

O M A N
عُضَائِد
D A I L Y

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SUNRISE 05:35 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:11 AM

DHUHR 12:18 PM

ASR 03:41 PM

MAGHRIB 06:57 PM

ISHA 08:16 PM

12
PIASTRI BEATS NORRIS IN RAIN-HIT BELGIAN GRAND PRIX

INBRIEF

HM GREETINGS TO PRESIDENT OF PERU

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dina Boluarte of the Republic of Peru on her country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Dina Boluarte and the people of her country.

OMAN AT 2ND UN FOOD SUMMIT



As per the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, will lead the Sultanate of Oman’s delegation at the 2nd UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake (UNFSS+4) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The two-day summit, beginning on Monday, is jointly organised by the governments of Ethiopia and Italy. The summit will focus on addressing challenges and opportunities in developing sustainable food systems while supporting international efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

INCREMENT FOR OMANI WORKERS

The Minister of Labour has issued a decision setting the minimum periodic increment and regulating its disbursement to Omanis working in the private sector. An Omani employee will be entitled to a periodic increment on January 1 of each year, provided that he/she has been employed in the establishment for at least 6 months, according to the result of his/her evaluation in the performance report (Ejada) with minimum increments as follows: Five per cent of the basic wage if the worker receives an excellent evaluation. Four per cent of the basic wage if the worker receives a very good evaluation. Three per cent of the basic wage if the worker receives a good evaluation. Two per cent of the basic wage if the worker receives an acceptable evaluation. The worker is not entitled to a periodic increment if he/she receives a poor performance report.

Daily pauses in Gaza fighting as aid arrives

ISRAEL said on Sunday it would halt military operations for 10 hours a day in parts of Gaza and allow new aid corridors as Jordan and the United Arab Emirates airdropped supplies into the enclave, where images of starving Palestinians have alarmed the world.

Israel has been facing growing international criticism over the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and indirect ceasefire talks in Doha between Israel and the Palestinian group Hamas have broken off with no deal in sight.

Military activity will stop from 10 am to 8 pm (0700-1700 GMT) until further notice in Al Mawasi, a designated humanitarian area along the coast, in central Deir Al Balah and in Gaza City, to the north.

Jordan and the United Arab Emirates parachuted 25 tonnes of aid into the Gaza Strip on Sunday in their first airdrop in months, a Jordanian official source said.

The official said the air drops were not a substitute for delivery by land. Palestinian health officials in Gaza City said at least 10 people were injured by falling aid boxes.

The military said designated secure routes for convoys delivering food and medicine will also be in place between 6 am and 11 pm starting from Sunday.

UN aid chief Tom Fletcher said staff would step up efforts to feed the hungry during the pauses in the



Palestinians gather as a C-130 Hercules military transport aircraft flies over during an aid drop on the northern Gaza Strip on Sunday. — AFP

UN aid chief Tom Fletcher said staff would step up efforts to feed the hungry during the pauses in the designated areas.

“Our teams on the ground... will do all we can to reach as many starving people as we can in this window,” he said on X.

Health officials at Al Awda and Al Aqsa Hospitals in the central Gaza Strip said Israeli firing killed at least 17 people and wounded 50 waiting for aid trucks on Sunday.

Dozens of Gazans have died of malnutrition in recent weeks, according to the Gaza Health Ministry in the enclave. The ministry reported six new

deaths over the past 24 hours due to malnutrition, bringing the total deaths from malnutrition and hunger to 133 including 87 children.

On Saturday, a five-month-old baby, Zainab Abu Haleeb, died of malnutrition at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, health workers said.

“Three months inside the hospital and this is what I get in return, that she is dead,” said her mother, Israa Abu Haleeb, standing next to the baby’s father as he held their daughter’s body wrapped in a white shroud. SEE ALSO P6

Thailand and Cambodia to hold peace talks

SAMRAONG, Cambodia: Thailand and Cambodia’s leaders will meet in Malaysia for peace talks on Monday, as the countries clashed for a fourth day in a deadly border dispute.

At least 34 people have been killed and more than 200,000 displaced as the countries, both popular tourist destinations, fight over a smattering of contested border temples.

Bangkok announced on Sunday that acting

Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai and Cambodia’s Prime Minister Hun Manet will meet for talks mediated by Malaysian leader Anwar Ibrahim, who chairs the Asean regional bloc of which Thailand and Cambodia are members.

Anwar said the expected talks were to focus on an immediate ceasefire between the two fighting neighbours.

“They (government representatives of Cambodia

and Thailand) have asked me to try and negotiate a peace settlement,” the Bernama national news agency quoted Anwar as saying late Sunday.

“I’m discussing the parameters, the conditions, but what is important is an immediate ceasefire,” the Malaysian premier said.

Cambodia has not commented on the planned talks, which are due to begin at 3:00 pm.

US President Donald Trump,

who spoke to both leaders late on Saturday, said they had agreed to “quickly work out” a ceasefire.

Trump has threatened both nations with eye-watering levies in his global tariff blitz unless they agree to independent trade deals.

“When all is done, and Peace is at hand, I look forward to concluding our Trading Agreements with both!” he wrote on social media. SEE ALSO P6

Oman gains Ramsar accreditation for Al Wusta Wetlands Reserve

LAKSHMIM KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, JULY 27

In a new environmental achievement, the Sultanate of Oman has received official accreditation from the Ramsar Convention for the inclusion of the Wetland Reserve in Al Wusta Governorate on the list of Wetlands of International importance.

This marks the third Omani site to be included in this prestigious list, following the Al Qurm Nature Reserve (2013) and Al Ansab Wetlands (2020).

This achievement was announced on the sidelines of the

15th Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention (COP15), held under the theme “Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future” in Zimbabwe, which continues until July 31.

This official international recognition represents a culmination of Oman’s efforts in biodiversity conservation and its commitment to implementing international environmental standards for protecting fragile ecosystems. It also highlights the reserve’s status as one of the most important ecological sites at both regional and global levels.

Ramsar Sites and the List



The site lies within Al Wusta Wetlands Reserve and covers about 80 per cent of the reserve’s area.

of Wetlands of International Importance come under the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, 1971), where each contracting party undertakes to designate at least one wetland site for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance.

There are over 2,000 “Ramsar Sites” on the territories of over 160 Contracting Parties across the world.

The Ramsar describes this environmentally significant place: “The site lies within Al Wusta Wetlands Reserve and covers about 80 per cent of the reserve’s area. It features coastal waters with rare marine vegetation,

alkaline lakes and marshes, coral and bivalve reefs, mangroves, and “sabkha”, which are intertidal flats with mineral deposits formed by seawater evaporation.”

Located in the Wilayat of Mahout, the wetlands were declared a reserve by a Royal Decree in 2014.

