

O M A N
عمان
D A I L Y

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PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR 04:55 AM
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Sandboarding
RED-HOT

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INBRIEF

DECREE RATIFIES
OMAN-SYRIA
AIR TRANSPORT
AGREEMENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday issued Royal Decree No 93/2025 on ratifying the air transport agreement between the government of the Sultanate of Oman and the government of the Syrian Arab Republic, signed in Montreal on September 22, 2025. Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree. Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

Oman and Azerbaijan review bilateral relations

HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, at his office on Wednesday. The meeting reviewed the advanced relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Azerbaijan. It also touched on aspects of the existing cooperation between the two sides, in addition to discussing a set of matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, the Secretary-General at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad, and the Adviser at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad. Later, the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Azerbaijan held an official session of talks in Muscat. The session discussed ways to enhance bilateral relations between the two countries in the political, economic, cultural and educational fields. It also reviewed regional and international developments of mutual interest. The Omani side was chaired by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, while the Azerbaijani side was chaired by Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs. — ONA

HIS MAJESTY
GREETES BOLIVIA’S
PRESIDENT-ELECT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Rodrigo Paz Pereira for his election as the new president for the Plurinational State of Bolivia. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Pereira in realising all aspirations of the Bolivian people. His Majesty wished the cooperation relations between Oman and Bolivia further growth to serve the joint interests.

Learning drives prosperity

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Gaza truce in danger as
Israeli strikes kill 104

U N S A Y S D E A T H S I N F R E S H S T R I K E S O N G A Z A ‘ A P P A L L I N G ’

THE Israeli military said on Wednesday that it would abide by a ceasefire accord in Gaza, as health officials in the enclave said air strikes had killed 104 people, with both Israel and Hamas trading blame for violations of the deal. The Israeli military said in a statement that it would continue to uphold the ceasefire agreement and would respond firmly to “any violation”. The Gaza health ministry said that 46 children and 20 women were among the 104 people killed in Israeli air strikes since Tuesday. Reuters couldn’t immediately verify the numbers, but a video showed several bodies of women and children inside a hospital during funeral processions. Despite the bombardments, US President Donald Trump said the US-backed ceasefire was not at risk. “As I understand it, they took out an Israeli soldier,” Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One. “So the Israelis hit back and they should hit back. When that happens, they should hit back,” he added. “Nothing is going to jeopardise” the ceasefire, Trump said.



A mourner reacts, on the day of the funeral for members of the Abu Dalal family, who were killed in an overnight Israeli strike on their home, in Nuseirat, central Gaza Strip, on Wednesday. — Reuters

Qatar’s Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani said on Wednesday that the attack on the Israeli soldier and the subsequent Israeli air strikes had been “very disappointing and frustrating for us”. Qatar, along with Egypt and the US, has been leading efforts to broker peace in Gaza. Meanwhile, the United Nations called the deaths in Israel’s new military strikes on Gaza “appalling”, as it urged all sides not to let peace “slip from our grasp”. UN rights chief Volker Turk said the attacks had reportedly hit schools, homes and tents for internally displaced people within the Palestinian territory. “Reports that over 100 Palestinians were killed overnight in a wave of Israeli air strikes mainly on residential buildings, IDP tents and schools across the Gaza Strip, following the death of an Israeli soldier, are appalling,” he said in a statement. “The laws of war are very clear on the paramount importance of protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure.” Turk said Israel must comply with its obligations under international humanitarian law, and would be accountable for any violations. — Agencies

Shabab Oman II concludes successful international voyage

AL MUSANNAH: The Royal Navy of Oman’s vessel Shabab Oman II returned home on Wednesday following the successful completion of its seventh international voyage, ‘Glories of the Seas 2025.’ The vessel conducted an extensive tour of European ports, showcasing Oman’s rich maritime heritage and disseminating messages of international friendship and peace, in direct alignment with national strategic objectives and the implementation framework of Oman Vision 2040. To mark this occasion, the

Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) hosted an official reception ceremony for Shabab Oman II at the Said Bin Sultan Naval Base, under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance. The ceremony featured comprehensive visual presentations documenting the vessel’s voyage milestones, operational achievements and international recognitions obtained during the Glories of the Seas 2025 mission. The event included musical performances by the RNO Band, enhancing the ceremonial proceedings.



The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) hosted an official reception ceremony for Shabab Oman II at the Said Bin Sultan Naval Base.

Following ceremonial protocols, the vessel commenced docking procedures at its designated berth within the naval base. The Minister of Finance and guests received a detailed operational briefing covering the ship’s navigation route, strategic national objectives and port engagements throughout the voyage. Al Habsi commended the vessel’s significant national role in promoting international peace, brotherhood and diplomatic friendship. “Shabab Oman II serves as a floating diplomatic ambassador, representing

Oman’s historical achievements, contemporary progress and future aspirations across global maritime communities,” stated Al Habsi. Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman, emphasised the voyage’s strategic significance: “The ‘Glories of the Seas 2025’ mission effectively communicated Oman’s enduring message of peace to international communities, demonstrating our nation’s rich maritime heritage while promoting universal values of friendship and cooperation across all port engagements.” — ONA

CHAIRPERSON'S
REPORT Q3 2025

On behalf of the Board of Directors of National Bank of Oman SAOG (NBO), I am pleased to present the third quarter 2025 report for the period ended 30 September 2025.

Oman's Economy

Oman's economy continued to show resilience in 2025, supported by prudent fiscal policies, rising non-oil revenues, and stronger investor confidence. Year-to-date results reflect steady macroeconomic management and progress toward diversification in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

By mid-year, total public revenues reached OMR 5.839 billion, with oil and gas revenues amounting to OMR 3.902 billion, while non-oil revenues rose to OMR 1.928 billion.

Oman's debt profile also improved during the period. Public debt declined to OMR 14.1 billion, compared to OMR 14.4 billion in the same period last year. This reduction is in line with the government's commitment to sustainable debt management.

Confidence in Oman's fiscal path strengthened further when Moody's upgraded the Sultanate's rating to Baa3 with a stable outlook, restoring investment-grade status. Earlier, Standard & Poor's reaffirmed its BBB rating.

These indicators highlight Oman's strong fiscal framework and continued progress toward a more diversified and resilient economy.

NBO's Financial Performance

Given this backdrop, Net Interest Income for YTD September 2025 was OMR 82.1 million, an increase of 2.0 per cent compared with the same period last year.

Fee Income for the same period was OMR 39.0 million compared to OMR 31.6 million, an increase of 23.4 per cent compared with the same period last year.

Total Income, as a result, was OMR 121.1 million for YTD September 2025, reporting a growth of 8.0 per cent year on year.

Operating Expenses for the nine months ended 30 September 2025 was OMR 49.2 million, compared to OMR 46.0 million for the corresponding period in 2024, an increase of 7.0 per cent.

Operating Profit as a result was at OMR 71.9 million and grew strongly by 8.8 per cent year on year.

Net Impairment for the first nine months was at OMR 11.0 million, compared to OMR 12.1 million for the corresponding period last year, a decrease of 9.1 per cent.

Net Profit, as a result, was OMR 51.8 million, a growth of 13.3 per cent over the corresponding period last year.

Gross loans and advances as of 30 September 2025 are at OMR 4.35 billion, showing growth of 9.1 per cent over last year. Customer deposits correspondingly are at OMR 4.07 billion, with the Bank continuing to maintain a healthy CASA mix.

The Bank's Core Equity and Total Capital Adequacy Ratio stood at 11.0 per cent and 16.4 per cent, respectively.

Key Achievements and Partnerships

Throughout Q3 2025, NBO continued to enhance its offerings and deliver innovative solutions that complement the Sultanate's financial landscape, ensuring a rewarding banking experience for customers. These efforts were reflected across multiple initiatives focused on innovation, digital transformation, investment growth, and customer engagement, all aligned with Oman Vision 2040.

During COMEX 2025, NBO showcased its latest digital innovations and signed several strategic agreements to strengthen collaboration and expand its digital services. A key highlight was the partnership with Omantel to deliver integrated digital and cybersecurity solutions and develop an AI platform for enterprise knowledge management. Another major agreement with Al Jabr paved the way for the launch of the second edition of the NBO Fintech Accelerator Program.

Further reinforcing its digital partnerships, NBO signed agreements with the Public Prosecution to integrate its Payment Gateway, deploy POS machines, and enable seamless payments through the NBO app. Additional partnerships included Taageer to incorporate financial products into NBO's open banking framework, The American International School of Muscat (TAISM) to implement API integration for payments and direct debit mandates, and Abraj Bousher Real Estate to deliver tailored corporate banking solutions that enhance operational efficiency and customer experience.

At COMEX, visitors experienced NBO's innovative digital capabilities first-hand, including instant account opening through Self Service Kiosks, on-the-spot debit card printing, and SIP applications. New kiosk services such as cheque leaf printing, KYC updates, digital signatures, and customer feedback were also introduced. NBO further presented its new mPOS and Full Function Machine (FFM), offering remittances and accessibility features such as voice guided transactions.

Furthermore, the bank signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Al Bandar Development to streamline real estate solutions and financial processes for property owners and developers.

Marking another milestone, NBO officially launched its Application Programming Interface (API) Gateway, a secure platform that enables seamless integration between customer systems and the bank's channels. The Gateway provides real-time access to a wide range of banking services, setting new standards in digital connectivity.

Continuing its drive for convenience, NBO also unveiled its first Drive-Thru ATMs in Al Mussanah and Salalah, offering customers a contactless, car based transaction experience tailored to today's fast paced lifestyle.

To strengthen personalized banking experiences and build closer relationships with high net worth customers, NBO hosted an exclusive networking dinner in Salalah for Sadara Priority Banking customers. The event provided an opportunity for meaningful connections and insightful discussions.

The bank also celebrated Customer Experience Day at its Head Office, emphasizing the importance of putting customers at the centre of every interaction. The event highlighted NBO's commitment to service excellence and innovation, featuring a panel discussion titled "Customer Experience as a Core Differentiator in Today's Business Environment," which explored how customer-focused strategies are shaping business growth. NBO also recognized employees who excelled in delivering outstanding service, reinforcing the belief that exceptional experiences start with empowered and motivated teams.

On the investment front, NBO launched its fourth open-ended mutual fund, the NBO Global Fixed Income Fund, through private placement to key investors. It is designed to generate income and capital growth through investments in bonds, sukuk, and other fixed-income instruments across global, GCC, and local markets.

NBO also acted as Sole Issue Manager for Energy Development Oman's OMR 50 million Series 1 Sukuk, the first domestic issuance by a government-related entity listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX). Structured by NBO Muzn Islamic Banking with a 4.40 per cent profit rate, the Sukuk attracted over OMR 80 million in demand, reinforcing investor confidence and NBO's leadership in innovative, Shari'ah-compliant financing solutions.

During the period, Corporate Banking successfully concluded a bilateral refinancing arrangement for an investment company, complemented by an interest rate hedge covering the full tenor of the loan, while extending additional financial support to its group entities. NBO also completed USD 132 million syndicated financing for the expansion of a manufacturing company in the UAE, acting as Underwriter, Mandated Lead Arranger, and holding key agency roles. Furthermore, NBO played

a pivotal role as Facility Agent Bank for a landmark USD 1 billion Term Loan Syndicated Facility, underscoring its expertise in managing complex, large-scale transactions and enhancing its fee-based revenue. Additionally, Trade Finance achieved solid year-on-year volume growth across its core product lines, and NBO has been providing financing for major infrastructure and energy projects. In addition, the Escrow Services business facilitated a share purchase agreement in the energy sector.

On the corporate digital front, the bank maintained strong momentum with a 6.4 per cent increase in payment volumes, continued expansion of direct debit electronic mandates, and wider adoption of Remote Deposit Capture (RDC). Six new strategic business-to-business agreements were finalized.

NBO Muzn Islamic Banking

Muzn Islamic Banking continues to perform well with total income for YTD September 2025 growing by 29.4 percent YoY. Gross Financing grew by 20.7 percent YoY to reach OMR 394 million as at 30th September 2025 and customer deposits grew by 5.3 percent YoY to reach OMR 354 million as at 30th September 2025.

During the third quarter, NBO Muzn Islamic Banking announced several strategic initiatives and partnerships aimed at expanding access to Shari'a-compliant financial solutions and enhancing customer benefits across the Sultanate.

As part of these efforts, Muzn Islamic Banking signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Sarooj Development Company to provide Shari'a-compliant home financing solutions for eligible customers purchasing properties within the Sarooj Oasis Project, an integrated mixed-use development in Sultan Haitham City.

Expanding its home financing portfolio, Muzn also launched new solutions tailored for self-employed customers, small business owners, and freelancers. Offering a competitive profit rate and a financing tenure of up to 25 years, this initiative promotes greater financial inclusion for diverse customer segments across the Sultanate.

Building on its focus to strengthen digital services, Muzn Islamic Banking introduced a Shari'a-compliant Direct Debit E-Mandate service designed to streamline recurring payments for both retail and corporate customers. Available through Muzn's Corporate Internet Banking platform and mobile app, the solution supports Oman's digital transformation efforts by enabling reliable, efficient, and delay-free management of high transaction volumes.

Recognizing the seasonal needs of families, Muzn further introduced tailored financial solutions to support back-to-school expenses, including tuition fees, transportation, and essential supplies. This step reflects Muzn Islamic Banking's ongoing commitment to providing practical and supportive Shari'a-compliant products that cater to the evolving needs of the customers.

Community Values

During the third quarter, NBO carried out a series of initiatives that underscored its commitment to talent development, financial literacy, and community engagement.

Building on last year's success, NBO concluded its flagship Hackathon, as part of its Fintech Accelerator Programme, after a 48-hour challenge to discover and develop the next generation of fintech talent in Oman. The event brought together 19 teams, including participants from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation's Upgrade Program, emphasizing strong cross-sector collaboration. The Hackathon reaffirmed the bank's commitment to advancing a vibrant fintech ecosystem. The top three teams received cash prizes and entry into the Accelerator for mentorship, funding, and market exposure.

Reaffirming its dedication to nurturing future leaders, the Bank welcomed 35 promising graduates into its flagship NBO Tomorrow's Leaders Programme, designed to build a resilient, future-ready workforce for the Sultanate. The Bank also successfully completed its annual Internship Programme, offering final-year students and recent graduates placements across its divisions. Through these initiatives, NBO continues to provide practical experience and exposure to banking operations while strengthening the pipeline of skilled Omani professionals.

Continuing its support for national innovation, NBO sponsored the Mulhim Hackathon held at the Bank's Head Office. Organized by the Academy of Strategic and Defense Studies in collaboration with public and private sector partners, the competition runs until October 29 and features a training camp designed to equip and mentor participants. The initiative aims to inspire young minds to develop innovative digital solutions in areas such as cybersecurity, education, and customer service.

By supporting this national initiative, NBO reinforces its role as a key enabler of innovation and talent development, contributing to the growth of Oman's digital economy.

In celebration of World Cleanup Day, the Environmental Society of Oman (ESO) organized a charity run that united participants from all walks of life in their shared commitment to protecting Oman's natural environment. NBO's sponsorship of the event reflects its dedication to promoting environmental awareness and sustainability, and to supporting community initiatives that contribute to a greener, cleaner Oman.

Extending its educational outreach, and in collaboration with the North Al Batinah Governor's Office, NBO organized workshops at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Sohar and Shinas, as well as the Vocational College of Al Khabourah. Covering topics such as smart saving, budgeting, and investment fundamentals, the sessions included interactive activities that allowed students to apply their learning in practical settings, supporting the Bank's ongoing efforts to enhance financial literacy among youth.

On the community front, NBO also hosted its Annual Kids Carnival at its Head Office in Muscat, bringing together employees and their families for a vibrant day of celebration and connection. The event highlights the Bank's commitment to fostering a workplace culture that values wellbeing, belonging, and togetherness.

Global Recognition

In recognition of its leadership in innovation, NBO received the Gold Award in the AI-Driven Creative Excellence category at the MMA Smarties Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Awards 2025. The accolade honoured the bank's pioneering marketing campaign featuring Abu Salim's AI-Driven Family, the first initiative of its kind in Oman.

As a testament to its outstanding performance, NBO was recognised at the AIWA Awards 2025, receiving the Best Performing Company Award in the Large Capital category at a gala ceremony in Muscat. This recognition further reaffirms the Bank's leadership and commitment to excellence within Oman's financial services sector.

Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank our customers, shareholders, executive management, and the entire team of NBO for their support and efforts in implementing the Bank's strategy and achieving its goals and objectives.

We would also like to sincerely thank our regulators, the Central Bank of Oman, the Central Bank of the United Arab Emirates and the Financial Services Authority, for their constant support and dedicated efforts to develop Oman's financial industry, especially the banking sector.

We pay tribute to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, under whose visionary leadership and wise guidance Oman continues its steadfast march towards sustainable economic growth and social development.


