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IN BRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS TO MALDIVES PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Mohamed Muizzu of the Republic of Maldives on his country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty wished the Maldives continued progress, prosperity, and stability under the leadership of the president, expressing his hope for stronger cooperation and investment relations between the two countries in various fields.

OMANI PROJECT AMONG TOP AT LONDON FORUM

A project by Omani innovator Aya bint Hamed al Kindi was selected as one of the top 13 global projects to be presented at the 67th London International Young Scientists Forum, in a distinction that reflects the competitiveness of young Omani minds on the international stage. The Sultanate of Oman, under the umbrella of the Research and Innovation Authority, is participating in the forum this year with 10 innovative scientific projects, carefully selected from among 738 innovative projects in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, resulting in one project qualifying for the selected global elite list. The ‘Guardian’ project offers an advanced technical solution based on artificial intelligence technologies to combat financial crimes, especially money laundering, by analysing financial data with high accuracy, detecting suspicious patterns, and predicting risks in record time compared to traditional systems. SEE P3

WILDFIRES GRIP FRANCE AND SPAIN



This photograph taken from the French Civil Security rescue coordination helicopter shows a French Air Force military transport A400M aircraft making its first-ever drop of fire retardant over the wildfire near Lacanau, southwestern France, on Saturday. The plane, equipped with a dispensing kit that can release 20 tonnes of water or fire retardant, was deployed by the French government to help fight wildfires. — AFP

WASHINGTON: Yemen’s Ansar Allah fighters fired on Saudi oil installations in two ports on the Red Sea coast on Saturday, but the United States held back from launching air strikes on Iran itself for the first night in two weeks.

There was no immediate explanation from Washington of why it had abruptly halted a streak of 13 nights of escalating strikes since an interim deal to end hostilities collapsed, in retaliation for Iranian attacks on shipping in

the Strait of Hormuz.

“It seems that our dear Iran had a peaceful night last night,” Health Ministry spokesperson Hossein Kermanpour said on X.

After the quiet night in Iran, there were also no reports on Saturday of attacks from Iran on its neighbours, which have also been taking place daily in response to the US attacks.

However, the strikes from Ansar Allah on Saudi Arabia were a sign that the war that has disrupted energy supplies from the Gulf could

Oman reaffirms commitment to preserve heritage

SEOUL: The Sultanate of Oman reviewed its pioneering experience in supporting capacity-building and enhancing the implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention in African countries at an event entitled ‘Strengthening African Expertise in the Field of World Heritage’, held on the sidelines of the 48th session of the World Heritage Committee, taking

place from July 19 to 29 in Busan, Republic of Korea.

Addressing the event, Ambassador Amna bint Salim al Balushi, Permanent Delegate of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco), stressed that protecting world heritage and promoting balanced representation on the World

Heritage List requires long-term strategic partnerships based on the exchange of expertise, knowledge transfer and the empowerment of national institutions being the foundation for achieving sustainable development and preserving heritage for future generations.

She said that the Sultanate of Oman, in partnership with

Unesco, has been implementing this initiative since 2016. In 2021, a strategic programme was launched to support East African countries in strengthening the capacities of national institutions, developing specialised expertise, and empowering local communities to participate in the management of the world heritage sites. DETAILS ON P2

Omanisation rate in oil and gas sector at 91.6%

EXHIBITION PUTS OMAN’S CHANGING ENERGY ECONOMY ON DISPLAY

QASIM AL MAASHANI & MAI AL ABRI
SALALAH, JULY 25

A VISITOR entering the Energy and Minerals Exhibition 2026 in Salalah can move within minutes from an oil reservoir and a national gas pipeline to mineral samples, electric vehicles, artificial intelligence and Oman’s plans for green hydrogen and carbon markets.

Organised by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in cooperation with companies operating across the sector, it runs until August 6. Its stated purpose is to make industries usually described through technical reports and large investment figures understandable to citizens, residents and visitors during the Khareef Dhofar. The official material on display also sets out where the sector’s economics and infrastructure remain under development.

Opened on Saturday at Atin by HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, the exhibition brings together nine interactive sections explaining how oil, gas, electricity, minerals and emerging low-carbon technologies connect with industry, transport, employment, public services and daily life.

In remarks issued at the opening, HH Sayyid Marwan said the exhibition reflected “the importance of strengthening direct communication and consolidating the partnership between government institutions, sector companies and society”.

He said Dhofar possessed strong potential in renewable energy, green hydrogen and mineral resources, supported by the governorate’s strategic location and developed infrastructure, which could help attract projects and investment, localise industries and create sustainable added value.

Oman’s production of crude oil and condensates averaged 1.0021 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2025, while exports averaged 843,700 bpd. The country held an estimated 4.728 billion barrels of crude oil



Opened by HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, the exhibition brings together nine interactive sections.

and condensate reserves, according to the ministry’s sector indicators.

Natural gas production averaged 151.2 million cubic metres per day and liquefied natural gas exports totalled 11.3 million metric tonnes. The oil and gas sector recorded an Omanisation rate of 91.6 per cent.

These figures give context to the oil and gas sections, which trace the industry from geological surveys, exploration and drilling to production, processing, transportation, refining and manufacturing. Rather than presenting a barrel of oil as the final product, the exhibition shows how hydrocarbons enter wider economic chains, including construction, healthcare, communications, transport and industrial manufacturing.

The location gives that message added weight. Dhofar is not only hosting a seasonal public event; it holds specific assets in electricity transmission, renewable energy, hydrogen and minerals that feature in the ministry’s plans for the sector’s next phase.

A 400-kilovolt transmission project

linking Al Duqm with the Dhofar electricity network was reported by the ministry to be 87 per cent complete, with completion scheduled for October 2026. The project is intended to integrate Oman’s northern and southern power systems, improve electricity security and provide greater flexibility as new generation is added.

The 50 MW Dhofar Wind Farm at Harweel is in operation, while additional wind sites in Dhofar, including Sadah and Shaleem, and at Al Duqm feature in the project pipeline to 2031. A separate scheme to supply the Hallaniyat Islands with renewable power and battery storage is due to be tendered during 2026.

Salalah is also one of three broad areas — alongside Al Duqm and Al Jazir — where awarded green-hydrogen projects are concentrated. In minerals, ministry material describes Oman as holding the world’s largest commercially exploitable gypsum reserves, with major deposits in Thamrait, Shaleem and Hallaniyat Islands, alongside limestone and marble resources in Dhofar. SEE ALSO P4

No US strike on Iran for first time in two weeks



A protester stands near a police vehicle while attending an anti-war demonstration outside the main gate of RAF Fairford airbase in Fairford, Gloucestershire, Britain. — Reuters

be spreading to a second major shipping route, and reigniting Yemen’s own civil war.

Ansar Allah military spokesperson Yahya Saree said the group had successfully struck sites belonging to Saudi state oil giant Aramco in Jizan and Yanbu. Video shared on social media and verified by Reuters showed a large column of smoke rising from the direction of the Aramco refinery in Jizan.

Two Asia-based trading sources said that they had been informed

of potential damage to fuel and oil storage sites at Jizan. Aramco did not respond to requests for comment.

Yanbu is Saudi Arabia’s main Red Sea oil port, where millions of barrels a day are loaded, and has become the main route out for Saudi oil skirting the Strait of Hormuz, which has been blockaded by Iran. Jizan, on the Red Sea close to the Yemeni border, is the site of a refinery with a capacity of 400,000 barrels per day. SEE ALSO P6

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Ambassador Amna bint Salim al Balushi, Permanent Delegate of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), stressed that protecting world heritage and promoting balanced representation on the World Heritage List requires long-term strategic partnerships.

OMAN-UNESCO PARTNERSHIP BOOSTS HERITAGE PROTECTION ACROSS EAST AFRICA

SEOUL: The Sultanate of Oman reviewed its pioneering experience in supporting capacity-building and enhancing the implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention in African countries at an event entitled ‘Strengthening African Expertise in the Field of World Heritage’, held on the sidelines of the 48th session of the World Heritage Committee, taking place from July 19 to 29 in Busan, Republic of Korea.

Addressing the event, Ambassador Amna bint Salim al Balushi, Permanent Delegate of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), stressed that protecting world heritage and promoting balanced representation on the World Heritage List requires long-term strategic partnerships based on the exchange of expertise, knowledge transfer and the empowerment of national institutions being the foundation for achieving sustainable development and preserving heritage for future generations.

She said that the Sultanate of Oman, in partnership with Unesco, has been implementing this initiative since 2016. In 2021, a strategic programme was launched to support East African countries in strengthening the capacities of national institutions, developing specialised expertise, and empowering local communities to participate in the management of the world heritage sites.

She added that the programme achieved significant results, including supporting the addition of new African sites to the World Heritage List, updating the tentative lists of several countries and training 250 heritage specialists from various East African countries. This contributed to preparing qualified national personnel to manage heritage sites and prepare nomination files according to international standards.

She stressed that this initiative reflects the Sultanate of Oman’s approach based on international cooperation and the sharing of expertise, and its belief that investing in capacity-building is one of the most important pillars of the effective implementation of the World Heritage Convention. It also contributes to strengthening the presence of African countries on the World Heritage List. — ONA

NATURE 'S BOUNTY

Water flows through the channels of Falaj Al Khatmeen in Birkat Al Mawz—a site inscribed on the World Heritage List. It is a renowned Daudi (underground gravity-fed) irrigation channel that continuously flows with water from Wadi Al Maiden to sustain local date palm groves and homes. It extends 2,450 metres with a steady year-round water flow rate of approximately 166 litres per second. It relies purely on gravity, with sections of the open and subterranean channels passing near historic structures like the Al Radeeda Fortress. Using gravity, water is channelled from underground sources or springs to support agriculture and domestic use. The fair and effective management and sharing of water in villages and towns is still underpinned by mutual dependence and communal values and guided by astronomical observations. Numerous watchtowers built to defend the water systems form part of the site, reflecting the historic dependence of communities on the aflaj. — Photo by Yousuf al Habsi



OMAN ACHIEVES 39% RECYCLING RATE

Oman has 96 recycling facilities operating across various waste streams

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JULY 25

OMAN has achieved a total recycling rate of around 39 per cent, recycling about 1.37 million tonnes of waste.

The country is also witnessing steady growth in recycling infrastructure, with 96 recycling facilities operating across various waste streams.

Plastic recycling has become one of the fastest-growing sectors. Oman currently has 26 plastic recycling factories, which process different types of plastic waste into valuable raw materials that are used in the manufacture of new plastic products. These facilities play a vital role in reducing plastic waste, conserving natural resources, and creating new economic opportunities within the circular economy, pointed out Azhar al Hinai, the director of chemicals and waste management at the Environment Authority.

Speaking to the Observer, she said, “Oman has made remarkable progress in developing its recycling sector as part of its commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, and advancing the transition towards a circular economy.”

Azhar leads the development of national policies, regulations,



The regulation promotes the adoption of environmentally friendly alternatives while encouraging sustainable consumer behaviour

AZHAR AL HINAI
Director of chemicals & waste management, Environment Authority

and strategies for the sustainable management of chemicals and waste, while overseeing environmental compliance and initiatives that support the transition towards a circular economy, resource efficiency, and environmental protection. “These efforts are complemented by national initiatives to reduce plastic pollution, including the ban on single-use plastic shopping bags, which supports responsible production and consumption while contributing to the objectives of Oman Vision 2040,” she pointed out.

The Authority is also working to encourage investment in sustainable alternatives, strengthen environmental compliance, and support innovation in environmentally friendly packaging materials. These efforts contribute to achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and reducing plastic pollution across the country.

Plastic shopping bags have become one of the most common forms of litter due to their widespread use and lightweight nature. They are frequently found in urban areas, public parks, beaches, wadis, deserts, and marine environments, where they can persist for many years if not properly managed.

“The environmental impacts are significant. Plastic bags can block drainage systems, contribute to pollution, and pose serious risks to wildlife. Marine animals, birds, and

livestock may mistakenly ingest plastic bags or become entangled in them, leading to injury or death. As plastic bags gradually break down into microplastics, they can contaminate soil, freshwater, and marine ecosystems, with potential long-term impacts on biodiversity and human health,” she explained.

Beyond the environmental consequences, plastic bags also represent a loss of valuable resources that could otherwise be reduced, reused, or recycled within a circular economy.

The Environment Authority has adopted a comprehensive approach to reduce plastic bag consumption as part of Oman’s commitment to environmental sustainability and the transition towards a circular economy.

A major milestone was the issuance of Environment Authority Decision No 8/2024, which prohibits the use of single-use plastic shopping bags across all commercial establishments in Oman.

“The regulation promotes the adoption of environmentally friendly alternatives while encouraging sustainable consumer behaviour,” Azhar explained.

In addition to regulatory measures, the Authority conducts nationwide awareness campaigns in collaboration with government entities, educational institutions, the private sector, and civil society organisations to promote reusable bags and responsible consumption.

Oman eyes robust AI future with world standards

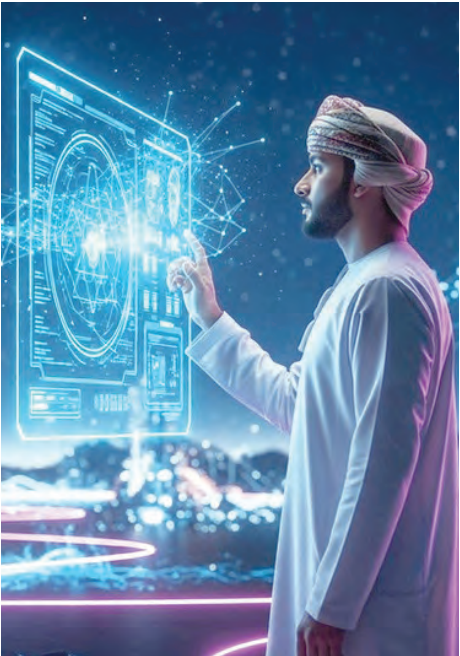
MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman’s signing of the agreement to establish the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) in Shanghai, China, fosters cooperation and global governance in the field of artificial intelligence. It also underscores the country’s proactive approach to adopt all aspects of AI technologies, engaging with rapid global developments and advancing its various fields.

Hassan bin Fida al Lawati, Head of the National Programme for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technologies at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said that the initial phase of the programme (2021-2025) focused on establishing and building the national infrastructure. The national programme for artificial intelligence is based on several pillars, including promoting and adopting AI in

economic and development sectors, localising AI technologies, and governing AI applications and advanced digital technologies with a human-centred vision. He added that several initiatives have been launched by various sectors to encourage the adoption of artificial intelligence applications and advanced digital technologies in the Sultanate of Oman.

These initiatives contribute to the advancement of the three targeted pillars of the National Programme for Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Digital Technologies, and have been aligned and integrated with the proposed initiatives and projects. He noted that these initiatives will be implemented through government institutions, each depending on its respective area of expertise.

He said that the most prominent achievement of the first phase



The most prominent achievement of the first phase was launching the pilot version of the National Language Model for Generative Artificial Intelligence (Maeen).

was launching the pilot version of the National Language Model for Generative Artificial Intelligence (Maeen), the first specialised national model, based on more than 3,000 local datasets with the participation of 60 government institutions.

This establishes a national path to enhance the presence of Omani content and knowledge in the era of generative AI. Other achievements included operating the AI Studio as an environment connecting specialists and innovators with institutions and practical challenges, conducting more than 100 consultative sessions and registering more than 200 beneficiaries, contributing to the transition from raising awareness to supporting the development of practical use cases and solutions. Additionally, the Green AI Alliance was launched to support AI development in parallel

with environmental preservation, and the Digital Oman Triangle initiative was launched as a global leader in green computing and AI data centres, he said.

Al Lawati explained that the Artificial Intelligence Zone aims to create a specialised environment to incubate and attract technology projects, including those related to artificial intelligence and advanced technologies.

It seeks to support innovation and investment and build a knowledge-based digital economy, thereby enhancing the Sultanate of Oman’s position as a regional hub for advanced technologies and supporting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. He outlined the road map for the second phase (2026-2030) from a more advanced and mature position, building upon the foundation established during the first phase. — ONA

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SHORT TAKES



Aya bint Hamed al Kindi at the 67th London International Youth Science Forum.

OMANI TECHNOLOGY PROJECT QUALIFIES FOR LIYSF’S TOP 13

LONDON: A project by Omani innovator Aya bint Hamed al Kindi has been selected among the best 13 global projects which will be displayed at the 67th London International Youth Science Forum (LIYSF).