According to the report, the Barr Al Hikman peninsula occupies the largest area of the site and has a coastline of about 160 km. It consists of coastal and inland plains of salt, mud flats, and some saltwater lakes of unique natural and geological importance overlooking the west coast of Masirah Island.

OMAN

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Sr. Consultant - Sports & Joint Surgery
Burjeel Hospital, Al Khuwair, Muscat

MOH-3347873/2025

SHORT TAKES



RAO band highlights cultural diversity in a global forum

RAO BAND ACHIEVES ADVANCED RANKINGS

EDINBURGH: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) music band has achieved advanced rankings in the initial stages of its participation in the (3B) category of the Scottish musical competitions, in preparation for the World Championship in Glasgow.

The band secured fifth place in its classification. Additionally, Warrant Officer Mohammed bin Khamis al Amri earned fourth place, and Sergeant Tariq bin Naseeb al Amri achieved sixth place in the Mace Bearer competition, among dozens of participants from various countries.

The band's performances are distributed across several Scottish cities, including Renfrew, Dumbarton, Dundonald, Bridge of Allan and Perth, culminating in Glasgow. Colonel Ahmed bin Salim al Shukairi, Director of Royal Army of Oman music band, stated that this participation is an opportunity to highlight Oman's cultural diversity. — ONA



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) hereby announces the following Tenders: -

Tender No.	Description of Project	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Distribution of Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2724138/2025	Construction of Sewer Connection for Al Bandar Mixed Development Project in Al-Mawaleh Area in Wilayat of A'Seeb	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	7/8/2025	8/9/2025
T/2724143/2025	Construction of New Sewerage Networks and Rehabilitation of Existing Networks in Ruwi (G4)	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in Excellent Grade and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	R.O 2,500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	7/8/2025	8/9/2025
T/2720134/2025	Construction of New DMAs in Wilayat of Sohar	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O.100/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	7/8/2025	8/9/2025
T/2715104/2025	Consultancy Services for the Assessment, Design, and Engineering of Rehabilitation Works for the Bausher (B1) Sewer Network - Phase II, Wilayat of Bausher	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority and International Companies specialized in the works mentioned	R.O.500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	7/8/2025	8/9/2025
T/2724156/2025	Design, Supply & Installation of Grab Screen System at Central Pumping Station CPS	Local Companies registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority and specialized in the works mentioned	R.O.50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	7/8/2025	1/9/2025

The tender documents can be obtained from the e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from this announcement date. The applicants shall pay the tender fee by logging into their (I-supplier Page).

Applicants who are not registered shall register through the following link: <https://owwsc.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> in order to receive the login credentials of the Supplier portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through Nama Water Services e-tendering page (Supplier Login <https://nws.nama.om/en-us/Business-with-Us/Supplierlogin>). All participating companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of the bid value in a sealed envelope. Bid Bonds must be obtained from a local Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman addressed to Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 2:00 pm on the bid submission date.

The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Nama Water Services) e-tendering page not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above. For more details refer to Tender Page of our website www.owwsc.nama.om & in case of general queries you may contact us through the email ID of tender@owwsc.nama.om

KHAREEF DHOFAR



STRONG WAVES AND
CURRENTS MAKE
BEACHES EXTREMELY
DANGEROUS



WET, SLIPPERY
EDGES POSE SERIOUS
RISKS OF FALLS AND
ACCIDENTS



NEVER LEAVE KIDS
UNATTENDED NEAR
BEACHES, SPRINGS, OR
STEEP AREAS



BEAUTY AND
DANGER ON
KHAREEF
BEACHES

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

WITH the arrival of the khareef season, Dhofar Governorate turns into a breathtaking oasis of greenery and mist, drawing thousands of tourists from across Oman and beyond. The cool, rainy weather and picturesque landscapes make it a perfect escape from the summer heat elsewhere in the region.

Families come to enjoy the natural beauty, the gushing springs and the tranquil beaches. However, behind this seasonal charm lies a hidden danger that many overlook — the perilous conditions along the coastline and water bodies during khareef.

Every year, unfortunately, this otherwise joyful season is marred by tragic drowning incidents. The strong ocean currents, rough seas and unpredictable weather patterns pose serious risks, especially to those unfamiliar with the governorate's coastal dynamics. Waves can rise up to four metres high, and dangerous whirlpools and undercurrents form, making swimming or even approaching the water extremely hazardous.

While Dhofar boasts several beautiful beaches that serve as ideal tourist spots throughout the year, during khareef, these areas become unsafe. Despite repeated warnings and awareness efforts, some visitors underestimate the power of nature, venturing too close to the shoreline, climbing onto cliffs for photos, or allowing children to play unsupervised near the water

While Dhofar boasts several beautiful beaches that serve as ideal tourist spots throughout the year, during khareef, these areas become unsafe. Despite repeated warnings and awareness efforts, some visitors underestimate the power of nature, venturing too close to the shoreline, climbing onto cliffs for photos, or allowing children to play unsupervised near the water.

Authorities strongly advise all visitors to exercise utmost caution. The primary guidelines include:

- Avoid swimming entirely, regardless of sea appearance. Calm waves can be deceptive.
- Never leave children unattended, especially near beaches, springs, or cliffs.
- Do not take selfies or photos from dangerous points, such as cliff edges or slippery rocks.
- Pay close attention to weather advisories, safety signboards and public announcements.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP), in collaboration with the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, has intensified efforts to safeguard the public. Marine rescue patrols have been stationed along key beaches that attract large numbers

of tourists. Field teams remain on standby, ready to respond to emergencies. Authorities are also using various media platforms — radio, television, social media and brochures — to spread awareness and emphasise the risks associated with the sea during khareef.

Many of the reported drowning cases are linked to disregard for warnings and an eagerness to capture dramatic photos or videos in risky locations. Even seasoned swimmers are urged to stay away from the water during this time due to the dangerous sea state. Furthermore, rocks and paths near cliffs often become slippery due to rainfall, increasing the risk of slipping and falling into the sea.

Khareef season is one of Oman's most treasured natural phenomena. To preserve its beauty and ensure it remains a source of joy, safety must be prioritised. Everyone — residents, tourists and government bodies — has a shared responsibility to follow guidelines, promote awareness and act responsibly.

Let's make safety part of the khareef experience so that this stunning season continues to be a celebration of nature, not a time of sorrow.

SHORT TAKES



Khareef season boosts sales growth and commercial activity

SOUQS, TOURIST SPOTS THRIVE DURING KHAREEF

SALALAH: Dhofar Governorate is experiencing a boom in commercial activity in traditional markets (souqs), shopping centres and tourism sites during the Khareef Dhofar Season.

The business activity is driven by a large influx of visitors to the governorate who wish to enjoy the exceptional monsoon weather. It constitutes direct support to the national economy.

Commercial activities range from shopping in traditional souqs and modern malls - with an observable rise in sales of handicrafts and local delicacies - to rising demand for restaurants, cafeterias, hotels, tourist sites and entertainment facilities.

The owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) told Oman News Agency (ONA) that Khareef Dhofar Season provides a great opportunity for the growth of sales and the expansion of commercial activity. — ONA

Jusoor Forum showcases disability entrepreneurship

AN event titled ‘Oman Broadband Jusoor Forum: A Step Towards Empowering People with Disabilities’ was held on Sunday in the Wilayat of Salalah, as part of ongoing efforts to support and economically empower individuals with disabilities.

Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, and patron of the opening ceremony, emphasised that the forum represents an effective model of collaboration between the public and private sectors.

She noted that such initiatives serve priority community groups, particularly people with disabilities, and reinforce efforts to empower them across various levels.

She highlighted that this purposeful community engagement reflects a national commitment to empowering people with disabilities, enhancing their economic participation, and providing them with opportunities to showcase their capabilities and talents.

She affirmed that empowering this group is a priority within the Ministry of Social Development’s plans and programmes, in partnership with Oman Broadband Company, to build an equitable society that fosters sustainable



Dr Laila says disability entrepreneurship serves priority community groups

The forum represents an effective model of collaboration between the public and private sectors

creativity and skill development for all its members.

On his turn, Eng Sultan bin Ahmed al Wahaibi, CEO of Oman Broadband Company, stated that organising the forum aligns with the company’s corporate social responsibility. He affirmed that people with disabilities are capable of contributing meaningfully when provided with a supportive environment and appropriate opportunities.

Meanwhile, Asma al Balushi, founder of the ‘Jusoor’ project for empowering people with disabilities, emphasised that the initiative stemmed from a deep

belief in the capabilities of this group.

She revealed future plans to transform the project into an independent institution dedicated to sustainable empowerment, serving as a platform for the voices of people with disabilities and an umbrella for initiatives supporting them and their development partners.

The forum, organised by Oman Broadband Company in collaboration with the ‘Jusoor’ project, witnessed significant visitor engagement, with attendees praising the quality and diversity of exhibits across 12 specialised pavilions. — ONA

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
365/2025	Strengthening and enhancing the internal network at the Ministry's General Office	Companies specialized in the field of Design, installation and maintenance of information programs and systems registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority with excellent or first or second or third or fourth degree.	Thursday 14-08-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 04-09-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
366/2025	Supplying and providing prosthetic devices and aids for people with disabilities to North Al Batinah and Musandam Governorates	Companies specialized in the field of Supply of medical supplies and tools registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 14-08-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 04-09-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
367/2025	Supplying and providing prosthetic devices and aids for people with disabilities to South Al Batinah Governorate	Companies specialized in the field of Supply of medical supplies and tools registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 14-08-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 04-09-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
368/2025	Supplying and providing prosthetic devices and aids for people with disabilities to Muscat Governorate	Companies specialized in the field of Supply of medical supplies and tools registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 14-08-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 04-09-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
369/2025	Supplying and providing prosthetic devices and aids for people with disabilities to Dhofar Governorate	Companies specialized in the field of Supply of medical supplies and tools registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 14-08-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 04-09-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
370/2025	Supplying and providing prosthetic devices and aids for people with disabilities to North Al Sharqiyah Governorate	Companies specialized in the field of Supply of medical supplies and tools registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 14-08-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 04-09-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
371/2025	Supplying and providing prosthetic devices and aids for people with disabilities to South Al Sharqiyah Governorate	Companies specialized in the field of Supply of medical supplies and tools registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 14-08-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 04-09-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
372/2025	Supplying and providing prosthetic devices and aids for people with disabilities to Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi Governorates	Companies specialized in the field of Supply of medical supplies and tools registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 14-08-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 04-09-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
373/2025	Supplying and providing prosthetic devices and aids for people with disabilities to the AL-Dakhla and AL-Wusta Governorates	Companies specialized in the field of Supply of medical supplies and tools registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 14-08-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 04-09-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On **Monday 28-07-2025**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om

WORLD

RENEWED UNREST



A soldier stands guard with a Kalashnikov rifle in front of a gathered crowd, in Goma. — AFP

AT LEAST 35 KILLED IN CHURCH ATTACK IN NORTHEAST DR CONGO

BUNIA: At least 35 people were killed on Sunday in an attack by Allied Democratic Forces rebels in northeastern DR Congo, ending a months-long period of regional calm, local sources said. The ADF, originally formed from former Ugandan rebels and which pledged allegiance to IS group in 2019, raided a Catholic church in the town of Komanda where worshippers were gathered for prayer, residents said by telephone from Bunia, capital of Ituri province.

“Last night around 9 pm, we heard gunfire near the parish church... so far we have seen 35 bodies,” Dieudonne Katanabo, an Umoja neighbourhood elder, said. “We have at least 31 dead members of the Eucharistic Crusade movement, with six seriously injured... some young people were kidnapped, we have no news of them,” Father Aime Lokana Dhego, parish priest of the Blessed Anuarite parish of Komanda, said. The priest added that seven other bodies had been discovered in the town.

Likewise attributing the attack to “ADF rebels”, Christophe Munyanderu, coordinator of the local NGO Convention for the Respect of Human Rights, gave a provisional death toll of 38. Lieutenant Jules Ngongo, army spokesman in Ituri, did not comment on the toll but confirmed the attack to AFP, stating that “the enemy is believed to have been identified among ADF” rebels.

The bloodshed comes after months of calm in the region of Ituri, bordering Uganda. The last major attack by the ADF was in February, leaving 23 dead in Mambasa territory. The town of Komanda in Irumu territory is a commercial hub linking three other provinces — Tshopo, North Kivu and Maniema.

The ADF has killed thousands of civilians and ramped up looting and killing in northeastern DRC despite the deployment both of the Ugandan army alongside Congolese armed forces in the area. At the end of 2021, Kampala and Kinshasa launched a joint military operation against the ADF, dubbed “Shujaa”, which has so far been unable to dislodge the group. — AFP

TACTICAL RETREAT

Key Somalia town falls to Al Shabaab



Militants took control of the strategic town of Maxaas in central Somalia on Sunday after heavy fighting with the army and local militias. Al Shabaab said it had taken the town of Maxaas, around 300 kilometres from the capital Mogadishu, which is considered a strategic hub for transport and logistics in the central region. Members of the Somali National Army confirmed the fall of Maxaas, though claimed it was a “tactical retreat”. — AFP

SEARING HEATWAVE

Türkiye evacuates thousands in fire battle



Firefighters battled wildfires across Türkiye on Sunday amid a searing Mediterranean heatwave, with authorities evacuating more than 3,600 people from settlements in two provinces. Wildfires in the southern provinces of Mersin and Antalya as well as the central province of Usak were largely brought under control, but blazes in the northwestern province of Bursa and the northern province of Karabuk were still burning. — Reuters

CROWD ACCIDENT

India temple stampede crushes six to death



At least six people were crushed to death at a popular temple in northern India’s Uttarakhand state on Sunday after a massive crowd surge. The stampede occurred on the stairway leading to the Mansa Devi temple in the Hindu holy city of Haridwar, on the banks of the Ganges river, and left many injured. “Six dead and more than 10 injured are admitted to the hospital,” police official Parmendra Dobhal said. — AFP

Thailand, Cambodia to hold talks in Malaysia

THE leaders of Thailand and Cambodia will attend mediation talks over their deadly border conflict in Malaysia, the Thai government said, even as both sides accused each other of launching fresh artillery strikes across contested areas. Talks are scheduled to begin at 3 pm local time on Monday, with acting Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai leading the Thai negotiating team, the government announced in a statement. Malaysia, which chairs the Asean regional cooperation forum, has informed the Thai government that Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet would also be attending the talks, the statement said.