Amal Suhail Bahwan
Chairperson

CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION			
As at 30 September 2025 (unaudited)			
	30/09/2025	30/09/2024	Audited 31/12/2024
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
ASSETS			
Cash and balances with Central Banks	167,717	307,540	302,512
Due from Banks and other money market placements	278,116	290,347	372,364
Loans, advances and Islamic financing assets	4,167,709	3,813,394	3,926,147
Investment securities	548,621	437,135	473,393
Other assets	155,684	80,416	108,662
Property and equipment	60,210	60,012	59,467
TOTAL ASSETS	5,378,057	4,988,844	5,242,545
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY			
LIABILITIES			
Due to Banks and other money market deposits	288,320	183,662	192,938
Customers' deposits	4,074,426	3,974,123	4,128,523
Other liabilities	182,872	110,716	133,800
Taxation	21,135	19,303	19,123
TOTAL LIABILITIES	4,566,753	4,287,804	4,474,384
EQUITY			
Share capital	162,595	162,595	162,595
Share premium	34,465	34,465	34,465
Legal reserve	54,198	54,198	54,198
Other reserves	22,770	8,867	11,429
Retained earnings	312,239	273,782	280,437
Total equity attributable to the shareholders of the Bank	586,267	533,907	543,124
Tier 1 perpetual bonds	225,037	167,133	225,037
TOTAL EQUITY	811,304	701,040	768,161
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY	5,378,057	4,988,844	5,242,545

CONDENSED CONSOLIDATED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME			
For the period ended 30 September 2025 (unaudited)			
	Nine months ended 30 September		Three months ended 30 September
	2025	2024	2025
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
Interest income	183,582	187,544	62,674
Interest expense	(107,450)	(112,234)	(36,098)
NET INTEREST INCOME	76,132	75,310	26,576
Income from Islamic financing and investment	19,235	17,559	6,859
Interest expenses on Islamic customers' deposits	(13,314)	(12,378)	(4,717)
NET INCOME FROM ISLAMIC FINANCING AND INVESTMENTS	5,921	5,181	2,142
NET INTEREST INCOME AND NET INCOME FROM ISLAMIC FINANCING AND INVESTMENTS	82,053	80,491	28,718
Fee and commission income	33,064	27,750	11,624
Fee and commission expenses	(11,921)	(9,613)	(4,222)
Net fee and commission income	21,143	18,137	7,402
Other operating income	17,913	13,422	5,550
OPERATING INCOME	121,109	112,050	41,670
Staff costs	(30,532)	(29,190)	(10,159)
Other operating expenses	(13,852)	(12,205)	(5,034)
Depreciation	(4,841)	(4,648)	(1,650)
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	(49,225)	(46,043)	(16,843)
PROFIT FROM OPERATIONS BEFORE IMPAIRMENT LOSSES AND TAX	71,884	66,007	24,827
Total impairment losses on financial instruments (net)	(10,974)	(12,062)	(3,877)
PROFIT BEFORE TAX	60,910	53,945	20,950
Taxation	(9,142)	(8,248)	(3,207)
PROFIT FOR THE PERIOD	51,768	45,697	17,743
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME			
Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss			
Equity investments at FVOCI – net change in fair value	16,134	1,141	8,249
Tax effect of equity investments at FVOCI – net change in fair value	(1,158)	(157)	(123)
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME	14,976	984	8,126
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD	66,744	46,681	25,869
Earnings per share:			
Basic and diluted	0.027	0.024	0.011



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SHORT TAKES

SHABAB OMAN II CONCLUDES VOYAGE



AL MUSANNAH: The Royal Navy of Oman’s vessel Shabab Oman II returned home on Wednesday following the successful completion of its seventh international voyage, ‘Glories of the Seas 2025.’ To mark this occasion, the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) hosted an official reception ceremony for Shabab Oman II at the Said Bin Sultan Naval Base, under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habshi, Minister of Finance. — ONA

11 STUDENT PROJECTS WIN INCENTIVES



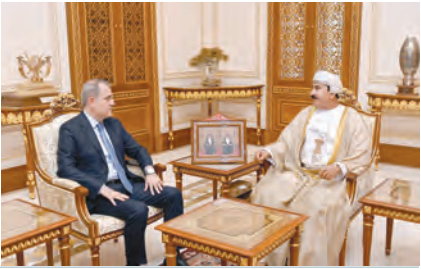
MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation announced that 11 projects from various higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman have won incentives from the “Upgrade” programme to transform student graduation projects into startups in its eighth edition for the year 2025. The ceremony was presided over by Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy. Dr Salah bin Soumar al Zadjali, Director-General of Programmes and Capacity Building at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, said that the programme aims to motivate researchers and innovators and support institutions to transform ideas into innovative startups with added value that contribute to sustainable economic development and enhance the Sultanate of Oman’s position in global competitiveness indicators. In his speech, he said that the programme in its current edition received 202 projects distributed across 3 tracks: the emerging technologies track, which received 134 projects, the water track, which received 43 projects, and the financial technologies track, which received 25 projects. 36 projects from various higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman qualified for the final stage, of which 11 projects were crowned. — ONA

Gen Al Numani receives Azerbaijani, Pakistani officials

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Wednesday Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The meeting discussed the bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Azerbaijan, and means



The officials discussed relations and ways to enhance cooperation. — ONA



of promoting them to serve the joint interests. Gen Al Numani also received Mohsin Raza Naqvi, Minister of Interior and Narcotics Control of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and his accompanying delegation. At the outset of the meeting, Gen Al Numani reviewed the advanced relations binding the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. — ONA

Oman and Azerbaijan ties reflect shared commitment

THE Official opening ceremony for the new Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan was held in Muscat on Wednesday under the auspices of Jeyhun Bayramov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, in the presence of Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister. The establishment of the embassy represents a significant milestone in the evolving friendship and cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Azerbaijan, serving to further strengthen bilateral relations and advance mutual interests. In his ceremonial address, Bayramov expressed profound satisfaction with the embassy’s inauguration in the Omani capital. He emphasised that this diplomatic advancement reflects the shared commitment of both nations to deepening their diplomatic and economic engagement. He further articulated his vision for enhanced bilateral cooperation across multiple sectors, including trade, energy, agriculture and education, noting that such collaboration will serve common strategic interests while reinforcing the growing partnership between the two friendly countries. The inauguration ceremony was attended by officials and diplomatic representatives from both nations. Earlier, the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Azerbaijan held an official session of talks. The session discussed ways to enhance bilateral relations between the two countries in the political, economic, cultural and educational fields. It also reviewed regional and international developments of mutual interest. The Omani side was chaired by Sayyid Badr, while the Azerbaijani side was chaired by Bayramov. The two sides emphasised the



The establishment of the embassy represents a significant milestone in the evolving friendship between Oman and Azerbaijan. — ONA

importance of sustaining diplomatic efforts to back regional security and stability. They also affirmed their countries’ keenness to expand cooperation and partnership across various fields, diversify their common interests for mutual benefit, and continue holding regular consultations on various regional and global issues and challenges. During the session, the two sides signed an agreement on mutual visas waiver for holders of diplomatic, special and service passports. It aims to facilitate the movement of official passport holders between the two countries. Additionally, a memorandum of understanding was signed for cooperation in the consular field, aimed at enhancing coordination on matters related to citizen affairs and developing frameworks for consular cooperation. Meanwhile, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, received at the Council’s headquarters Bayramov and his accompanying delegation.

The Chairman of the State Council underlined the importance of such visits in enhancing bilateral relations and exchanging views on matters of mutual interest, which reflect the keenness of the two countries to promote bonds of cooperation and joint coordination between them. During the meeting, Shaikh Al Khalili reviewed the role undertaken by the State Council within its legislative competencies and its contributions to studying legal, economic and developmental topics supporting the march of national renaissance, in alignment with the goals of Oman Vision 2040. On his turn, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan expressed his country’s eagerness to enhance bilateral cooperation with the Sultanate of Oman and advance the existing relations towards further development and prosperity, serving the mutual interests of the two countries. — ONA

Forum seeks to raise awareness on global measurement standards

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

In a pioneering step that reflects Oman’s strategic direction towards a knowledge-based economy and the enhancement of research quality, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in collaboration with the Modern College of Business and Science, organised the first National Forum for Peer-Reviewed Scientific Journals from October 29 to 30. The two-day forum serves as a national platform that brings together academics, researchers, and publishing

experts to discuss the latest practices in managing and developing peer-reviewed journals. It also aims to highlight their role in promoting academic integrity, improving research quality and supporting universities in achieving higher global rankings. The forum focuses on showcasing leading national peer-reviewed journals across various disciplines and highlighting their contribution to the advancement of scientific research in Oman. It also seeks to raise awareness about the global impact of measurement standards



The two-day forum serves as a national platform that brings together academics, researchers and publishing experts to discuss the latest practices in managing and developing peer-reviewed journals.

such as impact factors and citation indicators, while emphasising the importance of indexing national journals

in internationally recognised databases such as Scopus and Web of Science. Dr Issa bin Salem al Shabibi from

the Directorate-General of Capacity Building at the Ministry, who is moderating one of the panel discussions, explained that his session will focus on the role of experts in promoting and establishing high-quality scientific journals. “The session will explore the pivotal role that experts and researchers play in building a strong scientific publishing ecosystem capable of competing regionally and internationally,” he said. He added that focusing on quality and transparency in academic publishing is key to building the credibility of Omani journals and strengthening their

reputation in the global academic community. Dr Arabi Madbouli praised the initiative, describing it as a vital step in Oman’s research development journey. “We have observed remarkable progress in Oman’s research sector in recent years,” he said. “However, there is still a growing need for more Omani peer-reviewed journals that will nurture the research fields the country needs to support its scientific and economic growth.” He emphasised that developing strong Omani journals will directly contribute to the economy and science.

SPOTLIGHT



It's freedom in motion...There's something magical about the quiet of the dunes — then suddenly, you're flying down at full speed, and all you hear is the wind.

HAMAD AL MAAMARI

Sandboarding

RED-HOT

craze in Bidiyah

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

AS temperature drops across Oman, the golden dunes of Bidiyah come alive — not just with the hum of four-wheel drives or the rhythm of camel caravans, but with something far more youthful and dynamic: sandboarding.

Once a quiet desert escape, Bidiyah has evolved into one of the Sultanate's most exciting winter destinations. Every weekend, the rolling dunes of the Rimal Al Sharqiya transform into a natural arena where young Omanis gather to surf — not on water, but on sand.

Balancing on sleek boards, riders climb to the peaks of the dunes before launching themselves down, gliding effortlessly over the soft curves of golden sand. The sensation, they say, is like “surfing a moving mountain.”

“It's freedom in motion,” says 23-year-old Hamad al Maamari, who travels from Muscat almost every weekend to join his friends for desert rides. “There's something magical about the quiet of the dunes — then suddenly, you're flying down at full speed, and all you hear is the wind.”

Sandboarding has quickly grown from a niche hobby into a defining winter sport for Oman's youth. It blends physical challenge with artistry and adventure, attracting not only adrenaline-seekers but also photographers, tourists, and influencers who are captivated by the dramatic beauty of the desert.

In recent years, adventure tourism operators have tapped into the sport's rising popularity by offering guided experiences, professional boards, and safety training. This has helped make sandboarding accessible to beginners and tourists alike, turning Bidiyah into a hub for both sport and sustainable tourism.

Long celebrated for its cultural heritage — camel races, desert camping, and Bedouin hospitality — Bidiyah is now adding a new layer to its identity. Its vast dunes are becoming the meeting point of tradition and innovation, where young Omanis reinterpret their connection with the land in modern, adventurous ways.

“It's more than a sport; it's a lifestyle,” says Salim al Saawi, a university student who discovered sandboarding through social media. “You learn patience, balance, and courage — and you build friendships that last beyond the desert.”

Oman's winter months have always been ideal for outdoor exploration, but the growing enthusiasm for sports like sandboarding, hiking, rock climbing and paragliding reflects a broader cultural shift. The new generation isn't just admiring Oman's natural landscapes — they're interacting with them.

As the sun dips behind the dunes and the last riders carve their trails into the sand, the message is clear: Winter in Oman isn't about slowing down — it's about riding the golden waves and redefining what adventure means.

SHORT TAKES



The event will be held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah.

GENETIC RESOURCES FORUM ON SUNDAY

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

The third edition of the Genetic Resources Economic Forum, ‘Geno Business 3’, will begin on Sunday at Rotana Resort Salalah, running from November 2 to 3. The event will be held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

Organised by the Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Centre (Mawarid), the forum is held in cooperation with Dhofar University, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada), the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

The forum aims to highlight the economic value of biodiversity and genetic resources, foster connections between scientific research and entrepreneurship, and encourage investment in knowledge-based and genome-driven industries. It also seeks to strengthen regional and international partnerships that contribute to building a sustainable bioeconomy in Oman.

This year’s edition focuses on four main themes – food, medicine, beauty and sustainability.

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN INCOSAI CONGRESS



Oman’s delegation to the conference is headed by Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution. — ONA

MUSCAT: Represented by the State Audit Institution (SAI), the Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 25th International Congress of Supreme Audit Institutions (INCOSAI), being held in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, under the auspices of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI).

The Sultanate of Oman’s delegation to the conference is headed by Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution.

The conference looks into follow-up reports, including the report of the INTOSAI chairman, the report of the Supervisory Committee on Emerging Issues, the report of the INTOSAI Secretary-General and the report of the Chair of the Policy, Finance and Administration Committee (PFAC), in addition to reports of meetings of main committees affiliated to the organisation. — ONA



Indian Social Club Oman

(KERALA WING)

We, the Indian Social Club Oman, would like to provide clarification regarding the Indian Community Festival, held at Al Amerat Park on Friday, 24th October 2025, organized by the Kerala Wing of the Indian Social Club Oman.

During the welcoming procession for the Chief Guest, several cultural and social tableaux representing different regions of India were featured. The use of animals in the displays was intended solely to portray traditional agricultural practices, particularly the use of animals in ploughing fields. It did not bear any religious or ritualistic connotation. We express our sincere apologies for any misunderstanding this may have caused.

We deeply value and respect the people of Oman and the longstanding, brotherly relations shared between our two great nations. On behalf of the Indian Social Club Oman, we reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that all future activities are conducted with the utmost sensitivity and adherence to local values and traditions.

Indian Social Club Oman

Oman participates in GCC legislative officials meeting

KUWAIT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, participated in the 29th meeting of the GCC Permanent Committee of Officials of Legislative Departments, held in the State of Kuwait.

The Omani delegation to the meeting was headed by Dr Yahya bin Nasser al Khusaibi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs.

The meeting discussed a set of topics on its agenda, most notably the strategy for the work of the GCC Permanent Committee of Officials of Legislative Departments, and the outcomes of the meetings of the committee of experts and specialists



The meeting discussed the strategy for GCC Permanent Committee of Officials of Legislative Departments. — ONA

from the legislative departments regarding the executive bylaw for the Unified Law for International Transport between the GCC states. The meeting also reviewed the

work of the task force concerned with compiling the legislative principles. Additionally, it discussed a proposal from the General

Secretariat (the Assistant Secretariat for Legislative and Legal Affairs) regarding awareness-raising on legislative policy and the Legislative Drafting Guide for the unified laws of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as the use of artificial intelligence in the work of the legislative departments in the GCC states. It is worth noting that the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs represents the Sultanate of Oman in the meetings of the Permanent Committee of Legislative Departments of the GCC states, as it is the competent authority in the Sultanate of Oman in light of the mandates assigned to it by Royal Decree No 88/2020. — ONA

Forum reinforces women’s role in Oman Vision 2040

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

THE Omani Women’s Forum, held recently under the auspices of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, served as a national platform for constructive dialogue aiming to develop practical initiatives that promote women’s empowerment and enhance their participation in sustainable development.

The event came as part of the national efforts to achieve Oman Vision 2040 by strengthening the role of Omani women in various sectors and enabling them to play an active role as partners in the nation’s progress.

Dr Auhoud al Balushi, Director of the Centre for Women and Society Studies, stated that the forum represents an open space for discussing challenges and opportunities and showcasing inspiring success stories of Omani women. She emphasised that the goal is to produce realistic recommendations that can be translated into tangible policies and initiatives.

The event featured two main panel discussions that tackled key topics on women’s empowerment and participation in society. The first session, titled ‘Women and Decision-Making’, discussed the importance of women’s participation in leadership, management and policymaking roles across different sectors. It also highlighted success stories of pioneering Omani women leaders. The panelists



The event came as part of the national efforts to strengthening the role of Omani women in various sectors. - Photo by Abdulawahed al Hamdani.

included Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukailiyah, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA), Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), and Areej bint Mohsen al Zaabiyah, Board Member of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Chair of the Chamber’s Women’s Committee. The session was moderated by Buthaina al Balushi from the Ministry of Information, who guided a discussion that focused on supporting Omani women in assuming leadership positions in both public and private sectors.

The second session, titled

‘Women, Media, and Digital Marketing’, shed light on women’s roles in modern media and digital content creation, emphasising the significance of women’s voices in today’s media landscape. The panel included Dr Aisha bint Said al Ghabshiyah, Member of the State Council, Tahira al Lawati, media professional and former Member of the Majlis Ash’shura, Dr Hanan al Kindi, media consultant, and Dr Marwa al Hinaï, academic at Sultan Qaboos University. The discussion was moderated by Khulood al Alawi, General Manager of Hala FM Radio. It highlighted the role of media in shaping the image of Omani women, their growing presence in digital marketing and creative entrepreneurship, and

the challenges facing young women professionals in keeping pace with technological and professional advancements. Speaking to the Observer, Dr Auhoud al Balushi, Member of the State Council and CEO of the Centre for Women and Society Studies, said: “The forum is an intellectual and social dialogue that presents inspiring models of Omani women. We learn from their journeys and experiences of success, drawing lessons and understanding challenges.” Zainab al Balushi, a certified trainer in professional development and skills enhancement, expressed her appreciation for being invited to the forum. She noted that it provided a valuable opportunity to learn about initiatives to empower women.

Global challenge focuses on protecting biodiversity

PANAMA CITY: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education, is participating in the First Global Challenge 2025, held in Panama City, Republic of Panama. The competition, which runs until November 1, sees participation from over 190 countries worldwide.

Oman is represented by a national team comprising three students who qualified for the international event from schools in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The team members are Ziyad al Ismaili from Shaikh Ahmed bin Abdullah Al Kindi School, Al Khalil al Aufi from Bilarab bin Sultan School, and Al Khalil



al Kindi from Abi Obaidah School. The team is supervised by Ibrahim al Balushi from the Department of Innovation and Scientific Olympiad at the Ministry of Education and led by trainer Ahmed al Aufi from the Innovation and Scientific Olympiad Section at the Directorate-General of Education in Al Dakhiliyah. This participation is part of the Ministry of Education’s efforts to embed a culture of innovation in education and develop students’ skills in the fields of science, engineering and artificial intelligence. This year’s competition focuses on protecting biodiversity. — ONA

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



People who were working in the KK Park compound board a vehicle as Thai soldiers keep watch in Mae Sot District, Tak Province area. — AFP

India to repatriate 500 nationals who fled scam centre

BANGKOK: India plans to send an airplane to repatriate some 500 of its nationals who fled from a military raid on a scam centre in Myanmar into Thailand, Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said on Wednesday.