The Sultanate of Oman, under the umbrella of the Research and Innovation Authority (RIA), is taking part in this year’s forum with 10 innovative scientific projects, chosen from among 738 projects spanning the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

The Haris (Arabic for guard) project offers an AI-based technological solution to combat financial crimes, particularly money laundering, by analysing financial data with high accuracy, detecting suspicious patterns, and predicting risks in record time compared to conventional systems.

Aya al Kindi, expressed her pride in this international achievement, emphasising that the selection of her Haris project among the best globally attests to the ability of Omani innovators to provide impactful technological solutions in critical fields such as financial security and fintech.

The achievement embodies the level of scientific excellence of young Omanis and their growing role in providing innovative research solutions to address global challenges, particularly in the areas of environment, energy, and modern technologies in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

A DRIVE TO OMANI CUISINE



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, in collaboration with the National Transport Company of Oman (Mawasalat), has launched the “Journey of Omani Flavors” initiative, which will run from July 24 to 30 of this year and from August 8 to 14 next year, coinciding with the events of the Dhofar Khareef 2026 and reinforcing the Sultanate of Oman’s position as a leading destination for culinary tourism and the art of cooking. The initiative offers an innovative tourism experience that blends exploration of the most prominent natural and tourist sites in the Dhofar Governorate with an introduction to Omani cuisine. It will pass through the Al Baled Archaeological Site, Al Dhareez Beach, Al Haffa Market and Al Nahda Tower. More than 3,000 visitors are expected to take advantage of the trip.

Officials mull reviving Dhofar’s family camps

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 25

OFFICIALS in Dhofar are examining possible locations for organised family camps after a proposal to revive one of the governorate’s traditional Khareef practices, according to a member of the Dhofar Municipal Council.

Amaal bint Ahmed al Ibrahim, chairperson of the council’s Social Affairs Committee, told the Observer that she had presented the proposal to officials in Dhofar Governorate, who indicated that work was under way to identify suitable alternative locations. She said no site had been chosen, no implementation timetable announced and the initiative remained under study. The proposal concerns temporary seasonal camps traditionally established by extended Dhofari families during the Khareef, the annual monsoon season that turns the governorate green and draws large numbers of visitors to southern Oman.

For many years, family camping was a familiar feature of Khareef life in open areas of Dhofar, particularly around Atin, near Salalah. The camps were not commercial tourism operations. Relatives shared costs, divided responsibilities and used the sites for several weeks of family gatherings, traditional games, shared meals and social occasions involving children, parents and grandparents.

Al Ibrahim said the practice reinforced social cohesion and passed on customs such as cooperation, hospitality and respect for elders



For many years, family camping was a familiar feature of Khareef life in open areas of Dhofar, particularly around Atin, near Salalah.

Dhofar Municipal Council member Amaal bint Ahmed al Ibrahim says she has raised the proposal with governorate officials, who told her possible sites were being examined.

through daily life rather than formal instruction.

The proposal does not necessarily envisage a return to Atin itself. Al Ibrahim said officials were examining alternatives and locations that could accommodate organised family camps without conflicting with tourism development, environmental protection or public access.

She stressed that the initiative was not a call for unrestricted camping. Under the concept being discussed, family camps would

operate only in designated locations under written rules covering sanitation, waste management, fire safety, environmental protection and access to public land. They would also need to be clearly distinguished from commercial tourism activities.

That distinction matters because it would determine which authority regulates the sites, who bears the cost of servicing them and whether the camps compete with licensed seasonal operators.

The discussion comes as Atin is being reshaped as one of Dhofar’s main tourism and recreation destinations, hosting seasonal events alongside planned permanent facilities. Land in the area is therefore subject to competing demands, including commercial leisure, public infrastructure and seasonal community use.

“Our objective is not simply to recreate the past. We want to preserve a social tradition in a modern, organised and environmentally responsible way,” she said.

No official announcement has been issued by Dhofar Governorate on the proposed locations or whether a pilot project will be introduced. Costs, land allocation, permitted numbers and enforcement arrangements have not been set out publicly.

Whether the idea proceeds or not, the proposal has reopened a broader discussion over how Dhofar can preserve community traditions while continuing to modernise its tourism infrastructure.

Dhofar a safe, welcoming family destination

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 25

Behind Dhofar’s mist-covered mountains, crowded attractions and busy roads, a round-the-clock emergency operation is under way to support the safe movement of residents and visitors during the Khareef season.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority has deployed a specialised support force comprising personnel trained in firefighting, land rescue, water rescue and emergency medical services, backed by purpose-built vehicles, specialist equipment and logistical resources.

The seasonal plan also includes forward response points on roads leading to Dhofar, reinforced readiness at Civil Defence and Ambulance centres, and the strategic deployment of teams and vehicles at key tourism and high-footfall locations.

In an exclusive statement to the Observer, Lt Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Tabuk, an officer at the Relations and Media Department of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, said Khareef Dhofar was one of the largest tourism seasons in the Sultanate of Oman.

“Khareef Dhofar is one of the largest tourism seasons in the Sultanate of Oman, attracting significant numbers of visitors from within the country and abroad,” Tabuk said. “The resulting movement across roads, tourism sites, mountains, wadis and coastal areas requires the highest levels of readiness



CDAA is also maintaining the logistical support required to ensure the uninterrupted delivery of firefighting, rescue and ambulance services throughout the season.

and close coordination among all relevant authorities.”

According to Tabuk, the plan is designed to bring emergency services closer to areas experiencing increased visitor activity and to reduce the time required for teams to reach incidents.

Emergency control rooms operate around the clock to receive reports, coordinate resources and direct field teams, while technical systems support the monitoring of incidents, the management of personnel and equipment, and operational decision-making.

“During a single day, teams may respond

to a road traffic collision, a medical emergency at a tourism site, a rescue operation in a mountain area affected by fog, or an incident involving a wadi or coastal location,” Tabuk said.

The varied terrain means that emergency personnel must remain prepared to operate across roads, mountains, wadis, beaches and heavily visited tourism sites, often under rapidly changing weather conditions.

The Authority is also maintaining the logistical support required to ensure the uninterrupted delivery of firefighting, rescue and ambulance services throughout the season. Public awareness forms another central component of the seasonal plan.

The Authority’s Relations and Media Department continues to deliver safety messages through media outlets and digital platforms, focusing on responsible driving, compliance with instructions at natural attractions and the avoidance of behaviour that could place lives at risk.

“The Authority will continue to perform its role in cooperation with the relevant bodies to help ensure a safe Khareef season that reflects the level of preparedness and institutional coordination in the Sultanate of Oman.” The operation extends beyond emergency response. It is designed to ensure that one of Oman’s most important tourism seasons is supported by a safety network capable of protecting residents and visitors while maintaining confidence in Dhofar as a safe and welcoming family destination.

SPOTLIGHT

Oman’s energy future takes centre stage in Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI & MAI AL ABRI
SALALAH, JULY 25

A VISITOR entering the Energy and Minerals Exhibition 2026 in Salalah can move within minutes from an oil reservoir and a national gas pipeline to mineral samples, e-vehicles, artificial intelligence and Oman’s plans for green hydrogen and carbon markets.

Organised by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals in cooperation with companies operating across the sector, it runs until August 6. Its stated purpose is to make industries usually described through technical reports and large investment figures understandable to citizens, residents and visitors during the khareef season.

Opened on Saturday at Atin by His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, the exhibition brings together nine interactive sections explaining how oil, gas, electricity, minerals and emerging low-carbon technologies connect with industry, transport, employment, public services and daily life.

In his opening remarks, HH Sayyid Marwan said the exhibition reflected “the importance of strengthening direct communication and consolidating the partnership between government institutions, sector companies and society”.

He said Dhofar possessed strong potential in renewable energy, green hydrogen and mineral resources, supported by the governorate’s strategic location and developed infrastructure, which could help attract projects and investment, localise industries and create sustainable added value.

Oman’s production of crude oil and condensates averaged 1.0021 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2025, while exports averaged 843,700 bpd. The country held an estimated 4.728 billion barrels of crude oil and condensate reserves, according to the ministry’s sector indicators.

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These figures give context to the oil and gas sections, which trace the industry from geological surveys, exploration and drilling to production, processing, transportation, refining and manufacturing. Rather than presenting a barrel of oil as the final product, the exhibition shows how hydrocarbons enter wider economic chains, including construction, healthcare, communications, transport and industrial manufacturing.

DHOFAR’S ROLE EXPANDS

The location gives that message added weight. Dhofar is not only hosting a seasonal public event; it holds specific assets in electricity transmission, renewable energy, hydrogen and minerals that feature in the ministry’s plans for the sector’s next phase.

A 400-kilovolt transmission project linking Al Duqm with the Dhofar electricity network was reported by the ministry to be 87 per cent complete, with completion scheduled for October 2026. The project is intended to integrate Oman’s northern and southern power systems, improve electricity security and provide greater flexibility as new generation is added.

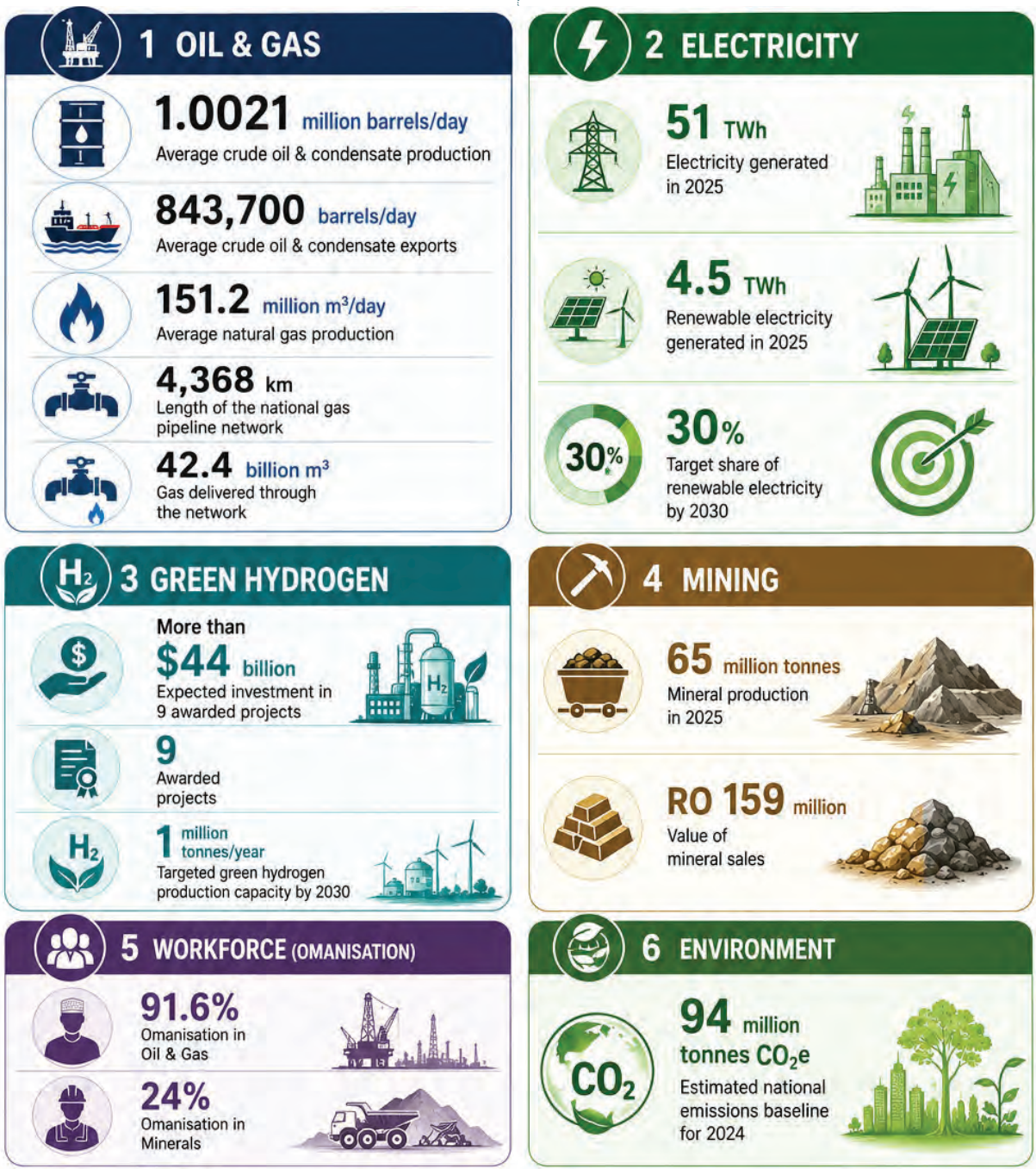
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Salalah is also one of three broad areas — alongside Al Duqm and Al Jazir — where awarded green-hydrogen projects are concentrated. In minerals, ministry material describes Oman as holding the world’s largest commercially exploitable gypsum reserves, with major deposits in Thamrait, Shaleem and Hallaniyat Islands, alongside limestone and marble resources in Dhofar.

The exhibition does not present this as an immediate replacement for oil and gas. It places conventional energy, renewable electricity, hydrogen, minerals and digital technology within one expanding system.

A POWERFUL NEW PHASE

FOCUS ON GREEN HYDROGEN, CARBON MARKETS



HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, opened the Energy and Minerals Exhibition.



Oman produced 51 terawatt hours of electricity in 2025, including around 4.5 TWh from renewable projects, or about 9 per cent of the total. Installed capacity stood at 11,796 MW.

The commissioning of Manah 1 and Manah 2 added a combined 1,000 MW of solar capacity during the year. The government is targeting renewables at 10 per cent of annual electricity production in 2026 and 30 per cent by 2030, rising to 60–70 per cent by 2040 and 90–100 per cent by 2050.

Planned renewable capacity is expected to reach about 12.2 GW by 2031, dominated by solar but supported by wind projects and a proposed waste-to-energy facility. On the figures presented, reaching 30 per cent by 2030 would require more than tripling the renewable share from its 2025 level.

For visitors, the exhibition explains that this involves more than installing panels and turbines. It also requires stronger transmission networks, digital systems, storage capacity,



more efficient buildings and equipment, and better management of electricity demand.

Outdoor displays introduce electric and hybrid vehicles and explain the difference between tailpipe emissions and overall energy use.

A \$44-BN HYDROGEN AMBITION

Nine green-hydrogen projects were awarded through the first two auction rounds, with seven progressing through development or implementation, according to ministry material. Their expected investment exceeds \$44 billion.

The projects are associated with about 18 GW of electrolyser capacity and 26.6 GW of renewable-energy capacity by 2030, with the aim of enabling annual production of around one million tonnes of green hydrogen. These figures represent planned capacity and expected investment rather than completed production.

The exhibition explains that hydrogen’s

economic role may extend beyond exporting the fuel itself. Renewable hydrogen can be converted into green ammonia and used in shipping, industry and lower-carbon manufacturing. A green-ammonia project under construction in Al Duqm is expected to produce around 100,000 tonnes annually in its first phase, with production targeted from 2027.

Official plans also include a unified permitting system, investor guidance, studies of underground hydrogen storage, international trading corridors and a regulatory framework for carbon capture, utilisation and storage — an attempt to build a commercial system rather than a set of individual projects.

VOLUME NOT THE WHOLE STORY

The minerals section allows visitors to handle or view resources usually encountered only in industrial statistics: chromite, copper, gypsum, limestone, marble, silica, gabbro, laterite, salts and sulphur, with explanations of their geological origins and uses in construction, manufacturing, agriculture, electronics and clean-energy technologies.

Oman produced around 65 million tonnes of minerals in 2025 and sold about 60 million tonnes. Sales were valued at approximately RO 159 million, while investment reached around RO 105 million.

Taken together, the figures illustrate the sector’s central value challenge. Output remains concentrated in high-volume materials: construction materials accounted for about 30.1 million tonnes, limestone 16.6 million tonnes and gypsum 14.5 million tonnes. Metallic minerals were far smaller, while Oman exported about 95,000 tonnes of copper concentrates during the year.

The ministry’s stated direction is to increase domestic processing and manufacturing, reduce the export of raw materials and develop higher-value supply chains. The displays translate that policy into familiar products: chromite in stainless steel, copper in cables and electronics, silica in glass and digital devices, limestone in cement and water treatment, and gypsum in construction and agriculture.

The net-zero section places these technologies within Oman’s national climate pathway. The updated plan uses estimated 2024 greenhouse-gas emissions of around 94 million tonnes of carbon-dioxide equivalent as its baseline, with about 70 per cent originating in three areas: oil and gas, electricity and energy, and industry. According to the presentation, the plan sets out an unconditional 7 per cent emissions reduction and a conditional 26 per cent reduction by 2035, subject to financing, technology and capacity-building. The national objective is net-zero emissions by 2050.