Tensions between Thailand and Cambodia have intensified since the late-May killing of a Cambodian soldier during a brief border skirmish. Border troops on both sides were reinforced amid a full-blown diplomatic crisis that brought Thailand’s fragile coalition government to the brink of collapse. Hostilities resumed on Thursday and, within just four days, escalated into the worst fighting between the Southeast Asian neighbours in more than a decade.

The death toll has risen above 30, including 13 civilians in Thailand and eight in Cambodia, while authorities report that more than 200,000 people have been evacuated from border areas. Monday’s talks come after Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim last week proposed a ceasefire and US President Donald Trump said on Saturday that the two leaders had agreed to work on a ceasefire.

Bangkok and Phnom Penh have



A man looks on inside a bunker as Cambodia and Thailand each said the other had launched attacks. — Reuters

Tensions between Thailand and Cambodia have intensified since the late-May killing of a Cambodian soldier during a brief border skirmish. Border troops on both sides were reinforced amid a full-blown diplomatic crisis that brought Thailand’s fragile coalition government to the brink of collapse

each accused the other side of sparking last week’s hostilities. Cambodia’s Defence Ministry said Thailand had shelled and launched ground assaults on Sunday morning at a number of points along the border. The ministry’s spokesperson said heavy artillery was fired at historic temple complexes.

“For me, I think it is great if Thailand agreed to stop fighting so both countries can live with peace,” Phnom Penh university student Sreung Nita said.

The Thai army said Cambodian forces had fired shots into several areas, including near civilian homes, on Sunday, and were mobilising long-range rocket launchers. “The situation remains tense and Cambodian troops may be preparing intensified military operations to inflict maximum damage in the final stages before negotiations,” the army said in an update. In the Thai province of Sisaket, Reuters reporters heard

shelling throughout Sunday and said it was unclear which side of the border it was on.

A government health clinic about 10 km from the border had shattered windows, collapsed walls and exposed wiring. Local media reported it was hit by artillery on Saturday, two days after the building and surrounding neighbourhood was evacuated. Only a few men remained to look after their homes, camping near a makeshift bunker they had dug for protection. Intermittent sounds of artillery fire could be heard in the distance. “It’s great that America is insisting on the ceasefire because it would bring peace,” Sisaket resident Thavorn Toosawan said. Thailand and Cambodia have bickered for decades over undemarcated points along their 817-km land border, with ownership of the ancient Hindu temples Ta Moan Thom and the 11th century Preah Vihear central to the disputes. — Reuters

UN HOPES AID PAUSES REACH GAZA 'S STARVING



GENEVA: The United Nations said it would try to reach as many starving people as possible in Gaza after Israel announced it would establish secure land routes in for humanitarian convoys. The UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) said it had enough food in, or on its way to, the region to feed the 2.1 million people in the Gaza Strip for almost three months.

UN emergency relief coordinator Tom Fletcher said on X he welcomed the announcement of “humanitarian pauses”. “In contact with our teams on the ground who will do all we can to reach as many starving people as we can in this window,” he said.

WFP said the pauses and corridors should allow emergency food to be safely delivered. “Food aid is the only real way for most people inside Gaza to eat,” it said in a statement. It said a third of the population had not been eating for days, and 470,000 people in Gaza “are enduring famine-like conditions” that were leading to deaths.

WFP said more than 62,000 tonnes of food assistance was needed monthly to cover the entire Gaza population of two million. The agency noted that, on top of Sunday’s “pause” announcement, Israel had pledged to allow more trucks to enter Gaza with quicker clearances along with “assurances of no armed forces or shootings near convoys”. — AFP

STAGED TRANSFER



Inmates queue up before being deported to Colombia at the Rumichaca international bridge, Colombia. — AFP

ECUADOR DEPORTS MORE THAN 600 INMATES AS COLOMBIA CRIES FOUL

BOGOTA: Colombian authorities said that Ecuador had deported about 600 Colombian prisoners via a land border crossing, after Bogota protested the action came without prior agreement. “In the morning, 603 people arrived, 60 women and 543 men, and we completed the reception of them” at the Rumichaca border crossing in Carchi province, Colombia’s acting foreign minister Rosa Villavicencio said. Authorities on both sides of the border had previously reported conflicting figures for the number of prisoners deported.

The inmates, wearing orange uniforms, waited in line to reenter their home country under the watchful eye of Ecuadoran police and military personnel. Early in the day, some in shorts and t-shirts did exercises while waiting for their turn to cross the border in the chilly Andean air, saying “We want to cross, we want to cross.” On Friday, the government in Bogota lodged a formal complaint with Quito, saying such a move without prior agreement was a violation of international law and an “unfriendly gesture.”

Ecuador’s foreign ministry said on Saturday that Bogota was told about the plan on July 8. The mayor of the border town of Ipiales, Amílcar Pantoja, told the media on Friday that prisoners without pending legal cases in Colombia would be released. Drug trafficking gangs operating in Ecuador — some involving Colombian criminals — have turned the country into one of the most violent in Latin America. The homicide rate has jumped from six per 100,000 people in 2018 to 38 in 2024, among the highest in the region. — AFP

KIM VOWS TO WIN ANTI-US BATTLE MARKING KOREAN WAR ANNIVERSARY

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said the country would achieve victory in “anti-imperialist, anti-US” battles, as the country marked the anniversary of the Korean War armistice, state media reported on Sunday. Kim “affirmed that our state and its people would surely achieve the great cause of building a rich country with a strong army and become honourable victors in the anti-imperialist, anti-US showdown,” KCNA state news agency said,

referring to his visit to a war museum on a previous day.

North Korea signed an armistice agreement with the United States and China on July 27, 1953, ending the fighting in the three-year war. US generals signed the agreement representing the United Nations forces that had backed South Korea. North Korea calls July 27 “Victory Day” even though the armistice drew a border dividing the Korean peninsula roughly equally in area after the two sides had made major

advances back and forth during the war. South Korea does not mark the day with any major events.