Starting last week, the Myanmar military has conducted a series of military operations against the KK Park cybercrime compound, driving more than 1,500 people from 28 countries into the Thai border town of Mae Sot, according to local authorities.

The border areas between Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia have become hubs for online fraud since the Covid-19 pandemic, and the United Nations says billions of dollars have been earned from trafficking hundreds of thousands of people forced to work in the compounds.

KK Park is notorious for its involvement in transnational cyberscams. The sprawling compound and others nearby are run primarily by Chinese criminal gangs and guarded by local militia groups aligned to Myanmar’s military.

Indian foreign ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India’s embassy was working with Thailand “to verify their nationality and to repatriate them, after necessary legal formalities are completed in Thailand.” — Reuters

Pakistan threatens to ‘obliterate’ Taliban after peace talks fail

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan’s defence minister threatened on Wednesday to “obliterate” the ruling Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan, a dramatic escalation of rhetoric after the collapse of talks towards a lasting peace between the South Asian nations.

Truce negotiations concluded in Istanbul without a “workable solution”, Pakistan’s information minister said early on Wednesday, in a blow for peace in the region after this month’s deadly clashes.

Pakistan reacted with fury to the failure of the talks, which sources said ended with a disagreement over militant groups allegedly using Afghanistan as a base to attack its security forces along their border.

“Pakistan does not require to employ even a fraction of its full arsenal to completely obliterate the Taliban regime and push them back to the caves for hiding,” Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said in a post on X.

The Taliban and Afghanistan’s defence ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the remarks.

Dozens were killed this month along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the worst such violence since the Taliban took power in Kabul in 2021. Both nations agreed to a ceasefire brokered in Doha on October 19, but could not find common ground in a second round of talks mediated by Türkiye and Qatar in Istanbul, Afghan and Pakistani sources briefed on the issue said on Tuesday. — Reuters

PEACE-MAKING

Trump receives S Korea’s top award



Gyeongju: South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has awarded US President Donald Trump the country’s highest order of merit in recognition of his “contribution to peace on the Korean Peninsula,” Seoul said on Wednesday. Trump was awarded the Grand Order of Mugunghwa. The award consists of a pendant worn around the neck. Lee also presented Trump with an ornate, gold-plated replica of a historical crown from Korea’s ancient Silla dynasty.

RECORD RAIN

Vietnam rains kill 7, flood 100,000 homes



Hanoi: Flooding triggered by record heavy rains in central Vietnam this week killed at least seven people and inundated more than 100,000 homes, the environment ministry said on Wednesday. Vietnam’s coastal provinces have been lashed by heavy rains since Sunday, with a record of up to 1.7 metres falling over 24 hours. Seven people have been killed and another five are missing, the ministry said in a report.

BITTER FIGHT

WHO urges Sudan ceasefire after massacres



Port Sudan: Sudan’s warring factions should halt fighting in which hundreds of civilians have been reported killed, including 460 in a hospital, since paramilitaries captured El Fasher, the WHO urged on Wednesday. The government accused the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces of targeting mosques in the city, where Yale University’s Humanitarian Research Lab said satellite images showed evidence of “continuing mass killing”.

Strikes shatter hopes of Gazans trying to rebuild



A boy amid the rubble of a house destroyed in an Israeli strike in Nuseirat on Wednesday. — AFP

THEIR Faces contorted with pain, relatives mourned two children killed in overnight Israeli strikes on Gaza, leaning over small bodies on the pavement wrapped in sheets, one stained blood red.

In the Nuseirat camp in central Gaza on Wednesday, Palestinians combed through piles of broken cement in a house flattened by an air strike, trying to salvage what they could. “We had dinner and sat down, and then it was as if Judgement Day had come. All these stones were on top of us,” Muneer Mayman said, pointing to a pile of cinder blocks and concrete under which he had been found.

“We lay there for more than two hours while they were removing the rubble from over us.”

Behind him, men and children were at work sifting through debris, hauling off belongings wrapped in blankets for lack of bags or wheelbarrows. In south Gaza’s Khan Yunis, an elderly woman held her face between her hands as she sat by a few utensils relatives had salvaged from rubble. Nuseirat’s Al Awda hospital reported at least 31 people killed in the strikes that broke the relative peace brought by a ceasefire that began on October 10.

Gaza’s civil defence agency said that 101 people, including 35 children, were killed since the strikes began, a figure confirmed by an AFP tally of medical officials in five hospitals. Jalal Abbas, a 40-year-old displaced man living in a tent in the central city of Deir Al Balah, said he fears the war will return for good. “The return of war is what we feared most. I expected the escalation and



The return of war is what we feared most. I expected the escalation and bombardment to resume because Israel always creates pretexts... Every day they threaten to bring back the war, using the issue of the bodies as an excuse — it’s all lies.

JALAL ABBAS
Deir Al Balah resident



A man brings an injure child to Al Awda hospital in Nuseirat on Wednesday. — AFP

bombardment to resume because Israel always creates pretexts,” he said.

“Every day they threaten to bring back the war, using the issue of the bodies as an excuse — it’s all lies,” he added.

Abbas was referring to Israel’s declaration that Hamas broke the terms of the US-brokered ceasefire deal by not returning the bodies of deceased hostages quickly enough.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Wednesday the military had launched the strikes “in response to the attack on soldiers and the blatant violation of the agreement to return the abducted missing”.

At least one Israeli soldier was killed in clashes on Tuesday.

In Khan Yunis, members of the civil defence, a rescue force acting under Hamas authority, had been searching by flashlight through the rubble through the night.

Women wailed as the rescuers took away the bodies of deceased relatives on stretchers, before search and rescue teams moved on to the next site, a plot of land where two tents were struck.

In north Gaza’s Al Shati camp, too, bombardments tore through the night. “We had just started to breathe again, trying to rebuild our lives, when the bombardment came back — bringing war, explosions and death,” Khadija al Husni, 31, said.

Husni also lives in a tent, having been displaced at least once, like nearly all Gazans after two years of war. — AFP

SHORTTAKES



Years of conflict in Syria have left many of its ancient cities in ruins, prompting calls for international support to restore key cultural landmarks, including the ancient city of Aleppo and Roman temple sites at Palmyra.

Saudi’s Diriyah eyes role in rebuilding historic Syrian sites

RIYADH: Diriyah, a Saudi gigaproject focused on developing a Riyadh historic site as a real estate and tourism destination, held discussions with Syrian officials this week about contributing to the reconstruction of historic sites in Syria.

“Someone is going to rebuild Damascus and Aleppo at some particular point, someone’s going to rebuild Beirut at some particular point,” Jerry Inzerillo, CEO of Diriyah Gate Company, said in an interview on the sidelines of the Future Investment Initiative (FII) summit in Riyadh. “We can’t do anything right now because we’re busy, but I think at some particular point we would,” he said, adding that he discussed the matter with Syrian cabinet members visiting Riyadh this week.

Years of conflict in Syria have left many of its ancient cities and archaeological treasures in ruins, prompting calls for international support to restore key cultural landmarks, including the ancient city of Aleppo and Roman temple sites at Palmyra. Challenges to such recovery efforts remain, relating to funding, security and political coordination.

Diriyah Gate could expand as a global developer of cultural heritage sites and could also develop six additional cultural heritage sites in Saudi Arabia, Inzerillo said.

The Diriyah project is part of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 strategy to diversify the economy and position the kingdom as a tourism and cultural hub. The development includes luxury hotels, museums and residential units built around the Unesco-listed At-Turaif district, the birthplace of the Saudi state.

TRAIL OF SILK ROUTE



Camels stand near a tower at Jiayu Pass, a strategic point along the Great Wall and the ancient ‘Silk Road’, in Jiayuguan, Gansu province, China, on Wednesday. — Reuters



A resident sits on part of the roof of his house, damaged by Hurricane Melissa, in Santiago de Cuba on Wednesday. — AFP

Melissa slams Cuba after tearing through Jamaica

HURRICANE

Melissa slammed into Cuba early on Wednesday, hours after causing devastation in neighbouring Jamaica as the strongest-ever storm on record to hit that Caribbean island nation.

Melissa hit the southern coast of eastern Cuba with maximum sustained winds of 120 mph (195 kph), the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said.

Around 735,000 people were evacuated from their homes in eastern Cuba as the storm approached, authorities said.

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel warned on Tuesday that the storm would cause “significant damage” and urged people to heed evacuation orders.

Melissa had weakened to a still dangerous Category 3 hurricane after roaring ashore near Jamaica’s southwestern town of New Hope on Tuesday, packing sustained winds of up to 185 mph, well above the 157 mph threshold for Category 5, the highest level on the Saffir-Simpson hurricane scale.

In southwestern Jamaica, the parish of St. Elizabeth was left “underwater,” an official said, with more than 500,000 residents without power. “The reports that we have had so far would include damage to hospitals, significant damage to residential property, housing and commercial property as well, and damage to our road infrastructure,” Jamaican Prime Minister



A police officer inspects a car damaged by a fallen tree after the passage of Hurricane Melissa in Manchester, Jamaica, on Wednesday. — AFP

Andrew Holness said on CNN after the storm had passed.

Holness said the government had not received news of any confirmed deaths from the storm, but given the strength of the hurricane and the extent of the damage, “we are expecting that there would be some loss of life.”

As daylight returned to Jamaica early on Wednesday, eyewitness reports and videos on social media showed swaths of downed trees, washed-out roads and roofs tossed about fields and roadways.

Video of the airport in Montego Bay showed inundated seating areas, broken glass and collapsed ceilings.

Meteorologists at AccuWeather said Melissa ranked as the third most intense hurricane observed in the Caribbean, after Wilma in 2005 and Gilbert in 1988 - the last major storm to make landfall in Jamaica.

Scientists say hurricanes are intensifying faster with greater frequency as a result of warming ocean waters caused by greenhouse gas emissions.

Many Caribbean leaders have called on wealthy, heavy-polluting nations to provide reparations in the form of aid or debt relief to tropical island countries.

CUBA BRACES

The storm’s centre, churning with violent wind gusts over 125 mph and heavy rain, slammed into Guama, a rural, mountainous area 25 miles west of Santiago de Cuba, the island’s second most populous city.

Authorities had shut down power to virtually all of eastern Cuba, evacuated vulnerable areas, and had asked residents to shelter in place in the provincial capital Santiago, a city of 400,000 people.

Authorities reported widespread flooding of lowland areas early on Wednesday from Santiago to Guantanamo, where upwards of 35% of the population had been evacuated.

The timing could not be worse for the Caribbean island. Cuba is already suffering from food, fuel, electricity and medicine shortages that have complicated life for many, prompting record-breaking migration off the island since 2021. — Reuters

Quiet supersonic X-59 jet soars over California desert in test flight

PALMDALE: Nasa’s X-59 supersonic-but-quiet jet soared over the Southern California desert on Tuesday in the first test flight of an experimental aircraft designed to break the sound barrier with little noise, paving the way for faster commercial air travel.

The sleek aircraft, built for Nasa by aerospace contractor Lockheed Martin, took off about an hour after sunrise from a runway at Plant 42 of the company’s Skunk Works facility in Palmdale, about 60 miles (100 km) north of Los Angeles.

After a steep climb over sod fields just east of the runway, the plane was seen banking to the north on a trajectory toward Edwards Air Force Base, where it landed safely about an hour later near Nasa’s Armstrong Flight Research Center. It was accompanied by a Nasa chase plane.

The plane’s unique shape is designed to greatly reduce the explosive-like sonic boom normally produced when an aircraft breaks the sound barrier, lowering the volume to a muffled “sonic thump” no louder than slamming a car door.

Perfection of such low-decibel flight



X-59 takes off from runway 7 at Palmdale USAF Plant 42 in California, on Wednesday. — Reuters

technology is aimed at overcoming one of the primary obstacles to supersonic commercial flight, long restricted over populated areas on land due to noise concerns, according to Lockheed.

Getting the plane off the drawing board and into the air was not inexpensive. Nasa has paid Lockheed more than \$518 million since 2018 to develop and demonstrate X-59, according to agency contracting data.

The single-engine jet - measuring just under

100 feet (30 metres) from nose to tail - flew at subsonic speeds on its first flight, as expected, reaching 230 mph (370 kph), according to Lockheed Martin. Its peak altitude during the flight was 12,000 feet (3,660 metres).

About 200 aerospace workers and their families watched the takeoff from a safe distance, parked along a nearby highway.

“X-59 successfully completed its first flight this morning,” Lockheed Martin spokesperson Candis Roussel said, hailing it as a “significant aviation milestone.”

Nasa’s lead X-59 test pilot Nils Larson was at the controls in the single-crew cockpit for the flight, Roussel said.

The X-59, a one-of-a-kind experimental aircraft, is built to reach a cruising speed of 925 mph (1,490 kph), or Mach 1.4, at an altitude of 55,000 feet (16,764 metres), more than twice as high and nearly twice as fast as conventional airliners fly, the company said.

Data derived from research with the X-59 will inform the development of new sound thresholds for supersonic flight over land, the company said.

The supersonic Concorde aircraft began

scheduled transatlantic flights with British Airways and Air France in 1976. But the plane was retired in 2003 due to high operating costs, limited seating and sluggish passenger numbers following a fatal crash in July 2000 and the September 11 attacks in 2001.

In press materials posted online last month, Nasa said the X-59’s first flight would be a “lower-altitude loop at about 240 mph (386 kph) to check system integration, kicking off a phase of flight testing focused on verifying the aircraft’s airworthiness and safety.”

During subsequent test flights, the X-59 will travel higher and faster, eventually exceeding the speed of sound - approximately 761 mph (1,225 kph) at sea level.

The California Manufacturers & Technology Association earlier this month named the X-59 as 2025’s “Coolest Thing Made in California” in its annual statewide technology contest.

“This work sustains America’s place as the leader in aviation and has the potential to change the way the public flies,” US Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, who is also acting Nasa administrator, said in a statement. — Reuters

OPINION

The weight of weather and its impact on people



RUMAITHA
AL BUSAIDI

The writer is an environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

DURING a guest lecture in Muscat, I asked students one question: What will Oman look like in 2100? Their answers came bright and certain. Greener, they said. Less dependent on oil. New energies everywhere. Yet, I could not shake the image of nine small coffins carried through streets wet with rain in Samad al Shan last year.

The children, aged between 10 and 14 from the same family, were lost to sudden floods just days after Eid, swept away by waters no one anticipated. Their village mourned futures that would never unfold. Scientists, teachers, and leaders who would never have the chance to build the Oman my students imagined.

These students were at the start of their first semester in specialised energy programmes. If anyone should know how to evaluate whether that beautiful future can be built, it should be them. So I spent the morning showing them how to assess new energy projects against the reality of a changing climate. How to ask whether infrastructure can survive cyclones we’ve never seen before. How to measure decisions against what’s already happening to real people in real places.

Each cohort I’ve taught told me the same thing afterward: no one had shown them this lens. I was invited to fill a gap that should not exist, and we see the stakes visible across the world. That same week, survivors of Super Typhoon Rai filed a lawsuit in the United Kingdom against Shell. The storm killed over 400 people in the Philippines in 2021. The families are naming what was lost and asking who bears responsibility. Projects everywhere are beginning to be measured not just against technical specifications but against human cost. From one Omani village to hundreds of villages in the Philippines, the cost is counted in lives.

Oman, too, must take stock. Cyclone Gonu devastated Muscat in 2007. Years later, floods swept through Samad al Shan, taking nine children from a single family. Seventeen years separate these events, which is not an anomaly but an pattern. Storms are intensifying with warming waters and arriving with a force that infrastructure built for yesterday’s climate cannot withstand.

When we approve an energy project, we approve assumptions about what the future will be like. We choose whether to design for the climate we used to have or the one we are entering. Every choice either accounts for what happened in that village, with a school

How to assess new energy projects against the reality of a changing climate. How to ask whether infrastructure can survive cyclones we’ve never seen before. How to measure decisions against what’s already happening to real people in real places.

built within the wadi’s tracks, or assumes water will not rise that fast again.

The students understood once the link was clear. One student leaned back, and I watched something shift in how she saw the work ahead, which was encouraging to see. The troubling part is that this framework is rarely core in other programmes. Many who begin specialised degrees lack tools to judge projects against climate reality. Graduates will step into roles that approve roads, substations, and ports.

Some will make thosecalls without this knowledge.

What happens between now and 2100 depends on whether someone reviewing a proposal this week knows to ask if the design assumes the climate we remember or the climate that is already here. In the Philippines, 400 families are asking who is responsible.

In Samad al Shan, the Abdali tribe will mark another Eid with a loss that does not soften. The task now is to make this way of thinking standard. It cannot depend on a guest lecturer. It must live in every classroom and every approval meeting, the way communities like that village carry the memory of water that rose faster than anyone thought possible.

Record potato harvest is no celebration in fries-mad Belgium

UMBERTO BACCHI

Fries powerhouse Belgium is in for a record potato harvest this year — but that’s hardly cause for celebration for farmers who face a slump in prices partially driven by a crunch in exports.

With almost all potatoes plucked from the ground, the European nation is set to produce about five million tonnes of the tubers, up 11 per cent on 2024 and just short of half a tonne per inhabitant, according to farming group Belpotato.

The milestone comes on the back of a steady rise in potato-farmed land fuelled by the country’s world-beating frozen fries industry, which is now feeling the pinch of US tariffs and growing competition from Asia.