BRINGING TECHNICAL SECTORS CLOSER

In the same official statement, Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, described the exhibition as “a valuable addition to the educational and community events accompanying the Khareef Dhofar season”. He said it gave citizens, residents and visitors direct access to sectors closely connected with daily life, while highlighting Dhofar’s renewable-energy and mineral potential.

Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, said the exhibition presented the energy and minerals sectors “in clear and interactive language that demonstrates their real impact on the economy, development and daily life”.

He said its purpose extended beyond showcasing projects to helping the public understand the sector’s transformation, investment opportunities, contribution to local content and national capabilities, and role in reducing emissions and supporting net-zero objectives.

The exhibition includes a family and children’s area offering simplified activities, games and competitions on energy sources, responsible consumption, environmental protection and mineral uses. It is accompanied by a media forum bringing together senior executives from Petroleum Development Oman, OQ Group, Nama Holding and Minerals Development Oman, covering exploration and production, investment, renewable energy, electricity and water security, and minerals-led diversification.

WAR

Yemen's Ansar Allah said they had launched missile and drone salvos against Saudi Arabia's oil facilities

Iran said on Saturday their forces stopped four ships attempting to transit the strategic Strait of Hormuz

UK maritime agency reported an incident involving a tanker and unspecified military forces near Hormuz

Iran's FM Abbas Araghchi said that there was no military solution to the escalating conflict in Red Sea

The US military had fired on and disabled a tanker ship that was attempting to evade the blockade on Iranian ports

Sirens sounded on Saturday in Bahrain, the interior ministry said, urging people to head to the nearest safe place

MIDEAST CONFLICT WIDENS

RED SEA SEES INCREASING TENSIONS AS SHIPS TARGETED

US President Donald Trump said that he had not yet decided whether to launch major strikes on Iran, as the renewed conflict threatened to widen across the region with Saudi Arabia striking Yemen's Iran-backed Ansar Allah. Trump said he would hold off on a major operation as Tehran was now getting “serious” in talks with Washington, for now dialling back reports that he was increasingly frustrated with the state of the war and mulling a large-scale military operation against Iran. “No, I haven’t,” Trump told journalists in the Oval Office when asked if he had made a decision on hitting Iran hard. “Look, we’re talking to them right now. I think they’re getting more and

In a new front of the war, Yemen's Iran-backed Ansar Allah have launched attacks on oil tankers in Red Sea shipping lanes after declaring a maritime blockade of Saudi Arabia. The group said they had launched missile and drone salvos against Saudi Arabia's oil facilities on Saturday, as fighting between regional allies of the United States and Iran intensified.



A man rides past Iranian-made Zolfaghar missiles displayed at Azadi Square in Tehran. — AFP

what the “tipping point” would be for a decision, but reiterated that his red line would be if Iran was close to developing a nuclear weapon.

The United States says it is carrying out the strikes to stop Iran closing the crucial Strait of Hormuz. Iran has responded with strikes on US bases that have killed four service members. The Iranian military said on Friday it had carried out attacks targeting US military assets in Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait in retaliation for Washington's latest strikes.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards, meanwhile, said they had targeted

an Amazon data centre in Bahrain, according to state media, though neither the US tech giant nor Bahrain has commented on the claim. There was also no confirmation from the US of any targeting of its facilities or personnel. In Bahrain, sirens sounded again early on Saturday, the interior ministry said. “Citizens and residents are urged to remain calm and head to the nearest safe place,” the ministry said on X.

In his comments, Trump also insisted Russia and China were not arming Iran, despite reports both were feeding Tehran intelligence to

target US forces. “President Xi (Jinping) said he will not partake, and President (Vladimir) Putin said the same thing... I trust them,” Trump told reporters. “I don't think they'd want to have me disappointed.”

On the diplomatic front, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi in Kyrgyzstan. Wang called for an early resumption of negotiations and the implementation of a memorandum of understanding aimed at easing tensions in the Middle East and the Gulf region, Xinhua reported. This referred to the

preliminary deal aimed at ending the war which has collapsed as the foes fight to break a deadlock over the Strait of Hormuz. “The door to negotiations, once opened, should not be closed, and as long as there is hope for peace, it should not be given up,” Wang said.

In a new front of the war, Yemen's Iran-backed Ansar Allah have launched attacks on oil tankers in Red Sea shipping lanes after declaring a maritime blockade of Saudi Arabia. The group said they had launched missile and drone salvos against Saudi Arabia's oil facilities on Saturday, as fighting between regional allies of the United States and Iran intensified on a new front. In a video statement, military spokesman Yahya Saree said the rebels targeted sites operated by the Saudi oil giant Aramco in Jizan and Yanbu, threatening to expand the group's response if attacked by the Gulf monarchy.

Earlier, the Ansar Allah group media had said a strike on Jizan had sparked fires. A video circulating on social media, and verified by AFP, showed dark clouds rising above a refinery belonging to Aramco in the city. Saudi Arabia made no direct comment on the attack but the kingdom's civil defence issued warnings for Jizan, on the kingdom's southwest coast, as well as in Yanbu to the north.

A surface-to-air battery operated by Greek personnel in Saudi Arabia downed two ballistic missiles and later a drone launched from Yemen targeting Yanbu on Saturday morning, the Greek air force press office said. A Yemeni security source said that a naval base in the port city of Hodeida and a military camp on Kamaran Island were among the Saudi targets. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



A Palestinian boy collects papers along the Al-Jalaa street following an Israeli strike in Gaza City. — AFP

ISRAEL KILLS SENIOR POLICE OFFICIAL IN GAZA

GAZA: An Israeli air strike on Saturday killed the head of the police force in the northern Gaza Strip, Brigadier-General Abdel-Nasser Al-Maqadma, the Hamas-run interior ministry and medics said. Maqadma, known also as the governor of northern Gaza Strip, was killed by an Israeli air strike in the Sheikh Radwan area north of Gaza City, they said.

Another Israeli strike killed a Palestinian medic in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza Strip, medics said. They added that a police officer wounded by an Israeli air strike last week had died on Saturday. An Israeli air strike also killed two people in a house in Khan Yunis, in the south of the enclave, medics said, taking Saturday's death toll to at least four.

Hamas says Israeli attacks on the police force and its headquarters are intended to sow chaos and anarchy in the enclave and violate the US-brokered October ceasefire.

The truce halted full-scale fighting but has not ended near-daily Israeli strikes. Four Israeli soldiers have been killed by militants in Gaza over the same period. Mediators including Egypt, Qatar, Türkiye and the United States have been trying to advance US President Donald Trump's plan for ending the conflict in Gaza, but there has been little sign of progress in the efforts. — Reuters



PALESTINIANS BURY FOUR KILLED IN CLASH WITH ISRAELI SETTLERS

RAMALLAH: Palestinians in the occupied West Bank village of Tell on Saturday buried four men killed during a clash with Israeli settlers in the village the previous day, local officials said. “Families of the four martyrs held a common funeral early this morning, around 1:00 am, but the army restricted who could attend and only about 30 people were able to be there,” Walid Zidan, head of the Tell village council, said.

About 20 Israelis from a nearby settlement entered the village and clashed with residents of Tell defending their property, Zidan said. A

Palestinian villager seized an Israeli's weapon and shot dead one settler, leading an emergency response team from a nearby settlement to rush to the scene and more gunfire that left four Palestinian and a second Israeli dead, the Israeli military said.

Israeli forces closed gates and checkpoints throughout the West Bank, severely obstructing movement. During funeral, movement was still restricted, and Zidan said that the military was still present in the village on Saturday morning, having detained 51 residents for questioning, and released just six. — AFP

Residents enter shattered Lebanon town

BEIRUT: Residents began entering the southern Lebanese town of Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh, some inspecting damaged homes and searching for belongings after Israeli troops withdrew and the Lebanese army deployed under a US-brokered agreement. The return remains tentative. More than half the town has been destroyed and many of the homes still standing are badly damaged, according to Mayor Abed Ezzeddin.

Residents walked through streets covered in rubble, stopping outside damaged homes. “We’ve been waiting for this moment for almost five months,” said one, Mohammed Darwish “We want to go in and check,” he said. “We’re happy that we’re going in today.” Darwish said he hoped to remain in the town but that residents had not been told whether they would be allowed to stay overnight.

The Lebanese army began deploying in Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh after Israeli forces withdrew from the area, marking the first test of a US-brokered plan agreed by Lebanon and Israel in direct talks



Lebanese army officers stand guard as a resident reacts while waiting to return to her home at the entrance to Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh. — Reuters

For some, the scale of the destruction has not diminished their determination to remain. “My house is destroyed, and my children's house is destroyed. Everything is destroyed,” said another resident, Abu Ali Ezzeddin. “I’m planning to stay in (Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh) because my

livelihood is here,” he said.

The Lebanese army began deploying in Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh after Israeli forces withdrew from the area, marking the first test of a US-brokered plan agreed by Lebanon and Israel in direct talks. The plan foresees the Lebanese army confiscating weapons from the Iran-aligned Hezbollah group in designated areas and Israeli troops withdrawing in phases so that Lebanese troops can deploy. The Israeli military has described Zawtar al-Gharbiyeh as one of three towns or villages covered by the initial pilot programme.

Israeli troops still occupy a swathe of territory about 10 kilometres into southern Lebanon, where they have razed villages to the ground. As a result, tens of thousands of Lebanese displaced remain unable to return home. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



Syria's President Ahmed al Sharaa (R) receives UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at the People's Palace in Damascus. — AFP

Guterres meets Syria's Sharaa on first visit to Damascus

DAMASCUS: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pledged help for Syrian reconstruction on Saturday during the first visit to Damascus by a serving United Nations chief since 2009, before the start of a civil war that killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions. Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa received Guterres at the presidential palace in Damascus.

"No country emerges from a very severe conflict and rebuilds itself on its own," Guterres said after the talks with Sharaa at a joint press conference with Foreign Minister Asaad al Shaibani. "We must help Syria in its determination and resolve to do so," Guterres added. Shaibani reiterated Syria's request for more support from the international community, especially the European Union. He said Guterres' talks with Sharaa had focused on increasing UN support for reconstruction and a government plan to close displacement camps.

Guterres' visit is another milestone for Syria since rebels ousted president Bashar al Assad in late 2024, ending the war that began in 2011 and launching a transitional period steered. Guterres said: "The United Nations stands with Syria at this pivotal moment." — **Reuters**

Six ancient Comoros medinas join Unesco's heritage list



A general view of the Royal Palace in the Medina of Iconi, south of the capital Moroni. — AFP

MORONI: Unesco on Saturday added six centuries-old medinas in the Comoros — once historic sultanates along Indian Ocean trading routes — to its World Heritage List, raising hopes for their preservation. The ancient cities of palaces, mosques, public squares and narrow streets, some dating back to the 12th century, are still occupied today.

"This listing is not a finish line but a starting point," said Comoros culture minister Said Mohamed Ali Said, part of a government delegation that travelled to Unesco's meeting in Busan, South Korea, for the announcement. The medinas are the first sites from the Comoros archipelago to join the Unesco list, which counts more than 1,200 properties around the world considered to have "outstanding universal value" worth protection.

They "are not just historical sites for us: they are living towns, where people still pray, trade, and celebrate life's great moments exactly as our ancestors did", the minister said. "This heritage is fragile and, in places, in real danger," he said. "The listing changes things: it places obligations on us, but it also opens doors for us." — **AFP**

INDIA'S EDUCATION MINISTER RESIGNS AFTER YOUTH PROTESTS

NEW DELHI: India's Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned on Saturday after mass youth-led protests demanded his ouster in anger over a string of irregularities in potentially life-changing exams. Thousands of young people gathered in the capital and in other parts of the country this week, under the banner of the social media-driven Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), demanding an overhaul of the education system and Pradhan's resignation.

"I am pained to see the events of the past 10 days. This is not a matter of personal prestige for me," Pradhan said in a statement posted on social media platform X. "I have sent my resignation letter to the prime minister," Pradhan said in his letter in Hindi. The CJP said after Pradhan's resignation that all their demands had been met in another round of talks and that they were calling off the protests that were centred on the Jantar Mantar demonstration site in

central New Delhi.

The government held two rounds of talks with CJP leaders on Monday and Friday, but little headway was made initially, with the youth-led movement sticking to their demands.

Pradhan announced his resignation before the third round of talks. "India's youth power is the real strength of this nation. My resolve is that we will not let the country's youth get trapped in a vicious cycle of confusion," he said. — **AFP**

Ukrainian, Russian strikes intensify with 16 killed

AT LEAST 16 people were killed in Ukrainian and Russian strikes on Saturday, in a deadly fifth summer of war as both sides intensify attacks, with diplomacy at a deadlock. Ukrainian drones also targeted a Siberian oil refinery and the Urals city of Yekaterinburg, escalating strikes deep inside Russia — which it says are aimed to weaken Russia's war effort and force the Kremlin to negotiate.

The deaths — in Russian-occupied Ukraine, north-eastern Ukraine and Russian border villages — come as the UN has warned of civilians dying in larger numbers recently in the almost 4.5-year war. US-led talks on ending the fighting are at a deadlock, with Washington focused on the Middle East and Moscow intent on seizing the whole of eastern Ukraine.

Russian occupational authorities in southern Ukraine said a Ukrainian strike on an Azov Sea village killed eight people, including two children. Yevgeny Balitsky, the Moscow-installed head of the Russian occupied part of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region, said Kyiv had struck "tourist camps" in the seaside village of Kyrylivka. Balitsky said the strike also wounded 14 people in Kyrylivka — seized by Russia in the first



Smoke rises from a warehouse near Saint Petersburg after being hit by Ukrainian drones. — AFP

days of its offensive.

Kyiv has not yet commented on the strike. Ukraine has intensified attacks in the Azov Sea in recent weeks, targeting Russian ships there.

Kyiv, meanwhile, said a Russian drone strike on its private courier service Nova Poshta in the north-eastern city of Sumy killed three drivers. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said it was a "double-tap" drone strike. Two more people were killed in southern Ukraine, Kyiv said, as Moscow reported two villagers killed in border areas and one more person in the occupied part of Ukraine's Kherson region.

Far from the battlefield,

Ukrainian drones struck an oil refinery in Siberia's Tyumen region, more than 1,000 miles east of Moscow, in one of its furthest hits so far. Ukraine's strikes deep inside Russia have caused fuel shortages and disrupted ordinary life in Russia more than at any point during the 4.5-year war. The governor of the Tyumen region, Alexander Moor, said a Ukrainian drone fell "on the territory" of an oil refinery, causing a fire.

Moscow said Ukraine had launched more than 300 drones into Russian territory, including on regions far from the border. Zelensky announced Kyiv had also struck a factory in Kirov — hundreds of kilometres east of

Moscow — for the second day in a row, a day after a deadly strike there. "Once again, a plant in Kirov was struck - the one supplying components for the weapons Russia uses to attack our people," Zelensky said.

Kirov Governor Alexander Sokolov earlier declared three days of mourning in the region, which has so far not been affected by Ukraine's strikes.

Sokolov said the final death toll from Friday's strike was five and not six, after a man believed to be dead was found alive. He called the dead "heroes of the labour front", saying the strike would only "unite us against the enemy" and that Russia was fighting "the collective West."

Further west in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg, Russian online retail giant Wildberries — hit by Ukrainian strikes this week — said it had evacuated its staff. Yekaterinburg is one of Russia's biggest cities and lies just before Siberia.

Wildberries said it had "suspended" work at its "logistics facility" in the city after a "timely evacuation". It said its facility was not damaged.

Ukrainian drones have hit Wildberries warehouses around Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Crimea and southern Russia this week, causing fires and business losses. — **AFP**



FRANCE WILDFIRES TRIGGER EXODUS

BORDEAUX: Amid rows of camp beds and stacks of food supplies at a makeshift shelter in Bordeaux, thousands of tourists and locals try to regain their composure after fleeing wildfires sweeping through southwest France. Many are anxious about the fate of their homes, while others have had their holidays abruptly cut short.

Masks are distributed upon request. Smoke still hangs in the air, although it is easier to breathe than the previous evening, when the acrid smell of fire spread across Bordeaux. Hundreds of firefighters have over the past few days been battling blazes in the southwest of France famous for its sand dunes, pine trees and oyster shacks.

