affairs committee. In rejecting EU membership talks voters brushed aside government warnings that EU membership could bolster its security. “The EU is still a very important partner for Iceland, and we need to strengthen our cooperation further. We will look at bilateral agreements, we

already have such agreements with Finland and Norway,” she said, also mentioning Japan and Canada as important partners.

Iceland, an Arctic island of 400,000 people, is a Nato member but has no standing army of its own. Its defence is based on a bilateral defence agreement with the United States from 1951 and Nato membership.

“We will have to strengthen cooperation within the EEA. A very positive outcome of the referendum is that all Icelandic parties are now united behind the EEA agreement,” she said. — Reuters

Putin, Xi and Pezeshkian attend Kyrgyzstan summit

THE LEADERS of Russia, China, Türkiye, India and Iran were in Kyrgyzstan on Monday for a two-day summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which seeks to be a counterbalance to the West. The regional SCO bloc — which brings together Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, four central Asian countries and Belarus — is celebrating its 25-year anniversary.

Upon arrival in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, Russian President Vladimir Putin met China's Xi Jinping, Russian media reported. Putin and Xi have previously used SCO summits to promote their vision of a multipolar world and present a united front against the West. Iran's leader Masoud Pezeshkian, Türkiye's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, India's Narendra Modi and Pakistan's Shehbaz Sharif were also in Bishkek.

The summit takes place four-and-a-half years into Moscow's Ukraine attack and six months into the war between Washington and Tehran. Speaking after the first exchange of fire between the United States and Iran in a month, Iran's Pezeshkian said continuing the war was not in Tehran's interests.

“We continue to strive for a path of agreement and understanding, and we believe that continuing the war is neither in our interest, nor in the interest of the region,” he told India's Modi. Putin, Xi, Pezeshkian, Modi and Sharif are due to take part in a plenary session chaired by Kyrgyz leader Sadyr Japarov.

The Kremlin has said Putin is due to hold talks with Pezeshkian and Xi. Russia and Iran — among the most sanctioned states in the world — have massively deepened their military and economic ties since Moscow invaded Ukraine.



Russia's President Vladimir Putin and China's President Xi Jinping shake hands during a meeting in Bishkek. — AFP

Upon arrival in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, Russian President Vladimir Putin met China's Xi Jinping, Russian media reported. Putin and Xi have previously used SCO summits to promote their vision of a multipolar world and present a united front against the West

US President Donald Trump has warned Moscow and Beijing against arming Iran.

Putin's meeting with Pezeshkian will come days after the CIA's director John Ratcliffe made a rare trip to Moscow, with US media speculating he could have discussed Ukraine and Iran with his Russian counterparts.

The SCO has historically focused on economic issues but has gained momentum in recent years under Moscow's and Beijing's leadership. On top of its 10 members, it now has 15 “dialogue partners”, including Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. It also has two observer countries: Afghanistan and Mongolia.

The SCO's founding declaration says the group is “not an alliance directed against other states”. But Putin and Xi have repeatedly made anti-Western speeches during its summits.

At last year's gathering, Putin accused Western countries of

provoking the Ukraine war, while Xi denounced “acts of intimidation”, referring to US-Chinese tensions.

The Bishkek summit takes place at a time when some SCO members are in the midst of real wars — the Ukraine and Iran conflicts — or trade wars, with the imposition of US tariffs on Chinese and Indian goods.

This month, the US slapped secondary sanctions on Iran's trading partners in the sectors of gold, technology, digital assets, aviation and maritime transport, aiming to cripple Tehran's economy.

Washington has also threatened Iran's allies with sanctions. China, a major importer of Iranian oil, responded by saying it would “firmly defend” its interests. Iran, living under sanctions since its 1979 revolution ended with authorities taking charge, has regularly said it will not cave to economic pressure. But Pezeshkian has acknowledged his country faces “economic difficulties”. Iran only joined the bloc in 2023.

Mohammad Hassan Najmi, an international relations expert, said that Tehran “believes its membership and active participation in these alliances can enable it to circumvent US and European sanctions”.

But concrete benefits of the group are uncertain, he said, as “in times of crisis, these alliances have rarely allowed Iran to resolve its difficulties”. While the bloc claims to represent some 40 per cent of the world's population and 25 per cent of global GDP, it remains diverse, with some disagreements among members. Russia and China compete for influence in central Asia, while Beijing has had strained relations with India and Pakistan. — AFP

World leaders need to see rising oceans in Pacific, urges UN

KOROR: Leaders from the world's top economies should stand on a Pacific atoll to see the reality of record sea level rise, a top UN official said in Palau on Monday. Noting last week's deadly floods in Nepal, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed said rising seas in the Pacific were the “other side of that story”. “We do already know that a warming climate is changing the world's ice at extraordinary speeds, not only threatening the communities below glaciers but adding more water to our oceans,” she told reporters.

Mohammed was speaking in Palau, where Pacific leaders have gathered for an annual summit to discuss challenges including climate change, crime and regional security.

The United Nations is pushing for G20 leaders to attend and make commitments at a meeting hosted by the tiny nation of Tuvalu in October, ahead of the upcoming UN climate summit in Türkiye, according to Mohammed. “We think they should turn up and really engage with the world

The United Nations is pushing for G20 leaders to attend and make commitments at a meeting hosted by the tiny nation of Tuvalu in October, ahead of the upcoming UN climate summit in Türkiye



A protestor holds a sign during a “People Over Profits” demonstration ahead of the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' meeting, North Carolina. — AFP

on what they need to do,” she said, even though there are concerns few leaders outside the Pacific will make the trip.

Tuvalu, which is among the most vulnerable countries in the climate crisis, is preparing to relocate its population after scientists predicted most of its land may become inundated. Palau's minister

for the environment Steven Victor said the Pacific was “not begging for any handouts”, but had fewer resources to deal with rising seas that threaten its communities the most. “We need them to come and see,” he said.

A UN report published Monday showed a record pace of sea level rise driven by warming oceans and glacier melt. Up to 1.2 billion people could be displaced by 2050, with Pacific island countries experiencing sea level rise at twice the global average, it said. It also highlighted a financing gap, with developing countries needing \$310-\$365 billion to adapt, yet having only \$26 billion in adaptation finance available in 2023.

Coral reefs are facing a “staircase of decline”, with global hard coral cover declining 9.5 per cent due to climate change over 40 years, another report released Monday in Palau by scientists found.

The Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network analysed data from 37,000 reefs

in 120 countries, finding a narrowing window between major bleaching events.

Although reefs can recover after bleaching if they have enough time, the frequency of marine heatwaves means only partial progress is made.

The study found a major bleaching event every five to six years since 2010. “We are steadily eroding the conditions they need to recover,” said the study's lead author Manuel Gonzalez Rivero. “Climate change is driving more frequent and severe marine heatwaves, but local pressures such as poor water quality, overfishing and coastal development are making reefs even less able to withstand them,” he added.

Among the worst affected are reefs in Australia, the Pacific and Caribbean. Around 100 million people live within five kilometres (3.1 miles) of a coral reef, a 46 per cent increase over two decades. The ocean was a highway for Pacific nations, connecting its people, but was in crisis, Palau's President Surangel Whipps said on Sunday. — AFP

OPINION

Safer roads begin with responsible drivers



AS OMAN becomes a regional logistics hub, driver responsibility must keep pace. The topic of fatal accidents is not being discussed on this platform for the first time or out of the blue. However, it still feels as though not enough is being done to instil a genuine sense of urgency or seriousness among the public.

The ongoing regional crisis caused by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has transformed the Sultanate of Oman into a critical transit and land logistics hub.

Heavy goods are now continuously dispatched from the ports of Al Duqm, Muscat, and Suhar to neighbouring Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Consequently, heavy-duty trailer trucks crisscross the main expressways and highways daily — often driven by operators who may be unfamiliar with the local topography and traffic regulations.

Last weekend, a horrific tragedy occurred when six women from the same family lost their lives after their bus was caught in a massive pileup involving around 15 vehicles. This incident highlights a grim reality.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), 43 per cent of road accidents in Oman in 2025 resulted from vehicle collisions, 23 per cent from

vehicle overturns, and 16 per cent from collisions with fixed objects, while 21 per cent involved pedestrians.

Furthermore, during Khareef Dhofar 2026, numerous accidents occurred on the Sultan Said bin Taimur Road, largely driven by the fact that 75.1 per cent of visitors to Dhofar preferred travelling by land rather than air 24.9 per cent.

Time and again, excessive speed is identified as the primary catalyst for road mishaps, followed by reckless behaviour and negligence. Muscat Governorate accounted for 17.5 per cent of accidents and Dhofar for 15.3 per cent with overall road traffic incidents resulting in 595 fatalities and 1,597 injuries.

Ironically, Oman's road network receives high praise from first-time visitors, who often rate it on par with advanced economies.

According to the World Economic Forum data published by the World Population Review for 2024, Oman ranks eighth globally and second in the Arab World on the Road Quality Index. This standard is echoed in international travel advisories, which note that roads in Oman are excellent, though caution is required during rainfall due to flash flooding.

Yet, flawless asphalt cannot compensate for human error. Mobile phone use while

Development inevitably brings side effects. Oman's emergence as a major regional freight hub may eventually necessitate multi-million-riyal investments in dedicated truck corridors

driving remains a pervasive threat; safety experts point out that drivers using phones — even hands-free — spend roughly 10 per cent of their driving time drifting outside their designated lanes, endangering passengers, fellow motorists, and pedestrians alike.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has actively embraced technology, deploying AI-powered cameras across major junctions to catch violators alongside enforcing strict fines. However, enforcement alone is not enough.