“We are at a tipping point,” Belpotato’s secretary Pierre Lebrun said. “Global markets have been buying fewer European fries”. Fried potatoes are a national dish and symbol of pride in Belgium. Dotted by “friteries” or “frituren” — diners specialising in the stuff with names like Fritapapa and Frit’city — the country has turned its taste for fried sticks into a huge commercial success.

The industry has expanded rapidly over the past decade, and Belgium is currently Europe’s biggest producer and the world’s largest peddler of what the British call chips. In 2024, the country exported more than three billion euros (\$3.5 billion) worth of cooked and frozen potato products, a three-fold increase on 2015, according to European Union data agency Eurostat.

A steady global appetite and a fast-food boom in Asia and the Middle East have spurred investments, said Christophe Vermeulen, the head of trade group CEO Belgapom.

As factories sought to churn out more and more fries, potato prices reached a historic high over the past couple of years — spurring a farming craze.

Farmers bought more land or rented it out from neighbours to plant potatoes, said Lebrun. Producers in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Germany, which also supply Belgian fries manufacturers, added 40,000 hectares to their plots this year, a seven-per cent increase on 2024, according to industry figures.

A similar hike was recorded the previous year. It seemed “the sky was the limit”, Lebrun said. But the situation has now come to a head. Frozen fries-makers — who eat up the lion’s share of Belgian potatoes — have been hit by a triple whammy of import tariffs in key market the US, a strong euro hurting exports and the emergence of rivals in India, China and Egypt, said Vermeulen. — AFP

Building cultural bridges with the closest east

NOT long ago, during a visit to Colombo—the capital of Sri Lanka, once known to Arabs as Serendib—I wandered through its streets and countryside on my way to its green havens, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya. I stopped at what locals call the city’s “book street,” reminiscent of Baghdad’s Al Mutanabbi Street or Cairo’s Al Attaba. As I browsed the crowded stalls, I felt both familiarity and distance. Earlier journeys from Mumbai to Hanoi had revealed cultures rich in philosophy, art and wisdom—worlds close to us, yet strangely overlooked, while our gaze remains fixed on the distant West.

This is not a call to close ourselves off; every civilisation holds its own beauty. Yet we once shared deep connections with these eastern nations through trade, language, faith, dress and food. Standing among the bookstalls, I recalled a note I had written that day: “In Colombo’s street of old books, one senses the wisdom of the Indus Valley—India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Maldives.

Despite hardship and political tension, the region carries a spiritual and intellectual legacy of great depth. It sustains a diverse coexistence of faiths and philosophies, while its universities lead in science and technology. Yet we Arabs still know little of its knowledge, though it lies close to us in geography, history and culture.”

I noticed that many books were in English but written by local authors—monks, scholars and writers reflecting on their inner and cultural experiences. There lies a world of ideas near to us but rarely explored. We often understand these cultures through Western lenses rather than their own voices, just as others once understood us



There lies a world of ideas near to us but rarely explored. We often understand these cultures through Western lenses rather than their own voices, just as others once understood us only through Orientalist writings.



BADR AL ABRI

The writer is the author of *The Jurisprudence of Extremism*

To know the world, we must look not only westward but also towards the rising light of the east, where echoes of our own story still live.

only through Orientalist writings. This distance must end. These societies share with us much of our past, our struggles and even our sensibilities. We should therefore establish university departments and research centres focused on studying the East, translating its essential works, and engaging with its intellectual heritage—not merely through tourism or transient politics.

This is not to exclude the rest of the world. True openness means embracing all knowledge, but we should stop being passive consumers of what others write. The Arab world often recycles rather than produces knowledge, rearranging Western theories within old frameworks. Translation and interpretation are valuable, but they must lead to discovery. We need to explore nearby intellectual worlds that remain outside our view.

Such exploration cannot thrive in fragmented or ideologically constrained environments. Knowledge grows only in spaces that allow freedom and diversity of thought. In the Maghreb, research

has advanced but suffers from limited resources; in the East, resources exist but independence is often lacking. Knowledge, however, recognises no borders—geographic, political or religious. Our shared heritage calls for joint cultural institutions that focus on creative production, not endless repetition.

The spread of intolerance towards difference, fear of openness, and shallow understanding of “the other” all result from the absence of such intellectual spaces. In their place rise rigid voices claiming absolute truth, manipulating ignorance and emotion. What begins as individual extremism soon becomes collective conviction, stifling scholarship and isolating society from its surroundings.

The result is a region hesitant to explore and fearful of dialogue, content to live within its own echo chambers while the world grows ever more connected. The east that once exchanged goods, ideas and poetry with us now stands before us, waiting to be rediscovered. Its philosophies of balance, its reflections on humanity and nature, and its traditions of coexistence offer valuable lessons at a time when division dominates global discourse.

We do not need to imitate these societies, but to learn from their paths and share with them our own. The rediscovery of the east is not nostalgia—it is a step towards recovering our intellectual vitality and our ability to engage the world on equal terms. To know the world, we must look not only westward but also towards the rising light of the east, where echoes of our own story still live.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari
The original version of this article was published in Oman Arabic newspaper on October 29, 2025.

Trump-related memes that reinforce his imaginary status



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

BIZARRE and provocative AI-generated memes ranging from Pope Trump to Star Wars Day lightsaber flub to the most recent ‘King Trump’ video, serve to reinforce and illustrate Trump’s projection of himself as a larger-than-life, mythic figure. These memes mock millions of American protesters who took to the streets to oppose his leadership and perceived authoritarian tendencies.

Critics argue these memes are vulgar and inflammatory, while supporters frame these videos as humorous or satirical.

Media scholars describe memes as amateur, pop-cultural artefacts that serve as a vehicle for commenting on political events and provide insights into how everyday media engage with public discourse. Scholars also argue that memes reflect worldviews and the presumed truths that underlie them.

These memes expose and reinforce the image of a public figure who believes in unchecked power, willing to disregard social order and international laws. In doing so, they shape the mythic status that Trump has created about himself.

Funny memes, which include elements of hate, jokes, and sarcasm, exemplify the various types of dark humour that can be damaging to those who are targeted. This often results in offensive content being dismissed as ‘just a joke’. The use of humour

enables manipulators to conceal messages that the public would typically deem unacceptable.

One of the contentious examples of AI-generated creativity, which was shared without context or credit, was the video on Trump’s vision for a Riviera in (Gaza) the Middle East. The creators of the video assert that their concept originated from a speech delivered by Trump in Las Vegas.

Hate speech is typically regarded as spoken or written language targeting a specific group. But hate speech can also be visual. Both linguistic and visual signs of hate spread through media, sometimes fused as memes, yet most studies focus on textual or verbal analysis, ignoring the visual side of hate speech. Visual images are highly effective at conveying information concisely and engagingly, making them easier to process.

In memes, image organisation, including the positioning of elements and framing, contributes to an image’s internal flow and carries with it ideological meanings. Saliency, which connotes importance and power, is expressed through visual designs using cultural symbols, size, colour, tone, focus, and foregrounding.

One clear strategy to represent Trump as powerful is a visual mashup with his head on a mythical character’s body. The ‘God Emperor Trump’ series depicts Trump as the ruler of the world, wearing armour modelled after that of the immortal Emperor

These memes expose and reinforce the image of a public figure who believes in unchecked power, willing to disregard social order and international laws. In doing so, they shape the mythic status that Trump has created about himself

of Mankind from the war game Warhammer 40,000, also known as ‘God Emperor’ or ‘Imperium of Man’. These compositional choices help reinforce Trump’s mythic status. According to the ‘Know Your Meme’ website, these images first appeared on 4Chan in June 2015.

Both the vertical and horizontal angles of interaction suggest strength. The camera looks up at Trump, connoting great power. His body also faces the camera, though his face looks off to the side. The pose suggests that he is not present to engage with viewers in a way that implies interaction. Instead, he is posing to be admired.

Trump’s power is not just represented in godlike imagery. Even the American national symbol, the bald eagle, is portrayed in the ‘God Emperor Trump’ as submissive to his rule rather than soaring freely.

The most recent meme post on Trump’s social platforms shows him wearing a crown and flying a jet labelled ‘King Trump’ that drops brown liquid on the heads of demonstrators. The short video was posted on the same day that millions of protestors in all 50 American states were chanting slogans against his authoritarian ways of governance.

Memes have become increasingly prevalent in Trump’s political discourse. He has trivialised significant issues, yet the emotions expressed on social media often disregard factual accuracy. Memes are constructed illusions.

FUNDS FOR CLIMATE ADAPTATION ‘LIFELINE’ FAR OFF TRACK

KELLY MACNAMARA

Wealthy countries are failing to meet their promised targets to provide a funding “lifeline” to help poorer nations prepare for worsening climate calamities, the UN warned on Wednesday.

Efforts to adapt to the increasingly dangerous and costly impacts of climate change - from building defensive sea walls, to planting drought-resistant crops - are set to be a major focus of United Nations climate negotiations in Brazil from November 10.

Storms supercharged by hotter seas, devastating floods, heatwaves and wildfires are intensifying across the planet as a result of warming driven by humanity’s burning of oil, gas and coal.

But the promised international funding is far off track, according to the latest Adaptation Gap report by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

“Climate impacts are accelerating. Yet adaptation finance is not keeping pace, leaving the world’s most vulnerable exposed to rising seas, deadly storms, and searing heat,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in his message on the report.

“Adaptation is not a cost - it is a lifeline.” Richer countries pledged in 2021 to double annual public adaptation finance for developing countries to around \$40 billion by 2025.

Instead, funding actually fell from \$28 billion in 2022 to \$26 billion in 2023, according to the latest figures in this report. Data from 2024 and 2025 is not yet available.

In her foreword to the report, UNEP chief Inger Andersen said that it now “seems unlikely” that this trend will turn around, imperilling long-term climate finance goals and meaning “many more people will suffer needlessly”.

The report projected that the adaptation finance needs of developing countries would be over \$310 billion by 2035 - 12 times more than the 2023 levels. “As action to cut greenhouse gas emissions continues to lag, these impacts will only get worse, harming more people and causing significant economic damage,” Andersen said in a statement.

Many developing countries are already grappling with the increasing costs of climate disasters today, as well as crushing debt levels, making investments in future resilience even harder.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has gutted the country’s main foreign development organisation, while other major donors have also squeezed their aid budgets.

Andersen called for a global effort to increase the money available, but cautioned against approaches that pile debt onto developing countries. — AFP

Courts are shaping the future of climate action

AMID rising geopolitical tensions, pressure to comply with climate obligations increasingly comes from courts. Earlier this year, both the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) issued landmark advisory opinions affirming that countries must address climate change, and that failure to do so may carry serious legal consequences.

This renewed legal clarity comes at a critical moment. Last year was the hottest on record, with global average temperatures exceeding 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels, yet the gulf between the urgency of the climate threat and the policy response continues to widen.

In the absence of political will, the legal system has become a key driver of climate progress. As the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Brazil (COP30) approaches, the groundwork has been laid for stronger, fairer, and more accountable climate action. The task now is for governments to adapt their policies in accordance with both international law and environmental needs.

The most immediate implication of the ICJ and IACtHR opinions is that national climate plans – known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) – must reflect the “highest possible ambition” and be consistent with the 2015 Paris climate agreement’s goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C. Alarmingly, as of 2024, global temperatures are on track to rise by up to 3.1°C by the end of the century. Following the September deadline for new NDCs, only half of greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions are covered by updated climate pledges, most of which fall well short of science-based targets.

The ICJ and IACtHR decisions, however, offer some cause for hope. At COP30, negotiators and civil-society representatives can push for ambitious measures, as non-compliance with the Paris agreement’s temperature goals can



The ICJ and IACtHR decisions, however, offer some cause for hope.



FRANCESCA MASCHA KLEIN

The writer is Legal Officer for Strategic Litigation at Germanwatch



LAURA SCHÄFER

The writer is Head of the Division for International Climate Policy at Germanwatch

be challenged not only in diplomatic forums but also in courts.

A rapid phaseout of coal, oil, and gas remains essential to effective climate action. But despite the so-called “UAE consensus” to move away from fossil fuels, many countries continue to obstruct progress. Here, too, the ICJ provides negotiators with new tools, explicitly recognising that governments may be held liable for failure to reduce GHG emissions, including through fossil-fuel production, consumption, exploration, and subsidies.

The international climate regime must evolve to reflect these changing legal realities. That requires creating stronger compliance mechanisms that ensure countries meet their targets and deliver on climate-finance commitments.

The legal shift is particularly evident in climate finance. For decades, developed countries have treated funding for climate adaptation and loss and damage as discretionary. Consequently, despite the establishment of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage at COP28, contributions remain far below what is needed.

The path forward is clear. The ICJ’s opinion affirms that wealthy countries have a legally binding duty to support mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage efforts across the developing world. To meet these obligations, at least \$1.3 trillion must be mobilised annually by 2035, with dedicated provisions for loss and damage.

Crucially, the private sector is not being let off the hook. The ICJ, IACtHR, and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea have all recognised that governments must regulate corporations where necessary to protect the environment, safeguard the climate system, and uphold human rights.

At the same time, corporate accountability is taking shape in domestic courts. In a landmark decision, Germany’s Higher Regional Court of Hamm ruled that large emitters can, in principle, be held liable for climate-related impacts. The case, brought by Peruvian farmer Saúl Luciano Lliuya, shows that individuals on the front lines of the climate crisis can force polluters to pay their fair share. But litigation alone cannot deliver justice at scale. Governments must establish clear legal frameworks to hold major emitters fully accountable for their role in driving the climate crisis before the damage becomes irreversible. Mechanisms such as mandatory reserves, disclosure rules, insurance schemes, and compensation funds can help internalise liability risks and embed accountability into the system, rather than leaving it to goodwill or the courts.

In countries like the Philippines and Pakistan, as well as US states such as Vermont and New York, lawmakers are advancing “polluter pays” legislation. Remarkably, climate lawsuits, by plaintiffs ranging from indigenous groups in Canada to farmers in Korea, are already invoking the ICJ’s reasoning, and a Brazilian court explicitly cited it when ordering a fossil project to cease operations.

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SPORTS

PASSIONCONTINUES

HALF A CENTURY WITH THE WORLD CUP: MENDIS AND HIS ENDURING LOVE AFFAIR



DULEEP MENDIS

Oman head coach

remarkable love stories between a man and the World Cup. “It’s been a long journey — fifty years with the World Cup in one form or another,” Mendis said at the Oman Cricket Academy ground after Oman’s recent qualification for the 2026 ICC Men’s T20 World Cup, to be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka in February-March. “Every time, the feeling is the same. The excitement, the anticipation, the pride. It never fades.”

Mendis’s first brush with the World Cup came as a young batter in the 1975 Prudential Cup, when one-day cricket was still experimental.

“They wanted to attract crowds in England because interest in cricket was fading,” he recalled. “It was the first time they tried 60-over games. We played Australia, but things didn’t go as planned — I even ended up in hospital after being hit on the head by Jeff Thomson.”

That baptism of fire didn’t deter him. He went on to represent Sri Lanka in the 1979 and 1983 editions before captaining the national team at the 1987 World Cup — the first after Sri Lanka had gained Test status.

From Sri Lankan trailblazer to Oman’s guiding light, the veteran coach marks 50 years of World Cup passion with yet another qualification triumph

MUSCAT: It has been half a century since Duleep Mendis first walked out on the global stage of cricket’s biggest spectacle. From representing Sri Lanka in the inaugural Prudential World Cup of 1975 to leading Oman to a historic fourth ICC T20 World Cup appearance in 2025, his journey stands as one of the most

By 1992, Mendis had transitioned to the role of head coach for Sri Lanka at the Benson & Hedges World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. Four years later, he played a pivotal off-field role in one of cricket’s greatest fairy tales. “In 1996, I was the team manager and also

chairman of selectors,” he said.

“That was a proud moment — we won the World Cup, beating Australia in the final. I still believe it was one of the greatest achievements of Sri Lankan cricket.”

A NEW CHAPTER IN OMAN

In 2012, Mendis received a call that would change the course of cricket in Oman. Oman Cricket’s present chairman, Pankaj Khimji, invited him to visit and help structure the country’s cricketing framework. “I didn’t know much about Oman cricket,” Mendis said. “But I like challenges. I came here, met the people, saw the passion, and decided to stay.”

The decision paid off handsomely. Under his stewardship, Oman transformed from a promising Associate member into one of the most consistent teams in the region.

Oman qualified for their maiden ICC T20 World Cup in 2016 and recorded one of the tournament’s biggest upsets by stunning Test-playing Ireland in Dharamsala — a result that helped Oman get the cricketing spotlight.

“That win over Ireland was huge,” Mendis recalled. “It gave Oman the confidence that we could compete at this level. And since then, we’ve just kept building.”

Oman have qualified for the 2021 T20 World Cup — which they also co-hosted with the UAE — and again for the 2024 and 2025 editions, making it four qualifications in just nine years, a record for any Asian associate nation.

The latest qualification came on home soil in 2025, with Oman finishing second behind Nepal in a tough nine-team tournament.

“We’ve shown that Oman can play with the best,” says Mendis. “Now the next goal is to not just participate but to make a real impact — to win matches against the big teams.”

3 Omanis secure spots in top fleet at Optimist event

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

THE 2025 Asian & Oceanian Optimist Championship, organised by Oman Sail in collaboration with the Oman Marine Sports Committee and the International Optimist Dinghy Association (IODA), continued this week off the coast of Al Musannah with ideal sailing conditions and fierce competition among young sailors from across Asia and Oceania.

The opening day on Monday saw perfect weather and steady winds that helped ensure a smooth start to the qualifying series. Sailors were divided into three colour-coded groups red, yellow and blue, to compete in four races each, setting the stage for the decisive rounds ahead.

On the second day, sailors returned to the water for two additional qualification races marked by tactical duels and impressive displays of skill and focus. The level of competition intensified as participants aimed to secure a place in the elite Gold Fleet.