But in a speech read out on Sunday at a commemoration ceremony honouring Korean War veterans in Washington, DC, South Korea’s President Lee Jae Myung pledged to further cement the country’s alliance with the United States and protect freedom and peace. “Through efforts in various fields including politics, economy, security, and culture. — Reuters

Ukraine attack disrupts Volgograd railway power

FALLING debris from destroyed Ukrainian drones disrupted railway power supply and train operations in part of the Volgograd region, the administration of the region in Russia’s south said on Sunday. There were no injuries as a result of the attacks, the administration said on the Telegram messaging app, citing Governor Andrei Bocharov. Russia’s defence ministry said on Telegram that its air defence units had destroyed nine Ukrainian drones over the region. In total Russia downed 99 drones overnight over 12 Russian regions, the Crimean Peninsula and the Black Sea, the ministry said.

Russia’s civil aviation authority Rosaviatsia said on Telegram that it had suspended flights soon after midnight at the airport in the city of Volgograd, the administrative centre of the Volgograd region. The flights had not resumed on Sunday morning. Because of the attack, trains were delayed in parts of the region, RIA state news agency reported.

The extent of the damage inflicted by the Ukrainian drone attack was not clear. The Russian defence ministry reports only how many drones its units destroy, not how many Ukraine launches. There was no comment from Ukraine.

Kyiv has often said that its attacks are in response to Moscow’s relentless strikes on Ukraine since Moscow attacked in 2022 and are aimed at destroying infrastructure key to Russia’s war efforts.

Russia prefers political and diplomatic means to resolve conflict in Ukraine, but Kyiv and the West rejected that path, Russian news agencies reported on Sunday, citing Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

“Our preferred route is through political and diplomatic means,” Peskov said, according to TASS state news agency. Peskov added, without providing evidence, that Moscow continues its military operation in Ukraine because “all proposals for dialogue were rejected, both by Ukraine and by Western countries.”

Meanwhile, Russian air defence units downed 291 Ukrainian fixed-wing drones,



Service members fire a self-propelled howitzer towards Russian troops, in Kharkiv. — Reuters

the Russian Defence Ministry said. “Air defence systems downed two guided aircraft bombs, three projectiles of Czech-made Vampire multiple rocket launch systems and 291 fixed-wing drones,” the ministry said on its Telegram channel.

It added that Russian warplanes and drones struck drone production facilities and control centres within Ukraine.

Russia’s Defence Ministry said on Saturday its forces had captured two more villages in eastern Ukraine, including one in Dnipropetrovsk region where Moscow says its troops have begun to make advances. Ukrainian forces made no acknowledgement that the villages had changed hands, but reported heavy fighting.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, in an assessment of the situation along the 1,000 km front line, said the logistics hub of Pokrovsk remained the focal point of battles. He also said Ukrainian forces had recorded “successful actions” in Sumy region on Ukraine’s northern border, where Russian forces have established a foothold in recent weeks.

The front-line clashes were reported three days after the two sides held their third direct meeting in Turkey aimed at resolving the nearly 3 ½ year-old war.

Both sides reported progress in swaps of prisoners or the remains of war dead, but no breakthroughs were announced in terms of a ceasefire or a meeting of the two countries’ leaders.

Russia said on Sunday a major annual navy parade had been cancelled for “security reasons”, without specifying the threat or concern. “It has to do with the general situation. Security reasons are of utmost importance,” said Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, quoted by Russian news agencies.

The parade was meant to be the highlight of Russia’s Navy Day, which falls on the last Sunday of July each year and honours the country’s sailors. But local authorities in the coastal city of Saint Petersburg, where the warships and submarines were scheduled to pass, said on Friday the parade had been cancelled without giving a reason.

Russian President Vladimir Putin appeared in a video message hailing the “bravery” and “heroism” of Russia’s sailors participating in the offensive in Ukraine.

“We are celebrating the holiday in a working atmosphere,” Putin said later on Sunday, in a video address to Russian forces involved in large-scale naval manoeuvres called “July Storm”. — Agencies

Greece gets EU help to battle disastrous wildfires

ATHENS: Greece on Sunday was battling wildfires that have ravaged homes and sparked evacuations, with Czech firefighters and Italian aircraft being deployed to help. Firefighters were working on five fire fronts late on Sunday in the Peloponnese area west of Athens, as well as on the islands of Evia, Kythera and Crete. “Today is expected to be a difficult day with a very high risk of fire, almost throughout the territory,” fire brigade spokesman Vassilis Vathrakogiannis said, though he added that the situation was improving.

Forecasters predicted that strong winds that have been fanning the flames would die down on Sunday in most areas. But they warned that Kythera, a popular tourist island with 3,600 inhabitants, continued to face “worrying” conditions.

Evacuation messages were on Sunday sent to people on the

island, which lies off the south-eastern tip of the Peloponnese. Giorgos Komninos, deputy mayor of Kythera, told the state-run ERT News channel that half of Kythera had been charred.

“Houses, beehives, olive trees have been burnt,” he said.

ERT reported that a broad fire was still burning on the island late on Sunday, but in smaller fronts and the situation was improving. Dozens of firefighters supported by three helicopters and two aircraft were battling the Kythera blaze, which erupted on Saturday and forced the evacuation of people stranded on a popular tourist beach. Local authorities have requested a state of emergency so that stepped-up assistance can be provided for the island, which was previously stricken by a major fire in 2017.

Eleven regions of Greece still face a very high fire risk, according to officials.



Firefighters try to extinguish flames as a wildfire burns on the island of Kythira. — AFP

Greece requested EU help on Saturday and two Italian aircraft were expected to arrive on Sunday, the fire brigade said. Units from

the Czech Republic were already at work. Numerous flare-ups were reported overnight on the island of Evia, near Athens, where flames laid waste to swathes of forest and killed thousands of farm animals.

Workers have toiled throughout the day to repair serious damage to Evia’s electricity network and some villages were facing water supply disruptions. Farther south, on Crete, reports said fires that started on Saturday, destroying four houses and a church, were now largely contained.

In Kryoneri, north of Athens, police reportedly bolstered security as fears grow that looters could target houses abandoned by residents fleeing a fire that erupted on Saturday but which was mostly contained on Sunday.

“We are fighting here. What can we do?” asked one local, Kryoneri Giorgos, wearing a mask to protect himself from the smoke. — AFP

OPINION

Guiding young minds from screens to real-world wonder



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan_Qaboos_University

A recently conducted research revealed that the typical time a 10-year old child could focus on a task is 10 minutes. In a world of scrolling and endless digital content, this should be one of the most discussed issues today.

According to ‘The Standard’, “Social Media platforms like TikTok and Instagram are designed to make our brains adapt to only receiving small and short forms of media at once”. This accounts for the rise of reels and ‘shorts’, as they are now called. Such short forms, when viewed for a long time, result in a person being incapable of paying more than 10 minutes attention to any content, written, oral, or task-based.