The national conversation around road safety must shift from a fear of penalties to a genuine culture of shared responsibility. Every driver must recognise that the privilege of holding a licence carries a fundamental duty to society.

Development inevitably brings side effects. Oman's emergence as a major regional freight hub may eventually necessitate multi-million-riyal investments in dedicated truck corridors. While social media was quick to place the blame entirely on heavy vehicles for the Samayil tragedy, that is only one piece of the puzzle.

The true responsibility lies with driver behaviour, alertness, and choices behind the wheel. Superior infrastructure requires equal commitment to safety from every individual who uses it.

JAPAN SEEKS RECORD DEFENCE BUDGET, WITH AI FOCUS

Japan's defence ministry requested a record budget of \$55.6 billion on Monday as Tokyo looks to artificial intelligence to speed up decision-making in the face of a tense security environment.

The final budget reportedly could reach 10 trillion yen as Tokyo undergoes a sweeping upgrade of its defence in order to navigate growing tension with neighbours such as China, North Korea and Russia.

The latest request focuses on countering “new ways of warfare”, with an emphasis on the use of AI, drones and standoff missiles.

Under the request, the ministry hopes to implement an AI-powered decision support system.

It also wants to procure low-cost drones that can work in tandem with long-range missiles to neutralise enemy assets.

The ministry said it plans to develop underwater-launched hypersonic missiles and establish a new unit to bolster defences against cognitive warfare, a growing threat aimed at shaping public opinion through disinformation campaigns and other operations.

The budget request for the fiscal year starting from April 2027 highlights the latest step by Japan to boost its military to meet the volatile geopolitical reality, gradually shedding its traditional pacifist stance that limited the use of force purely for self-defence.

China's rapid military expansion and North Korea's steady development of missiles and nuclear weapons have pressed Japan to shore up its defence.

Russia's war in Ukraine has fuelled worries among Japanese policymakers that a similar conflict could erupt in East Asia, considering China's mounting pressure on Taiwan and its escalating territorial disputes with Japan.

The Nikkei newspaper said the defence ministry's request may jump to more than 10 trillion yen, citing an unnamed ruling party lawmaker.

The current request did not specify the estimated costs of many products and services, including missiles, drones and digital systems.

These figures will be finalised once the government finishes its revision of core national security documents by the end of the year, defence officials said.

Those three documents set the outline of the country's future defence capabilities while assessing the country's security environment.

Japan has been beefing up military spending and security cooperation in Asia, deploying missile launchers to outer islands, moving to acquire “counterstrike” capabilities and easing rules on weapons exports. — AFP

Marks should not define students' academic futures

AS STUDENTS in Oman and around the world prepare for a new academic year, social media discussions have raised an important question: Should students' college specialisations be determined mainly by their marks?

Academic performance is important, but it should not be the only factor. A student's passion, abilities, interests, and potential must also be taken into consideration. After all, choosing a specialisation is not simply about entering a college programme. It can influence a person's career, happiness, and sense of purpose for many years.

In Oman, students must begin making important academic choices while they are still at school. They may have to select science, arts, or particular subjects that affect which specialisations will later be available to them. However, many students do not yet understand themselves well enough to make such a major decision.

A subject may appear interesting from a distance, but after studying it in greater depth, a student may discover that it is not what they expected. At the same time, they may develop an interest or ability in a field they had never previously considered.

Students also make choices because of pressure from other people. Families, teachers, and friends may offer advice with good intentions, but their recommendations do not always reflect what the student genuinely wants.

Some students choose subjects because they seem prestigious, secure, easy or socially acceptable. Others follow a path simply because their marks qualify them for it. As a result, they may enter university without feeling any real connection



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

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to what they are studying.

This is why changing academic paths should be clearer and more accessible. Students need proper guidance about transferring between programmes, changing subjects, and understanding how earlier choices affect later opportunities.

Universities and schools should provide counselling that helps students identify their strengths and interests rather than focusing only on grades. Marks can show how well someone performed in particular examinations, but they cannot fully measure curiosity, creativity, determination, or passion.

I have also changed my opinion about gap years. I once saw them as unnecessary interruptions, but I now recognise how valuable they can be. A carefully planned gap year can give young people time to mature, gain work or volunteer experience, explore different fields, and make a more informed decision.

Not every student needs a gap year, but for someone who feels uncertain, taking time to think may be better than rushing into a specialisation and regretting it later.

What, then, should happen to students who are already studying subjects they dislike? Whenever possible, they should explore

transferring to another programme. If an immediate change is not possible, they should remember that one qualification does not have to determine their entire life. They can develop other interests through short courses, volunteering, independent study, or postgraduate education.

One of my friends is an inspiring example. She earned a PhD in computational linguistics and built a successful, well-paid career in technology. Yet around the age of forty, she realised that her true passion was social work. She used the money she had saved to complete a master's degree in an entirely different field. Her story proves that changing direction is not a failure. It is sometimes an act of courage and self-knowledge.

Education systems should therefore create room for both passion and change. Young people need guidance, flexibility, and time, not the expectation that one early decision must define them forever.

Grades may open doors, but passion gives students a reason to walk through them. Most importantly, anyone who feels trapped in the wrong field should remember that life is long, learning never ends, and it is never too late to choose a new path.

Climate change is knocking: Are we listening?



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

AN AVALANCHE, GLACIER collapse and mudslide: are we hearing about these disasters more often now? Is climate change getting a little too close for comfort?

Climate change is no longer just a topic to be discussed at conferences or debated in international forums. It seems to be getting increasingly difficult to keep it at a comfortable distance. If we look closely, someone, somewhere, is being affected — by drought, unexpected rainfall, floods, landslides or the collapse of glaciers.

A large mass of ice and rock recently collapsed from a glacier high in the Himalayas, sending a powerful surge of water downstream through the Bhote Koshi River and into communities in northern Nepal. The resulting flash floods affected communities across Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Dhading districts.

Nepal's Foreign Minister has called for a 'global effort' to tackle climate change, saying that his country is among those worst affected by rising temperatures.

Initially, experts thought the disaster might have been caused by an earthquake. Later, it was concluded that a glacier collapse was responsible. Glaciologists have long been studying how global warming is shrinking glaciers and how these changes can affect sea levels, water systems and natural disasters.

In the coming days and weeks, we will hopefully know more about what happened and what it tells us about a changing climate.

For now, the struggle is real and deeply personal.

According to Unicef, the flash floods in Nepal in August 2026 have left more than 17,000 children in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. The emotional turmoil is only beginning. Many people are still in shock while rescue and relief operations continue.

And while Nepal is dealing with the immediate consequences of a devastating disaster, Oman is looking at another side of the climate challenge: water security.

In Salalah, Oman is hosting the Water Resources Sustainability Seminar, 'Water and Climate Change' — a scientific platform bringing together experts and specialists to discuss water and climate challenges, examine solutions and explore technologies that can strengthen water security and resource sustainability.

The objectives are clear: to raise awareness about the importance of sustainable water resources in a changing climate; discuss the challenges facing water resources as a result of climatic impacts; present modern strategies and technologies for water sustainability; examine the role of national policies and partnerships in strengthening water security; and develop practical recommendations for long-term water sustainability.

Water is something we have taken for granted for generations. We grew up with ponds, wells, springs, rivers and lakes as familiar sources of water. But water can also become the source of catastrophe. At

The floods in Nepal may seem like someone else's tragedy. But the question of water is not far away at all. Perhaps climate change has not suddenly arrived at our doorstep

the same time, in arid regions, seawater has increasingly become part of the solution.

What we once considered abundant is now something we have to think carefully about conserving and sustaining.

There is pressure from agriculture to ensure food security. There is pressure from growing populations and expanding cities. There is increasing industrial demand. And, alongside all of this, there is the fundamental need to protect the resource on which all of these activities depend.

That is why the Salalah seminar has focused on themes such as water-resource sustainability under climate change, water-resource management and planning for climate risks, modern technologies for ensuring water sustainability, and policies and partnerships supporting water security.

Presenting a paper on sustainable solutions to climate change and its impact on water resources, Hamad bin Khamis bin Rashid Al Hatmi of Oman Water Society pointed to the pressures created by rapid urban growth, population expansion, migration, changing lifestyles, and urban, industrial and agricultural development.

But climate change is made up of enormous global forces — and our response to it is also made up of millions of small decisions.

The glacier collapse in the Himalayas may seem very far away from Oman. The floods in Nepal may seem like someone else's tragedy. But the question of water is not far away at all.

Perhaps climate change has not suddenly arrived at our doorstep.

INDIA'S AVIATION BOOM FACES TURBULENCE

ANUJ SRIVAS

One year ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the airline sector as a symbol of a rising India poised to "soar to great heights".

Today, that optimism is facing a harsh reality check.

A series of crises at India's two main carriers, Air India and IndiGo, has exposed safety and regulatory shortcomings in the world's third-largest domestic aviation market.

The turmoil has been compounded by geopolitical shocks that have squeezed profits and forced airlines to reassess expansion plans.

The setbacks have highlighted the lack of competition, with Air India and IndiGo together accounting for nine out of 10 domestic airline seats.

"The last two years, 2025 and 2026, have been the darkest years for India in terms of its global reputation and credibility," said Mark Martin of Martin Consulting.

The latest blow came earlier this month when an Air India flight from Thailand's Phuket to New Delhi plunged 300 feet midair, injuring 24 passengers.

The incident sparked scrutiny after reports that the captain tested positive for marijuana upon landing, prompting Air India to order a one-time drug screening of all pilots.