The momentum carried into Wednesday, which hosted the final qualifying races. At the end of the day, three Omani sailors, Mohammed al Qasmi, Khalid al Sarihi and Khamis al Mashaikhi, successfully advanced to the Gold Fleet after delivering exceptional performances throughout the preliminary rounds.

Their results reflect the growing strength of Oman’s youth sailing programmes and the nation’s commitment to developing world-class sailors.

IODA PRAISES GROWTH, ORGANISERS Speaking to the media, Susan Elliot, Ioda Race Coordinator, praised the impressive organisation and regional development of sailing. “Over the past decade, we have witnessed a remarkable resurgence in the performance of Asian and Oceanian sailors internationally, largely due to increased investment in youth sailing and Optimist training programmes. Hosting championships like this one plays a vital role in inspiring the next generation of sailors.”

She added that hosting large-scale events presents logistical challenges from accommodation and transport to smooth race operations, but noted that Oman Sail has excelled in delivering



Three Omani sailors, Mohammed al Qasmi, Khalid al Sarihi and Khamis al Mashaikhi, successfully advanced to the Gold Fleet.

both professionalism and genuine Omani hospitality. “Visiting Oman is always a special experience. Barcelo Musannah Resort provides the perfect venue for an event of this scale and the dedication of the organising team has ensured that every detail, on and off the water, is handled with precision and care.”

SAFETY TAKES PRIORITY Mohammed al Balushi, the event’s Safety Officer, emphasised that safety remains the top priority throughout the competition. “The Royal Oman Police Coast Guard is stationed nearby, supported

by divers, lifeguards and a fully equipped medical team ready for any emergency.” “We also monitor every boat through a digital tracking system to ensure full supervision and swift response at all times,” he added. On Thursday, the championship will feature the Team Racing events, where the best-performing national teams will compete head-to-head before the fleet finals begin later this week. With top young sailors advancing into the Gold, Silver and Bronze fleets, spectators can expect thrilling duels and exceptional displays of skill as the road to the continental titles continues.

Oman, Saudi Arabia forge hockey development alliance

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

A strategic partnership between the Oman and Saudi Hockey Federations marks a new step towards advancing the sport across the Gulf region. In line with efforts to strengthen regional cooperation and develop the sports system, the Oman Hockey Association (OHA) has signed a partnership and cooperation agreement with the Saudi Hockey Federation to enhance technical, administrative, and organisational aspects of the sport and open new horizons for its regional development.

The agreement was signed by Dr Marwan bin Juma al Jumaa, OHA Chairman, and Abdulilah bin Mansour al Maimoun, CEO of the Saudi Hockey Federation, in the presence of board members and representatives from both sides. The agreement includes a comprehensive



The agreement aims to boost hockey in the Gulf. — Khalfan al Ruzaiqi

cooperation programme that encompasses the exchange of expertise between coaches and referees, joint training camps, tournaments and development courses, as well as collaboration in sports management, marketing and player and technical staff development programmes. This partnership represents a significant milestone in the sports relations between the two countries, paving the way for an integrated system that will help qualify national talents and enhance the competitiveness of Gulf national teams in continental

and international events. The new partnership also sets the stage for joint initiatives such as hosting friendly tournaments, training programmes, workshops and the exchange of technical and administrative expertise. It aims to strengthen the presence of hockey in the Gulf, reflecting the strong ties between Oman and Saudi Arabia. The agreement also provides a platform to expand the reach of the sport across the region and create quality opportunities for the development of players, coaches and referees in

line with international best practices. Ahmed al Darmaki, OHA Board Member, stated that the signing of the agreement marks a continuation of Oman’s efforts to develop the sport, which is considered one of the oldest in the country and enjoys a strong status on the Gulf, Arab and Asian levels. He noted that the coming phase will focus on expanding the sport’s presence across the Gulf and supporting federations that show genuine interest in establishing and strengthening hockey programmes in their countries. Abdulilah bin Mansour al Maimoun, CEO of the Saudi Hockey Federation, emphasised that the agreement with Oman aligns with Saudi Arabia’s continuous efforts to support athletes and fulfil their aspirations in line with the Kingdom’s vision for sports development and quality of life.

KEENTUSSLE



Seeb and Kuwait SC players in action.

SEEB, KUWAIT SC
PLAY OUT 1-1 DRAW
IN AFC CHALLENGE
LEAGUE

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

Oman’s Seeb club ended their second match against hosts Kuwait SC at 2025-26 AFC Challenge League Group B clash on Tuesday in a 1-1 draw. The draw postponed determination of group winners who will secure the automatic qualifying spot to the last round on Friday.

Seeb must register a win against Lebanon’s Al Ansar FC if they want to qualify as the group toppers, while a draw will make them depend on the other groups results. In the other match of the group, Lebanon’s Al Ansar FC revived their hopes after beating Bashundhara Kings 3-0.

Seeb, champions of the 2022 AFC Cup, will continue to demonstrate their competitive spirit on the continental stage as they aim to secure a place in the AFC Challenge League knockout phase.

Seeb head coach Nicola Djurovic commended his players for their commitment and performance against a strong opponent. “It was not an easy match, and we missed the victory after failing to convert our scoring chances,” said Djurovic.

“Our situation now is quite challenging, as we must win the upcoming match against Al Ansar to ensure our qualification. The players are already focused and preparing strongly for that decisive clash.”

Despite a strong start by the home side, Seeb managed to break the deadlock in the 33rd minute after Kuwait SC goalkeeper Khaled al Rushidi parried an attempt from Nasser al Rawahi, veteran striker Abdulaziz al Maqbali reacted quickest to slot home the rebound and give the Omani side the lead. However, the advantage was short-lived. Ten minutes later, Kuwait SC found the equaliser through Amoory, who curled a superb effort into the top corner following a smart short corner routine, leaving Seeb’s goalkeeper Ahmed al Rawahi with no chance.

Seeb came close to restoring their lead in the 61st minute when Ali al Busaidy delivered a low cross that Al Maqbali narrowly fired over from close range. Another golden opportunity went begging in the 82nd minute when Nanga Soro’s strike from a Mohamed al Hatmi cutback was denied by the outstretched leg of Al Rushidi. Despite the relentless pressure in the closing stages, Seeb were unable to find the decisive goal and the match ended in a 1-1 draw.



Oman esports team started with a 2-0 victory over Indonesia. — Nawaf al Busaidy

Esports team opens with win
to keep hopes in Bahrain

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 29

THE Oman national esports team began its Rocket League campaign at the third Asian Youth Games in Bahrain with a well-deserved 2-0 victory over Indonesia in its opening match, before falling 2-1 to Jordan in the second encounter. It was a mixed start that provided valuable lessons and fuelled ambition ahead of the remaining group stage fixtures.

In swimming, Mohammed al Farsi concluded his participation without winning a medal, despite finishing second place in the 100m backstroke heats in Group 1 with a time of 1:06.54. The result was not enough to secure a place in the finals amid strong competition from East Asian swimmers, as China’s Ji Shiji topped the heat with a time of 57.31 seconds.

The third edition of the Games, held from October 22 to 31, brings together over 5,000 athletes from 45 Asian National Olympic Committees, competing in 24 sports, 31 categories, and 253 events, hosted at major sports venues including: Isa Sports City, Khalifa Sports City, Bahrain International Exhibition & Convention Centre, Endurance Village and Sama Bay Zone.

STRONG START IN ‘ROCKET LEAGUE’
The Oman esports team delivered an impressive performance in its debut, showing great cohesion, focus and control from the outset thanks to solid team tactics and swift transitions between offence and defence. The opening win significantly boosted the players’ morale and gave the team strong momentum.



Mohammed al Farsi finished second in the 100m backstroke heats in Group 1.

Despite the narrow loss in the second match against Jordan, who led by one goal at half-time, Oman’s efforts to overturn the result and equalise fell short, ending the match in an undeserved 2-1 loss.

The team heads into the remaining group stage matches with strong hopes of securing a qualifying spot. Oman are scheduled to face Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain in what promises to be a challenging route to the knockout phase.

Twenty Asian teams are competing in the Rocket League event. Oman are represented by three players born in 2008: Sultan bin Kamran al Balushi, Mishari bin Ammar al Ajmi and Abdullah bin Badr al Amri. The delegation is headed by Hamad bin Yaqub al Jahwari (team manager) and Abdullah bin Nasser al Atiqi (coach).

Matches are played in a 3 vs 3 format. In the event of a tie, an additional overtime round determines the winner.

Group stage matches follow a single round-robin format, where the winner earns 1 point and the loser earns 0 point. The top three teams from each group advance to the knockout stage, which is played in a single-elimination format, requiring strong control, tactics and teamwork.

GOOD SHOW IN SWIMMING
The swimming heats witnessed fierce competition among top swimmers from across the continent, particularly from East Asia. Al Farsi competed in the 100m backstroke heats and delivered a good performance, placing second in his group, but his time was not enough to reach the final. He also exited the heats in the 100m freestyle, 100m backstroke, 50m freestyle and 50m backstroke events.

After his final race, Al Farsi said: “It was an important and enriching experience for me. Although I was not able to reach the finals, I gained valuable experience and competed with some of the best swimmers in Asia, especially from the East. This participation will motivate me to work harder in the coming period to improve my performance and timing.”

He expressed his gratitude to the Oman Olympic Committee, the Oman Swimming Association, and the technical and administrative teams for their support.

TECHNICAL COMMITTEES
Oman is also represented on the technical and organisational side of the Games, with Mal Allah al Busaidy, a member of the Asian Aquatics Technical Committee, participating as part of the tournament’s technical committee.

Al Busaidy explained that the committee plays a vital role in ensuring aquatics competitions run to the highest standards through preparing technical regulations, setting participation criteria, supervising referees, reviewing technical performance, and coordinating with the organising body to ensure the readiness of sporting facilities, equipment and technologies.

Oman’s coastline makes waves with Deep Water Solo 2025

NAJAH AL RIYAMI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

The cliffs of Barr Al Jissah came alive on October 25 as Oman hosted the second edition of the Deep Water Solo Friendly Open, drawing climbers from across the Gulf, Europe, and beyond for a day of competition, courage and community.

Against the dramatic backdrop of Muscat’s coastline, athletes arrived at Bandar Al Rowdha Marina before setting off aboard traditional dhows to the competition site. By mid-morning, the turquoise waters below the cliffs were alive with shouts, splashes, and cheers as climbers tested their strength and nerve on the sheer limestone walls rising straight out of the sea.

Deep Water Soloing, or Psicobloc, is climbing in its purest form. Without ropes or harnesses, competitors rely entirely on technique, power and composure, with only the ocean below to break their fall. For spectators following by boat, the sight of climbers pushing through crux moves before plunging into the water made for an unforgettable spectacle.

This year’s event brought together participants from 16 nations and showcased the increasingly international character of Oman’s adventure sports scene. Christian Medina from Ecuador claimed first place in the men’s category, followed by Saud al Zohli of Oman and Rob Lowe from the United Kingdom. In the women’s division, Magdalena



In the women’s division, Magdalena Nowak of Poland took the top spot.

Nowak of Poland took the top spot, with Ilia and Lavi, both from Russia, placing second and third. “The energy this year was incredible — the community, the level of competition, and the shared love for the sport,” said Issam al Busaidy, who has been instrumental in building Oman’s Deep Water Solo community. “Muscat might be the only capital city in the world where you can climb high-quality DWS routes right within city limits.”

The event builds on a legacy that began in 2017, when Read Macadam and world-renowned climber Chris Sharma introduced the first Psicobloc competition in the Middle East. That pioneering effort inspired a new generation of climbers and helped establish Oman as a natural

playground for those seeking authentic, outdoor challenges. Since then, the Deep Water Solo scene has evolved from a small group of enthusiasts into a growing regional movement. Regular community climbs, training initiatives and international collaborations have contributed to Oman’s reputation as a hub for adventure tourism. Local organisations and sponsors have also played a key role in providing logistical support, safety infrastructure and promotion, ensuring that the event maintains international standards while preserving its grassroots spirit. The 2025 edition concluded with a prize ceremony and community gathering at Bandar Al Rowdha Marina.

SPORTS

DEFENDING CHAMPIONS

OMAN’S BODYBUILDERS TO VIE IN WEST ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIP IN BAHRAIN

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

Oman’s national bodybuilding and physique team will take part in the sixth edition of the West Asian Bodybuilding Championship which will take place in Bahrain on Thursday and will run until Sunday.

The regional event will feature wide participation from various West Asian bodybuilding federations. Oman hosted the previous edition of the event in Muscat last year.

The Oman bodybuilders showed an impressive performance at home as they claimed the top spot in the overall standings with a total score of 325 points while Iraq came in second with 234 points and Iran team with 204 points in third position. Oman’s bodybuilders and physique stars earned a total of 46 medals including 20 gold, 17 silver and 9 bronze.

The Omani delegation in Bahrain will be headed by Imad al Salti, the newly-elected Chairman of Oman Bodybuilding Committee (OBC), Mohammed al Oraimi, OBC Secretary, is the team manager.

The delegation includes international referee Badr al Amri and national bodybuilders including Asaad al Siyabi, Ahmed al Hadidi, Ali al Maamari, Mohammed al Ajmi, Abdulmajid al Raisi, Nasser al Wahibi, Khalid al Shahi, Mahir al Balushi and Moosa al Balushi.

The competition will be held at Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Khalifa Hall at the University of Bahrain in Muharraq on Saturday and Sunday while the athletes’ weigh-in will take place on Friday at the Golden Tulip Hotel which will also host the participating delegations.

The Omani team will enter this championship with strong ambitions to secure multiple medals, building on its impressive record in previous regional events, where Omani athletes consistently delivered strong performances and podium finishes.

The national team bodybuilders underwent an extensive preparation since the start of the year, reaching advanced levels of readiness that position them among the top contenders in both bodybuilding and physique categories.

Oman replace Pakistan at Junior Hockey World Cup

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

OMAN will mark their first-ever appearance at the FIH Hockey Men’s Junior World Cup when Oman took the spot after Pakistan pulled out of the event in India.

The men’s junior team of Oman will now join the list of participating teams for this event that will take place from November 28 to December 10, 2025 in the cities of Chennai and Madurai in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

Oman join as the next highest placed team in the continental championship (Junior Asia Cup 2024) qualifying for this Junior World Cup.

The International Hockey Federation (FIH) announced Oman’s qualification after the Pakistan Hockey Federation has notified the FIH that they have not accepted the invitation to participate in the upcoming Tamil Nadu 2025, after their team had qualified for this event at the Asia Junior Cup last year.

Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, Chairman of the Oman Hockey Association (OHA), said the entry to the World Cup is a major milestone for hockey in Oman.

“Getting an entry to the World Cup is a major milestone in the development of hockey in Oman. This gives a golden chance for the next generation of players to gain experience and compete at the global level, which will further strengthen Oman’s presence on the international hockey map.

EXTREMELY PROUD

The OHA chief expressed his appreciation to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Oman Olympic Committee, partners,



Oman emerged AHF Cup winners in 2025.

“We are extremely proud of this historic achievement for the Sultanate of Oman. It reflects the tremendous efforts made by the OHA, the players and the technical and administrative staff to elevate the sport to this honourable level. Without doubt, our participation in the Junior World Cup is the culmination of years of planning and hard work.

DR MARWAN AL JUMA
OHA Chairman

and sponsors for their continuous support in advancing hockey in Oman and for their contribution to the association’s progress.

“We are extremely proud of this historic achievement for the Sultanate of Oman. It reflects the tremendous efforts made by the OHA, the players and the technical and administrative staff to elevate the sport to this honourable level. Without doubt, our participation in the Junior World Cup is the culmination of years of planning and hard work.”

“It is a qualitative step towards building a new generation of players capable of competing at the continental and global levels. We will continue working with a team spirit to ensure ideal preparation for the squad and a performance that honours Oman in this world-class event, Al Juma concluded.

This edition will make history as the first-ever FIH Junior Hockey World Cup to feature 24 teams, expanding the global reach of the sport.

From traditional powerhouses like Argentina, India and Germany to exciting debutants like Switzerland, Namibia and China,

the expanded format promises more matches and more opportunities for emerging talent to shine.

Germany won the last edition in 2023, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

With state-of-the-art venues, vibrant fan culture, and the electric atmosphere of Indian hockey, this event will showcase the future of the game in its purest, most energetic form.

The pool stage matches will be played from November 28 to December 2, followed by knockout matches from December 4 to 10.

The tournament will also mark a new step in FIH’s digital and broadcast evolution, bringing the action closer to fans worldwide through the revamped Watch. Hockey platform.

TEAMS

Pool A: Canada, Germany, Ireland, South Africa

Pool B: Chile, India, Oman, Switzerland

Pool C: Argentina, China, Japan, New Zealand

Pool D: Belgium, Egypt, Spain, Namibia

Pool E: Austria, England, Malaysia, Netherlands

Pool F: Australia, Bangladesh, France, Korea

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Qurayat, Sohar, Dhofar and Masirah secure spots in HM Cup final round

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

Qurayat, Sohar, Dhofar and Masirah have claimed the final four qualification spots for the final rounds of the 55th edition of the His Majesty’s Cup Hockey 2025, following the decisive playoff matches held on Wednesday. The matches witnessed fierce competition and dramatic battles to seize the remaining tickets.

Qurayat thumped Oman Club 8-2 in the decisive match played at the Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat.

Qurayat opened the scoring through Sufyan Saeed Nasser in the 12th minute after a well-coordinated attack. Mohammed bin Mubasher al Balushi doubled the lead in the 15th minute, ending the first period 2-0 ahead. In the second quarter, the team extended their lead through Said al Fazari in the 17th minute and Hamza Ali in the 29th minute, closing the first half comfortably at 4-0.

Qurayat’s dominance continued in the third quarter, with Mohammed bin Mubasher al Balushi netting the fifth goal and his third of the match. Oman reduced the gap through Aws al Zadjali from a penalty corner in the 36th minute. Qurayat quickly responded through Azid al Fazari, also from a penalty corner, before Al Balushi completed his hat-trick with the seventh goal in the 43rd minute.