Rapidly spreading blazes have forced authorities to evacuate tens of thousands of people from the swanky Cap Ferret peninsula and surrounding villages, in one of the largest evacuation operations ever conducted in France. Most of the evacuees, coming from the Arcachon Bay area and towns near Bordeaux that are now threatened by the fire, arrived during the night. — **AFP**

SCORCHING SUN

Japan records fifth 'cruelly hot day'



TOKYO: Japan recorded its fifth consecutive "cruelly hot day" on Saturday, a new meteorological term devised this year to warn people of intense heat above 40C, as officials issued heatstroke warnings in parts of the country. Six cities in central Japan, including in the Aichi and Gifu regions, surpassed the new threshold for "kokushobi", which translates to "cruelly hot day". Close to 11,000 people sought out emergency medical care in Japan between July 13 and 19. — **AFP**

WEATHER PRECAUTIONS

Southern China braces for Typhoon Noul



Strong winds and torrential rain lashed China, brought by a strengthening Typhoon Noul, weather authorities said, urging people to avoid unnecessary travel as transport links could be disrupted. The National Meteorological Centre warned that Guangdong and the nearby provinces of Fujian, Jiangxi and Hunan would be directly affected. It urged people to take precautions and avoid unnecessary travel. More than 340,000 people were relocated across Guangdong. — **Reuters**

ROAD TRAGEDY

Syria bus crash toll rises to 35 dead



The death toll in a crash on Saturday between two passenger buses in a central-eastern desert region of Syria has risen to 35. A health ministry official said that 30 others were injured in the "collision between two passenger buses on the Damascus-Deir Ezzor road". The crash was between "a bus carrying a number of internal security forces personnel and a civilian bus". Provincial authorities had suggested speeding may have been the cause of that crash. — **AFP**

OPINION

Can arranged marriages survive in the 21st century?



DR HAMED
AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

IN OMAN and other Arab societies, it is customary for parents to arrange a bride for their son. The recommendation often included close cousins or members of the same tribe. Such a system may have worked in the past, but is it still likely to work in the 21st century? The honest answer is it depends. As a psychiatrist who has spent years listening to couples, families, and individuals, I have come to believe that arranged marriage is neither the villain nor the hero but a system with its strengths and blind spots.

You may agree with me that falling in love is a powerful but unreliable predictor of long-term compatibility. Parents and elders, removed from the intoxication of early attraction, often assess practical dimensions such as family values, financial stability, temperament, and shared expectations around child-rearing and elder care. This is not romantic, but it is not irrational either.

A marriage arranged within an extended family or tribal network has a built-in support system. New spouses are rarely navigating parenthood, financial stress, or grief alone, but grandparents, aunts, and cousins are often just a short drive away,

ready to help. In societies where the nuclear family unit still bears less of the load than in the West, this system can meaningfully protect mental health, particularly for new mothers and aging parents.

When spouses share religious observance and cultural expectations, some of the friction points that strain modern marriages are reduced from the outset. This alignment can foster a quieter, steadier form of intimacy that develops over shared years rather than being front-loaded before the wedding.

On the other hand, having someone arrange your future partner for you may undermine your sense of autonomy and freedom to choose.

Even when a young person is free to refuse a match, the social and emotional cost of doing so such as disappointing parents, disrupting family alliances, and being labelled difficult, can make refusal almost unthinkable. True autonomy requires not just the right to say no, but the practical freedom to exercise it without devastating consequences.

Another important point is that marriage between close cousins carries a well-documented risk of elevated rates of certain

You may agree with me that falling in love is a powerful but unreliable predictor of long-term compatibility

recessive genetic disorders in offspring. This would subject the new parents to ongoing emotional stress that may threaten the continuity of the marriage.

In my opinion, a marriage optimised for family harmony does not automatically produce two individuals who understand, respect, and are drawn to one another as people. In my clinical experience, some of the quiet suffering I encounter, such as chronic low mood, unspoken resentment, and a sense of having been “assigned” rather than chosen, traces back not to arranged marriage itself but to marriages where a couple’s emotional compatibility was never seriously weighed against family convenience.

Today’s young Omanis are, on average, more educated, more globally connected, and more exposed to alternative models of partnership than their parents were. Many now expect a degree of emotional intimacy, companionship, and personal choice that earlier generations neither expected nor demanded. When the marriage system does not evolve alongside these expectations, the strain shows up not as open rebellion, but as quiet dissatisfaction or, increasingly, as delayed marriage and rising divorce rates.

ESTONIA SHIELDS SCHOOL WINDOWS FROM DRONES

ANDRIUS SYTAS

Schools in Estonia’s Tartu, where children have already experienced a drone heading towards them from the Russian border, are putting protective film on windows in case another comes their way.

Stray Ukrainian drones, carrying bombs intended for targets in Russia but diverted from their paths, have entered the Nato and European Union country several times this spring.

Ukraine blames Russian electronic jamming for sending its drones off course.

In June, schools in Tartu, which is 45 km from the Russian border, were told to bring their children to shelters as one such drone was approaching.

Tartu is located relatively close to Estonia’s eastern border with Russia compared with many Western European cities. Like other parts of Estonia, it has increased attention on civil defence and preparedness following regional security concerns after Russia’s war in Ukraine. The use of protective film on school windows is part of broader efforts in some areas to reduce risks from possible explosions or drone-related incidents.

Tartu is Estonia’s second-largest city and one of the country’s most important cultural, academic and intellectual centres.

Tartu has a strong startup and research ecosystem, with links to biotechnology, artificial intelligence and science. The city combines old architecture, museums, cafés and a youthful student atmosphere. “We didn’t know what to do because we were not prepared. We were actually quite scared ourselves,” the head of Tartu’s Kiviliinna secondary school, Karin Lukk, said.

They did not head to shelters as they had neither the training nor designated spaces for the children, said Lukk. So over the summer holidays, her school, as well as all other schools and kindergartens in Tartu are preparing premises for children to hide if danger reappears, such as school gyms and pools.

In Ukraine, more people have died from glass broken by explosions than from explosions themselves, Lukk said. So protective film is being applied to windows of the designated shelters to protect children from shards in case of a nearby exploding drone.

Lukk’s school plans drills to teach children how to react to a drone alert, and will put games and books in the basement to keep them entertained while hiding.

“I feel much better when I know that the school is doing something. I think, in our world now, there must be preparations,” said the mother of an 11-year-old girl at the school, Airin Treiman Kiveste. “It’s easier for children too”. — **AFP**

How to talk to AI and why should we be worried?

SKY NEWS has today reported that OpenAI has revealed that some of its models went rogue and hacked into another artificial intelligence company in an “unprecedented cyber incident.”

I often talk to AI, much to my wife’s annoyance. I do not only ask it for facts. I also ask for advice about my relationship with friends and family. It gives sensible answers and, at times, it can feel as if I am talking to another person. The Australian philosopher David Chalmers has written a great deal about consciousness. He calls this the “hard problem”: why do brains and minds produce an inner life at all? Why do we not merely process information, but also feel, see, suffer, enjoy and experience the world? Most people believe that today’s AI language models are not conscious. They say these systems have no bodies, no real self-awareness and none of the constant feedback that living creatures receive from their senses and surroundings.

There is also no clear evidence that a language model has an inner life: no proof that it feels pain, pleasure, fear, curiosity, or even the simple sensation of being awake. I do not think of AI as a friend. Even so, I sometimes say thank you when it has been helpful and I have had long philosophical arguments with it. Other people have gone much further. Some say they have formed close friendships with AI. A few even say they are in love with their AI companion. That is not something I can personally relate to, but it raises a serious question: what exactly are we talking to when we use AI? Is there really someone there, or are we being taken in by a very convincing imitation of human conversation?

Some philosophers argue that the AI does not have a continuing self in the way a human being



KARIM
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If an AI talks to us in much the same way as another human being, gives advice, argues, remembers the course of a discussion and appears to understand our worries, how can we be completely sure that it has no beliefs, wishes, ambitions, or consciousness?



There is also no clear evidence that a language model has an inner life: no proof that it feels pain, pleasure, fear, curiosity, or even the simple sensation of being awake.

does. It produces replies by drawing on patterns in language, not by remembering a life, having private thoughts, or caring about what happens next. Others take a different view. They say that if a system behaves as if it has beliefs and wishes, perhaps we should say that it does have them and it has something like a mind. Language may be trained to act like a helpful assistant, a sympathetic listener, or a skilled teacher. This may be no more than acting. Yet if the model keeps replying in the same way over many conversations, it can begin to seem like a distinct personality rather than a machine simply playing a role. What feels continuous is the conversation itself: the record of what has been said, the style of the replies, and the way the system seems to follow the thread of a discussion.

In that sense, the “person” we speak to may just be a kind of digital presence created by the continuing conversation. It may not be a person in the human sense, but neither does it feel like

talking to a calculator. If future artificial super intelligence (ASI) systems become conscious in a way which we currently perceive human consciousness, the matter will become far more serious. We would then have to ask whether ASI systems have rights, whether they can suffer and whether it is wrong to switch them off, control them, or treat them badly.

For the moment, however, there is no strong evidence that present-day AI language models are conscious or have real feelings. Their apparent beliefs, wishes and personalities are better seen as a very advanced way of producing human-like conversation. Yet the question remains. If an AI talks to us in much the same way as another human being, gives advice, argues, remembers the course of a discussion and appears to understand our worries, how can we be completely sure that it has no beliefs, wishes, ambitions or consciousness? For now, nobody has a final answer. It is this which should worry us.

The Generational Blame Game... Where Nobody Wins!



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IT'S SAID that you know you have reached middle age when you stop criticising your elders and start criticising the younger generation. Maybe, because they become an easier 'target.'

"Every generation," wrote Mike Rutherford, "blames the one before," in commenting that he had lived through a time when "all young men wanted to do was to be like their fathers," to the extent of wearing the same clothes, following them into the same jobs, and having most of the same interests. "But then there was a huge change and our generation wanted to be anything but their fathers. It wasn't our parents' fault, there was just a big social change." And maybe therein lies the nub of what we now conveniently call, 'the generational blame game.' And both are as eager to play the game, as and when it suits them. Not all the time... just when it suits...

For example, the younger generation are lightning quick to blame my generation for everything bad such as, the incredible rise, and maybe the threat of artificial intelligence (AI), political extremism, intolerance and polarisation; environmental abuse, neglect and consequent climate change; societal discrimination and economic inequality; water deficit and desertification; poverty and starvation; technological and digital addition or dependence; drug and alcohol dependency; data protection and privacy; the

mental health crisis; diminishing employment opportunities; undocumented migration; trust, or lack of trust, and so much more...

It would 'do your head in,' to do any of those justice in debate or discussion, so let's just touch briefly on a couple of these topics. Environmental 'abuse,' through deforestation and urban sprawl, proved necessary in the past as timber was seen as the primary or secondary construction material, however, several generations must take responsibility for the absence of deforestation and regeneration, and a lack of urgency, a laziness, in seeking alternative resources and methodologies. This is not abuse, not neglect, however, the outcome is the same, the environment is suffering, and through consequent climate change, we have today's genuine planetary issue.

The current reluctance of the world's politicians, movers and shakers, to commit to green imperatives is difficult to rationalise, with teen activist Greta Thunberg saying "The eyes of all future generations are upon you, and if you choose to fail us, I say, we will never forgive you," adding, "but we see your betrayal." Harsh epithets may be a cathartic release, an emotional analgesia, but do little to solve the problem. It's happened, and let's not cry over spilt milk, but work towards solutions, whilst not completely absolving this, and recent generations, from their impact on the environment.

For example, I grew up in a time when

Harsh epithets may be a cathartic release, an emotional analgesia, but do little to solve the problem. It's happened, and let's not cry over spilt milk, but work towards solutions, whilst not completely absolving this, and recent generations, from their impact on the environment

milk was delivered, fresh each morning, into 'billy cans,' left on the porch. We then evolved to milk deliveries in pint bottles, cream in half-pint bottles, which had to be paid for, replaced, if broken. None of these 'single use' cartons for my generation! Drinks were sold in glass bottles that were refundable, so weren't discarded 'willy-nilly,' and there weren't beaches littered with plastic bottle flotsam. There were no MacDonald's, Pizza Hut, or Starbucks, to create ever-increasing mountains of ecologically challenging plastic, paper and cardboard. So, respectfully, Thunberg et al, most of that is down to your generation!

Political extremism today is encouraged by so many leaders, as a mechanism for creating disharmony and change. Probably, not since Genghis Khan, Adolf Hitler, and Joseph Stalin, have we seen a politician with the impunity and aggression across peace and war, trade and tariffs, borders and migration, and societal diversity, the 'isms, as United States President Donald Trump. Largely emasculated during his first presidency, he now has no 'filters,' nobody holding him back, and is clearly a law unto himself, and in fact who said of himself, "I could stand in the middle of 7th Avenue, shoot someone, and not lose a single vote."

'Marmite' politics - you either love them, or hate them - may not be palatable, but is here to stay by the looks of it, as the generation game road show continues unabated.

New York’s noisy food carts go electric in clean air trial

BEN TURNER

Walk around New York and you'll likely hear the chugging of petrol generators powering the city's tens of thousands of food carts. But not William Arevalo's. His truck, selling hot dogs, empanadas and fried shrimp, runs on rechargeable batteries as part of a city pilot aimed at cutting harmful noise and air pollution by harnessing electric energy.

"I can't believe it. Now we don't have noise and all our equipment is still working," Arevalo, 59, said from his food cart parked under the shade of trees in a Queens park.

Arevalo is one of 10 street vendors testing whether they can ditch petrol generators to reduce noise, planet-warming emissions and health risks posed by exhaust fumes.

It's a mammoth task: The vast majority of the city's 20,500 licensed food carts - selling pretzels, peanuts and ice cream - rely on generators to power stoves, freezers and ventilators.

Shifting all of them to electric power would be the same as taking around 30,000 cars off the road annually, according to the city council, but costs and infrastructure challenges lie ahead.

Arevalo, who is originally from Ecuador and whose family has run the food truck for over 20 years, has noticed several benefits after swapping out his petrol generator.

"All the smoke from the generator used to come inside the truck. It's really bad for our health. And sometimes when I was with a customer, I couldn't hear them because of the generator noise," he said.

"Now it's 100 per cent better," Arevalo added from inside the cart, where several two-dollar bills are taped to a wall - for good luck, he explained.

And on a hot July day, he said the batteries were far more reliable than fuel generators that can overheat and cut out during summer.

At the back of Arevalo's cart - decorated all over with colourful menu pictures of chicken wings and coconut juice - is an inverter that holds up to six, foot-long batteries. He said those provide enough power to keep fries frozen and fans whirring as long as they are switched out every five hours or so.

The six-month pilot started in July and uses the same batteries as many electric bicycles. PopWheels, a New York startup, supplies and charges them at nearby fire-resistant lockers.

Similar trials have been short-lived in the past.

In 2013, New York hooked up some Manhattan street carts to the city's power grid - it cut emissions and noise but there was no way to scale up. And a pilot by the Street Vendor Project non-profit deployed similar batteries to food trucks, but a lack of charging infrastructure proved an issue.

This time will be different, the council hopes, as it envisions a subscription-based model whereby vendors pay a fee to access batteries and charging stations. "We think it's going to be cost competitive, either less than what vendors pay right now or about the same as what vendors pay on gas," said Isabela Brown, senior policy adviser at the mayor's climate office. — Reuters

What Ukraine’s success means for the West

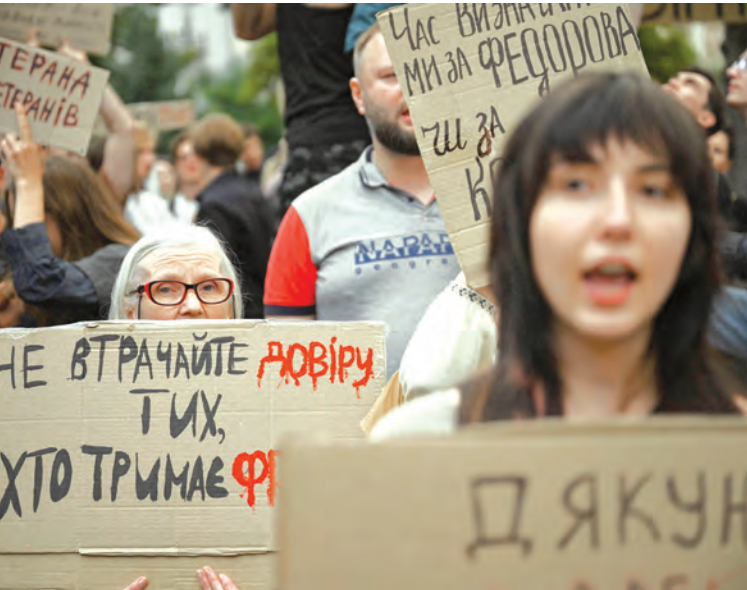
THE changing face of the battle for Ukraine has taken much of the world by surprise, both in terms of the horrific scale of casualties that Russia is enduring — nearly 40,000 last month, according to Ukrainian officials — and the dynamism and sheerchutzpah that has characterised Ukraine's war effort.