For many observers, the episode is part of a broader pattern that has kept Air India under the spotlight since last year's crash of a London-bound Boeing 787 Dreamliner that killed 241 people.

An unrelated audit of Air India identified around 100 safety lapses, including seven violations requiring "urgent corrective action" and "recurrent training gaps" for Boeing 787 and 777 pilots, according to a parliamentary panel report.

The safety culture at Air India is "lax", said Shakti Lumba, a former airline operations chief.

"At present, everyone is paying lip service to safety. By paying lip service, you do not create a safety culture," he said.

Former Air India executive director Jitender Bhargava said the reported drug case raised questions about management oversight, arguing the pilot community would know if a colleague was taking drugs.

Air India and IndiGo did not immediately respond to request for comment. The safety concerns come as airlines grapple with mounting financial pressures. Rising jet fuel prices linked to the Middle East war have added to the strain.

Ratings agency ICRA estimated Indian airlines will lose nearly \$4 billion this fiscal year.

"The problem has not been a lack of growth," said Harsh Vardhan, chairman of Starair Consulting. "It is that every other part of the ecosystem has not been able to keep up with this growth and manage it well." — AFP

America is closing the door on opportunity — and talent

FOR GENERATIONS, the United States distinguished itself not simply by its wealth or military power, but by offering ambitious people born in other countries the chance to overcome the birthplace lottery.

Unfortunately, the Trump administration's new visa policy for international students, though billed as merely a technical administrative change, signals a gradual retreat from this defining ideal.

By replacing the longstanding 'duration-of-status' framework with fixed admission periods and stricter rules governing extensions and continued enrolment, it makes the path to studying in America, and ultimately building a productive life there, more uncertain.

Many of those commenting on the change have focused on the implications for universities, research, and innovation. But as valid as those concerns are, they may overstate the immediate consequences.

The most talented students will still find ways to come to the US, leading universities will continue to recruit them, and employers will continue to sponsor them. The policy raises costs and creates uncertainty, but it does not shut the door completely.

The signal the change sends is more far-reaching. For the average student abroad — not the exceptional candidate with multiple offers from elite institutions, but the ambitious young person hoping that education might provide a path to a better future — the calculation changes. Every additional administrative hurdle, every increase in uncertainty, and every signal that foreigners are less welcome discourages applications.

To some extent, this shift may reflect changing economic realities. For decades, international students filled critical roles as research assistants, teaching assistants, and laboratory researchers before moving to technology companies



PINELOPI KOUJIANOU GOLDBERG

The writer is a former World Bank Group chief economist and Professor of Economics at Yale University

and other industries hungry for highly skilled workers.

As AI begins to automate some of these tasks, and as employers anticipate a future requiring fewer entry-level knowledge workers, the economic incentives for importing talent may weaken.

Whether this transition proves as extensive as many expect remains to be seen. It would not be surprising if changing labour-market conditions made governments more willing to restrict high-skilled immigration.

But even if that interpretation is correct, it misses what has historically made the US exceptional as the land of opportunity.

Debates about inequality in advanced economies typically focus on disparities within countries: progressives emphasise income and wealth inequality, whereas conservatives point to the geographic inequalities caused by deindustrialisation and globalisation.

But while both concerns are important, they pale in comparison to the inequalities created simply by the accident of being born in one country rather than another.

A child born in Somalia faces opportunities fundamentally different from those available to a child born in the US.

A girl born today in Afghanistan confronts barriers that a girl with identical talents born in Sweden is unlikely ever to encounter. These disparities dwarf many of the inequalities that dominate political debate in rich countries.

Yet political philosophy has generally treated national borders as morally decisive. Even John Rawls, whose 'veil of ignorance' became one of the most influential frameworks for thinking about justice, stopped short of applying the principle across countries.

If you happened to be born in a place offering few opportunities, that unfortunate disadvantage largely fell outside the scope of distributive justice.

For much of its history, the US represented an important exception,

not out of altruism, but because openness served its interests. The country welcomed people willing to work hard, build businesses, study, innovate, and contribute to economic growth. The result benefited both immigrants and the US itself.

This is not to romanticise the American Dream. Research by the Harvard economist Raj Chetty has demonstrated the extent to which a child's prospects depend on where he or she grows up within the US.

In their influential book Streets of Gold, economists Ran Abramitzky and Leah Boustan have shown that the classic 'rags-to-riches' immigrant story often unfolded across generations rather than within a single lifetime. Many immigrants remained poor; it was their children and grandchildren who climbed the economic ladder.

But these findings reinforce the broader point. The first generation may not always have prospered, but immigrant parents gave their descendants opportunities that would have been unimaginable had they remained in their countries of origin. The American Dream was never a guarantee of success. It was a guarantee that success was possible.

Of course, that possibility is unevenly distributed: family background, neighbourhood, schools, and social networks all influence whether individuals even perceive the opportunities available to them.

But it is a better proposition than the situation faced by millions around the world whose opportunities are constrained not only by circumstance, but also by the borders they cannot cross.

This possibility has also distinguished the US from many wealthy societies that pride themselves on equality and social justice but maintain far more restrictive immigration regimes. America's openness was never perfect, nor was it motivated solely by generosity.

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SPORTS

SEKTIIOUI EYES FUTURE AS GULF CUP TEST

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

OMAN NATIONAL football team head coach Tarik Sektioui said yesterday that the team's next phase must be built on careful planning, gradual change and a clear long-term vision, as he outlined his plans ahead of the Gulf Cup and the AFC Asian Cup.

Speaking at a press conference held at Al Zain Hall at the Omantel building in Muscat, Sektioui reviewed his first months in charge, highlighting the three training camps held so far and the need to improve players' physical and mental readiness.

The coach said one of the main issues he had identified was the lack of sufficient recovery time for players, particularly those exposed to a demanding season and frequent changes in coaching staff.

"Football is a science in its own right, and every detail matters," Sektioui said, stressing that players need adequate periods of rest and recovery before returning to training. He also pointed to the mental impact of players working under five or six different coaches during a single season, saying the constant flow of different tactical instructions can leave players mentally overloaded.

Sektioui said such observations were not intended to focus on shortcomings, but rather to provide a realistic assessment of the situation and identify areas that need improvement.



Tarik Sektioui during press conference at Al Zain Hall, Omantel building in Muscat.

The coach explained that the first camp, held in April for five days, focused mainly on local players and gave the technical staff an opportunity to assess their technical, tactical and personal qualities.

The second camp, held in Indonesia in June and lasting 10 days, provided a broader assessment, with professional players joining the group and Oman facing two different opponents.

Sektioui said both matches provided valuable lessons, regardless of the results, stressing that teams must learn from victories as well as defeats.

The third camp helped the coaching staff further establish its working methods, particularly in defensive and attacking organisation, while developing the team's identity and playing character.

The coach revealed that 56 players, including eight

goalkeepers, had been monitored during the period, while 43 players, including six goalkeepers, were selected across the three camps.

GRADUAL RENEWAL

Sektioui stressed that the renewal of the national team was being carried out gradually and responsibly rather than through sudden changes.

He highlighted the emergence of several players in the 20–21, 22–23 and 24–26 age groups, describing

them as important elements for Oman's future. He also said the technical staff was continuing to search for promising young goalkeepers and had considered holding a specialised camp for players under 23 and under 20.

"The process requires planning, commitment, dedication, intelligence and, above all, patience," he said.

Sektioui also thanked the Oman Football Association, its board members and club presidents for their cooperation, particularly in facilitating the latest 10-day camp.

GULF CUP AS A PLATFORM

Looking ahead, Sektioui said Oman would enter the Gulf Cup with the objective of producing a strong performance and competing seriously, while acknowledging the strength of the teams involved.

He said the Gulf Cup should serve as an important platform ahead of the Asian Cup, where Oman's ambition must go beyond simply progressing through the group stage.

"Our ambition is to go as far as possible," he said, stressing that reaching advanced stages requires a clear plan and sustained work rather than simply setting ambitious targets. Sektioui also called on the media to support the national team's project by helping the public understand the direction of the programme, emphasising that everyone involved shares the same objective: developing Omani football and building a stronger national team for the future.

Oman racing takes bronze; top five at Nürburgring

AHMAD AL HARTHI VERY HAPPY WITH GOOD POINTS IN GTWCE ENDURANCE RD4

STRONG DRIVES FROM OMANI AND TEAM-MATES IN GERMANY

HARD WORK LIFTS BMW M4 GT3 EVO TRIO FROM NINTH TO FIFTH IN 3HR RACE

OMAN RACING'S TRIO CLIMB INTO TOP 10 OF CLASS CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

BRONZE CLASS drivers Ahmad al Harthi, Calan Williams and Javier Sagrera battled hard to a top five result in round four of the GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup season at the Nürburgring on Sunday, 30th August – the best possible outcome in the three-hour race.

Progressing well from the fifth row of the Bronze grid, the Oman Racing by Century Motorsport trio extracted everything they could from the No.42 BMW M4 GT3 EVO. Equally the result, the squad's second highest finish of 2026, was a great reward for the entire team which had worked tirelessly throughout practice and qualifying to try and get to the bottom of ongoing technical gremlins.

In qualifying on Sunday morning, Sagrera was the fastest of the team-mates with a best lap time of 1m55.188 seconds in the second of the three grid-determining sessions. On combined times across Q1, Q2 and Q3, the Oman Racing trio secured ninth for the start of the afternoon's race.



Strong drives from Omani and team-mates Williams and Sagrera in Germany.

Al Harthi took the opening stint and although having to go slightly wide at Turn One, due to some contact further ahead, the OQ, Omantel, Oman LNG, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY) and BMW Oman supported sportsman was able to soon move up into eighth position.