This is surely not productive for anyone, much less young learners who need to be trained to stay focused for a longer period of time. Being quickly distracted means that there has been no opportunity to think, apply, or learn from an idea.

It is not only young people who suffer from attention deficit. Companies are now

commonly complaining that they are not able to retain workers who are constantly looking for more stimulation and more variety. They are likely not going to stay in one job for long.

It is not just nostalgia to ask for concentration and sustained attention. We may hark back to a time when we would savour a book over a weekend, reflect on it and discuss it with others before stacking it at the back of our minds. But innovations and creative ideas have come because of such sustained and focused work, not by pursuing momentarily fashionable ideas.

It is almost too late to stop the relentless power of social media, but not completely. It is imperative that we recognise the enormity of this reality and come up with quick fixes. The responsibility for this falls on all of us – parents, teachers, guardians, mentors and employers.

But most importantly, this needs to start at home. Parents need to be at the vanguard of ensuring that children spend productive time away from digital devices that over stimulate

Children need to be gently guided away from digital screens and introduced to the joys and lasting benefits of engaging with the real world through fun and meaningful activities

the brain and ensure passive consumption. This can easily be done by engaging kids with outdoor activities and indoor games.

Creating small, enjoyable post-reading activities like drawing or writing about favourite characters also ensures that children spend more time away from simply watching to actually creating.

A time-tested strategy is to simply identify one interest that a child may have – including crafts, music, cooking, or sports. Think of the number of ways this passion could be encouraged. This could include calling over friends to collaborate, creating small crafts to be exhibited in the family, or giving the child a simple dish to make. All of this will make a child concentrate on a real task and benefit from encouragement by family and friends.

If there is one task this summer, it should be to take children away from digital devices and teach them the benefits of engaging with the real world in ways that are fun and productive.

UN CALLS FOR GLOBAL AI REGULATION

NINA LARSON

The world urgently needs to find a global approach to regulating artificial intelligence, the United Nations’ top tech chief said, warning that fragmentation could deepen risks and inequalities.

Doreen Bogdan-Martin, head of the UN’s International Telecommunications Union (ITU) agency, said she hoped that AI “can actually benefit humanity”.

But as concerns mount over the risks posed by the fast-moving technology – including fears of mass job losses, the spread of deepfakes and disinformation, and society’s fabric fraying – she insisted that regulation was key.

“There’s an urgency to try to get... the right framework in place,” she said, stressing the need for “a global approach”.

Her comments came after US President Donald Trump unveiled an aggressive, low-regulation strategy aimed at ensuring the US stays ahead of China on AI. Among more than 90 proposals, Trump’s plan calls for sweeping deregulation, with the administration promising to “remove red tape and onerous regulation” that could hinder private sector AI development.

Asked if she had concerns about an approach that urges less, not more, regulation of AI technologies, Bogdan-Martin refrained from commenting, saying she was “still trying to digest” the US plan.

“We have the EU approach. We have the Chinese approach. Now we’re seeing the US approach. I think what’s needed is for those approaches to dialogue,” she said.

At the same time, she highlighted that “85 per cent of countries don’t yet have AI policies or strategies”. A consistent theme among those strategies that do exist is the focus on innovation, capacity building and infrastructure investments, Bogdan-Martin said. “But where I think the debate still needs to happen at a global level is trying to figure out how much regulation, how little regulation, is needed,” she said.

Bogdan-Martin insisted the Geneva-based telecoms agency that sets standards for new technologies was well-placed to help facilitate much-needed dialogue on the issue.

“The need for a global approach I think is critical,” she said, cautioning that “fragmented approaches will not help serve and reach all”.

As countries and companies sprint to cement their dominance in the booming sector, there are concerns that precautions could be thrown to the wind – and that those who lose the race or do not have the capacity to participate will be left behind.

The ITU chief hailed “mind-blowing” advances within AI, with the potential to improve everything from education to agriculture to health care – but insisted the benefits must be shared.

— AFP

Young, old and sick are starving to death in Gaza

RAWAN SHEIKH AHMAD, ISABEL KERSHNER & ABU BAKR BASHIR

ATEF Abu Khater, 17, who was healthy before the Gaza Strip was gripped by war, lies in intensive care in a hospital in the north of the Palestinian enclave, suffering from severe malnutrition.

“He is not responding to the treatment,” said his father, A’eed Abu Khater, 48, who has been sheltering in a tent in Gaza City with his wife and five children. “I feel helpless,” he added in a phone call, his voice strained with grief. “We lost our income in the war. Food is unaffordable. There is nothing.”

Gaza’s hospitals have struggled since early in the war to cope with the influx of Palestinians injured and maimed by Israeli air strikes and, more recently, by shootings meant to disperse desperate crowds as they surge toward food convoys or head to aid distribution sites.

Now, according to doctors in the territory, an increasing number of their patients are suffering – and dying – from starvation.

“There is no one in Gaza now outside the scope of famine, not even myself,” said Dr Ahmed al Farra, who leads the paediatric ward at Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza. “I am speaking to you as a health official, but I, too, am searching for flour to feed my family.”

The World Food Programme, an arm of the United Nations, said this week that the hunger crisis in Gaza has reached “new and astonishing levels of desperation, with a third of the population not eating for multiple days in a row.”

Al Farra said the number of children dying of malnutrition had risen sharply in recent days. He described harrowing scenes of people too exhausted to walk. Many of the children he sees have no preexisting medical conditions, he said, giving the example of Siwar Barbaq, who was born healthy and now, at 11 months old, should weigh about 20 pounds but is under 9 pounds.



Displaced Palestinians wait in front of a charity kitchen in the western Gaza City area.

The lack of available food and water is taking a heavy toll on Gaza’s most vulnerable civilians – the young, the old and the sick.

The Gaza Ministry of Health has reported more than 40 hunger-related deaths this month, including 16 children, and 111 since the beginning of the war, 81 of them children. The data could not be independently verified.

Throughout the war, UN agencies and independent aid groups have accused Israel of allowing far too little food into Gaza, warning of impending famine for its more than 2 million people. For much of that time, Israel has said that enough food was reaching Gaza, blaming diversions by Hamas and mismanagement by aid groups for problems.

Hollow-eyed, skeletal children languish on hospital beds or are cared for by parents, who gaze helplessly at protruding ribs and shoulder blades, and emaciated limbs resembling brittle sticks. The haunting scenes are a stark contrast to the plenty that exists just a few miles away, across the borders with Israel and Egypt.

Now, aid enters in two ways. One is a new, much-criticised system run by private American contractors under the auspices of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, a private Israeli-backed group, which has a few set distribution sites in southern Gaza and one in the centre of the strip. The other consists of convoys of aid brought in by independent international organisations.