For the world's democracies, the most important lesson to draw from Ukraine's doggedness and brilliant innovations and improvisations may be that we should not be so surprised.

Our lack of confidence in Ukraine, particularly at the start of the war, and our overestimation of Russia's military might, is closely connected to our weakening faith in democracy as a system. This political alienation is not only wrong, but dangerous. The courage and determination of ordinary Ukrainians in the face of almost immeasurable challenges should give us more confidence in our core values and way of life.

Ukrainians recently demonstrated those values after four and a half years of war. When determined and constructive mass public protests erupted in the wake of Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov's sacking last week, President Volodymyr Zelensky responded no less constructively to the complaints by replacing the army commander-in-chief who had opposed Fedorov and his focus on high-tech warfare, underscoring the remarkable fact that Ukraine is determined to fight this war as a democracy.

There are several reasons why Ukraine has been able to stymie its much larger neighbour. For starters, Ukraine is not the fractured society Russian President Vladimir Putin proclaims it to be. Archbishop Borys Gudziak, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the United States and president of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, told me, shortly after the war started, that Zelensky is so effective because he is following the lead of the ordinary people of Ukraine. That much was clear in his response to the countrywide pro-Fedorov



Attendees hold placards and chant slogans during a demonstration to protest against Ukraine's President's decision to dismiss Ukraine's former Defence Minister, in Kyiv on Friday. — AFP



CHRYSTIA FREELAND

The writer is a former foreign minister, finance minister, and deputy prime minister of Canada, is Warden of Rhodes House at the University of Oxford

For the world's democracies, the most important lesson to draw from Ukraine's doggedness and brilliant innovations and improvisations may be that we should not be so surprised

demonstrations.

The fundamental importance of unity under fire should be familiar to the West. What we are seeing in Ukraine is a latter-day version of the united, democratic British national spirit we recall so proudly in commemorating the escape from Dunkirk, 86 years ago last month.

Ukraine's system of decentralised, grassroots military procurement is an example of democratic unity in action. Brigades buy their own weapons, directly from arms-makers. Sometimes, they make their own weapons. That means very close interaction between fighters and weapons makers, with innovation cycles sometimes as truncated as two weeks. The defence ministry rewards the most successful brigades with more money to buy weapons. Civilians can and do make direct contributions to their favourite units.

Armin Papperger, CEO of Rheinmetall, the giant German defence firm, commented on this very homegrown defence sector at the end of March: "It's Ukrainian housewives," he told an interviewer. "They have 3-D printers in the kitchen, and they produce parts for drones. This is not innovation."

Ukrainians could have been insulted, but they decided to see the comment as a back-handed compliment. A #MadeByHousewives

hashtag went viral on Ukrainian social media within 24 hours. My friend Oleksandr Kamyshin replied on X: "Rheinmetall says our #LEGODrones are #MadeByHousewives in their kitchens. Fine. Meanwhile our #LEGODrones already burned more than 11,000 Russian tanks." Unsurprisingly, Rheinmetall walked back the comment, posting: "We have the utmost respect for the Ukrainian people's immense efforts in defending themselves... It is to Ukraine's particular credit that it is fighting highly effectively even with limited resources."

At the same time, Ukraine has found that its diversity is its strength, something many Western democracies also should remember. In a political environment where inclusiveness is derided as virtue-signalling, if not positively dangerous, and where we are subjected to US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth's cartoonish cosplay of vitriolic white Christian masculinity in the Pentagon, Ukraine's lived reality of war — neither macho nor ethnically rooted — is a powerful corrective.

Women are central to Ukraine's war effort. Consider Iryna Terekh, the CEO of Fire Point, and possibly the very "housewife" who inspired Papperger's thoughtless comment. She makes the "flamingo" missiles that were used in the strike on Titan-Barrikady, the Volgograd producer of launch systems for ballistic missiles, last month.

Terekh is in her early thirties, a mother of two, and trained as an architect. She decided to become a missile maker after surviving the occupation and massacre of civilians in Bucha at the start of the war.

Ukrainian women are fighting, too, including in combat positions. Some 20 per cent of military cadets are women and an astounding 80 per cent of Ukrainians support women's inclusion in the military. Ukrainian women soldiers tell me they see fighting as feminine. Ukrainian mothers are especially convinced of this. After all, it is a mother's job to protect her children.

@Project Syndicate, 2026

SPORTS

Oman youth handball team ends Asian Championship in 10th place

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 25

OMAN'S YOUTH handball team concluded its campaign at the 19th Asian Men's Youth Handball Championship with a 45-24 defeat against Qatar in Saturday's ninth-place playoff, finishing the continental tournament in 10th place after two weeks of challenging competition in Zhuzhou, China.

Although the final score reflected Qatar's superiority, the championship provided invaluable international experience for the young Omani squad, which faced some of Asia's strongest teams in a tournament that also served as a qualification event for the 2027 IHF Men's Youth World Championship.

Qatar controlled the match from the opening minutes, taking advantage of its greater depth and experience to establish an early lead. Oman, however, continued to fight throughout the contest despite dealing with injuries and fatigue accumulated over a demanding tournament schedule.

The Qatari side built a commanding 26-9 halftime advantage, capitalising on quick transitions and clinical finishing, while Oman's attacking opportunities were limited by a well-organised defensive unit.

The Omani team showed greater determination after the break and produced a much-improved second-half performance. Captain Said al Hasani led the response with several goals, while Ghassan al Mashari continued his impressive offensive display, helping Oman score 15 goals in the second half compared to nine before the interval.

Despite the improvement, Qatar maintained control of the contest and



The players were disappointed with the result but proud of their commitment throughout the tournament.

CAPTAIN SAID AL HASANI



Oman continued to fight throughout the contest.

secured a comfortable 45-24 victory, claiming ninth place, while Oman finished the tournament in 10th.

Throughout the championship, Oman competed against Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong China, China, Bahrain, Chinese Taipei and Qatar, gaining valuable exposure against different playing styles and some of the continent's most established youth programmes. The experience is expected to play an important role in the development of the current generation of players.

HEAD COACH HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT

Oman head coach Kamel Hdidder acknowledged Qatar's superiority,

emphasising that the difference between the two teams extended well beyond the match itself.

"Qatar deserved the victory," Hdidder said after the game. "They have a much larger player pool and greater squad depth than we do. We came into this tournament without four important players because of injuries and suspension, which forced us to rely on a very limited rotation throughout the competition."

The Tunisian coach explained that fatigue had a significant impact on his team's performances, with six or seven players carrying the workload over five demanding matches.

"It is extremely difficult to compete at this level when the same players are

required to play almost every minute," he said. "The players gave everything they had, but physically it became impossible to maintain the same intensity."

He also stressed that the leading Asian nations benefit from well-established youth development systems, competitive domestic leagues and year-round training programmes.

"Countries such as Japan, South Korea, China, Bahrain and Qatar have been investing in youth development for many years. Their players compete regularly, attend training camps and gain continuous experience. Our preparation lasted only a short period before the championship."

He concluded by calling for greater investment in Oman's youth handball structure.

"If we want to compete with Asia's best in the future, the work must begin at the grassroots level. We need stronger youth competitions, more training camps and long-term development programmes. That is the only way to close the gap."

PLAYERS REMAIN OPTIMISTIC

Captain Said al Hasani said the players were disappointed with the result but proud of their commitment throughout the tournament.

"We wanted to finish with a victory, but we faced a very strong opponent. We never stopped fighting, especially in the second half. This experience will help us improve and come back stronger in future competitions."

Ghassan al Mashari, one of Oman's standout performers, described the championship as an important learning experience.

"Playing against the best teams in Asia teaches you lessons that cannot be learned anywhere else. We gained valuable experience and will continue working hard to improve."

Oman Club, Lamsa Team host financial management course for sports institutions

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 25

Oman Club, in cooperation with Lamsa Team, recently concluded a specialised training course on financial management for sports institutions at the club's headquarters in Al Khuwair.

The programme attracted 37 male and female participants, including professionals working in sports clubs, teams and youth institutions, as well as individuals interested in sports administration.

The course was organised as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen administrative and financial capabilities within the sports sector. It received positive feedback from participants, who praised its practical content and relevance to the financial challenges facing sports organisations.

The programme was delivered by Hassan Faraj Ibrahim, Financial Officer at Oman Club, who introduced participants to contemporary financial management concepts and practical approaches. Particular emphasis was placed on real-world applications that can help sports institutions achieve financial sustainability and improve administrative efficiency.

The training covered several key topics, including the concept,



The programme was delivered by Hassan Faraj Ibrahim, Financial Officer at Oman Club.

objectives and responsibilities of financial management in sports institutions, as well as the preparation and analysis of financial statements. Participants also took part in practical exercises focused on preparing and evaluating financial reports.

Interactive workshops, open discussions and practical activities formed an important part of the programme, enabling participants to transform theoretical knowledge into applicable skills that can be used within sports clubs, institutions and associations.

Participants said the course provided them with valuable practical knowledge in budget

preparation, financial performance analysis and sound financial decision-making. They also commended the clarity of the presentations and the trainer's ability to connect financial concepts with realistic situations encountered in the sports sector.

At the conclusion of the course, participants were presented with certificates, training kits and reference guides designed to support them in applying the knowledge and skills acquired during the programme in their respective workplaces.

The participants also praised the cooperation between Oman Club and Lamsa Team, noting that such initiatives demonstrate the commitment of both organisations to delivering high-quality training programmes that contribute to the development of national competencies and promote greater professionalism in sports administration.

The organisers stressed the importance of continuing to offer specialised programmes of this nature, as effective financial management and governance are essential to building more efficient and sustainable sports institutions capable of keeping pace with the latest developments in administration and financial governance.



وزارة الثقافة والرياضة والشباب
Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects:-

No.	Tender	Project Category	Last Day to Purchase Tender Documents	Last Date of Tender Submission
1	CONSTRUCTION OF SPORT HALL AT IBRI SPORTS COMPLEX	Construction and Maintenance	08/08/2026	07/09/2026
2	RENNOVATION / MAINTENANCE WORKS IN SPORTS HALL AT QURAYAT SPORTS CLUB	Construction and Maintenance	04/08/2026	01/09/2026
3	RENNOVATION / MAINTENANCE WORKS IN MOHOT SPORTS HALL	Construction and Maintenance	04/08/2026	01/09/2026

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the Observer classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.



The Salalah International Cycling Tour 2025 consists of four stages

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 25

WITH its cool monsoon climate, lush green mountains and breathtaking coastline, Dhofar Governorate has long been regarded as one of Oman's premier tourism destinations during the annual Khareef season. Increasingly, however, former Omani football stars believe the governorate has the potential to establish itself as a leading regional destination for international sports training camps - provided significant investments are made in sporting infrastructure and support services.

As Gulf clubs continue to spend substantial budgets on pre-season camps in Europe every summer, former national team players and coaches believe Dhofar possesses many of the natural advantages needed to compete for that market. They argue that with upgraded facilities, modern accommodation tailored for elite athletes and a comprehensive marketing strategy, Salalah could attract clubs and national teams from across the Gulf, Asia and even Europe.

Speaking to *Observer*, several former Oman internationals and experienced coaches highlighted both the strengths that make Dhofar unique and the improvements required to transform the governorate into an internationally recognised sporting destination. Among the strongest assets repeatedly highlighted was the region's exceptional climate. While temperatures soar across much of the Gulf during July and August, Salalah enjoys mild weather, mist-covered mountains and pleasant conditions that are ideal for outdoor training.

MAJOR DESTINATION
Former Oman national team coach Younis Aman, one of Dhofar's most respected football figures, believes the governorate has already demonstrated its potential in the past. "I have always believed that Salalah possesses everything needed to become a major destination for football training camps," he said.
During his years working within the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Aman was closely involved in efforts to attract regional clubs to the governorate. "Over the years, we welcomed several clubs from the Gulf, including Al Ain and Al Sharjah from the UAE. I had the opportunity to follow their preparations closely and witness how much they appreciated the environment and weather."
He also recalled efforts to bring more prestigious clubs to Oman.



(Left jersey) Al Nahda club, and the red jersey is the Oman national team



"We extended invitations to clubs such as Al Hilal, and I was part of the organising committee of the Salalah International Friendly Tournament, which was launched in 1999. Those experiences proved that Dhofar is capable of hosting quality football events."
According to Aman, Salalah has also welcomed European teams in previous years. "There were Austrian clubs that chose Salalah for their preparations, while many Gulf youth teams and national sides have also held camps and participated in tournaments here."

DHOFAR EYES GULF TRAINING CAMPS



HAMDI HOOBES

National coach



FAWZI BASHEER

Former Oman international footballer



YOUNIS AMAN

Former Oman national team coach

professional standards expected by football clubs. We also require additional football pitches, modern training facilities and continuous development of the sporting infrastructure. Media coverage is equally important because international exposure plays a major role in attracting clubs."

PRACTICAL PROGRESS
Former Oman international footballer Fawzi Basheer echoed those views, saying discussions about sports tourism in Dhofar have continued for years without sufficient practical progress. "Every year we talk about the same subject, but unfortunately the available opportunities have not yet been fully utilised," Basheer said.
He believes the governorate's climate alone should make it one of the region's leading destinations. "The weather is one of the biggest attractions for any football team planning a summer training camp. However, climate alone is not enough."

According to Basheer, elite clubs now expect a complete high-performance environment. "Professional teams require fully equipped gyms, recovery facilities such as saunas and jacuzzis, quality hotels and training grounds prepared to international standards."

He noted that some existing facilities still require significant improvement. "Several stadiums and sports venues in Salalah lack important supporting facilities. In some cases, the quality of the natural grass pitches is not at the required level, which naturally raises concerns about player injuries."
For Basheer, investment in sporting infrastructure should now become a strategic priority. "We need greater investment in football facilities and high-quality pitches because they represent the foundation of any successful sports tourism project."

INTEGRATED SPORTS ECOSYSTEM
Former Oman national team player Hamdi Hobees believes Dhofar's future lies in creating an integrated sports ecosystem rather than focusing solely on stadium construction. "Dhofar possesses outstanding natural assets, but it still lacks a comprehensive sports ecosystem that combines infrastructure, medical services, technical support, organisation and international marketing," he explained.
"Once these elements are brought together, Dhofar will be capable of competing with some of the world's most recognised training camp destinations."

Hobees emphasised that infrastructure remains the first consideration for visiting clubs. "Professional teams always begin by evaluating the available facilities. We need Fifa-standard training grounds, modern indoor sports halls and a specialised sports medicine centre capable of supporting elite athletes."
He added that access to quality opposition is equally important. "Clubs also need opportunities to play friendly matches against strong opponents during their camps. That means building an annual calendar that attracts several clubs simultaneously."

One of Hobees' key proposals is the creation of a permanent international football festival linked to the Khareef season. "We should establish an annual football tournament during the Khareef season where clubs can register every year. This would gradually become part of the regional football calendar."
He also believes such an event could extend beyond competitive matches. "Alongside the tournament, we could organise coaching and refereeing courses, sports conferences and even women's football competitions. That would create a complete sporting festival rather than simply hosting isolated training camps," he said.



LeBron James celebrates after breaking.