Minutes later the Omani climbed into seventh and set his sights on continuing his good progress, while at the same time fending off the attentions of the No.91 Porsche. Al Harthi had risen into sixth position before the end of the first hour, when the race's first Full Course Yellow period was

called due to a McLaren stranded in the gravel.

As teams began to serve their first mandatory stops, Al Harthi moved up into fourth before he then headed to pitlane for Oman Racing's first driver change as the race tipped into its second hour. The No.42 BMW headed back into the race with Williams installed behind the wheel, running in fifth.

Slipping to sixth before the Safety Car was needed after two cars collided, the Australian was then shuffled back into eighth in Bronze after racing had resumed. There was then another intervention when a stricken

McLaren at Turn 14 was tagged by another of the marque's entries. With 70 minutes to run the race fired back into life and Williams looked determined to pounce.

As the field headed towards the end of the lap, two rivals ahead of Williams diced and a third became involved as well. Opening up a great opportunity, the Oman Racing driver read the situation perfectly and sliced past all three cars as they delayed one another. Staying on track as the final pit stops unfolded, Williams momentarily took the class lead before then pitting the BMW on lap 58.

Sagrera climbed into the driving seat of the No.42 with 50 minutes remaining and emerged from pitlane sixth in class. With only half an hour to go, a penalty for a rival squad then meant the Spaniard was able to move up into the top five which he held to the chequered flag.

Notably, the team-mates have also climbed back into the top 10 of the Bronze class championship standings.

Ahmed al Harthi: "Honestly, P5 is a very, very strong result for us considering the technical issues we had all week in the build-up to the race. To get such a strong result, at a very tough circuit and in a very competitive race was a very positive end to the weekend. We're really looking forward to the final round, first figuring out what the gremlins were, and continue pushing. Everyone worked so hard all week, a huge thank you to them and to our incredible sponsors for the wonderful support they give."

There is now a break of seven weeks in the 2026 GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup calendar, with the fifth and final race of the season taking place on Saturday, 17th October, at Autódromo Internacional do Algarve in Portugal.

SHORTTAKES



Omani officiating pair was selected to take part in the third edition of the IHF Women's Trophy,

OMANI REFEREEING DUO CHOSEN FOR IHF WOMEN’S TROPHY

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

Omani handball refereeing will strengthen its presence on the international stage after an Omani officiating pair was selected to take part in the third edition of the International Handball Federation (IHF) Women's Trophy, scheduled to be held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, from October 13 to 17.

The IHF Rules and Referees Committee appointed Omani continental referees Sultan bin Saif al Siyabi and Salim bin Saif al Siyabi to officiate at the tournament, highlighting the growing confidence in Omani refereeing talent at both the continental and international levels.

The selection represents another important addition to Oman's growing record of international refereeing assignments and reflects the progress made in developing national handball officials capable of competing at the highest levels of the sport.

For Sultan and Salim al Siyabi, the tournament will provide valuable international experience and an opportunity to further develop their officiating skills while working alongside referees and technical officials from different handball nations.

Their appointment also underlines the continued efforts to strengthen Oman's refereeing system through technical education, international exposure and professional development programmes. Such opportunities play an important role in preparing national referees for major continental and international competitions and enhancing Oman's presence within the global handball community.

The IHF's selection of the Omani pair comes as part of a wider international officiating group appointed for the tournament. Saudi Arabia will be represented by referees Israa bint Sadiq al Ghafri and Jinan bint Hassan bin Ibrahim, who will join the Omani officials in managing the matches.

The tournament's technical delegation will include Saleh bin Ashour of the United Arab Emirates and On Ah Kim of South Korea, who have been appointed as technical delegates for the competition.

The participation of the Omani referees in Tashkent adds another chapter to the country's international handball refereeing record and reflects the steady development of Omani officials through continued participation in regional, continental and international competitions.

Beyond the tournament itself, the appointment is seen as an important opportunity for the Omani refereeing pair to gain further experience in an international environment and contribute to the successful administration of the competition.



Seeb, the defending champions, begin their title defence with a win over Bahla in the Jindal League for the 2026-2027 season.

Seeb, Al Nahda, Al Nasr start JL with wins

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

DEFENDING champions Seeb made a confident start to their Jindal League title defence after defeating Bahla 3-1 at Nizwa Sports Complex on Sunday, while Al Nahda and Al Nasr also opened their campaigns with valuable victories in the first round.

Seeb showed their intent early against Bahla, imposing control in midfield and taking advantage of defensive hesitation from the hosts. Omar al Malki opened the scoring in the sixth minute after a moment of confusion between Bahla's backline and goalkeeper Ahmed al Rawahi. The early goal gave the champions greater rhythm, and Gabonese striker Axel Méyé doubled the lead in the 18th minute on his first league appearance for the club.

Bahla, who had entered the league opener with confidence after two consecutive wins in the Sohar International Cup, responded quickly through Faisal al Aghbari. His fine

individual effort in the 21st minute reduced the deficit and briefly brought Bahla back into the contest. Hosni al Hinai then came close to restoring parity with a powerful effort, but Seeb goalkeeper Mutasim al Wahaibi was alert to preserve the lead.

Bahla improved after the interval, but Seeb's defensive organisation and quick transitions kept them in control. Axel Méyé struck again in the 57th minute to complete his brace and seal the champions' first three points of the season. Bahla coach Abdulaziz al Riyami made changes in search of a way back, while Seeb managed the closing stages effectively to secure a strong opening statement.

At Al Buraimi Sports Complex, Al Nahda snatched a 1-0 win over promoted Al Musannah after a tight contest that remained alive until the final minutes. Al Nahda dominated long spells of the first half and created the clearer chances, including an effort from Jamal al Wahshi that was pushed away for a corner by Al Musannah goalkeeper Al Mutasim al Balushi.

The hosts increased their pressure after the break and were awarded a penalty

following a VAR review, but Valon Ahmedi's attempt struck the crossbar. Al Musannah grew into the game after that setback and defended with discipline, with Al Mutasim al Balushi producing several important saves. However, Al Nahda finally broke through in the 87th minute when Marwan Taib met a cross inside the area and headed into the far corner. Referee Naif al Balushi added ten minutes of stoppage time, but Al Nahda held firm to claim the win.

In Salalah, Al Nasr began their league campaign with a 2-0 victory over Fanja at Al Saada Sports Complex. After a cautious opening, Al Nasr gradually gained control and nearly scored in the 24th minute through Fahad Adel, whose shot cleared Bilal al Balushi's crossbar.

The breakthrough arrived in the 30th minute when Malian midfielder Noumory Keita finished a counter-attack to put Al Nasr ahead. Mohammed Abdulhakeem Bait Sabee then doubled the advantage in first-half stoppage time, heading home from close range. Al Nasr remained compact after the restart and protected their lead to complete a composed opening-night victory.

Oman fall to UAE in FIBA Asia Cup Pre-Qualifiers

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

Oman's national basketball team suffered their third defeat in the FIBA Asia Cup 2029 Pre-Qualifiers after losing 115-89 to hosts UAE at the Shabab Al Ahli venue in Dubai on Sunday.

The national team endured a difficult start to the Group A encounter, with UAE taking advantage of Oman's lack of concentration in the opening minutes and imposing a fast attacking rhythm. The hosts quickly established control and ended the first quarter with a commanding 42-17 advantage.

Oman responded strongly in the second quarter, showing greater

organisation and intensity at both ends of the court. Improved ball movement and attacking efficiency allowed the national team to score 28 points while restricting UAE to 20.

The improved display helped Oman reduce the deficit to 17 points by half-time, with UAE leading 62-45.

Oman maintained their momentum after the break and produced another competitive performance in the third quarter. The national team matched their opponents for long periods, scoring 25 points to UAE's 26 as the two sides traded baskets in a much more balanced contest.

However, the hosts regained control in the final quarter. UAE stepped up their attacking pressure and outscored Oman 27-19 to secure



Oman players in action against hosts UAE during their FIBA Asia Cup 2029 Pre-Qualifiers clash in Dubai. — Ammar al Musafir

a 115-89 victory.

Abdulrahman al Shuaibi delivered a strong individual performance to finish as Oman's leading scorer with 24 points. Osama al Riyami contributed 16 points, while Hadid Bait Bakhit added 14 and Ahmed al Sinani scored 13.

Ayman al Muharrami also reached double figures with 11 points, while Rasheed al Zahaibi contributed six.

Despite the defeat, Oman's response after a difficult opening quarter offered some positives for the technical staff, with the team showing improved offensive execution and competing closely with the hosts during the second and third periods. Oman scored

72 points across the final three quarters compared with UAE's 73, highlighting the improvement after the opening period.

The result leaves Oman without a win after three Group A matches, following earlier defeats against Kuwait, 88-63, and Bahrain, 106-62.

The national team will now turn their attention to their final First Round fixture against Nepal on Monday, as they look to register their first victory of the campaign and conclude their participation in Dubai on a positive note.

Oman will aim to build on the improved phases of their performance against UAE and produce a more consistent display throughout the four quarters in their final group encounter.

SPORTS

L I O N E L M E S S I - I N T E R N A T I O N A L C A R E E R

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Adiós

MESSI

HE CAPTAINED ARGENTINA TO WORLD CUP TITLE IN 2022 AND FINAL IN 2026

MESSI WON COPA AMERICA TITLES IN 2021 AND 2024 AFTER EARLIER FINAL DEFEATS

LIONEL MESSI, who captained Argentina to World Cup victory in 2022 and the final in 2026, is retiring from international football, he said on Monday.