— The New York Times

The myth of being needed



ABDULAZIZ
AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author,
translator and a
communications
professional

In a world that often glorifies hustle culture and long working hours, taking a holiday can feel like a guilty pleasure. Many people usually spend so much of their life trying to be useful and always available! They confuse presence with value and being busy with meaning. Even when they leave office, they often don't leave it. They carry it in their pockets and heads. They refresh emails while waiting for coffee and check messages "just in case." There is a voice in them that whispers, "What if they need me?" This is both terrifying and critical indeed.

Remember: the world moves on without you. People will manage without you and meetings will always happen. Things might be delayed, or they might not even notice you are away. To some, this might look a failure, but it is a blessing. Being away reminds you that you are more than what you do. You are allowed to be a human being, not just a function. And you are allowed to step back, not because you are replaceable, but because you deserve rest.

What really happens when you disappear? The first day off feels strange as you don't know what to do. You find yourself reaching for your phone in line at the grocery, out of a habit. You walk slower, but still feel rushed.

You catch yourself mentally drafting a reply to a message that you are not supposed to read! But then something shifts slowly and quietly, and you begin to arrive in your own life.

Yes, you might become a little stranger when you disconnect! Perhaps you become a little foreign to yourself. That version of you who once spent whole afternoons reading in bed, watching movies and enjoying your mornings with family or friends.

You notice how the morning light actually falls across your table. You taste your coffee instead of drinking it. You listen to your breath, not for mindfulness points, not to fix anything; just to hear it. Just to remember that you are here enjoying your own time.

The truth is, holidays are not just about escaping the daily routine; they are essential for your mental, physical and emotional well-being. Whether it is a beach getaway, a mountain retreat, or a simple staycation at home, taking a proper break from work and routine offers benefits that go far beyond relaxation.

You are not a machine. Over time, the pressure of work, daily responsibilities and constant connectivity can take a toll on both your mind and body. A holiday gives you the space to reset. Physically, it helps reduce

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stress hormones, improve sleep and boost immunity. Mentally, it can ease anxiety and clear mental fog, helping you return to life more focused and balanced.

Hence, taking a holiday is not selfish; it is smart. Whether you are travelling abroad or just unplugging for a few days at home, the break can refresh your body, reset your mind and renew your sense of purpose. Life is not just about work and responsibilities; it is also about enjoying the moments in between.

Just leave the room and walk outside. So, simply close your laptop and go somewhere with no signal. Let the world forget you for a little while, so you can remember who you are when no one is asking anything of you. So go ahead, book that trip, plan that day off, or take that long weekend. You will be better for it and so will the people around you.

Then, eventually, the break will end. You turn your phone back on. The emails are there, like polite little ghosts waiting at the door. But they don't scare you anymore. You walk back into work carrying something fragile and valuable, a sense of self that work didn't give you and can't take away.

Likewise, you will come back to office changed and refreshed. You come back clearer, slower, but not behind; just better aligned.

CHALLENGES IN DEFINING GAZA'S PLIGHT

CÉLIA LEBUR

The United Nations and NGOs are warning of an imminent famine in the Gaza Strip - a designation based on strict criteria and scientific evidence.

But the difficulty of getting to the most affected areas in the Palestinian territory, besieged by Israel, means there are huge challenges in gathering the required data.

The internationally-agreed definition for famine is outlined by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), an initiative of 21 organisations and institutions including UN agencies and aid groups. The IPC definition has three elements.

Firstly, at least 20 per cent of households must have an extreme lack of food and face starvation or destitution.

Second, acute malnutrition in children under five exceeds 30 per cent. And third, there is an excess mortality threshold of two in 10,000 people dying per day.

Once these criteria are met, governments and UN agencies can declare a famine.

Available indicators are alarming regarding the food situation in Gaza. "A large proportion of the population of Gaza is starving," according to the World Health Organization's chief, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

Food deliveries are "far below what is needed for the survival of the population", he said, calling it "man-made... mass starvation".

Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said last Friday that a quarter of all young children and pregnant or breastfeeding women screened at its clinics in Gaza last week were malnourished, blaming Israel's "deliberate use of starvation as a weapon".

Almost a third of people in Gaza are "not eating for days" and malnutrition is surging, the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) said last Friday.

The head of Al Shifa Hospital in Gaza City said last Tuesday that 21 children had died across the Palestinian territory in the previous 72 hours "due to malnutrition and starvation".

The very few foodstuffs in the markets are inaccessible, with a kilogramme of flour reaching the exorbitant price of \$100, while the Gaza Strip's agricultural land has been ravaged by the war.

According to NGOs, the 20 or so aid trucks that enter the territory each day - vastly insufficient for more than two million hungry people - are systematically looted.

"It's become a technical point to explain that we're in acute food insecurity, IPC4, which affects almost the entire population. It doesn't resonate with people," said Amande Bazerolle, in charge of MSF's emergency response in Gaza.

"Yet we're hurtling towards famine - that's a certainty."

NGOs and the WHO concede that gathering the evidence required for a famine declaration is extremely difficult.

"Currently we are unable to conduct the surveys that would allow us to formally classify famine," said Bazerolle. — AFP

Nature risk is financial risk

On December 26, 2004, a massive undersea earthquake triggered a tsunami that left 230,000 people across Southeast Asia dead. Almost everyone, both human and animal, was caught off guard, with a notable exception: elephants. In places like Thailand and Sri Lanka, elephants became agitated hours before the waves hit. Wild elephants fled to higher ground, and captive ones defied their handlers, sometimes with tourists still on their backs. Sensing low-frequency vibrations undetectable to most species, they acted on early warning signals – and were far more likely to survive.

Today, another, far larger disaster is brewing, as rapid planetary warming and escalating environmental degradation threaten every sector of the global economy. And while many investors continue with business as usual, as if unaware of what is coming, one group is attempting to get out of harm's way: long-term asset owners, such as pension funds and sovereign wealth managers.

These investors, unlike hedge funds or private equity firms, take a generational view of the assets they manage. They cannot afford to ignore the inextricable link between global financial stability and environmental stability, an awareness reflected in new initiatives like the Debt Suspension Clause Alliance and the Global Hub for Debt Swaps for Development. While some claim that accounting for climate change amounts to "mission creep" for global financial stewards like the International Monetary Fund, bellwether investors recognise that nature and climate risks will materialise in near- and medium-term shocks, affecting every facet of the global economy.

So, even as many shareholders and CEOs remain focused on quarterly results, long-term asset owners have begun to scrutinise companies for natural-capital risk, in order to anticipate environmental shocks that could reduce the long-term value of their assets. Norway's Government Pension Fund Global, which manages \$1.7 trillion in assets, is now assessing a whopping 96 per cent of its portfolio for such risk. This is not some internal refinement of environmental, social and governance (ESG) pledges; it is a major institutional change.