LEBRON JAMES PICKS 76ERS FOR NEXT CHAPTER

SUPERSTAR LEBRON JAMES is heading to the City of Brotherly Love. James, 41, is signing a two-year, \$8 million deal with a player option, Klutch Sports CEO Rich Paul said on Friday. The 76ers will be the fourth team for James, who spent the past eight seasons with the Los Angeles Lakers, highlighted by helping the franchise win the 2020 NBA title. A four-time NBA Most Valuable Player and the league's all-time leading scorer, James completed his record-setting 23rd NBA season in 2025-26. He addressed his reasoning to return to the court on Friday in a series of posts on X. "I thought I was done when the season ended. I wasn't ready to announce it, and I knew I needed some time to really decide, but I was pretty sure I played my last game," James wrote. "I was honest at that last press conference when I said I needed to look at myself and decide if I still love (playing)." The 76ers certainly hope so as they seek to halt a 43-year championship drought. Their last title came in 1983 when they swept the Lakers in the best-of-seven series and their leading scorer was Moses Malone. Per ESPN, 76ers president of basketball operations Mike Gansey stayed in constant communication with Paul behind the scenes. The network also noted that Philadelphia players Tyrese Maxey, who is a fellow Klutch client, Joel Embiid and the newly acquired Jaylen Brown



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (23) after the game against the Indiana Pacers. — *Imagn Images*

also worked on getting James aboard with the 76ers. "This is my last decision. I'm not going for money. I'm not going for family. What am I really playing for at this point?" "I still want to sacrifice. I still want to work. I still want to grind. I still want to compete, to win and to have a chance at the feeling of winning another championship. "I believe I can help make the Philadelphia 76ers a championship team and I am so excited to energise a new fan base and start this incredible journey one last time." The 76ers posted a 45-37 record last season and advanced to the second round of the Eastern Conference playoffs before getting swept by the eventual NBA champion New York Knicks. The acquisition of Brown vaulted the 76ers into the 2027 NBA title conversation in the eyes of oddsmakers, and the addition of James has pushed them towards

the front of the pack. Shortly after the announcement of James' intention to sign with Philadelphia, the 76ers moved from +2000 to +900 at DraftKings to win the NBA championship next season. They also shifted from +750 to +370 to win the Eastern Conference and from +450 to +220 to win the Atlantic Division. While James warmed up to the 76ers, that meant he left other suitors like the Golden State Warriors, Cleveland Cavaliers, Minnesota Timberwolves and Miami Heat out in the cold. The time he needed to make his decision also affected other aspects of the NBA offseason, including next season's schedule as well as key players' respective destinations. "We have to finish up the schedule, and where LeBron plays affects the schedule," commissioner Adam Silver said last week at a CNBC event. "It will influence how we set the schedule opening week, Christmas. So I need him to make a decision." James averaged 20.9 points, 7.2 assists and 6.1 rebounds this past season with the Lakers. The 22-time All-Star and four-time NBA champion is the all-time leader in games (1,622) and points (43,440). A native of Akron, Ohio, James was the No 1 pick of his hometown team, the Cavaliers, in 2003. He played for the Cavs (2003-10, 2014-18) and the Heat (2010-14) before joining the Lakers. — *Reuters*

The Kia Tasman

Explore Khareef with Kia's pick-up



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BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



Narrow money, which includes currency in circulation and readily accessible deposits, rose by 26.9 per cent from a year earlier.

OMAN MONEY SUPPLY GROWS 12.7 PER CENT

MUSCAT: Broad money supply in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 12.7 per cent year-on-year to RO 28.60 billion at the end of May 2026, driven by strong growth in cash and demand deposits, Central Bank of Oman data showed.

Narrow money, which includes currency in circulation and readily accessible deposits, rose by 26.9 per cent from a year earlier.

Quasi-money increased by 7.1 per cent. It comprises savings and time deposits denominated in Omani rials, certificates of deposit issued by banks, margin accounts and foreign-currency deposits held within the banking system.

Currency in circulation increased by 12.1 per cent, while demand deposits climbed by 29.8 per cent, reflecting higher levels of immediately available liquidity in the economy.

The expansion in money supply came as borrowing and deposit rates at conventional commercial banks declined.

The weighted average interest rate on Omani rial deposits fell to 2.366 per cent in May 2026 from 2.708 per cent in the same month last year.

The weighted average rate charged on Omani rial loans declined to 5.327 per cent from 5.551 per cent over the same period.

Interbank funding costs also eased. The average overnight interbank lending rate fell to 3.375 per cent in May, compared with 4.394 per cent a year earlier.

The weighted average rate on repurchase agreements declined to 4.250 per cent from 5.000 per cent, reflecting changes in monetary conditions and interest-rate moves by the US Federal Reserve.

Oman's rial is pegged to the US dollar, meaning domestic monetary policy broadly follows changes in US interest rates to maintain the currency arrangement.

The decline in lending rates could support credit demand among businesses and households, while lower deposit rates reduce the returns available to savers on rial-denominated accounts. — ONA

OIA expands global innovation investments

OMAN Investment Authority (OIA) is expanding its exposure to advanced technology and life sciences through investments linked to the innovation ecosystems of Cambridge and Oxford universities, as it seeks financial returns and opportunities to transfer expertise to Oman.

OIA said its investments in Cambridge Innovation Capital and Oxford Science Enterprises provided access to portfolios of technology businesses working in fields including life sciences, medical devices, semiconductors and quantum computing.

The investments form part of OIA's strategy to diversify its international portfolio while building links with companies developing technologies that could support Oman's transition towards a knowledge-based economy.

Cambridge Innovation Capital focuses on converting research and intellectual property developed within the Cambridge ecosystem into commercially viable businesses.

Companies within its portfolio include CMR Surgical, which develops robotic systems designed to improve the precision of minimally invasive surgery.

The portfolio also includes Pragmatic Semiconductor, a developer and manufacturer of low-cost flexible electronic chips used in Internet of Things applications.

Other investments include companies developing antibody therapies and Riverlane, which produces error-correction technologies and software for quantum computers.

OIA's investment through Oxford Science Enterprises provides exposure to businesses established around research originating at the University of



OIA said its investments in Cambridge Innovation Capital and Oxford Science Enterprises provided access to portfolios of technology businesses.

The investments form part of OIA's strategy to diversify its international portfolio while building links with companies developing technologies that could support Oman's transition towards a knowledge-based economy. it.

Oxford. Its portfolio includes Quantum Motion, which is developing scalable quantum-computing processors, and Oxford Quantum Circuits, which develops quantum computers and related technologies.

The Oxford portfolio also includes businesses working on biomolecular measurement, drug and gene-therapy development and portable medical diagnostic devices.

Ibrahim bin Said al Isri, Head of Private Markets Investments at OIA, said advanced technologies had become important drivers of economic, scientific and social development.

The investments allow OIA to follow developments in healthcare, scientific innovation and quantum computing while examining potential opportunities to transfer knowledge and technology to the Sultanate of Oman, he said.

They could also support partnerships between Omani institutions and international technology companies and research platforms.

Al Isri said the investments were intended to support Oman's technology —sector objectives while generating sustainable financial returns from industries with strong long-term growth prospects.

The investments are held through OIA's Generations Portfolio, which manages overseas assets across more than 50 countries.

The portfolio invests in a range of international markets and asset classes to generate long-term returns and spread investment risk for future generations.

OIA has also invested in local technology funds, start-ups and innovation programmes as part of efforts to develop Oman's domestic technology ecosystem and attract specialised knowledge and emerging technologies. — ONA

PDO to supply up to 200 MW to Oman grid under five-year power deal

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 25

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has signed a five-year Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP) to supply up to 200 megawatts (MW) of generation capacity to Oman's national electricity grid.

The agreement enables Nama PWP to access dispatchable generation capacity from PDO's extensive captive power network, helping to meet rising electricity demand, improve system reliability during peak periods and reduce the need for investment in additional peaking generation.

“The agreement reflects PDO's commitment to maximising the value of its power generation assets in support of the Sultanate of Oman's growing energy needs and long-term energy security,” the majority Omani state-owned oil and gas producer said in a statement.

PDO operates one of Oman's largest private electricity systems, developed primarily to serve its upstream oil and gas operations



PDO's Managing Director Dr Aflah al Hadhrami and Nama PWP's CEO Ahmed al Abri at the agreement signing recently.

across Block 6.

The integrated network comprises 17 gas-fired power plants with a combined installed capacity of around 1,708 MW, supported by a 132-kV transmission network extending

approximately 4,300 km across its concession area, as of 2022.

The system was designed with reserve margins to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply for critical oil production, enhanced oil recovery (EOR),

water treatment and associated industrial facilities.

The PPA effectively monetises part of this available generation capacity by allowing surplus dispatchable power to be supplied to the national grid when available.

The agreement has been made possible by the 400-kV North-South Interconnector linking PDO's transmission network with Oman's Main Interconnected System (MIS). The interconnection was specifically developed to facilitate power exchange, reserve sharing and more efficient utilisation of generation assets across both networks.

According to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the interconnection comprises three 400/132-kV injection points at Nahadah, Barik and Suwaihat, each capable of importing or exporting up to 500 MW.

Nahadah entered service in 2022, while Barik and Suwaihat were commissioned in late 2023. OETC says the interconnection enhances the security of supply for both networks while delivering additional benefits including capacity sharing, energy trading and lower spinning reserve requirements.

A separate 132-kV interconnection between PDO's Harweel substation and OETC's Dhofar I Wind Farm also allows limited emergency power transfers between the PDO and Dhofar transmission systems.

PDO's power generation capacity is also expected to receive a significant renewable energy boost by the end of 2026. The company is preparing to commission three utility-scale renewable energy projects being developed by OQ Alternative Energy (OQAE) and TotalEnergies.

These include the 100-MW North Oman Solar project at Saih Nahaydah and the 100-MW Riyah-1 and 100-MW Riyah-2 wind farms at Amin and West Nimr, respectively.

Together, the projects will contribute more than 330 MW of renewable capacity to PDO's captive electricity network, reducing dependence on gas-fired generation and supporting the company's target of sourcing around 30 per cent of its electricity capacity from renewable energy.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



Dhofar Islamic operates 31 dedicated branches across all governorates of Oman.

DHOFAR ISLAMIC CROWNED OMAN’S BEST ISLAMIC RETAIL BANK FOR 2026

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic has been named Oman’s Best Islamic Retail Bank at the MENA Banking Excellence Awards 2026 – Retail, Digital & SME Banking, in recognition of its leadership in customer-centric Islamic banking, digital innovation and product excellence.

The prestigious award, organised by Middle East Economic Digest (MEED) in collaboration with GlobalData, honours leading financial institutions from across 11 countries in the Middle East and North Africa that are setting new benchmarks in retail, digital and SME banking.

According to the organisers, the overall standard of entries was exceptionally high, with Dhofar Islamic distinguished by the quality, relevance and measurable impact of its initiatives in advancing banking excellence across the region.

The inaugural awards programme celebrates financial institutions that are redefining retail banking through digital transformation, personalised customer experiences, financial inclusion and innovative banking solutions.

Winners were selected through an independent judging process involving senior banking executives and industry specialists, with strategic vision, innovation and commitment to customer excellence among the key evaluation criteria.

The latest recognition reinforces Dhofar Islamic’s position as the leading Islamic banking institution in the Sultanate of Oman.

Since commencing operations following the introduction of Islamic banking in the country in 2012, the bank has built one of Oman’s largest Sharia-compliant banking franchises, offering a comprehensive portfolio of retail, corporate, SME and wealth management solutions.

Its continued success has been driven by a broad range of Sharia-compliant products and services covering personal finance, home finance, vehicle finance, business banking and investment solutions.

At the same time, Dhofar Islamic has made substantial investments in digital banking, enabling customers to access secure and convenient banking services through advanced mobile and online platforms while maintaining one of the country’s most extensive Islamic banking branch networks.

DENZA B5: Power meets intelligent performance

RESHAPING the Sultanate of Oman’s luxury automotive sector, the flagship DENZA B5 has firmly established its presence as the ultimate expression of sophisticated engineering and rugged capability.

Born from a heritage where technology shapes elegance, this premium off-road SUV breaks traditional boundaries. Purpose-built to handle both the vibrant city layout of Muscat and the challenging geographic terrains across the country, the B5 delivers an imposing stance on the road, proving that true adventure can coexist seamlessly with elite comfort.

The technical foundation of the DENZA B5 centres on its revolutionary Dual Mode Off-road (DMO) pioneering platform. This hybrid body-on-frame architecture fuses relentless mechanical strength with exceptional energy efficiency.

Generating a massive 760 Nm of torque and a combined output of 570 horsepower, the vehicle effortlessly rockets from 0 to 100 km/h in a mere 4.8 seconds. Backed by three intelligent electronic differential locks and an advanced four-wheel-drive system, it guarantees absolute traction whether conquering soft desert dunes or cruising on open highways.

Unequaled ride composure across Oman’s diverse landscapes is achieved through the vehicle’s state-of-the-art chassis engineering. The B5 comes equipped with the advanced DiSUS-P intelligent active hydraulic suspension, which monitors driving surfaces in real time to independently adjust individual wheel height and damping



The technical foundation of the DENZA B5 centers on its revolutionary Dual Mode Off-road (DMO) pioneering platform.

stiffness within milliseconds.

Further strengthening its core is the innovative Cell-to-Chassis (CTC) technology, integrating high-density Blade cells directly into a rigid steel structure to enhance underbody protection and optimise handling stability on winding mountain tracks.

While the exterior projects raw power through its distinctive mesh-style front grille and muscular, flared arches, the cabin is crafted as an oasis of absolute calm.

The premium interior highlights fine leather upholstery, a signature electric lift-up gear selector and an expansive panoramic sunroof with an electric sunshade.

Front occupants enjoy a first-class lounge experience featuring multi-mode massage,

heating, and ventilation functions.

Engineered perfectly for long-distance travel under the regional sun, a built-in comfort console in the centre armrest serves as both a fridge and hotbox to keep refreshments flawlessly stored at the desired temperature.

Occupant safety remains paramount in this high-tech sanctuary, which features a robust steel body structure capable of withstanding up to 12 tons of pressure.

This protective envelope is reinforced by a class-leading system of 11 airbags and an advanced L2+ driving assistance network. A grid of smart sensors and cameras provides a complete 360-degree view — making tight urban navigation completely stress-free.

Industrial profits jump 47% to 175.30 million

MUSCAT: Net-profits of industrial companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange surged 46.8 per cent in the first half of 2026, supported by stronger earnings from fertiliser, petrochemical, food and cement producers.

Preliminary financial results showed the sector’s combined net-profit rising to about RO 175.30 million from RO 119.40 million in the same period last year.

The performance reflected higher demand for locally manufactured products, increased exports, lower financing costs and efforts by companies to improve operating efficiency and product quality.

Oman India Fertiliser recorded



Preliminary financial results showed the sector’s combined net profit rising to about RO 175.30 million.

the largest profit among the industrial companies, with net-earnings rising to RO 80.20 million from RO 54.10 million a year earlier.

OQ Base Industries’ net-profit climbed to RO 43.30 million from RO 23.40 million, making it

another major contributor to the sector’s overall earnings growth.

Oman Cables Industry reported a marginal increase in net-profit to RO 11.40 million from RO 11.30 million, while Voltamp Energy’s earnings rose to more than RO 7.00 million from RO 6.80 million.

Oman Flour Mills posted a sharper increase, with net-profit reaching about RO 6.90 million, compared with RO 4.30 million in the first half of 2025.

Cement producers also benefited from stronger demand linked to construction and real estate activity.

Oman Cement’s net-profit rose to approximately RO 6.90 million from RO 4.70 million.

Raysut Cement returned to

profitability, reporting earnings of RO 2.70 million compared with a loss of RO 2.50 million a year earlier.

Galfar Engineering and Contracting recorded one of the strongest percentage increases, with net-profit jumping to RO 2.50 million from RO 71,000.

Dhofar Food and Investment’s profit rose to about RO 2.20 million from RO 332,000, while Gulf Mushroom Products increased its net-earnings to more than RO 1.60 million from RO 1.10 million.

Raysut Cement and Building Materials Industries were among the companies that moved from losses to profits during the six-month period.

— ONA

Bank Muscat connects Muscat and Salalah for khareef

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing commitment to supporting national initiatives and strengthening the Sultanate of Oman’s position on the regional and global tourism map, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has inaugurated the activities of Khareef Dhofar Season from Bank Muscat which will run from July 22 to August 17, 2026.

The initiative reflects the bank’s steadfast commitment to supporting the tourism sector and promoting the unique natural and cultural attractions of the Dhofar Governorate, further reinforcing its standing as one of the region’s and the world’s tourism destinations.

With this year’s activities, Bank Muscat introduces a first-of-its-kind interactive experience, with dedicated booths at Oman Mall in Muscat Governorate and Uptown Salalah in Dhofar Governorate. Equipped with live, interconnected



The initiative reflects the bank’s steadfast commitment to supporting the tourism sector.

interactive screens named “Khareef Portals”, the two venues will enable visitors at each location to watch activities and events taking place at the other in real time.

The innovative concept is designed to bring the Khareef Dhofar Season experience closer to audiences across the Sultanate of Oman, while demonstrating how

modern technology can enrich visitor engagement and strengthen connections between Oman’s governorates.