The record eight-times Ballon d'Or winner is his country's record appearance-maker and scorer with 125 goals in 207 games, having transformed a complicated relationship with the national team into a story of redemption and triumph.

"It was a decision that hurt — and still hurts deep down — but I understand that the time has come. I swear to you that I always gave it my all — not just in these last few years when we won

MESSI LEAVES ARGENTINA AS RECORD SCORER WITH

125

GOALS IN 207 GAMES

everything, but before that too; I always fought and left everything on the field for this jersey, to bring you joy and make you feel proud to be Argentine through football," the 39-year-old Messi wrote on Instagram.

"I leave with the peace of mind and pride of having given you — alongside my teammates — moments we once only dreamed of," he added.

Defeat in this year's World Cup final by Spain denied Messi a fairytale farewell, but his place among the game's greats had long since been secured.

After years of disappointment with Argentina, including defeat in the 2014 World Cup final and successive Copa America finals, Messi won his

first major international trophy at the 2021 Copa America before leading his country to glory at the 2022 Qatar World Cup.

The former Barcelona and Paris St Germain forward who now plays for Inter Miami added another Copa America title in 2024 and arrived at his sixth World Cup hoping to complete an extraordinary final chapter.

A 1-0 loss to Spain ensured that did not happen but Messi, who made his Argentina debut in 2005, walks away having emerged from the shadow of 1986 World Cup-winning captain Diego Maradona to forge a legacy of his own as another defining figure in his country's football history. — Reuters



MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,580.147

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$91.67
BRENT \$90.92
LIGHT \$86.21



SHORT TAKES



The entities will support and facilitate Jazeera Steel's international operations and ongoing business activities in the United States.

JAZEERA STEEL ESTABLISHES US HOLDING, OPERATING ARM

BALARAB ALTAMIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

Al Jazeera Steel Products Co SAOG has completed the incorporation of two wholly-owned subsidiaries in the United States, giving the Suhar-based manufacturer a direct corporate presence in the American market, according to a disclosure filed with the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

The company said the incorporation and legal establishment of both entities had been successfully completed, following its earlier disclosure of February 15, 2026, in which the board of directors approved the plan.

The structure comprises a US holding company, Jazz Steel Holding Inc, incorporated as a corporation with an initial capital of \$2 million. It is wholly owned by Al Jazeera Steel Products Co SAOG.

Beneath it sits an operating entity, Jazz Steel Products LLC, incorporated as a limited liability company with a capital of \$1.5 million. The operating company is wholly owned by the holding company rather than directly by the Omani parent — a two-tier arrangement that separates the group's US trading activity from the entity holding the investment.

"The establishment of these entities is intended to support and facilitate the Company's international operations and ongoing business activities in the United States", the company said in the filing.

The disclosure was made under MSX rules requiring listed issuers to inform the market of material developments affecting their operations or corporate structure.

US urges G20 to pursue growth amid rising debt concerns

ASHEVILLE: US officials urged Group of 20 country finance leaders on Monday to push harder for economic growth as the best way to counter concerns over rising global debt levels.

The two-day meeting in Asheville, North Carolina, comes as the global economy is being buffeted by an energy shock triggered by the Iran war, faces rising tensions over China's huge goods trade surplus and is braced for how an investment surge in AI will ultimately play out.

Global debt levels earlier this year hit a record of nearly \$353 trillion, leading to concerns about financial stability and prompting some investors to reappraise even traditionally safe havens such as US Treasuries.

"The world is awash in debt post-GFC, post-Covid, and the only way for us to get out of this is to grow our way out of this," US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said at the start of the meeting, referring to the 2007 to 2009 global financial crisis.

"I'm confident that a lot of the leaders are very receptive to this," he added.



US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh, President and CEO of Citizens Bank of Edmond Jill Castilla, CEO of JPMorgan Chase Jamie Dimon attend a plenary session as finance ministers and central bank governors from G20 countries meet in Asheville, North Carolina. - Reuters

US Federal Reserve Chairman Kevin Warsh, attending his first international economic policy meeting since taking office in May, said he was looking forward to learning more about growth prospects among member economies.

"If I were to try to characterise this moment, it would be one of a global investment surge," he said, adding that it had reversed

the "global savings glut", which in the past had kept capital idle due to a shortage of investment opportunities.

Finance ministers and central bankers were due on Monday to attend a session with business leaders, reflecting the Trump administration's view that growth was best served by freeing up the private sector by deregulation and producing more energy.

NGC calls for LPG price review amid rising costs

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

NATIONAL

Gas Company SAOG (NGC), one of Oman's leading liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) bottlers, has made fresh representations to the government seeking a revision of the regulated pricing framework for LPG cylinders, citing mounting input and operating costs that are squeezing margins in its domestic business.

The publicly traded company is also awaiting regulatory clarity on a proposed industry-wide initiative to introduce colour-coded branding of LPG cylinders, aimed at distinguishing the products of individual bottlers and improving accountability and safety across the market.

Dr Rachid Majjad, CEO of National Gas Company, said the company resubmitted its request for a price revision to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in early July 2026, reviving discussions with the ministry's new leadership.

"We met them together with two of our Board members to convey the message that the price revision in Oman is really important under the current conditions", Dr Majjad told shareholders and investors during NGC's earnings call covering its first-half 2026 performance.

At the heart of NGC's representations is a regulated rate of RO 1.9 applicable to its standard 22-kg LPG cylinder business, which management says has remained unchanged since 1994.

The figure — which is distinct from the final retail price paid by consumers for a filled cylinder — relates to the regulated pricing applicable to the bottler's part of the LPG supply chain. The



The regulated rate of RO 1.9 per standard 22-kg LPG cylinder has remained unchanged since 1994: National Gas

The initiative has been under discussion for around two years and is expected to bring greater differentiation and discipline to what is currently largely a colour-neutral market.

framework has its roots in regulations introduced in 1994 governing the sale, maintenance and replacement of LPG cylinders in Oman.

According to Dr Majjad, the prolonged pricing freeze has become increasingly challenging as the company's LPG purchase price alone has risen by around 50 per cent, alongside increases in payroll, transportation, taxation and other operating costs.

NGC has long sought a review of the pricing regime. As far back as 2014, the company was highlighting the growing pressure that higher LPG procurement and operating costs, coupled with unchanged cylinder pricing, were placing on the economics of its Oman business.

As an interim measure, NGC has been withdrawing discounts traditionally extended to traders and distributors.

The practice, used competitively in the industry for around two decades, effectively meant selling below the regulated rate. NGC began eliminating these discounts in selected areas in January 2026, with Muscat following from September 1.

Separately, NGC is awaiting

government guidance on plans to introduce distinctive colour branding for cylinders marketed by individual LPG companies.

The initiative has been under discussion for around two years and is expected to bring greater differentiation and discipline to what is currently largely a colour-neutral market.

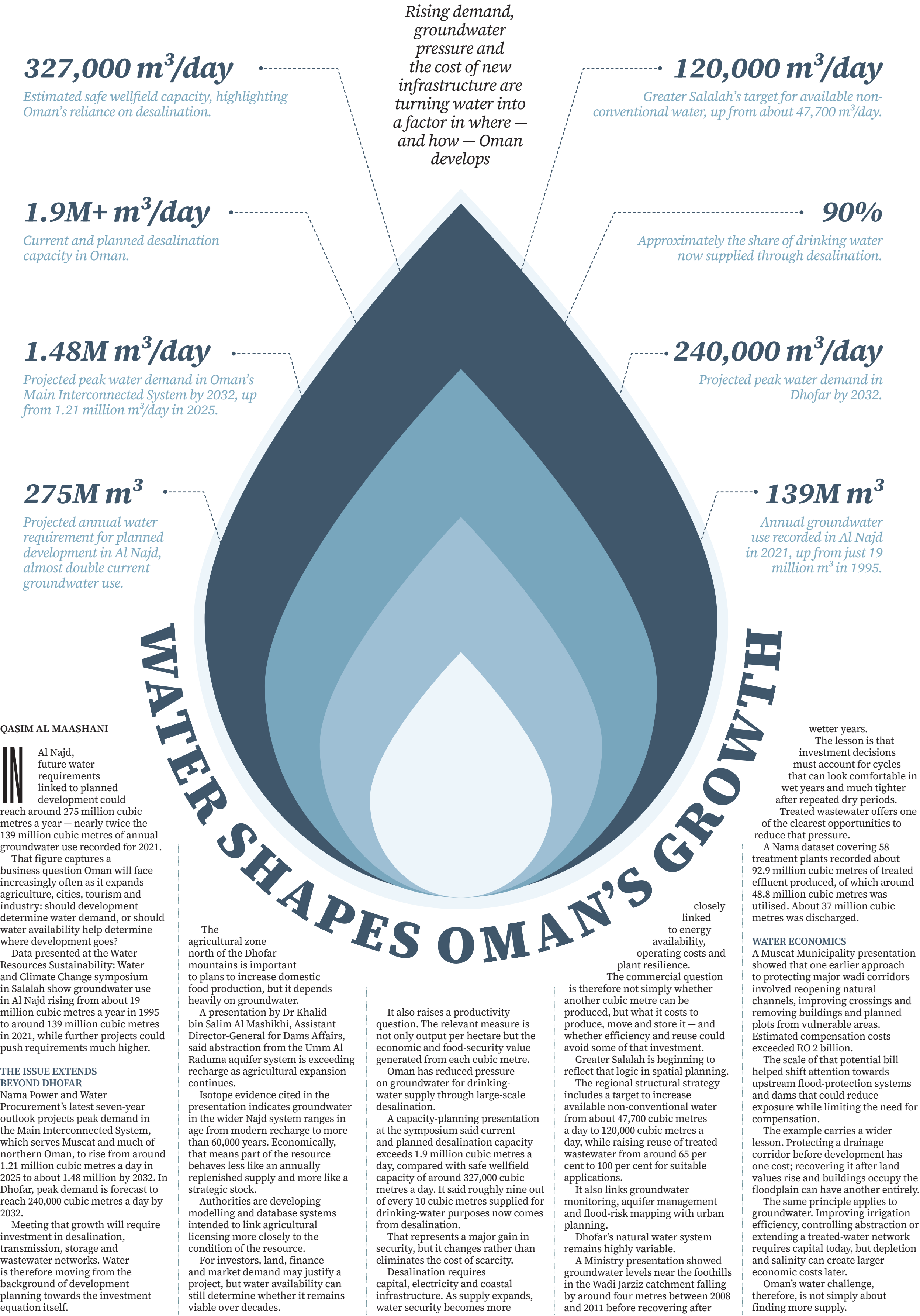
Under the proposed arrangement, each LPG company would have its own cylinder colour. NGC plans to adopt yellow cylinders carrying its "MiraGas" brand, already used by the company in Malaysia.