In the final quarter, Al Zadjali scored Oman’s second goal, but Azid al Fazari sealed the result with an



Qurayat and Oman Club players in action. — **Khalfan al Ruzaigi**

eighth goal from a penalty corner in the 58th minute, securing a well-deserved qualification for Qurayat.

DHO FAR CLAIM GROUP C SPOT

Dhofar booked their place in the final phase after defeating Mirbat 5-3 in a thrilling playoff match at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex in Salalah.

Dhofar started strong with a fourth-minute opener by Basim bin Khater Dorbin, followed by a second goal from Abdullah bin Mohammed al Nubi in the 8th minute. Despite Mirbat’s attempts to respond, Dhofar ended the first quarter 2-0 ahead.

Abdullah al Raa extended the lead with a third goal in the 24th minute.

Early in the third quarter, Dhofar widened the margin with a penalty stroke converted by Abdullah al Raa in the 32nd minute, before Mohammed Akgak added a fifth goal from a penalty corner. Mirbat finally found the net through Mohammed

bin Salem al Toubi. They netted a second goal from a penalty corner by Yusuf bin Salem Yusuf in the 50th minute, followed by a third from Mzeed Abdulhakim in the 51st minute, but Dhofar held firm until the final whistle.

SOHAR, MASIRAH ADVANCE

Sohar qualified for the final stage without playing after Saham failed to show up for the playoff match scheduled at the Sohar Sports Complex. Sohar were awarded a 5-0 win in accordance with the Oman Hockey Association regulations.

In the last playoff match, Masirah beat Rustaq 4-2 to secure the fourth and final qualification ticket for the knockout stage. Masirah’s goals came through Al Baraa al Nofli (9’ and 56’), Nasser al Nofli (40’), and Khalid al Balushi (43’). Rustaq’s goals were scored by Khalid al Nofli (22’) and Mahmoud al Sheedi (25’).

With this, the list of teams qualified for the final rounds scheduled from November 2 to 12 at the Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat is now complete, featuring clubs from both the Elite and Challenger categories.

The eight qualified teams have been drawn into two groups as Group 1 features Ahli Sidab, Salalah, Dhofar and Masirah. Group 2 includes Seeb, Al Amerat, Qurayat and Sohar.

The final-round matches begin next Sunday, starting with Ahli Sidab vs Masirah, followed by Salalah vs Dhofar.

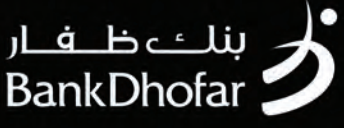


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Representatives signing the MoU during the Duqm Economic Forum held earlier this week.

MoU signed for new mixed-use destination in Al Duqm

SAEED AL MASHARFI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

PLANS for a new integrated tourism, residential and commercial project in the Special Economic Zone in Duqm will contribute to positioning this southeastern corner of Oman as a modern, sustainable urban destination serving the country’s growing investment and tourism landscape.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to this end was signed by the Oman Company for the Development of Special Economic Zone SAOC (Tatweer), fully owned by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), with Al Abrar Real Estate, a subsidiary of Al Siyabi International Group.

The project aims to establish a dynamic mixed-use destination that combines hospitality, housing, business and leisure facilities. It will include premium tourism amenities, modern residential communities, commercial zones and public services designed to enhance quality of life and strengthen Duqm’s role as an attractive hub for investors and visitors alike.

Eng Abdullah al Wahaibi, CEO of Tatweer, said the Special Economic Zone in Duqm is emerging as a prime tourism destination: “The zone enjoys remarkable diversity, from beaches and valleys to mountains, making it a natural haven. In recent years, we have witnessed growing interest from tourists attracted to the wide variety of activities available in Al Duqm.”

MSX capitalisation up 51% to RO 30.53 billion

In continuation of its integrated strategies introduced to revitalise the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) and advance the capital market of Oman, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has implemented a series of programmes aimed at increasing listings, boosting liquidity and enhancing market infrastructure.

The MSX index has successfully surpassed the 5,000-point barrier for the first time in nearly eight years, as annual trading volume grew by 5 times, from RO 645 million in 2021 to over RO 3.25 billion during the first ten months of 2025.

Meanwhile, the market capitalisation has increased by 51% from RO 20.24 billion in 2020, reaching RO 30.53 billion in October 2025, which reflects the effectiveness of OIA’s measures to reinforce MSX’s position as a regional financial and investment hub in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

This robust growth follows the promulgation of Royal Decree No 5/2021 on transforming Muscat Stock Exchange into a Closed Omani Joint Stock Company wholly owned by OIA.

This laid the groundwork for taking clear and direct measures, such as injecting liquidity, launching IPO programmes, establishing institutional liquidity platforms and implementing local asset management plans.

As a result of these positive interventions, trading volumes rose to unprecedented levels.



The MSX index has successfully surpassed the 5,000-point barrier for the first time in nearly eight years, as annual trading volume grew by 5 times, from RO 645 million in 2021 to over RO 3.25 billion during the first ten months of 2025.

In addition, the market capitalisation increased significantly, reflecting the tangible impact of OIA’s responsible efforts to strengthen MSX’s position and enhance investor confidence.

Mulham bin Basheer al Jarf, Deputy President for Investments at OIA, noted that the transformation witnessed by Muscat Stock Exchange reflects OIA’s ambitious vision to establish an efficient and attractive capital market that enhances economic growth and attracts quality investments.

Al Jarf added: “Since its inception, OIA aimed to turn MSX into a high-performing, investor-friendly exchange and a key investment enabler for the Omani economy. To achieve this, we adopted a phased plan, starting with reinforcing trust, enhancing liquidity and broadening ownership and ending

with building a flexible and effective institutional system that applies the global best practices and aligns with Oman Vision 2040 goal of a diversified and sustainable economy”.

Aown Abbas al Bahrani, Chief Investment Officer — Public Markets at OIA, highlights: “Today, the Muscat Stock Exchange stands as a clear example of the tangible outcomes of effective and well-planned strategies. Since 2022, it has grown by 67 per cent, with an average annual increase of 14.6 per cent — outperforming major global indices such as the S&P 500 and the MSCI indices for GCC, global, emerging and Chinese markets.

This success reflects a clear vision to enhance market liquidity, diversify the investor base and expand listing opportunities, enabling MSX to deliver returns that surpass

regional and international benchmarks and strengthen its position as a leading investment destination both locally and regionally”.

Haitham al Salmi, Chief Executive Officer of the Muscat Stock Exchange, said: “OIA’s strategic vision has been instrumental in transforming MSX’s performance through a well-structured listing programme and institutional initiatives that enhanced market liquidity and investor confidence.

MSX has effectively translated these directions into tangible and clear actions, including developing the regulatory framework, improving transparency and increasing trading efficiency. Recently, MSX successfully boosted market liquidity through development-focused reforms that improved trading operations and deepened the market.”

Japan’s NYK to boost Duqm’s connectivity with global energy chains

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 29

A MEMORANDUM of Understanding (MoU) signed by Japanese shipping giant Nippon Yusen Kabushiki Kaisha (NYK Line) with the Port of Duqm Company (PODC) earlier this week will help strengthen Duqm’s position as a key node in evolving global logistics and energy chains.

Under the MoU, the two sides will collaborate on the development and connectivity of the Port of Duqm. The agreement covers future-oriented domains, including green steel supply chains, green hydrogen and ammonia transportation; and finished-vehicle logistics within the Middle East region.

Reggy Vermeulen, CEO of Port of Duqm Company SAOC, signed the comprehensive MoU with Yuji Otsuka, General Manager of the Dry Bulk & Energy Business Coordination Group at NYK Line, during the Duqm Economic Forum 2025, which concluded in the Wilayat of Al Duqm, Al



Representatives of the Port of Duqm Company and NYK Line signing the MoU in Al Duqm.

Wusta Governorate, on Tuesday, October 28, 2025.

In a statement, Vermeulen said: “The signing of this MoU is a testament to the strong alignment of vision between NYK and PODC. It reflects our shared commitment

to unlocking new growth opportunities and establishing Duqm as a strategic maritime hub in the region. We are confident that this collaboration will make a significant contribution to the development and economic growth of Al Duqm and the Sultanate of Oman”.

Otsuka of NYK Line noted that the pact marks a “new phase in our collaborative relationship” that builds on previous discussions between the two sides.

“We will engage in concrete discussions with PODC to build a better supply chain, taking into account the geographical advantages of the Port of Duqm and the potential for hydrogen and ammonia production using renewable energy”, he said.

The agreement underscores the growing international interest in Oman’s vast potential for renewable energy development, especially in green hydrogen.

Duqm is also positioning itself as a centre for the production and export of hydrogen, ammonia and direct reduced iron (DRI) — a

low-carbon steel feedstock — leveraging the region’s abundant wind and solar energy resources.

NYK has developed particular expertise in the safe and efficient transport of Direct Reduced Iron (DRI) — a form of green steel produced using hydrogen instead of coke, thereby avoiding CO₂ emissions.

The shipping line has also introduced proprietary technology designed to mitigate the risks of overheating, fire and explosion associated with DRI shipments.

Significantly, the MoU with the Port of Duqm will also enhance NYK’s already substantial footprint within Oman’s ports.

A major player in the transportation of cars and trucks, the company operates roll-on/roll-off (RoRo) services at SOHAR Port and Freezone. NYK has also been a long-time Japanese partner in Omani maritime ventures — some of the first vessels in the fleet of majority Omani-owned Asyad Shipping were joint ventures between Oman and Japanese companies, including NYK Line.

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Q3 2025 RESULTS

MUSCAT: Underscoring its sustained leadership as the Sultanate of Oman’s leading finance company, National Finance has reported a remarkable performance for the third quarter of 2025.

Demonstrating resilience, the company’s results reflect robust fundamentals, prudent



TARIQ BIN
SULAIMAN
AL FARSI

Chief Executive
Officer of National
Finance

risk governance and a forward-looking growth strategy anchored in customer-centricity.

With its strong network of 23 branches across the country, National Finance continued to enhance its portfolio quality and operational efficiency while accelerating its digital transformation journey.

The company remains committed to long-term sustainability and to supporting the growth of the nation’s

financial ecosystem in line with economic priorities.

Maintaining its growth momentum, National Finance achieved a 43.33% year-on-year increase in operating profit, reaching RO 19.32 million for the period ended September 30, 2025, compared to RO 13.48 million during the same period last year.

Profit after tax was RO 11.01 million, marking a 25.77% increase, driven by higher net finance income and enhanced operational efficiency. The company’s net investment in leases expanded to RO 638.74 million, reflecting a 10.34% growth since December 2024.

Backed by a strong regulatory capital base of RO 147.93 million — the highest among finance and leasing companies in the Sultanate of Oman — National Finance remains well-positioned to pursue sustainable portfolio expansion, support the nation’s diversification agenda and deliver consistent value to its shareholders and stakeholders alike.

Commenting on the results, Tariq bin Sulaiman al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance, stated, “Our third-quarter performance reflects not only the strength of our business fundamentals but also the depth of our strategic foresight and operational discipline.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our Chairman and the Board of Directors for their steadfast leadership and guidance, which continue to strengthen our strategic direction and drive our collective success.

At National Finance, we view growth through the lens of long-term value creation, balancing profitability with purpose.

In alignment with Oman Vision 2040, we remain committed to advancing national development, fostering entrepreneurship and empowering communities through responsible lending and innovation.

With a solid capital foundation and a digitally enabled business model, our focus remains on building resilience, driving customer service excellence and advancing sustainable economic transformation”.

AM BEST
AFFIRMS GIG
GULF’S
FINANCIAL
RATING OF “A
(EXCELLENT)”

MUSCAT: GIG Gulf, part of Gulf Insurance Group KSCP, announced that AM Best has affirmed its Financial Strength Rating (FSR) of “A” (Excellent) and Long-Term Issuer Credit Rating (ICR) of “a+” (Excellent), which marks the fifth consecutive year that GIG Gulf has maintained its A (Excellent) rating with no changes compared to last year’s assessment.

The outlook for both ratings remains stable, confirming our robust financial position.

GIG Gulf’s established presence in the region is a key differentiator. The company ranks among the top



the United Arab Emirates.

Additionally, GIG Gulf holds a 50% stake in Gulf Insurance Group (a Saudi Joint Stock Company) in Saudi Arabia, further reinforcing its diversification and ability to offer compliant solutions across the region. Paul Adamson (pictured), CEO of GIG Gulf, commented: “We

five insurers in its core markets, with presence in Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and

are proud to once again receive this strong endorsement from AM Best.

The affirmation of our ‘A’ rating is a testament to GIG Gulf’s clear focus on profitability, a disciplined approach to risk, strong internal governance and a growing regional presence.

GIG Gulf is well-positioned to keep thriving in the Middle East’s dynamic insurance market.

The ratings reinforce our commitment to delivering sustainable growth and long-term value for our customers, partners and shareholders across the region”.

BankDhofar opens new
branch in Al Khuwair

In line with its continuous efforts to enhance customer proximity and deliver superior banking experiences, BankDhofar has inaugurated a new branch in Al Khuwair, one of the most vibrant and fast-growing districts in the Wilayat of Bausher, Muscat Governorate.

The new branch is designed to serve all segments of society, with a particular focus on employees from government institutions, ministries and private sector companies.

This expansion reflects BankDhofar’s commitment to being the most reliable, innovative and comprehensive financial partner in the Sultanate of Oman, offering services that are convenient, flexible and digitally advanced — all delivered with a human touch rooted in trust.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Mansour bin Khalifa al Siyabi, Member of the Majlis Ash’shura representing Bausher and was attended



The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Shaikh Mansour bin Khalifa al Siyabi, Member of the Majlis Ash’shura representing Bausher.

by several senior officials from the bank. Ghada bint Mohammed al Raisiyah, Acting Assistant General Manager and Head of Capital Branches and Contact Centre at BankDhofar, emphasised that the new branch underscores the bank’s commitment to creating an integrated financial environment that supports all segments of society. “Our

branches are equipped with the latest technologies and highly qualified staff to ensure that customer needs are met efficiently and effectively”, she said.

Al Raisi added: “Earlier this year, BankDhofar refreshed its brand identity under the slogan ‘From Your World, We Innovate’.

This embodies our promise to listen to customers, understand

their evolving needs and respond with innovative, meaningful and easy-to-use financial solutions that positively impact their lives”.

Today, BankDhofar stands as the second-largest bank in Oman in terms of branch network, with more than 140 branches across the Sultanate of Oman.

Each branch is equipped with modern technologies and trained professionals dedicated to delivering an exceptional banking experience.

Through its expanding network, BankDhofar offers a comprehensive suite of banking solutions tailored to diverse customer segments — including women, youth, children and high-net-worth individuals.

The bank also provides specialised wealth management services and a range of flexible savings and investment plans, such as fixed and recurring deposits, children’s education accounts and retirement savings programmes that promote long-term financial security.

IGC TO SIGN GAS PACTS TO POWER OMAN’S INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

MUSCAT: In a move that will mark a major milestone for the Sultanate of Oman’s gas sector, the Integrated Gas Company (IGC) will announce the signing of a series of Gas Purchase and Allocation Agreements with leading industrial companies during an official ceremony to be held on November 2, 2025.

The event will coincide with the nation’s celebrations of Oman’s Glorious November and the National Day on November 20.

The new agreements will allocate over 27 million cubic metres of gas per day for an average of ten years per agreement — an amount roughly equal to the current allocation for the industrial sector, effectively doubling the total gas dedicated



The new agreements will allocate over 27 million cubic metres of gas per day for an average of ten years per agreement.

to national industries.

This milestone represents a significant step forward in strengthening Oman’s

manufacturing base and advancing economic diversification.

The gas allocations will support projects across the petrochemical, fertiliser, pharmaceutical, iron and steel, food and agriculture, power generation, cement and mineral sectors, with total investments exceeding RO 2 billion — reinforcing Oman’s position as a competitive and sustainable industrial hub.

IGC stated that these agreements form part of its broader strategy to ensure the optimal utilisation of national gas resources and to support high-value, economically viable projects that contribute to sustainable growth and the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Amouage unveils The Tent — an ingenious petite boutique

MUSCAT: At first, the sight is perplexing. It appears to be two lengths of fabric, hanging from the ceiling and pulled to the side, like a pair of rich, opulent curtains.

Here, in these surroundings of flat, polished surfaces and sharp angles, it’s an unexpected vision — a surprise that is both arresting and compelling. A few steps further and it becomes clear that this is an entrance — an invitation to delve into what looks remarkably like a tent. But the surprises do not end there.

Upon closer inspection it can be seen that the curtains

are not made of fabric at all, but have been shaped out of metal. They are solid and robust; and yet with their folds and curves and undulations, they seem to be rippling in an invisible wind. Behind them, a smiling face offers a cup of Omani coffee, a bowl of enticing dates... and a welcome that is impossible to resist.

The spirit of Omani hospitality lies at the heart of The Tent, Amouage’s latest petite boutique, unveiled at Harrods’ Salon De Parfums. Over the last few years, the esteemed Omani High Perfumery House has taken



The spirit of Omani hospitality lies at the heart of The Tent, Amouage’s latest petite boutique, unveiled at Harrods’ Salon De Parfums.

its unique retail aesthetic across the world, opening singular boutiques in the USA, China, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and, of course, Oman.

Now, together with its UK partner Kenneth Green Associates and its architectural collaborator Héroïne, Amouage takes its place amongst the celebrated perfume houses showcased on the top floor of London’s iconic store.

“Opening a petite boutique at Harrods’ Salon De Parfums is a truly momentous occasion for us”, says Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy, Chairman of Amouage. “It is

an opportunity to share all of the values we hold most dear with an incredibly discerning clientele. And it also allows us to celebrate our passion for tireless, unflinching craftsmanship”.