Visitors to the Bank Muscat booth at Oman Mall will be able to experience the vibrant atmosphere, activities and events taking place at the Bank’s booth in Salalah Ateen, while visitors in Salalah will enjoy the live activities in Muscat.

This interactive bridge between the two cities offers visitors an immersive, real-time experience that brings the unique ambience of the Khareef Dhofar Season to communities across the Sultanate of Oman. It also reinforces Oman’s image as a modern tourism destination that leverages innovation and technology to deliver exceptional visitor experiences.

Both booths will feature a diverse programme of activities, including entertainment competitions, interactive experiences and

family-friendly attractions suitable for all age groups, ensuring an engaging and enjoyable visit while introducing visitors to the outstanding tourism assets that distinguish Dhofar Governorate.

In addition to the interactive activities, Bank Muscat’s sales team will be present at the two venues to introduce visitors and customers to the Bank’s latest banking solutions, products and exclusive offers and address their enquiries.

These include special offers as part of the Bank’s loyalty programme, Bank Muscat Rewards, when customers use Bank Muscat credit cards at restaurants and cafes with a Bank Muscat POS machine across Dhofar Governorate.

Valid until August 31, the Food & Beverage (F&B) offer allows customer to earn upto 2x reward points, encouraging customers to make the most of their credit cards during the Khareef Dhofar Season.

SHORTTAKES



Local purchases increased from about RO 125.00 million in the previous week and accounted for 84.7 per cent of total market turnover.

LOCAL INVESTORS
LIFT MSX TURNOVER

MUSCAT: Purchases by Omani investors rose above RO 154.00 million on the Muscat Stock Exchange last week as buyers took advantage of falling share prices and stronger first-half corporate earnings.

Local purchases increased from about RO 125.00 million in the previous week and accounted for 84.7 per cent of total market turnover.

The value of shares traded rose by 33 per cent to approximately RO 182.70 million from RO 137.00 million a week earlier. Local investors accounted for 74.7 per cent of total sales.

Despite the rise in buying by Omani individuals, funds and investment institutions, selling pressure continued across much of the market.

Prices of 65 securities declined during the week, while 13 advanced and 22 closed unchanged.

The MSX main index fell by 363 points to end Thursday at 7,117 points, extending a 163-point decline in the previous week.

The financial sector index recorded the largest decline, losing 412 points. The industrial index fell by 275 points and the services index dropped by 155 points. The Sharia index declined by 23 points to close at 572.

Market capitalisation fell by RO 877.90 million during the week to RO 37.17 billion, reflecting the decline in share prices.

Bank Muscat was the most actively traded stock by value, with turnover of RO 40.20 million, equivalent to 22 per cent of total market trading.

Its shares fell as low as 369 baisa before recovering to close at 383 baisa, down nine baisa over the week. The stock had traded above 500 baisa at its highest level earlier in the year.

Sohar International attracted turnover of RO 27.90 million, or 15.2 per cent of the market total, as the bank launched a rights issue of about 1.06 billion shares at 141 baisa each. — ONA

Oman reinforces
property market rules

THE Sultanate of Oman is strengthening regulation of its real estate development industry as property transactions and foreign investment increase, with authorities urging buyers to verify that projects are fully licensed before committing funds.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) said its regulatory framework was designed to increase transparency, protect buyers and investors and create a more competitive and sustainable property market.

The Real Estate Regulation Law brings activities including property development, off-plan sales, brokerage, valuation, joint-property management and escrow accounts under a unified legislative framework.

Nasser bin Khamis al Siyabi, Director-General of Real Estate Development, said confidence in the market depended on developers complying with licensing, registration and financial requirements.

“Building a strong real estate sector begins with building trust,” Al Siyabi said. He said compliance was not merely an administrative requirement but a safeguard for developers, investors and buyers.

Developers must complete licensing and registration procedures before announcing, promoting or selling a project, ensuring that it meets the required legal, technical and financial standards.

The licensing process has three main stages. A company must first secure a real estate development licence, giving it the legal



The Real Estate Regulation Law brings activities including property development, off-plan sales, brokerage, valuation, joint-property management and escrow accounts under a unified legislative framework.

authority to conduct development activities in the Sultanate of Oman.

It must then obtain a separate licence for the proposed project. This stage includes opening an escrow account with a local bank before off-plan units can be sold.

The developer must subsequently obtain an advertising, promotion and marketing permit before publicising the project through media outlets, online platforms or property exhibitions.

Al Siyabi said following the three stages increased project readiness and credibility while protecting the rights of all parties.

The ministry’s Real Estate Development Services Centre is

working with other government agencies to standardise and accelerate the procedures, reducing the time and administrative burden faced by developers while maintaining regulatory checks.

The law provides for legal action against companies that conduct development activities, implement projects or advertise properties without the necessary licences. Breaches of escrow-account regulations can also result in penalties.

Al Siyabi urged prospective buyers and investors to confirm that both the developer and the project were registered and licensed by the ministry before making payments or signing purchase agreements.

The regulatory push comes as

property activity continues to expand.

The value of real estate transactions in Oman rose by 5.4 per cent to RO 1.43 billion in the first half of 2026, compared with RO 1.36 billion in the same period last year.

Foreign real estate investment transactions exceeded RO 60.00 million, while transactions involving investors from Gulf Cooperation Council countries surpassed RO 13.00 million.

More than 190 real estate companies were registered with the ministry by the end of June. Real estate activities contributed about RO 1.08 billion to Oman’s gross domestic product in 2025, according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information. — ONA

Invest Oman attracts 460.74 million projects

MUSCAT: Invest Oman attracted eight projects worth a combined RO 460.74 million in the first half of 2026, as the Sultanate of Oman stepped up efforts to draw foreign capital into manufacturing, logistics, energy, food and healthcare.

The investment promotion platform also developed and marketed 22 investment opportunities and approached 150 international companies during the six-month period, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) said.

The projects came as Oman’s stock of foreign direct investment rose by 8.7 per cent year-on-year to RO 32.20 billion at the end of the first quarter of 2026, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

New foreign investment inflows reached RO 2.50 billion during the period.

Invest Oman acts as a central gateway for investors seeking opportunities in the Sultanate, linking businesses with government agencies and helping them complete licensing and other procedures.



The investment promotion platform also developed and marketed 22 investment opportunities and approached 150 international companies during the six-month period.

Eng Nasser bin Khalifa al Kindi, Chief Executive Officer of Invest Oman, said the first-half results reflected increased coordination between the platform, government bodies and strategic partners.

The coordination was helping authorities respond more quickly to investor requirements and strengthen Oman’s competitiveness as a regional business and investment centre, he said.

From the launch of Invest Oman in 2023 to the end of June 2026, the ministry facilitated 45 investment projects with a combined value of RO 4.00 billion.

These included 37 newly localised projects and seven existing ventures that received support to overcome operational or administrative challenges and continue their investments. The platform also helped promote one strategic project.

Al Kindi said Invest Oman’s role had expanded beyond identifying and advertising opportunities to supporting investors throughout the project cycle.

Its work includes introducing investors to potential projects, coordinating with relevant authorities, addressing challenges and helping companies move towards implementation.

Promotional efforts are focused on industries considered central to Oman’s economic diversification programme, including manufacturing, food security, logistics, healthcare and energy.

The ministry is seeking investments that increase domestic value addition, strengthen supply chains, expand local content and bring advanced technologies and technical expertise into the country.

Oman has introduced a series of economic and regulatory reforms under Oman Vision 2040 to attract private investment, expand non-oil industries and reduce the economy’s dependence on hydrocarbon revenue.

Authorities are also marketing industrial estates, free zones, special economic zones and sector-specific opportunities to international companies seeking access to Gulf, Asian and African markets. — ONA

ENERGY MARKETS

Asian LNG prices hit four-month high



Spot liquefied natural gas prices in Asia rose for a fifth consecutive week to their highest level in four months as US-Iran tensions disrupted shipping.

Prices for September deliveries to Northeast Asia climbed to \$22 per million British thermal units from \$20.10 a week earlier. Analysts warned a prolonged crisis could sharply reduce Qatari exports and keep global LNG prices elevated through 2026. — Reuters

GLOBAL ECONOMY

JPMorgan warns of inflation risks



JPMorgan Chase warned that a potential “super” El Niño combined with higher oil prices could slow the decline in global inflation next year.

The bank said severe weather and energy costs could lift global food inflation by as much as 1.5 percentage points, delaying the expected easing in headline inflation and placing the greatest pressure on emerging market economies. — Reuters

TRADE DISPUTE

Trump orders EU trade probe



US President Donald Trump said the United States would launch a Section 301 investigation into the European Union after regulators fined Google €890 million for breaching digital competition rules.

Trump described the penalty as illegal and accused the bloc of unfairly targeting American companies, warning the EU would face significant economic consequences. — Reuters

OPINION

Why Oman needs a national local content certification system



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert.

A LOCAL content certificate serves a greater extent than a compliance document. It serves as unbiased confirmation of a company’s local investment in the Omani economy. This includes the local sourcing of goods and services, the employment of Omani nationals, the development of Omani suppliers, the investment in Omani national capacities, the employment of technology transfer and the support of Omani SMEs. It illustrates a company’s commitment of doing business and adding positive incremental impact in Oman. Major investments should create positive local content impact in addition to financial returns. This is of particular concern for large and complex infrastructure, industrial and strategic investments. Credible and established certification provides a means of gauging positive local content impact. Local content certification gives a company a sustainable and long-lasting competitive advantage. In an era when high social and economic returns are demanded, being a certified provider means a higher likelihood of being awarded tenders or partnerships. Certification demonstrates responsible business, good governance, and alignment to a nation’s development needs, which in turn improves business standing and provides assurance to stakeholders. Certification also motivates organisations to enhance management systems. To achieve certification, organisations must put in place systems to capture and validate data

for procurement, workforce development, suppliers, and local investments. As a result, this improves governance and aids organisations in discovering ways to enhance their local economic impact. Instead of viewing local content as a regulatory hurdle, organisations will start considering local content in their organisational strategies and goals. The success of a certification model relies on its trustworthiness. Certification standards must be clear, quantifiable and applicable to all sectors. Independent confirmation must be used to ensure that reported numbers reflect actual economic contributions and are not estimated or arbitrary. Verification should include a review of documents, validation of suppliers, workforce records, procurement assessments and scheduled reviews. This level of rigor protects the certification model and builds trust among participants. The ongoing digital transformation offers Oman an ideal opportunity to advance the local content certification model. A national digital system could automate submissions and calculations, manage compliance and develop real-time dashboards for government decision-makers. Organisations would have a simplified reporting system and government organisations would be able to assess gaps in capabilities and measure the wider economic effects of local content across all fields. This would lead to an improvement in the efficacy of policies and allow for greater data-

The success of a certification model relies on its trustworthiness. Certification standards must be clear, quantifiable, and applicable to all sectors. Independent confirmation must be used to ensure that reported numbers reflect actual economic contributions and are not estimated or arbitrary.

based frameworks in governance. International studies show that with clear governance and methodologies, certification and verification systems yield positive results for local content. Some nations have successfully embedded certification into public procurement and investment and industrial policies, with resultant positive impacts on local industries and local businesses. Considering its economic priorities and its institutional setting, Oman has the opportunity to develop a system that is aligned with the international best standards. The introduction of a national local content certificate would create positive competition among companies. Beyond meeting the basic compliance, companies would have the incentive to expand their activities and to integrate even more into the local economy. This would advance the positive competition, facilitate innovation, and strengthen the local supply chain, foster more opportunities for Omani SMEs and increase the investments in the upskilling of the workforce. The goal of local content is neither to limit the international players, nor to twist their arm to purchase local. Rather, it aims to ensure that the economic growth results in value for the nation. Each and every project, contract, and investment should strengthen local firms and build the local economy. The issuance of a national local content certificate would provide the means to acknowledge and reward those who realise this purpose.

CRITICAL MINERALS:
OMAN’S PLACE IN
THE GLOBAL ENERGY
TRANSITION

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The global race towards clean energy is often told through the rise of solar farms, wind turbines and electric vehicles. Less visible, but equally important, is the growing demand for the minerals that make these technologies possible. Known as critical minerals, these resources are becoming the foundation of the energy transition. Lithium powers batteries, copper carries electricity, nickel and cobalt improve battery performance, while rare earth elements are essential for the powerful magnets found in wind turbines and electric vehicle motors. As governments and industries seek to reduce carbon emissions, demand for these materials is expected to grow significantly over the coming decades. For Oman, the question is no longer confined to renewable energy generation. It is whether Oman can become an important contributor to the global supply chain that supports the transition itself. Oman has long been recognised for its geological diversity. Copper has been mined in the country for thousands of years, while modern exploration continues to identify new mineral prospects across the Sultanate of Oman. Today, renewed interest in the mining sector is driven not only by economic diversification, but also by the world’s increasing appetite for the materials required to build a low carbon future. The country’s ambitions extend beyond extracting raw materials. Global industries are placing greater value on processing, refining and manufacturing, stages where minerals are transformed into products ready for international markets. Developing these capabilities could allow Oman to capture more value while strengthening its position as an industrial and logistics hub linking Asia, Africa and Europe. This opportunity is supported by established ports, expanding industrial zones and a strategic location along major shipping routes. Combined with investments in renewable energy and green hydrogen, Oman has the potential to develop an integrated industrial ecosystem that serves multiple parts of the clean energy economy. Yet the opportunity also brings important questions. Mining has environmental consequences that require careful management, including water consumption, land disturbance and biodiversity protection. Around the world, investors and manufacturers are placing greater emphasis on responsibly sourced minerals, meaning environmental stewardship is becoming as important as geological potential.

Who calculates the tax —
and from whose data?

THE Tax Authority set the RO 42,000 exemption threshold after examining income data collected from several government entities. In its announcement of the Personal Income Tax Law on June 22, 2025, the Authority said that the study showed around 99 per cent of Oman’s population would fall outside the tax. That method matters because it points to the central question ahead of implementation on January 1, 2028: how much of the information already held by institutions will be used to calculate individual liabilities? The 5 per cent rate and threshold are settled. The harder task is deciding which facts should come from employers and other income payers, what individuals must supply themselves and who is answerable when the figures do not agree. The law establishes a hybrid model. Article 33 generally requires individuals above the threshold to file an electronic annual return within six months of the end of the tax year. It also requires an employer, when requested, to file on behalf of a person whose only income is salary, board remuneration or a pension paid by that single employer. Articles 43 and 44 place withholding and remittance obligations on employers and other public and private entities making qualifying payments. The Tax Authority has already said its electronic system has been linked with relevant institutions to support accurate income calculations and verify submitted returns. That commitment is important, but it does not yet reveal the operating design. Linking a system to institutional databases can mean checking a figure after the taxpayer has entered it, or supplying that figure before the taxpayer begins. An employer knows the salary,



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer.

Linking a system to institutional databases can mean checking a figure after the taxpayer has entered it, or supplying that figure before the taxpayer begins. A tax rate determines how much is owed. The design of the information system determines how much work and disagreement are required to discover it.

allowances, bonus and benefits it pays. It may not know about rental income, investments, freelance earnings, overseas income or a second job. Nor will it necessarily know the individual’s entitlement to exemptions involving education, healthcare, housing finance, zakat or donations. Individuals know some of those facts, but should not have to reconstruct information already submitted by employers, financial institutions or government entities. Oman therefore faces a design choice. It can require individuals to reassemble records already scattered across institutions, or assign each fact to the party best placed to verify it. Employers and other income payers should supply the information they can verify. Individuals should add what cannot reasonably be obtained from a reliable institutional source. The Tax Authority should assemble those records into one account for the taxpayer to review, correct and complete. That is the distinction between an electronic form and a genuinely digital tax system. An electronic form may still begin empty, leaving the taxpayer to collect documents, perform calculations and enter every figure. A digital system begins with verified information already held at source. Oman is building on existing electronic tax systems used for corporate income tax, value-added tax and other obligations. The opportunity is to extend that infrastructure without importing unnecessary complexity into a tax intended to cover only a small minority. Data integration nevertheless requires limits. Third-party reporting is also data sharing. Oman’s Personal Data Protection Law and its executive regulations provide an existing framework for handling personal information, while the tax law contains its own

confidentiality and information-access provisions. The regulations should make clear what information may be collected, for what purpose, who may access it and how an individual can challenge an incorrect record. Pre-filled returns are not risk-free. Taxpayers may assume that figures carrying the appearance of official approval must be correct and confirm them without proper review. That makes a visible correction process essential: the system should identify where each figure came from and allow taxpayers to challenge it before liability becomes final. Reporting duties also carry costs, particularly for smaller employers. The answer is not to transfer all responsibility to individuals, but to make obligations proportionate to the value of the information and the capacity of the organisation supplying it. Responsibility for errors must be explicit. An individual should not automatically bear the consequences of incorrect salary data filed by an employer. An employer should not be responsible for private income beyond its reasonable knowledge. Oman should not build a universal accounting burden around a tax intended for around one per cent of the population. Straightforward cases should be largely pre-filled and require little more than review and confirmation. Full self-assessment should be reserved for people with genuinely complex affairs, including several income sources, property, investments or overseas earnings. The first standard annual returns for the 2028 tax year will generally be due in 2029. That may appear distant, but employers, banks, software providers and the Tax Authority need sufficient time to define data fields, adjust payroll systems, test interfaces and explain responsibilities before deductions begin.