The initiative would potentially go beyond cosmetic branding. Dr Majjad said NGC also envisages replacing existing cylinder valves with self-closing valves conforming to international safety standards.

The company has assessed the cost of implementing the changes and submitted its estimates to the ministry.

However, questions remain over how the transition will be funded, including whether the additional cost would ultimately be borne by consumers or supported through some form of government assistance.

BUSINESS FEATURE



SELECTIVEGROWTH



24 OMANI COMPANIES
SHOWCASE SERVICES
AT “LEAP 2026” IN
SAUDI ARABIA

RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman began its participation in the “LEAP 2026” exhibition and conference, which kicked off today in Riyadh, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and will continue for several days.

The participation features 24 Omani technology companies showcasing their technical products and solutions to an elite group of investors, partners, clients and stakeholders from various markets, aiming to open new horizons for cooperation, build partnerships and explore available commercial and investment opportunities in the technology sector.

In its fifth participation, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology focuses on empowering Omani technology companies and startups to access the Saudi and regional markets, enhancing digital export opportunities and international expansion, alongside holding business meetings, discussing cooperation opportunities, concluding partnerships and agreements; and highlighting Omani competitive capabilities and technical solutions across a number of promising tech fields.

The Ministry’s participation comes as part of its efforts aimed at empowering Omani technology companies and startups through the “Numou” programme dedicated to supporting companies in the growth stage, which contributes to stimulating and enhancing their presence and regional and international expansion, as well as enabling them to access business opportunities, partnerships and new markets. — ONA

Water limits proposed for
Najd farm expansion

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 31

AGRICULTURAL expansion in Dhofar’s Najd region could in future be governed by an annual water budget, with farm and investment licences tied to measured water allocations under a proposed framework within the capacity of the groundwater system.

The roadmap, presented by Dr Khalid bin Salim al Mashaikhi, Assistant Director-General for Dams Affairs at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, would place a “water ceiling” by making water availability a core condition for future agricultural licensing.

The proposal comes as groundwater abstraction from the Umm Al Radhuma system exceeds recharge, according to the presentation, reflecting mounting pressure from agricultural expansion linked to food-security goals.

Under the proposed approach, the Najd basin would have an annual water budget derived from hydrogeological modelling and updated periodically. Agricultural and investment permits would be conditional on quantified water shares measured through metres and connected to a unified agricultural and water database.

The approach marks a shift from viewing land availability as the main limit on agricultural growth towards using the basin’s water capacity to determine



The proposal, presented during a forum held in Salalah this week, makes water availability a core condition for future agricultural licensing in the Najd.

how much development can be sustained over time. Najd, north of the Dhofar mountain range, covers the administrative areas of Al Mazyouna, Thamrait, Shaleem and Al Hallaniyat Islands and Maqshin. It is one of Oman’s promising agricultural zones for vegetables, wheat and fodder, but depends primarily on groundwater.

The basin is hosted mainly in the Dammam, Rus and Umm Al Radhuma geological formations and is divided hydrogeologically into four aquifer layers.

Isotope data cited in the presentation indicate that groundwater ranges from relatively recent supplies to water more than 60,000 years old, highlighting the long replenishment times associated with parts of the resource.

A network of 181 monitoring stations tracks groundwater levels, rainfall and wadi flows across the basin. The ministry is also using hydrological and

groundwater-flow models, together with simulation tools, to assess long-term sustainability and forecast how the aquifer may respond to future abstraction and recharge.

The presentation said tropical cyclones can produce significant episodic recharge and raise groundwater levels by several metres, while the Khareef Dhofar contributes only a relatively small share to the Najd basin.

Three gaps were identified as central to the next phase of management: controlling water use according to the actual requirements of crops; aligning crop types and production volumes with market demand and food-security targets; and matching projects that run for decades with the groundwater system’s long natural renewal cycle. The roadmap also calls for wider use of treated water to replace part of groundwater withdrawals, including

dedicated treatment units within agricultural zones. It proposes recharge dams on the southern catchments of major wadis flowing towards Najd to strengthen replenishment of the aquifers. Governance is being supported through the Najd Agricultural Area Development Office, which reports directly to the minister and is tasked with coordinating agricultural and water management, preparing an integrated investment map, building a unified database and involving agricultural associations in crop-planning policies.

The policy challenge is therefore moving beyond how much land Najd can bring into production.

The more critical question is how much agriculture its groundwater system can support without undermining the resource on which the region’s long-term food-production ambitions depend.

Bank Muscat reaffirms Capital Market leadership with OMIFCO IPO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 31

Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has successfully advised on the landmark IPO of Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO), one of Oman’s largest industrial enterprises and a leading regional producer of urea and ammonia.

Bank Muscat played a pivotal role in the transaction, acting as the sole Issue Manager and Joint Global Coordinator alongside another international bank as well as a collecting bank alongside Meethaq Islamic Banking.

The offering comprised the sale of 1.672 billion shares representing 25% of OMIFCO’s total share capital, raising approximately RO 260.9 million (\$678 million).

That made the transaction one of the largest public offerings on the Muscat Stock Exchange in

recent years and the region’s largest IPO of the year 2026 so far amidst heightened geopolitical volatility.

OMIFCO’s IPO is the only IPO of scale in GCC year-to-date and notably it received strong participation from marquee institutional investors from across the regional and international markets which is a further testament to the ongoing resurgence of the Sultanate of Oman’s capital market.

The subscription period, which ran from June 16 to 25, 2026, generated overwhelming demand from both institutional and retail investors across Oman and internationally.

Total subscription reached 18 times of the shares on offer, with aggregate subscription of approximately RO 4.7 billion (\$12.2 billion), the highest subscription ever recorded for an IPO on the Muscat Stock Exchange.

The institutional tranche alone



The offering comprised the sale of 1.672 billion shares representing 25% of OMIFCO’s total share capital, raising approximately RO 260.9 million (US\$678 million).

was covered 27.4 times. Shares were priced at the top of the marketed range and surged more than 20% on first day of its trading debut,

reflecting the strength of investor conviction in the offering.

The robust performance of the IPO reinstated the confidence of investors in Oman’s capital markets, paving the way for future divestment transactions from OIA which are in the pipeline.

Bank Muscat’s Investment Banking team, as the sole Issue Manager and Joint Global Coordinator, played a pivotal role across every stage of the transaction lifecycle, from transaction structuring, stakeholder management, regulatory coordination, close investor engagement, issuance pricing and managing subscriptions and settlements.

The Bank worked closely with OMIFCO’s shareholders, including OQ SAOC, IFFCO and KRIBHCO, to craft a compelling equity story anchored in OMIFCO’s position as the largest fertiliser complex in

Oman and among the top five in the GCC, its long-standing offtake relationships, and its strategic relevance to global food security amidst shifting trade flows. The Bank also took lead in developing an attractive dividend policy which reflects the robust business profile and provides a compelling investment proposition for the investors.

The Bank’s transaction structuring expertise, combined with its deep engagement with institutional investors, was instrumental in creating a strong interest amongst institutional investors, consequently achieving a Shari’a-compliant offering that met the highest professional and regulatory standards, maximizing value for selling shareholders while simultaneously provide investors with a high-quality investment option in the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

AUTOMOBILE AND TARIFF

Toyota and Honda may get stuck



US President Donald Trump is targeting Ottawa with a proposed 50% tariff on Canadian car imports — but Japan’s Toyota and Honda may end up footing the bill.

The two Japanese automakers account for more than three-quarters of all cars made in Canada. They could be forced to shutter some production lines if the tariffs go into effect on January 1 as proposed, analysts said. — Reuters

SHEIN SHARES

Fast-fashion retailer Shein shares fall



Shares of online fast-fashion retailer Shein slumped more than 10% in gray-market trading on Monday, one day ahead of its Hong Kong Stock Exchange debut.

The company raised \$1.7 billion at \$48.56 a share, valuing it at about \$26.5 billion, according to sources who declined to be identified. Official pricing is due to be announced later on Monday. — Reuters

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

ChatGPT becomes first AI chatbot



ChatGPT will have to comply with tougher safety rules after the EU added it Monday to a list of digital services subject to greater legal scrutiny, a first for an AI chatbot.