Brian Stanton, Managing Director at Kenneth Green Associates, adds, “Together with Harrods, we are excited to launch the Amouage petite boutique.

This is a key milestone that will enable us to better serve our clients through a tailored retail experience, reflecting the sophistication and artistry that are at the core of Amouage”.

SHORTTAKES



Raysut’s capital-restoration plan aims to preserve shareholder value, meet statutory obligations and reinforce operational continuity

LOSS-RIDDEN RAYSUT CEMENT CALLS EGM TO RESTORE ERODED CAPITAL

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

PUBLICLY-TRADED Omani cement manufacturer Raysut Cement Company SAOG has called an extraordinary general meeting (EGM) to tackle full erosion of its share capital after accumulated losses at the parent level reached RO 54.99 million as at June 30, 2025, according to a board note to shareholders.

The company says it will table options to restore capital in line with Article 147 of Oman’s Commercial Companies Law and is seeking a mandate to develop a detailed plan within 60 days of the meeting.

The note outlines potential measures including a rights issue or fresh equity, debt-to-equity or convertible instruments, and strategic divestments; and estimates that restoring compliance would require up to RO 44.99 million based on the latest unaudited figures.

Raysut Cement adds that any funds raised would be channelled to strengthen the balance sheet and stabilise operations, with priorities including settling and restructuring debt, providing capital to normalise market activity, covering essential operations and maintenance; and selective capital expenditure aimed at improving efficiency and reducing energy costs.

The board warns that failure to remedy the capital position within the legal window could expose the company to compulsory liquidation, while maintaining that the business can continue as a going concern if funding is secured and executed on schedule.

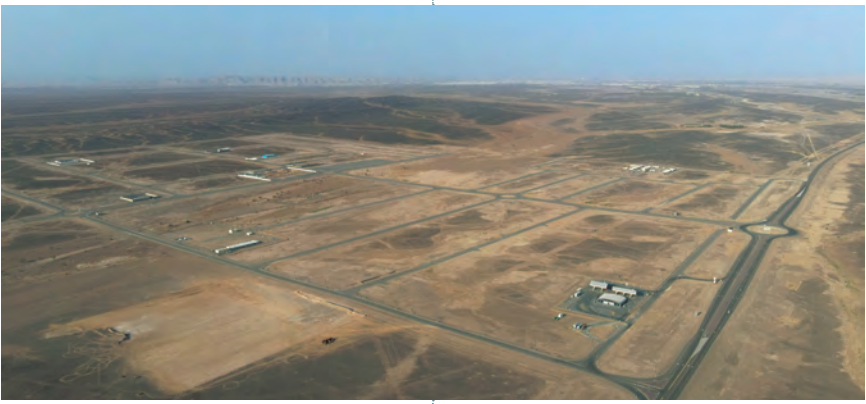
RO 19.8m investments in Ibri Industrial City

A total of 16 investment projects have been established in Ibri Industrial City, managed by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), with total investments reaching RO 19.8 million by the end of the first half of this year.

These projects occupy a combined area of 188,889 square metres out of the 3 million square metres developed in the first phase of the industrial city, which spans a total of 10 million square metres.

Key investment sectors currently active in the city include oil and gas, food processing, manufacturing and light industries.

Salah bin Nasser al Alawi, Director General of Ibri Industrial City, noted that the announcement of an additional gas pipeline extension to Ibri Industrial City under the Integrated Gas Company’s project — linking Al Dhahirah Governorate to Al Batinah North



Key investment sectors currently active in the city include oil and gas, food processing, manufacturing and light industries.

Governorate — marks a major step forward.

He said this development enhances Madayn’s ongoing efforts, in collaboration with relevant authorities, to attract and localise more investments and promote sustainable industrial growth in Oman.

Al Alawi added that Madayn is implementing several complementary projects within the city, including the construction of a security gate and the beautification of the main roundabout.

During the first half of this year, operations began at the fuel station within the Integrated Services Station project, which also includes a rest area and vehicle service facilities.

The station provides vital services to companies, employees, nearby residential areas and travellers along the international highway leading to

the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Strategically located between the borders of Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Ibri Industrial City enjoys a prime position as a growing logistics and commercial hub.

Its proximity — less than 150 kilometres — to both borders enhances its role as a transit point for goods and commodities, stimulating economic activity across the region.

The industrial city offers modern infrastructure, including an integrated network of roads, water, electricity and sewage services, as well as other industrial amenities. Its flat terrain facilitates construction, reduces natural hazards and lowers development costs.

Additionally, the abundance of natural resources in Al Dhahirah supports industries such as manufacturing and mining, strengthening the city’s appeal as an investment destination. — ONA

GCC-FRANCE TRADE REACHES \$33.7 BILLION IN 2024

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, OCT 29

Trade exchange between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and France reached \$33.7 billion in 2024, marking a 13.5% increase from 2023, according to recent figures released by the GCC Statistical Centre.

Total GCC exports to France amounted to \$15.7 billion, marking a 12.95% increase from the previous year. Petroleum and



French exports to the GCC reached \$18.1 billion in value in 2024.

its products dominated outbound trade to France, making up 77.7% of exports valued at \$12.2 billion.

Miscellaneous exports followed at 8.3% with a value of \$1.3 billion, while machinery and mechanical appliances accounted for 4.5%, with a value of \$0.7 billion.

Exports of arts and antiquities; and aircrafts and aircraft parts each made up 3.8%, with a value of \$0.6 billion. Meanwhile, arms and ammunition accounted for 1.9%, valued at \$0.3 billion.

Imports from France to the GCC reached \$18.1 billion in 2024, marking a 14.6% increase from

the previous year. Miscellaneous imports made up 41% of the total, with a value of \$7.4 billion, followed by machinery and mechanical appliances which represented 20.4% of imports at \$3.7 billion.

Perfumes and cosmetics accounted for 12.7%, valued at \$2.3 billion, followed by pharmaceutical products at 9.9% valued at \$1.8 billion. Gold and precious stones also represented 9.9% of imports worth \$1.8 billion, while aircraft and parts made up 6.1% valued at \$1.1 billion.

Azura Beach 2 redefines coastal living at Al Mouj Muscat

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, OCT 29

Al Mouj Muscat, Oman’s premier integrated tourism and lifestyle destination, has unveiled Phase Two of Azura Beach Residences, a new collection of luxury homes that continues the success of its first phase. Strategically positioned within the exclusive Al Marsa District, the new development further strengthens Al Mouj’s reputation as Muscat’s most sought-after waterfront address.

The latest phase comprises 307 units — a blend of one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, as well as limited four-bedroom beachfront chalets featuring private pools and direct beach access. Designed to maximise natural light and panoramic sea and marina views, each residence integrates open-plan interiors, expansive terraces and high-quality finishes, elevating the



Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, speaks to media during the unveiling of Phase Two of Azura Beach Residences.

standard of contemporary coastal living.

Residents will enjoy a premium range of facilities, including an infinity-edge pool, private wellness and fitness areas, a co-working

lounge, landscaped parks and dedicated play zones for families. With direct access to the 400-berth Al Mouj Marina, vibrant retail and dining promenades; and Oman’s only PGA-accredited golf course, Azura Beach Residences Phase Two embodies resort-style living within a secure, self-contained community.

Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, said the new release builds on the “remarkable success” of Phase One, which sold out in record time. “Phase Two of Azura Beach Residences builds on the remarkable success of the first release and responds to what discerning buyers are seeking today — privacy, serenity and a deeper connection to the sea. By creating a community where every home is oriented to the water, we have introduced something truly special. Azura offers a sanctuary where every detail is attuned to coastal living at its most exclusive”.

In addition to its architectural and lifestyle appeal, Al Mouj Muscat continues to embed sustainability into its projects.

In an interview with the Observer, Saleh al Siyabi, Vice President of Sales at Al Mouj Muscat, highlighted the eco-friendly principles driving Azura Beach Residences Phase Two.

“From the design phase, we put sustainability at our core”, Al Siyabi said. “We are embedding energy-saving systems, expanding greenery across the community and using treated water to irrigate our golf course. The Al Mouj Marina’s natural marine life is also being preserved and enhanced, reflecting our ongoing commitment to sustainability”.

He noted that Azura’s location within the less densely developed area of the community adds to its exclusivity and appeal.

“Azura Two will complement the wider Al Mouj community”,

he explained. “It offers a lower density and is surrounded by major amenities such as the Peninsula Hotel, the marina and a 500-metre beachfront — all designed to enrich the resident experience”.

Pre-sales for Azura Beach Residences Phase Two have already begun, with buyers required to make a 10 per cent initial payment. Construction and delivery are expected within three years, following the tendering phase. Al Siyabi also noted that the project presents a lucrative opportunity for both local and international investors.

“We are targeting investors, second-home buyers and principal home seekers”, he said. “Investors can expect yields between 8–9 per cent and strong capital appreciation. Foreign buyers also benefit from 100 per cent freehold ownership and lifetime residency for immediate family members”.

TRADE BREAKTHROUGH

Washington, Seoul seal trade deal



US President Donald Trump and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung finalised a long-debated trade agreement during Trump’s Asia visit. The deal spares Seoul from heavy US tariffs in exchange for \$350 billion in new investments in the United States.

“We made our deal, pretty much finalised it”, Trump said, expressing optimism ahead of his upcoming summit with China’s Xi Jinping. — Reuters

TELECOM REGULATION

EU defends merger rules



EU merger regulations do not hinder telecom operators from expanding, a senior European Commission official said, countering industry criticism. Over 20 major telecom firms urged Brussels to relax rules to spur digital infrastructure investment and compete globally.

“Merger control is not about scale as such. The issue is always market power”, clarified Guillaume Lorient, Deputy Director-General for mergers. — Reuters

ENERGY OUTLOOK

Oil demand peak delayed to 2032



Global oil demand is now expected to peak in 2032, two years later than forecast, according to Wood Mackenzie. The consultancy cited continued reliance on hydrocarbons for transport and petrochemicals, as well as AI-driven energy needs and geopolitical tensions.

It warned that 2050 net-zero goals are increasingly out of reach ahead of next month’s COP30 climate summit in Brazil. — Reuters

OPINION

Oman is open for business, supported by a strong legal foundation



HAIDER
AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The writer is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI.

OVER the past five decades, the Sultanate of Oman has witnessed significant economic developments, including modernising its legislative frameworks and expanding its logistical infrastructure, such as ports, roads, airports and industrial zones.

This is in addition to launching electronic platforms and facilitating investment procedures. Now everyone is looking forward to have business in the Sultanate of Oman in the coming period, within the framework of global competition.

The country’s business environment, as described by international institutions, is supported by a strong legal framework aimed at regulating economic activities and further encouraging investment. It also features facilities for investors, including incentives and opportunities in well-known economic sectors.

Today, Oman boasts an attractive investment environment, in addition to its important geographical location at the crossroads of global trade routes.

This gives it the opportunity to open up markets for exporting national products and deliver them to emerging markets via vital transport corridors. The country’s business environment is also characterised by political stability and operates within the framework of the Oman Vision 2040 and its objectives.

Such collaboration seeks to enhance the

investment climate, diversify the economy and open up greater prospects for exploiting the country’s natural resources due to the need for them.

The World Bank’s “Doing Business 2020” report indicates that Oman has recently climbed 10 places in business, currently ranking 68th globally. By offering business incentives, eliminating bureaucracy and streamlining laws and business processes, this will inevitably lead to a higher ranking in business.

Oman’s economic and business environment is described as the most politically and economically stable in the region.

It enhances confidence in this environment to attract investment and move forward in reducing dependence on oil as the primary source of income, in addition to diversifying the economy, creates new job opportunities for business seekers in investment sectors such as tourism, logistics, agriculture, industry and others.

The government is also continuing to implement economic reforms within the framework of the Oman Vision 2040 to improve the business climate, facilitate procedures and encourage entrepreneurship.

The recent Foreign Capital Investment Law, issued by Royal Decree No 50/2019, allows 100% foreign ownership in most sectors and abolishes the minimum capital requirement, removing a major obstacle to investor entry.

The country’s business environment, as described by international institutions, is supported by a strong legal framework aimed at regulating economic activities and further encouraging investment.

Laws on public-private partnerships and privatisation have also been issued to encourage private sector investment in major projects.

Furthermore, the government is taking steps to reduce fees and offer tax exemptions and special incentives in economic zones, which contribute to reducing the cost of starting projects and enhancing the economic attractiveness of foreign investors.

The government platforms provide comprehensive business services by providing a single electronic window that brings together more than 50 government services for investors, facilitating the establishment of companies and obtaining licences online quickly and easily.

All of these factors make Oman an attractive destination for foreign direct investment in the region.

Today, the Sultanate of Oman offers increasing opportunities, especially for entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which are the backbone of economies worldwide.

Young people see many promising opportunities, particularly in the technology, digital services and e-commerce sectors

Meanwhile, the government is committed to providing support through training programmes in these sectors, while encouraging institutions to increase their efficiency and connect them to the real job market.

CHINA’S BRAZIL
TIES ARE SOWN
BEYOND SOYBEANS

KA SING CHAN

Soybeans have become a trump card — not for Donald Trump, but for Xi Jinping. China’s leader is expected to resume purchases of the crop from the world’s largest economy as part of a trade deal when he meets with his US counterpart on Thursday in South Korea. Turning a crucial import into trade war leverage is a win for China’s planning model.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Sunday he anticipates that China will revive “substantial purchases” of US soybeans for several years. China stopped buying the American produce after Brazil’s President Luiz Indácio Lula da Silva visited the People’s Republic in May.

Trump had described the refusal to buy the legume from the US as “an economically hostile act” and threatened to stop buying China’s cooking oil.

It’s hardly a like-for-like retribution. The US is China’s top market for used cooking oil — a popular input for renewable fuels — but at \$1.1 billion last year, the export was worth only a fraction of the \$12.6 billion China spent importing Uncle Sam’s soybeans.

While US farmers are struggling to find a replacement market, the People’s Republic has long set out to cultivate Brazil into a soybean superpower.

Beijing has provided satellite surveillance to track deforestation and Chinese fertiliser exports to the biggest Latin American economy grew to \$18 billion in 2023, nearly triple 2018 levels.

China’s agricultural conglomerate COFCO has invested more than \$2.3 billion in Brazil since entering the market in 2014, including a port in Santos capable of handling up to 14 million tonnes of grain a year.

Crops from Latin America could become even more competitive if Beijing is permitted to build a cross-continental railway, opens new tab linking Brazil’s Atlantic ports to Peru’s Pacific coast, a project that could divert traffic from the Panama Canal.

Brazil is also one of the most active countries in the world in collaborating with the Chinese central bank in the yuan settlement of commodity trades.

Chinese investment is pushing into other areas too. — Reuters

Anti-money laundering
role shifted to UK’s FCA

THE UK government’s reform of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing supervision will significantly change and diminish the roles of the legal regulator and HMRC.

The treasury revealed the outcome of its consultation on reforming anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing supervision, primarily for professional services, by creating a Single Professional Services Supervisor (SPSS), with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) taking on this new role.

Along with the FCA and HMRC, the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) served as a Professional Body Supervisor (PBS) for anti-money laundering and counter terrorism financing for most law firms in England and Wales.

These bodies were responsible for supervising firms that carry out activities within the scope of the money laundering regulations.

However, under the reform, the FCA will supervise legal services, accountancy services and trust and company service providers, including all firms currently supervised by the PBS and HMRC.

The government believes that having the City watchdog (FCA) oversee professional services firms is the most effective approach. The FCA was chosen for its existing expertise, as it already supervises financial institutions on anti-money laundering and counter terrorism financing.

In the foreword, City minister Lucy Rigby MP explained, “This change will align the supervision of professional services firms with other similar parts of the economy which already have a public sector supervisor”.

The implementation is subject to the passage of enabling legislation, with the Treasury to publish a separate consultation on the new supervisor’s powers.

Ali Ishaq, partner at law firm Reed Smith, stated, “Designating the FCA as SPSS could strengthen AMI, enforcement by providing



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

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A person walks past the Bank of England in the City of London financial district, in London, Britain. — Reuters

centralised, data-driven oversight, stronger investigative tools, better intelligence-sharing and more credible deterrence.

However, Colette Best, director of anti-money laundering at law firm Kingsley Napley, stated: “The FCA is not a natural supervisor for legal services and there are a lot of questions to be answered”.

The Law Society notes solicitors will face significant change following this move, as the role of the SRA “will be significantly reduced”.

On another issue — with the Chancellor’s Budget coming up next month, the matter of tax is causing some concern, particularly among the high earners.

The top one per cent of taxpayers account for around a third of all income tax and capital gains tax paid in the financial year end of 2024, it has been revealed.

According to HMRC, the top 500,000 taxpayers contributed £93.8 billion last year, which represented 33 per cent of the total raised.

The top 100,000 paid £54.9 billion and covered a fifth of total receipts, according to a Freedom of Information request obtained by the investment service Wealth Club.

The balance in tax paid between the super rich and Brits across the country uncovers the Treasury’s

reliance on a small portion of the population to pay for expenses.

The Chancellor Rachel Reeves has indicated that she will target the wealthy in next month’s Budget, arguing that those with the “broadest shoulders” should pay their “fair share”, of taxes.

A Treasury spokesman said in a statement: “The UK’s tax system is progressive, meaning those with higher incomes contribute more, helping to support vital public services”.

Income tax is the largest revenue-raiser for the UK government while capital gains tax receipts are more volatile on a monthly basis. In the most recent set of data published by the Office for National Statistics, it was shown that HMRC collected £32 billion more last month than at the same time last year.

Income tax and national insurance contributions totalled £235.3 billion on the month, with Quilter’s tax expert Rachel Griffin pointing out that the figure was “artificially inflated by the freeze to tax thresholds, which has steadily dragged more earners into higher tax bands as wages rise”.

“This doesn’t point to a roaring economy but a sign of a Treasury increasingly reliant on extracting more from the same taxpayers”, Griffin said.