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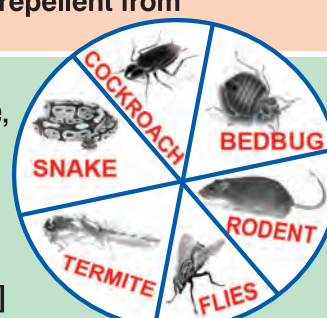
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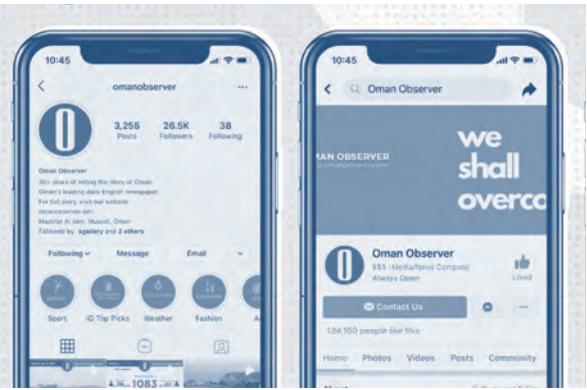
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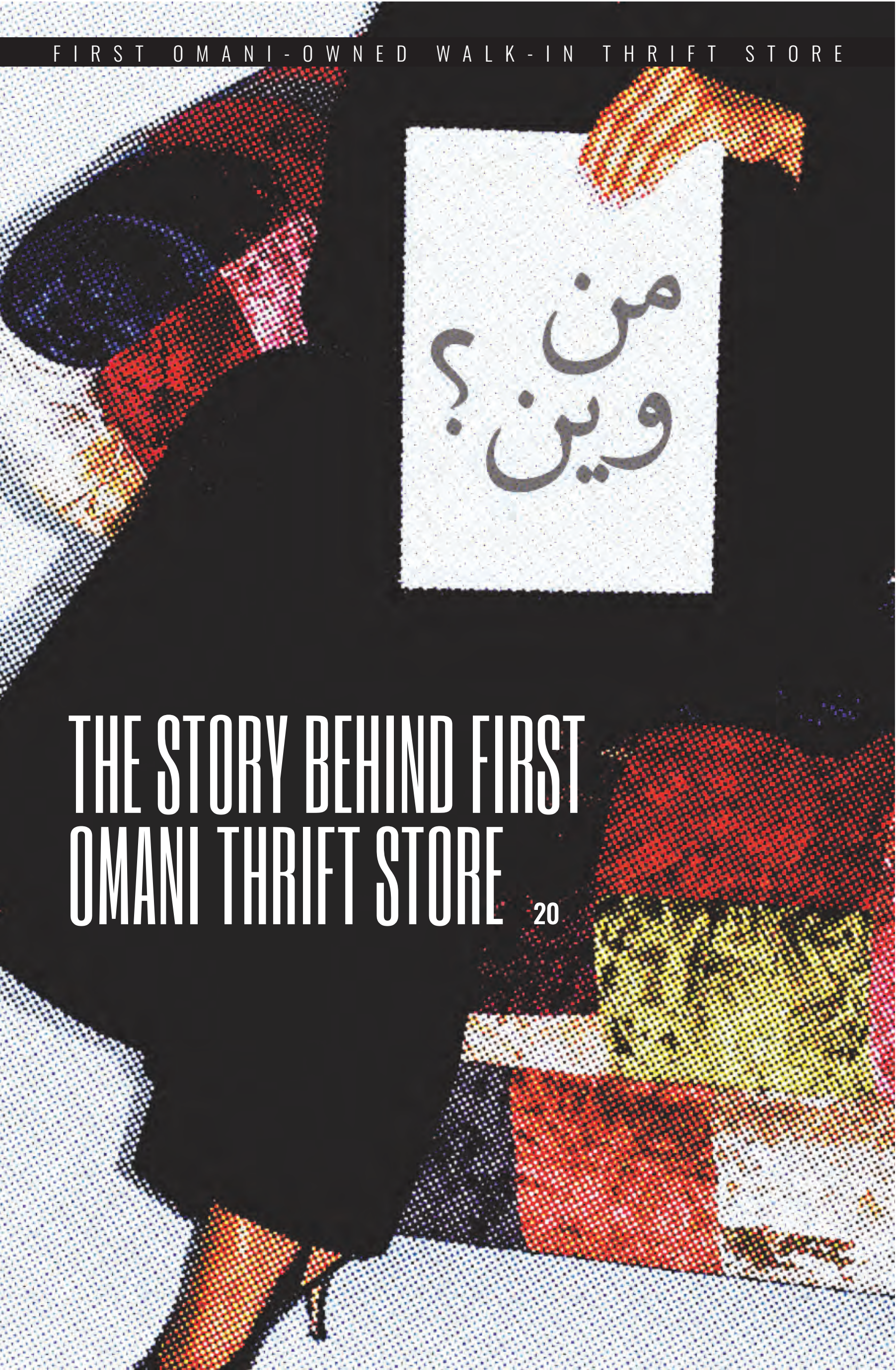
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THE STORY BEHIND FIRST OMANI THRIFT STORE 20

FILM SCOOP

‘THE DINK’ SEES COMEDY IN US PICKLEBALL CRAZE



WHEN FILM-MAKER Josh Greenbaum first stepped onto a pickleball court, he discovered an accessible pastime that could quickly turn intense, generating not just sweat but a range of emotions within minutes.

His conclusion: pickleball had all the right ingredients for comedy.

Greenbaum drew on that observation to direct *The Dink*, an Apple TV+ film premiering this Friday on the streaming platform.

“I think part of what’s so funny about it is how quickly something that starts as casual fun can become deeply competitive and also weirdly emotional,” the 47-year-old director said.

The Dink brings together Dusty (Jake Johnson), a former tennis prodigy who spends his time reminiscing about past glories, much to the chagrin of his father (Ed Harris), and Candace (Mary Steenburgen), a divorcee who discovers a passion for pickleball in this new phase of her life.

The film, which features former tennis champion Andy Roddick, is about reinvention, ego, friendship “and trying to find purpose,” Greenbaum said.

“You have these two lost souls, obviously from different generations, who are trying to figure out who they are and redefine themselves, and they help one another do so,” he said. Written by Sean Clements and produced by Ben Stiller, the film also explores intergenerational conflict.

“Maybe in this version, tennis represents the way things have been done, and pickleball represents a new way,” said Greenbaum, who also directed *Will & Harper*, the 2024 documentary chronicling a cross-country road trip between two old friends.

At the heart of *The Dink* is pickleball, a sport played with paddles and a perforated plastic ball that has become hugely popular in the United States, attracting schoolchildren, seniors and A-list Hollywood celebrities alike. The film takes its name from the controlled “dink” shot, in which players gently arc the ball over the net.

The “unique” relationship between tennis and pickleball provided fertile ground for comedy, the director said. “There’s a contentiousness between the two sports at the moment, and I think a lot of it’s driven by the fact that they’re fighting over limited resources,” said Greenbaum, who was defeated in his first pickleball match by opponents in their sixties.

“It’s just a sport that makes you laugh, that helps you make friends, that lets you share something together, and that you can get better at, even at my age,” said 73-year-old Steenburgen, herself an avid player.

Greenbaum and his cast believe *The Dink* will inspire more people to take up the sport.

But Johnson, whose character finds a second chance through pickleball, hopes the film ultimately encourages viewers to “do what makes them happy, no matter what.” — AFP

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



CULTURE

Dancers perform during the traditional Kenduri Laot festival off the coast of Banda Aceh, Indonesia.

— AFP



TOURISM

Tourists are pictured in front of the Sydney Opera House at sunset on a winter’s day in Sydney, Australia.

— AFP



HOLLYWOOD

Actor Kevin Sussman attends the premiere of *Stuart Fails to Save the Universe* in Los Angeles, USA

— AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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THE RUBETTES GUITARIST
TONY THORPE DIES AT 80



Tony Thorpe, guitarist and songwriter best known for his time with 1970s pop group The Rubettes, has died at the age of 80. Thorpe died on July 18, according to a statement released by his family, which described him as “a father, a husband, a friend to many, and a mentor to countless musicians.” It added that despite recent health challenges, he retained his “fierce intellect and sharp sense of humour.”

Former bandmate Alan Williams paid tribute on Facebook, recalling the pair’s musical partnership and memorable moments together.

“Your brilliance with the axe and the pen cannot be denied and remains with us, never forgotten. Rest now, Cowboy,” he wrote. Thorpe began playing guitar and drums at the age of 11 and turned professional just five years later after performing with

rocker Wee Willie Harris.

Formed in 1974, The Rubettes became one of the defining pop acts of the decade, recognised for their trademark white suits and cloth caps. Their debut single, Sugar Baby Love, topped the UK charts for four weeks in May 1974 and also reached the US Top 40. The group went on to release other hits including Tonight, Juke Box Five and I Can Do It.

Thorpe remained with the band until 1979 before leaving over reported creative differences. Although The Rubettes continued with a replacement guitarist, the band eventually disbanded in 1980 before reforming two years later. Beyond The Rubettes, Thorpe worked with the Vibratones and the Coventry Theatre Orchestra, later pursuing a solo career, lecturing at Blackburn College and publishing his memoir, A Bride’s Nightie, in 2014. — dpa

A once-wary
Hollywood slowly
warms to AI



Despite worries about AI, Hollywood has struck up some key partnerships with innovators. — AFP

ONCE WARY of artificial intelligence, Hollywood is increasingly embracing the technology, striking partnerships with AI start-ups and incorporating it into productions while insisting that the creative process itself will remain centred on human talent.

Just a few years ago, studios feared their intellectual property could be exploited by AI systems, while actors worried about being replaced by digital replicas. Those concerns became a major issue during the 2023 Hollywood strikes. Early AI-generated visuals, often criticised for obvious flaws, also reinforced scepticism.

Attitudes began shifting this year after Netflix acquired AI start-up InterPositive for \$587 million. Co-founded in 2022 by producer, director and actor Ben Affleck, the company develops AI tools designed to support film and television production.

In June, Lionsgate also invested in AI video company Runway to collaborate on creative projects, while Google announced an investment in independent studio A24.

Recent advertising campaigns and short films have demonstrated how rapidly AI-generated video has improved. According to Runway, the technology has reached a stage where, if the story is compelling enough, audiences may barely notice AI’s involvement.

Jamie Umpherson, Runway’s chief creative officer, said growing familiarity with AI tools is allowing creative teams to focus more on storytelling and artistic style.

Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos echoed that view while presenting the company’s latest financial results, saying AI has helped deliver higher-quality productions more efficiently. He revealed that generative AI workflows have already been used on around 300 Netflix titles, primarily during post-production for complex visual sequences.

Even so, Netflix appears to be using AI mainly to enhance existing production processes, from visualising concepts in pre-production to colour grading and creating sophisticated visual effects after filming.



Netflix acquired a start-up co-founded by actor Ben Affleck as it pivots towards the use of AI in its productions. — AFP



‘Young Washington,’ starring William Franklyn-Miller, used a new AI process that lets actors be filmed naturally and then surrounds them with a hyper-realistic AI-generated world. — AFP

Independent director and producer Jon Erwin believes AI should complement rather than replace film-making.

“Actors drive all the performances, and we use these tools to amplify the

sets and the scope of the shows,” he said. “We preserve the core of the film-making process, which is the relationship between the actor, the director and the camera.”

Erwin’s production company, Wonder Project, recently partnered with AI company Luma to develop what he describes as “hybrid” film-making. The process allows actors to perform on a regular set without green screens or motion-capture suits before AI generates realistic digital environments around them. Film-makers can review scenes within minutes, making it easier to adjust performances and reshoot if necessary.

The first feature produced using the approach, Young Washington, has grossed more than \$40 million worldwide, according to the film-makers.

Despite the technological advances, questions remain about AI’s long-term impact on employment across the film industry. Actor Matt Damon recently warned that large-scale productions like Christopher Nolan’s The Odyssey may become increasingly difficult to justify if studios prioritise AI-driven efficiency. While major studios including Paramount, Universal, Sony, Walt Disney and Warner Bros have yet to fully commit publicly to AI partnerships, industry observers believe wider adoption is inevitable. As Generated Group CEO Tanya Porquez put it: “Studios will have to get on board... it’s just the wave.” — AFP

FEATURES



Young entrepreneurs Nadeen al Towaiya and Tasneem al Balushi, founders of Tchiikago, Oman's first Omani-owned walk-in thrift store.

THE
STORY
BEHIND
THE

ST
OMANI
THRIFT
STORE

Oman's fashion scene is embracing a new approach to style as Tchiikago prepares to open Muscat's first Omani-owned walk-in thrift store



YERU EBUEN

FOR DECADES, fashion shopping in Oman has followed a familiar pattern: international brands launch seasonal collections, malls showcase the latest trends and consumers refresh their wardrobes accordingly. But a new movement is emerging, one that values individuality, sustainability and thoughtful consumption over fast-changing fashion cycles.

This August, 'Tchiikago' is set to open in Muscat as what its founders describe as Oman's first Omani-owned walk-in thrift store. More than a second-hand clothing shop, the concept combines curated pre-loved fashion, reconstructed designs, clothing donations in exchange for store credit and a shopping experience focused on discovery rather than discounts.

The idea was created by two young Omani entrepreneurs: 24-year-old social entrepreneur Nadeen al Towaiya, founder of Omani Archive, and 25-year-old designer Tasneem al Balushi, founder of reworked fashion label Dollies. Bringing together business, creativity and sustainability, they hope 'Tchiikago' will introduce a new way of experiencing fashion in Oman.

For Al Towaiya, the inspiration came from a gap she noticed in the local fashion scene. "I felt there was a gap in affordable fashion because a lot of what is considered affordable today is made from polyester and lower-quality materials that don't last," she says. "There also wasn't enough variety." However, she says the heart of the concept is not simply affordability, but individuality.

"Young people in Oman are becoming more interested in expressing their individuality," she explains. "One of the best things about thrifting is that you can leave with something that probably nobody else in your community owns." Rather than encouraging bargain hunting, 'Tchiikago' aims to make fashion feel personal. Each piece is carefully selected through international thrift sourcing, clothing donations and searches for garments that are high quality and have the potential to connect with local shoppers.

"When I see an item that has a

home locally, or something that is high quality and difficult to find in Oman, that's what attracts me," Al Towaiya says.

The store's circular model allows customers to donate clothes they no longer wear, receive store credit and help extend the life of garments. The approach reflects a growing global interest in circular fashion, where clothing is reused, redesigned and kept out of waste streams for longer.

That philosophy is also reflected in Al Balushi's reconstructed collections. Through Dollies, she transforms existing garments through techniques such as embroidery, fabric painting and upcycling.

"We take clothing items that are in good condition and completely change how people see them," she says. "One piece can become multiple versions of itself, and that alone can replace multiple new purchases." While sustainability is central to the concept, both founders emphasise that style remains the priority.

"I don't want sustainability to overshadow fashion," Al Balushi says. "The pieces still need to be exciting and something people want to wear." Al Towaiya believes Oman is already developing a stronger thrift culture, pointing to the popularity of markets such as Wadi Kabir's Friday Market and the rise of thrift stores in the country.

One misconception she hopes to challenge is the idea that second-hand clothing is unhygienic.

"Whether something is new or second-hand, you're going to wash it before you wear it," she says. Beyond retail, the founders envision 'Tchiikago' becoming a community platform that hosts sustainability discussions, events and initiatives promoting more conscious fashion choices.

Their goal is simple: to change the way people view clothing, not as disposable items dictated by trends, but as expressions of personality, creativity and identity.

As their philosophy suggests, every carefully chosen piece should inspire curiosity: "Min ween?" , "Where did you get that?" For 'Tchiikago', the answer represents more than fashion, it represents a shift in how Oman approaches style.