Brussels also designated Reddit and Roblox as “very large” online platforms, a label that comes with additional obligations and oversight. — AFP

OPINION

Phone + Tablet = The Future? welcome to the Fold



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

WHENEVER I travel, whether for business or pleasure, I usually carry two devices: a smartphone to stay connected and a tablet for reading books, writing my weekly articles, watching videos and browsing the web on a larger screen. This time, however, I decided to leave that usual combination behind and take Samsung’s latest innovation, the Galaxy Z Fold8, with its passport-sized form factor, for a test drive.

What surprised me was how quickly I realized that I could replace, or at least significantly reduce my reliance on, both devices with just one. A phone when folded, a tablet when opened. Today, I share my personal experience and honest opinion of Samsung’s latest foldable, and aim to shed light on whether the fold is the future of smartphones.

So, what exactly is a fold phone? Simply put, it is a smartphone with a flexible screen and hinge that allows it to fold and unfold, giving you two screen sizes in one device.

The concept is not new. Royole introduced the FlexPai in 2018, widely recognised as the first commercially available foldable smartphone. Samsung followed in 2019 with the original Galaxy Fold, helping turn foldables into a serious smartphone category.

Since then, several generations have brought improvements in the hinge,

durability, thickness, screen and overall experience. Today, Samsung, Google, Huawei, Motorola and others are competing in this space, with Apple also expected to enter the foldable market.

I was among the early adopters when foldables first became mainstream. I bought one for my dad from Samsung, received another for myself from Huawei and later purchased the Honor fold when it was launched recently. Unfortunately, neither experience convinced us that foldables were ready.

The Samsung Fold disappointed us in less than a year with hinge issues, the Huawei presented a different challenge due to the US-China technology conflict which meant Google services were unavailable, making it difficult to use as an everyday phone, and finally the Honor despite the quality build did not excite me much with its software (in comparison to the former phones).

We, together, subsequently stayed away from foldables. They were expensive toys with great potential but the technology had not yet matured enough to justify the price.

Fast-forward several generations, and my experience with the eighth-generation Fold is quite different. I enjoy using it and I feel the technology has finally grown up. For me, the biggest advantage is the passport-like form factor. A traditional smartphone gives me one screen. A tablet gives me a larger screen but is less convenient to carry. The Fold8 sits

The concept is not new. Royole introduced the FlexPai in 2018, widely recognised as the first commercially available foldable smartphone. Samsung followed in 2019 with the original Galaxy Fold, helping turn foldables into a serious smartphone category.

comfortably between the two. I can read, write, browse, watch videos, manage emails and multitask on one device that fits in my pocket, whether I am wearing a dishdasha, jeans or a suit.

Of course, there is room for improvement. I would like a stronger camera setup, particularly a better telephoto camera, faster charging, a larger battery, better optimization of apps for the larger screen and improved stylus support. Some apps still do not make full use of the available display, although software updates can hopefully address much of this.

So, is the fold the future? I believe it could be. Not because everyone needs a foldable today, but because it addresses a real problem ,ie, how do we carry a larger screen without carrying a larger device? This is where I believe the passport-sized Fold8 has succeeded.

For the first time, I feel I am carrying a phone and a tablet in my pocket, something I had been looking forward to for years and something I am now happy to have folded into.

I am confident that, sooner or later, especially as prices come down, foldable technology will become a standard part of the smartphone market, and perhaps a device that many (not just senior executives, but professionals and students as well) will own. Until we catch up again next week, I welcome you to the foldable future. Stay tuned.

THE HIDDEN COST OF BELONGING IN OMAN

I thought I had cracked the code this month, as I carefully followed the advice of economists on managing my monthly income and expenses almost like a company would. Everything was going perfectly well until my emergency fund — meant for a broken car or an unexpected hospital visit — somehow became my social obligations fund.

That was when I realised that all those financial rules I had been happily learning from international economists do not quite work the same way in Oman.



RAHMA
AL KALBANI

Omani journalist and writer specialising in economic and social affairs

It is not because life is particularly expensive here, In fact, inflation has remained relatively moderate compared with global levels and neighbouring countries, staying below 3 per cent according to the latest figures in July.

The problem is simply that these perfect calculations for managing your income do not always take into account the size of your social circle or the price of belonging to it. When an American economist, for example, tells you to set aside a little money for a friend’s birthday, it sounds simple enough. But social circles look a little different in Oman.

The average Omani household has around seven members, compared with just 2.5 in the US. And that is only the people under one roof, before we add grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews and friends. And remember, we are still only talking about birthday gifts. The cost of belonging goes much further than that.

Belonging makes us happier, so perhaps all this spending is an investment of some kind. But how much does it cost? To be an active member of Omani society, your wallet needs to show up almost as often as you do.

There are the two Eids, family gatherings, friends and colleagues. If you are lucky, the family meets at your grandparents’ house and you only bring dessert. But social media has upgraded the experience: rented farms, catering and a share that can easily reach RO 50.

Then come weddings — sometimes three celebrations, each needing an outfit and perhaps a gift — followed by graduations, newborns and even gender reveals, which Instagram seems to have made socially necessary!

By my very unofficial math, even a quiet social year could cost around RO 670. However one enthusiastic wedding season could ruin the calculation.

And unfortunately, you may have to trust my math on this one, because there are no precise statistics tracking what Omani households spend on social obligations.

Five D’s that make digital Oman investable

TWO ministries published numbers this year that belong in the same sentence. MoTCIT reports that the communications and information technology sector attracted around RO 1.2 billion of investment in 2025, including some RO 65 million into artificial intelligence.

Nama Power and Water Procurement now lists data centres alongside heavy industry among the forces lifting peak demand on the main grid from 7,503 megawatts in 2024 to a forecast 12,198 by 2031. Read together, they say something simple: digital Oman has stopped being a policy ambition and become a capital allocation question. For anyone placing money in the Gulf, that shift is worth reading closely.

It helps to weigh the opportunity across five D’s, because the first is already complete. Data is not only cables and racks, though Oman has those: Omantel has investments in more than 20 submarine cable systems globally and five unique submarine cable landing stations in Oman, Equinix runs carrier-neutral facilities in Muscat and Salalah and Otech was accredited in February 2026 as the first company in the Middle East authorized by AWS to deliver sovereign cloud.

The less visible half is legal. The Electronic Transactions Law arrived under Royal Decree 39/2025, the Government Digital Transformation Regulation under Ministerial Decision 108/2025 and the Executive Regulation of the Personal Data Protection Law entered full enforcement in February 2026. To an operator weighing where to host regulated workloads, an enforced data protection regime is not friction. It is the precondition. That is the D most investors underweight and in Oman it is finished.

Demand is where the next five years will be shaped and it is being built deliberately. The Oman Digital Triangle will develop three separate but digitally connected zones built around green data centres and submarine cable connectivity, serving cloud, artificial intelligence and advanced digital services



DR YOUSUF
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BALUSHI

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

Data, demand, density, depth and dialogue. Oman has spent five years building the enabling layer — connectivity, sovereign cloud and, since February, a fully enforced data protection regime. The Digital Triangle turns that groundwork into an investable proposition and the returns sit in the layer above the rack.

regionally. Filling them requires workloads and the pipeline is visible. By end-2025, 2,277 government services and permits had been digitised, up from 1,700 a year earlier, carrying over 29 million transactions annually.

In 2026 the Port Community System arrives, integrating ports, airports, dry ports, borders, free zones and railways into one digital environment. That matters commercially more than its name suggests, because it converts Oman’s logistics volumes into recurring digital demand with a domestic anchor. MoTCIT puts the core digital economy at roughly RO 800 million in 2023, near two per cent of output, against a target of ten per cent by 2040. On the Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan’s four per cent growth path that is close to RO 7 billion, or compounding near fourteen per cent a year.

Few sectors anywhere carry a mandate of that order. Density is the variable that will price it. The grid must add nearly 4,700 megawatts of peak capacity by 2031 while lifting renewables towards the thirty per cent targeted for 2030, which Nama’s plan puts at some 7.5 gigawatts of new clean capacity.

That combination is what makes the Digital Triangle’s green data centre model saleable, since European and Japanese buyers increasingly specify the carbon intensity of the compute they buy and the Green AI Alliance gives the question an institutional home. Investors should still model allocation carefully.

Hydrogen developers build captive generation, so the contest is not for the same wires, but it is for the same land, renewables supply chain, engineering contractors and capital; and aluminium and steel at Suhar and Al Duqm sit in the same market. The commercial question is not whether power will be available, but what the terms will be and how early they are published.

Depth is improving faster than the outside view assumes. Omanisation in information technology reached 45.5 per cent in 2025 against 38 per cent in 2024, while the share of

Omanis in technical, specialised and leadership IT roles rose to about 69 per cent from 63 per cent. More than 11,000 people have passed through the Makeen initiative, 2,032 of them last year 2025 and the country’s first master’s programme in digital transformation has launched with the University of Technology and Applied Sciences.

Companies specialising in artificial intelligence reached 46 by 2025 and the Oman Startup Hub registers more than 200 startups, 48 incubators and accelerators and funding above RO 127 million. This is where the returns concentrate.

A data centre runs on modest headcount; the money sits in the layer above it, in managed services, security operations, data engineering, integration and the fine-tuning of the national language model Mu’een for Omani banking, health and logistics. The IMF’s work on Omani digitalisation agrees: the gains land inside the firms adopting the technology.

Dialogue is the fifth D and the one an investor can actually use. Between the Green AI Alliance, the AI Studio and the Tajaawob platform, Oman has built unusually open consultation machinery and the Digital Triangle is still at the design stage. Entering that conversation now, while power terms, zone specifications and offtake structures are being written, is worth more than any incentive negotiated later.