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CHANGING WORLD

Taking education beyond classroom



SHADDAD AL MUSALMI
The writer is a Senior Editor at Oman Daily Observer.

Around the world, we often see classrooms filled with students who are busy preparing for tests rather than preparing for life. Nobody is to blame because it is how the system has evolved over time.

The other day, my youngest son, currently in Grade 4, told me he was terrified of going to Grade 5 next year.

I tried to understand his fears and realised that he was afraid because in Grade 5, they must go through examinations and different tests,

unlike the previous years where passing was based on activities and less intense studies.

I immediately calmed him down, assuring him there was nothing to worry about. I told him that Grade 5 is just like the previous stages he had been through, but he refused to believe me, claiming his teacher had warned him of intense moments ahead.

Perhaps it is time we pause and rethink what learning truly means.

Education is not about memorising and being tested, but about how we can use what we have learned to understand the world around us.

Thinking clearly, caring, sharing and kindness are lessons that are not tested in school but deeply define who we are and play a significant role in shaping who we become as people.

I am not saying academic excellence is not important, but the future demands more than that.

Education should be more than just passing examinations or collecting certificates; it should be viewed as a lifelong process.

The fear of failure has quietly become a part of the modern classroom, shaping how young people perceive learning.

This story is similar worldwide, with students feeling weighed down by the expectations of parents, teachers, and society.

Learning does not end when school does; in fact, it continues in workplaces, homes, relationships, and in the daily choices we make.

Education was never meant to frighten but to inspire students to think and act well.

It should encourage them to create and explore without the fear of making mistakes, but with openness to curiosity and resilience. When guided with understanding instead of fear or pressure, students discover confidence.

I strongly recommend that parents and teachers work hand in hand to balance the importance of examinations.

While examinations will always be a part of education, they should not define a child's ability, identity, or future. We should celebrate the efforts, not just the achievements.



ENTERTAINMENT

US actress Jodie Foster answers a question on stage during a Q&A following the premiere of "A Private Life" on the opening night of The American French Film Festival (TAFFF) at the DGA Theatre in Los Angeles. — **AFP**



SEASONS

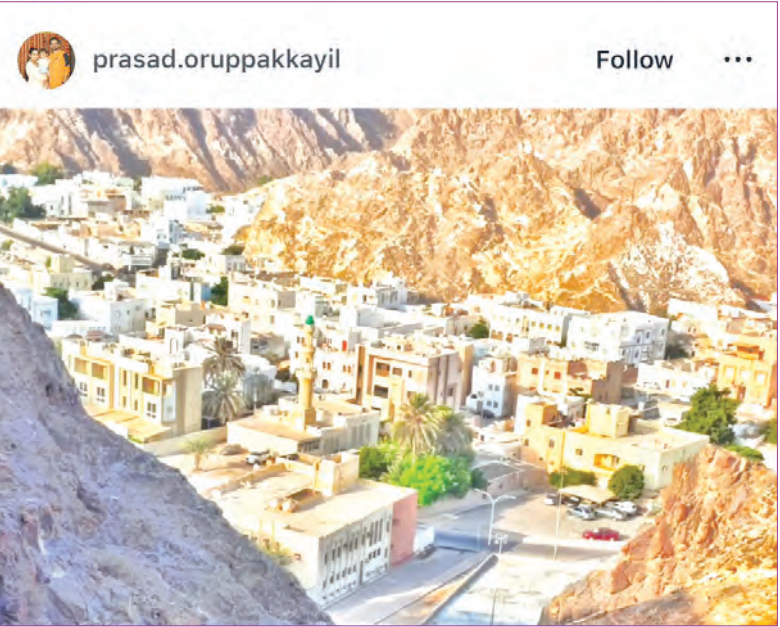
A woman takes a picture of a piece of paper with the Chinese character reading "autumn" cut out in front of a ginkgo tree in Beijing. — **AFP**



SUPERCARS

Tuned cars stand on a carpet during the "Carwalk" event to promote the Essen Motor Show at the Grugahalle venue in Essen, western Germany, featuring the areas of performance and racing. — **AFP**

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Where the mountains meet the city

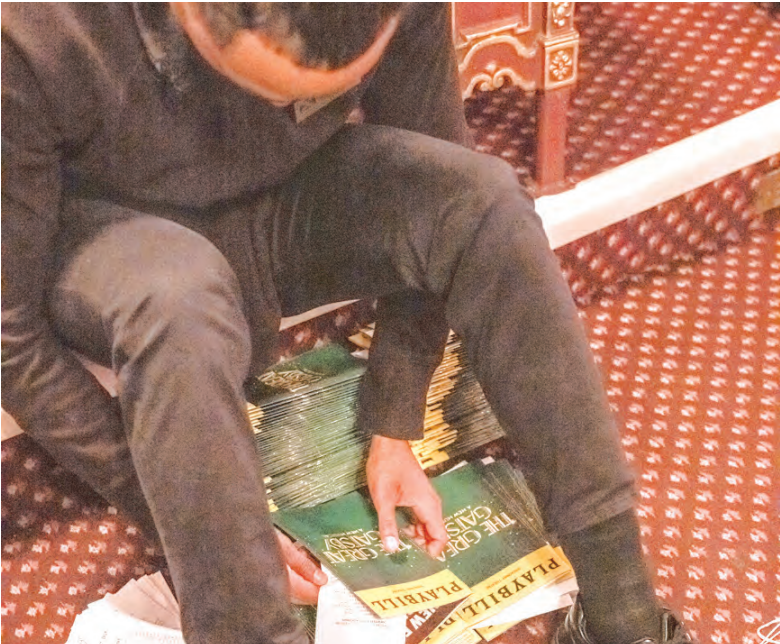


The prey and the predator

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A Broadway Tradition Is Fluttering Into History



FOR THEATREGOERS, it produces an all too familiar sinking feeling. You open your Playbill and a little piece of paper flutters out, alerting you that a member of the cast is out and someone unexpected will be performing. For understudies who are finally getting a turn in the spotlight, though, those little slips offer rare moments of recognition.

Love them or hate them, they are a Broadway tradition on the way out.

A little-noticed provision in the tentative contract agreed to this month between the Broadway League and Actors' Equity Association would make those inserts — "stuffers" in industry parlance — optional. The deal, which is being voted on by Equity members, allows shows to announce most cast changes through QR codes printed in Playbills, along with either a verbal announcement or a cast

list posted in the lobby.

But some Broadway troupers who came up the hard way fear that few audience members will bother to open the QR codes on their phones to see who is performing. "I understand, from an environmental standpoint, that they're wasteful and I understand why producers, cost-wise and for other reasons, don't want them", said Julie Benko, who was the understudy of the title role in the recent revival of "Funny Girl" and created her own show, "Standby, Me", about the four musicals in which she has covered principal roles.

"But", she went on, "I think the understudies, the swings, the standbys and the alternates do so much work, with so little recognition, so much of the time — this is a little piece of paper that makes sure they're acknowledged by the people who are watching them".

— The New York Times.



Huda al Mahrooqi

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

IN the early morning light, a scarlet red Mwasalat bus hums steadily through the streets of Muscat. Behind the wheel, wearing a calm smile and confident gaze, sits Huda al Mahrooqi, the first Omani woman to drive a public transport bus in the entire Gulf region. For many commuters, she is a symbol of quiet strength and inspiration. For Huda, it is simply a dream realised through courage and persistence.

"I've loved driving and field work since I was young," she recalls warmly. "My late mother was the first person who inspired me to follow this path." That inspiration became a lifelong passion, one that led Huda to unexpected places, from volunteering during Cyclone Shaheen, where she drove a small truck to support affected families, to sitting in the driver's seat of a full-sized city bus.

A short video of her volunteer work circulated widely online, fuelling her determination to push further. "After that, I consulted my mother and my eldest daughter. They were my greatest supporters," she says. "That encouragement gave me the strength to challenge myself and prove that women can step into non-traditional fields." With determination in her eyes and support from Mwasalat, Huda obtained her heavy vehicle driver's licence and joined the national transport company, embarking on a journey that would make history.

But the road to this milestone was not without challenges. "Some people believed this job was only for men," she admits. "I took it as a personal challenge." One of her fondest memories came during training at Burj al Sahwa station. "A male colleague was surprised to see me behind the wheel," she remarks. "But after a few minutes, he said proudly that he wanted to take a photo with me to show his students an example to follow."

Despite being a certified driving instructor before joining Mwasalat, Huda discovered that handling heavy vehicles required a new kind of skill and patience. "I failed my first test because I was nervous," she says candidly. "But I

MEET THE FIRST OMANI WOMAN BEHIND THE WHEEL OF A BUS



passed the second time with confidence and never looked back." Her first day on the job was filled with both nerves and pride. "At first, I was naturally scared," she admits. "But as the hours passed, fear turned into happiness. The smiles and encouragement I received from people on the streets gave me positive energy." Today, after nearly ten months behind the wheel, Huda has found her rhythm and her joy in daily routes that bring her face-to-face with passengers from all walks of life. "Many people smile when they see me driving," she says. "Their reactions give me hope and energy to continue. Our society is open-minded and supportive of women's roles in development, and that makes me proud."

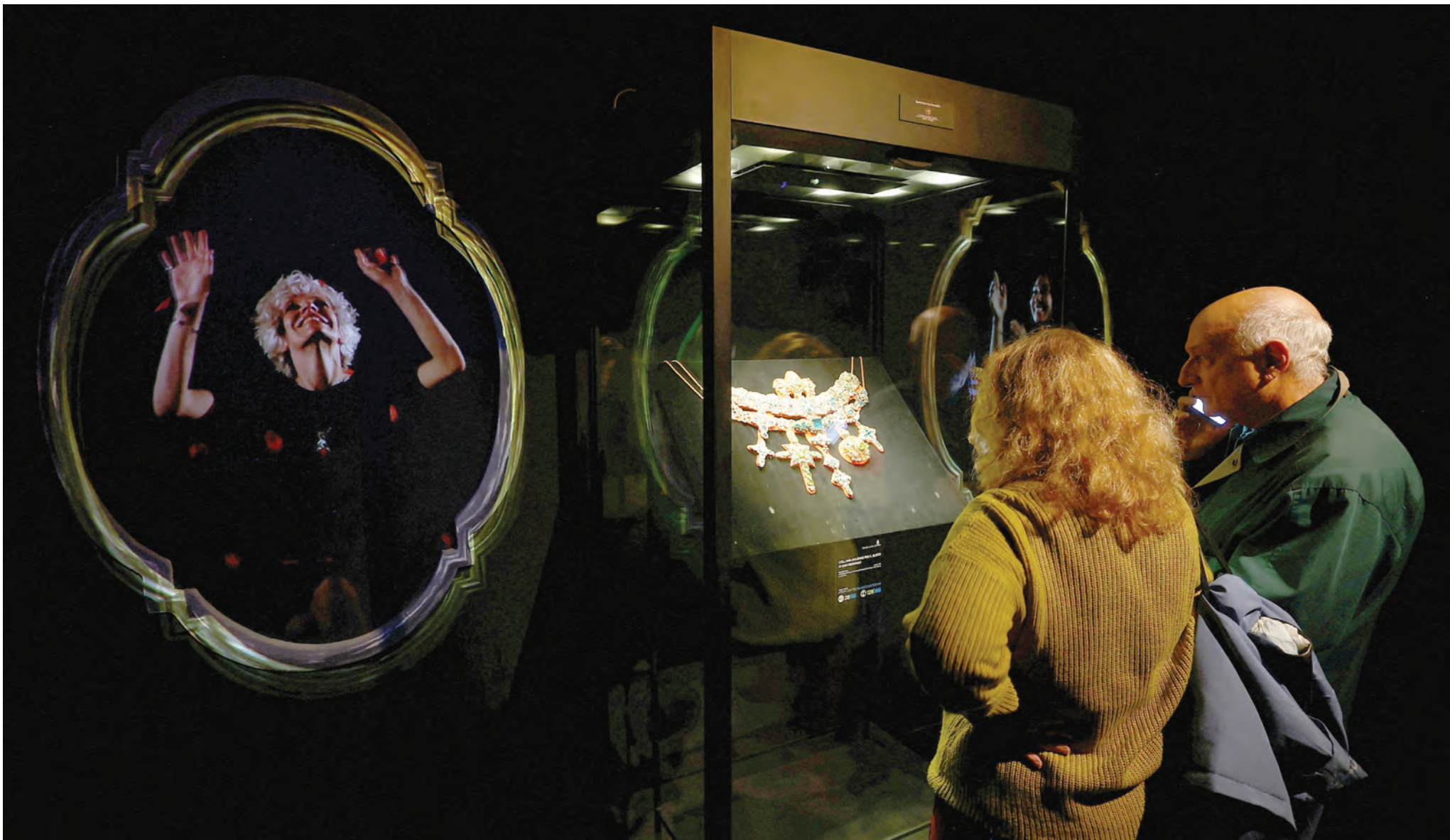
Her story has already inspired countless others, breaking stereotypes not just in Oman but across the Gulf. "The

Omani community is understanding and encouraging," she reflects. "People here appreciate hard work and celebrate women's achievements." For young women aspiring to enter unconventional careers, Huda's message is clear and empowering. "Be strong and believe in yourself. Don't let anyone stop you from following your dream."

As for her own ambitions, Huda believes the road ahead is wide open. "Omani women today are engineers, doctors, pilots, and bus drivers. No field is off-limits anymore. I hope every woman works with love and passion because real success begins with that." With her hands steady on the steering wheel and her heart set on progress, Huda al Mahrooqi continues to drive not just a bus but a movement, one that proves once again that the Omani woman knows nothing is impossible.

FEATURES

A team of gemology experts has spent more than a decade studying the most valuable pieces of the collection at Naples' Tesoro di San Gennaro. Using microscopes and specialised equipment, the team has photographed more than 10,000 stones.



Visitors view the “Treasure of San Gennaro”, a collection of more than 21,000 sacred and royal artefacts donated over seven centuries, at the Museum of the Treasure of San Gennaro. — Reuters

PROTECTING TREASURES WITH FORENSIC MAPPING



A collar set with more than 1,500 precious stones from the “Treasure of San Gennaro”, is displayed at the Museum of the Treasure of San Gennaro in Naples. — Reuters

CIRO DE LUCA AND GISELDA VAGNONI

WITH the art world on high alert for any sign of the missing Louvre jewels, one Italian collection says its method of creating a photographic fingerprint of its own priceless gems and artefacts could make them harder to break apart and sell on.

A team of gemology experts has spent more than a decade studying the most valuable pieces of the collection at Naples' Tesoro di San Gennaro. Using microscopes and specialised equipment, the team has photographed more than 10,000 stones.

As well as the armed security and alarmed displays that provide physical protection for the site, the process has allowed them to certify the unique characteristics of the gems to provide a kind of forensic fingerprint that experts liken to DNA.

Major European museums have declined to comment on their security protocols in the wake of the Louvre theft, but the Naples method offers a rare insight into some of the measures used by institutions.

WARNED ABOUT SECURITY

“If the Louvre had adopted this security system, thieves would not be able to resell the stones from the stolen jewellery”, **Ciro Paolillo**, a former professor of investigative gemology at La Sapienza University in Rome, who led the mapping work, said.

“The stones would be identified, even if cut, at the first official quality certification by an international body”.



A jeweled mitre made in 1713 for the statue of Naples' patron saint, St. Gennaro, set with diamonds, emeralds and rubies



A gold chalice decorated with emeralds and rubies

Louvre director **Laurence des Cars** has said she had repeatedly warned that the centuries-old building's security was in a dire state. She said exterior security cameras did not offer full coverage of the facade, adding that the window through which the thieves broke in was not monitored by CCTV.

The Paris prosecutor said on Sunday suspects had been arrested over the robbery, but declined to give further details, saying newspaper reports about the arrests would hinder the search for the stolen jewellery and the perpetrators.

MAFIA TARGET IN 1975

The San Gennaro treasures, a trove of sacred art and jewels, have been assembled over seven centuries from donations from popes, royals and the wealthy. It includes a cross adorned with emeralds and diamonds given by **Joseph Bonaparte**, the eldest brother of **Napoleon**, who was king of Naples in the 1800s.

Nestled beside Naples' cathedral, the museum houses over 21,000 pieces, among them a mitre encrusted with nearly 4,000 precious stones and a necklace with over 1,500 gems.

It is named after the fourth-century martyr who is the patron saint of the southern Italian port.

Although no official appraisal of the collection has ever been conducted, **Francesca Ummarino**, the museum's director, said that the mitre and the necklace together have an estimated value of around 100 million euros (\$116 million).

It also includes 53 silver busts, most dating back to the 17th and 18th

centuries, each weighing around 200 kg, she said.

The Italian team led by **Paolillo** analysed samples of silver and gold to trace their origins to specific workshops in Naples' historic Goldsmiths' Quarter.

However, such metallurgical mapping, no longer possible as alloys are now standardised by law, would not help in case of a heist.

“The criminals would melt down the masterpieces, making it impossible to understand the alloy”, **Paolillo** said.

Unlike most religious artefacts in Italy, the collection does not belong to the Vatican or the state. It is owned by the people of Naples and managed by the “**Deputazione**”, a lay institution founded in 1527.

The Treasure of San Gennaro was kept in the vault of the Bank of Naples for nearly 30 years following an aborted robbery attempt orchestrated by the local mafia, the **Camorra**, in 1975.

It was reopened to the public in 2003 and since then, no robbery has been reported, despite the city's crime index remaining high.

“We have anti-theft security windows, all equipped with alarms. We have a military patrol on duty 24 hours a day at the museum entrance and if, unfortunately, any objects were to be stolen, the mapping of the stones would allow us to recognise them”, said **Riccardo Carafa d'Andria**, vice president of the Deputation.

“Out of deep devotion to their patron saint, Neapolitans do not touch the Treasure of San Gennaro — and they would never allow anyone else to touch it either”. — Reuters