Three markers will show how the thesis is travelling: whether allocation terms for the Triangle are published early; whether MoTCIT’s next measurement lifts the digital economy above three per cent of GDP; and whether private enterprise workloads follow government ones onto Omani compute.

Oman spent five years laying cables and writing law. The cables made the country reachable and the law makes it bankable. What the next five years decide is whether it also becomes a place that runs its own models, on its own compute, for its own industries. On the evidence now published, that is where the money should be looking.

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WITCHES **REUNITED**

‘PRACTICAL MAGIC 2’ RETURNS TO CELEBRATE SISTERHOOD



Sandra Bullock and Nicole Kidman reunite to reprise their beloved roles as cursed witch sisters Sally and Gillian Owens in “Practical Magic 2”, nearly three decades after the original film first introduced audiences to the magical Owens family.

Released in 1998 to a lukewarm reception, “Practical Magic” gradually developed a devoted cult following, with its themes of sisterhood, love, family and female friendship resonating with audiences long after its theatrical run.

The long-awaited sequel now brings the Owens women back together for another supernatural adventure spanning generations.

Stockard Channing and Dianne Wiest return as the eccentric aunts Frances and Jet, while Joey King and Maisie Williams join the family as Sally’s daughters, Kylie and Antonia.

Bullock and Kidman also serve as producers on the sequel, which marks Bullock’s return to acting after a four-year break. For Kidman, the reunion represents more than simply revisiting familiar characters, but also an opportunity to celebrate the lasting appeal of the original and the women at its centre.

“It’s kind of extraordinary that we get to bring it back. If you told us 28 years ago that as women, we would still be able to star in a huge studio movie and carry it, we wouldn’t have believed it”, Kidman said at the film’s European premiere in London on Wednesday.

“We’re hoping we pass the baton to our beautiful baby witches and at the same time, it’s so lovely still being given the spotlight”. Set some 25 years after the events of the original, “Practical Magic 2” follows the Owens women as they join forces to break a spell that has left them loveless.

The story once again places the family’s bond at the heart of its supernatural challenges, while introducing a new generation of witches to the story.

For Channing and Wiest, returning to their roles felt remarkably natural, with the reunion made possible largely by the enduring enthusiasm of fans. “They asked for this to be done. This is all based on popular demand”, Channing said.

Wiest said the film would not have happened without the support of audiences, adding that its return reflects “women supporting other women, women coming together as sisters”.

The sequel draws inspiration from Alice Hoffman’s 2021 novel “The Book of Magic” and also stars Lee Pace, Xolo Maridueña and Solly McLeod. It is directed by award-winning Danish filmmaker Susanne Bier.

Bullock said the sequel preserves the “flavour” of the original, particularly the humour, emotional depth and dynamic between the two sisters.

— Reuters

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



TRADITIONS

A woman dressed in a traditional costume dances during the ‘Casco Peatonal’ celebrations in the Casco Antiguo historic district of Panama City. — AFP



COMPETITIONS

A robot remotely controlled by a young person stands during an aura farming competition in Mexico City, Mexico. — Reuters



TOURISM

Two people riding motorbikes take a break at a lookout for Mt Fuji on lake Motosu in Minobu, Yamanashi Prefecture. — AFP

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UK BLOCKS EXPORT OF ‘NATIONAL TREASURE’ £71M REMBRANDT PAINTING



Painted by Rembrandt in 1657, the oil painting called “Portrait of Catrina Hooghsaet”, depicting a Dutch woman in a white cap and collar and dark gown, is one of the artist’s “most exceptional later works”, the government said.

The British government has temporarily banned the export of a Rembrandt portrait valued at over £71 million (\$97 million), in a bid to keep the “national treasure” in the country.

The UK culture minister can place a temporary export ban on any work of art designated a national treasure, giving a local museum or collector time to raise money to buy it.

This painting is the most expensive object ever given this status. The government announced Thursday it has blocked the painting being permanently taken out of the country, at least until December 26, “with the aim of keeping an important work in the UK and on public display”.

It hopes a British museum or other “appropriate” buyer will express interest in acquiring

the painting for £71.7 million within that period.

The government statement said an export licence application for the painting had been lodged, but did not divulge to which country it would be sent.

It said a decision on the export licence was being deferred to at least December 27.

Painted by Rembrandt in 1657, the oil painting called “Portrait of Catrina Hooghsaet”, depicting a Dutch woman in a white cap and collar and dark gown, is one of the artist’s “most exceptional later works”, the government said.

In 2015, the painting was first subjected to a temporary export ban when its long-term owner in Wales sold it privately at Sotheby’s to an unnamed overseas buyer for £35 million.

— AFP



Animal welfare groups say frequent handling, noise and interaction with strangers can cause stress for animals kept in cafes.

JAPAN TO SURVEY ANIMAL CAFES OVER HYGIENE, WELFARE CONCERNS

JAPAN plans to probe popular animal cafes, where visitors can interact with anything from cats to capybaras, following concerns about hygiene and the creatures’ welfare, authorities said on Thursday.

Japan has hundreds of the cafes where campaigners say animals are sometimes kept in cramped spaces and that their popularity encourages the capture and illegal trade of rare wildlife.

A fact-finding survey will begin as early as next month, starting with obtaining basic facts such as the number of establishments and what animals they keep, an environment ministry official said.

The ministry will examine whether they comply with relevant laws, including whether animals have enough space and how often cleaning takes place, said the official, without wishing to be named.

“We may then do on-site inspections if we find facilities that appear to be breaching rules” stipulated by the animal welfare law, he said.

The decision to launch the survey followed recommendations by members of an expert panel about animal welfare.

Animal welfare groups have long been alarmed by the cafes, where visitors can pet and play with a dizzying array of animals including micro-pigs, hedgehogs, owls and snakes.

A 2025 survey by World Wide Fund for Nature Japan said that some kept endangered species listed on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation.

They also included species covered by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, which regulates international trade in wildlife.

Some shops had inadequate hygiene management without nudging users to handwash after contact with animals and its “microbiological testing detected



Japan is preparing to survey animal cafes amidst concerns over hygiene, overcrowding and the treatment of wildlife.



pathogenic bacteria in multiple facilities”, the report said.

“Whether the animals are otters, capybaras, raccoons, owls, reptiles, or other wild species, these businesses are built around close encounters that prioritise customer entertainment over the animals’ needs”, said Laila Imai, campaign coordinator in Asia of animal welfare group PETA.



“Many are subjected to constant handling, noise, flashing cameras and interactions with strangers throughout the day”, Imai said.

“What may appear charming to visitors can be stressful and unnatural for the animals forced to live that way”.

Some animal cafes act as adoption centres, helping to find new homes for rescued cats and dogs. — AFP

FEATURES



A smooth return to school starts long before the first bell. Experts share practical ways for parents to reset sleep, screen time and daily routines while easing children’s worries and building confidence, independence and a sense of security.

HELPING CHILDREN EASE BACK INTO SCHOOL

RUQAYA AL KINDI

AFTER months of late bedtimes, alarm-free mornings and greater flexibility around play and screen time, returning to school can feel like a major transition for children. Preparing for the new school year, therefore, involves more than buying uniforms and school bags. Gradually readjusting children to a new rhythm, both psychologically and practically, can make the transition smoother.

Mariam Alsalem, Educational and Family Counselor and Trainer, emphasised that sleep directly affects a child’s activity, mood and behaviour. Abruptly changing sleep schedules can make the start of school more difficult, she said, recommending that parents gradually move bedtime earlier by one to two hours over a period of one to two weeks.

A clear daily routine can also provide children with a sense of security and reduce stress and resistance, said Shamsa Altenaiji, Montessori Teacher and Certified Positive Parenting Trainer. A simple bedtime routine could include dinner, a bath, brushing teeth, reading a story and then going to bed, while keeping the order consistent each night.

One common mistake, Mariam noted, is leaving preparations until the final few days and expecting children to change everything at once. Parents should also avoid repeatedly warning children about



school without actually helping them practise the new routine.

Telling children that “school’s starting and playtime is over” can make school feel like a punishment, Shamsa said. Instead, parents can focus on what children may look forward to, such as seeing friends, joining new activities and having fresh experiences. Allowing children to choose items such as a backpack or lunch box can also build excitement.

Mariam encouraged parents to discuss their children’s previous achievements to strengthen confidence, while asking what they are excited or worried about.

When a child says, “I don’t want to go to school”, parents should listen before trying to reassure them. The reason could be bullying, academic difficulties, fear of a teacher, comparisons with others, an upsetting experience or separation anxiety. “Before you think about how to respond,

you need to understand the reason first; because knowing the reason is 50% of the solution”, Mariam said.

If tears occur on the first day, both experts advised parents to remain calm. Shamsa recommended acknowledging the child’s feelings, offering reassurance and a hug, explaining simply when the parent will return and keeping the goodbye short and clear.

Persistent school refusal accompanied by headaches or stomachaches, sleep or appetite changes, excessive fear, frequent crying, withdrawal, nightmares, irritability or sudden refusal to attend school warrants further attention. If these signs affect daily life, parents should work with the school and seek specialist support when necessary.

Screen time should also be reduced gradually rather than suddenly, Shamsa said, with alternatives such as reading, drawing and play. Mariam stressed that managing device use should be a lifestyle rather than a school-year measure.

Finally, involving children in preparing clothes, backpacks, snacks or a morning routine chart can strengthen independence. A calm morning begins the night before, with preparation and adequate sleep.

Ultimately, success is not simply getting a child into the classroom without tears, but helping them develop security, confidence and independence, while knowing home remains a safe place to return to and share their experiences.