Norway is not alone. Finland's State Pension Fund recently



In Indonesia, deforestation and peatland degradation from unsustainable palm-oil production led to the imposition of a temporary export ban in 2022.

began exploring ways to quantify nature-related financial risks in relation to long-term pension liabilities. And Temasek Holdings in Singapore has started using satellite monitoring and biodiversity data to evaluate natural-capital risks and opportunities.

At a time when ESG frameworks have become a flashpoint in political and culture wars, there can be no doubt that these actions are driven not by political pressures or social trends, but by pragmatism – and a growing sense of urgency. Already, extreme weather, biodiversity loss, water stress and resource scarcity are disrupting economies, with vulnerable low-income countries especially hard hit.

In 2022, floods in Pakistan devastated agriculture – which employs 40 per cent of the workforce – driving up food prices and pushing the country to the brink of default. In Indonesia, deforestation and peatland degradation from unsustainable palm-oil production led to the imposition of a temporary export ban in 2022. In Brazil and Ethiopia, rising temperatures and erratic rainfall have slashed coffee yields in recent years, causing global prices to spike and undermining rural incomes and export revenues.

High-income countries are far from immune to these risks. In the United States, prolonged droughts are reducing crop yields from Arkansas to Oklahoma, forcing farmers to drill deeper wells and switch to less profitable crops. Meanwhile, climate-related disasters,

such as hurricanes and wildfires, are causing home insurers to raise premiums, reduce coverage and even exit high-risk regions. In Europe, nature-related risks have affected olive oil production in Italy and Greece; grapes in France, Italy and Spain; timber supplies in Central and Northern Europe; fishing in the Mediterranean; and transport on the Rhine and Danube rivers. And this does not even begin to cover the vast human costs of the nature and climate crisis, evident in places like Valencia and Texas.

Yet such risks have not been adequately priced into financial models. This is partly because data on natural capital, unlike on greenhouse-gas emissions, remain fragmented, inconsistent and difficult to access. The risks are complex and systemic – water scarcity, biodiversity loss and climate change cut across sectors and borders, triggering cascading effects – and there are no measuring or reporting standards in place. As a result, most banks lack the information they need, especially location-specific data, to evaluate borrowers' environmental dependencies.

But new tools are emerging that can help close these gaps. For example, Exploring Natural Capital Opportunities, Risks and Exposure (ENCORE) is a free online tool that helps financial institutions identify nature-related risks to which they are exposed through their lending, underwriting and investment in high-risk industries.

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YOUTHHOCKEY



Seeb and Saham players in action.

SEEB THRASH SAHAM AS AL NAHDA AND AL SALAM SHARE POINTS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

The fifth round of the 2025 Youth Hockey League continues on Monday (today), with three anticipated, the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amaret will host a match between Ahli Sidab and Al Salam, in a clash where both teams aim to secure the three points to improve their positions on the standings. At the same time, the hockey field at Sohar Sports Complex will witness a strong encounter between Masirah and Seeb. Meanwhile, the third match will take place at the Sultan Qaboos Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, where Al Ittihad will face Salalah in a game expected to be filled with competitiveness and excitement.

AL NAHDA AND AL SALAM SHARE POINTS
The fourth round of the league produced several notable results, most notably the 1-1 draw between Al Nahda and Al Salam at the Sohar Sports Complex hockey field. The match was fiercely contested from the first quarter, especially since the two teams had previously drawn in their third-round encounter, adding a competitive edge to the match. Al Nahda nearly opened the scoring with a well-organised attack led by Yassin al Alawi, but Al Salam's defence intervened just in time. Mohamed al Raisi responded for Al Salam with a dangerous attempt that was blocked by Al Nahda's defence, and the first quarter ended in a goalless draw.

In the second quarter, both teams continued to share control of the match, but a lack of precision in the final touch prevented any goals, keeping the score 0-0 at halftime.
The breakthrough came in the third quarter when Mansour al Raisi scored the opening goal for Al Nahda from a swift counterattack, exploiting a gap in the defence. The game's intensity rose as Al Salam tried to equalise, while Al Nahda relied on counterattacks that nearly produced a second goal, but luck was not on their side.
In the final quarter, Al Salam came out with a strong attacking intent and managed to equalise through a well-placed shot by Naif al Maamari inside the penalty area. Both teams pushed for a winning goal in the closing minutes, but the match ended in a 1-1 draw, marked by excitement and balance until the final whistle.

SEEB CRUSH SAHAM 7-0
In another match of the same round, Seeb achieved a dominant 7-0 victory over Saham at the Seeb Club hockey field. Seeb controlled the game from the outset, with Fahad bin Khamis al Balushi opening the scoring in the sixth minute, followed just two minutes later by a second goal from Mohammed bin Abdullah al Shibli, capitalising on a quick counterattack. Saham tried to reduce the deficit through Majid al Maamari, but Seeb's defence remained alert, and the first quarter ended 2-0. In the second quarter, Saham continued their attacking attempts but failed to create real danger. Seeb responded through Al Waleed al Raisi, who scored the third goal from a penalty corner. With Saham's performance declining, Seeb took advantage and added a fourth goal through Hassan Darwish al Balushi in the 24th minute, ending the quarter 4-0.
Seeb's dominance continued in the third quarter as they earned another penalty corner, which Mohamed Saeed al Shibli converted into the fifth goal.

Al Shabab defeat Seeb to lift maiden Super Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

Al Shabab Club lifted their maiden Super Cup title on Saturday night following a 5-4 penalty shootout victory over Seeb at Al Saada Sports Complex in Salalah. The curtain-raiser of the 2025/2026 football season concluded in a goalless draw in regular time before the penalty decider handed Al Shabab their first Super Cup trophy in club history. This victory also marked Al Shabab's second successive triumph over Seeb, having defeated them earlier this year in the prestigious HM Cup final on February 20 through a solitary goal by Badar al Alawi.
In front of a packed stadium enjoying the cool khareef breeze at Al Saada Sports Stadium, both teams delivered an intense and competitive match but failed to convert their chances. Seeb held greater possession and created more opportunities through the lively trio of Ali al Busaidy, Arshad al Alawi, and Salah al Yahyaei, but their finishing let them down. Al Shabab, on the other hand, responded with counterattacks led by Jameel al Yahmadi and Mohammed al Ghafri, who also fell short in the final third.

The match headed straight into penalties as Al Shabab maintained their composure as all five of their players including: Jonsen, Jameel al Yahmadi, Ahed al Mashakheyi, Badar al Alawi, and Yousef al Malki converted their spot kicks. Seeb successfully converted four penalties through Salah al Yahyaei, Abdullah Fawaz, Arshad al Alawi, and Mohammed al Musallami, but their returning striker Marwan Taeab saw his effort denied by Al Shabab's goalkeeper Abdulmalik al Badri, sealing the title for Al Shabab.
Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, chief guest presented medals and trophies to the winning team, coaching



Al Shabab players celebrate on the podium after winning the Super Cup against Seeb.

staff, and match officials in presence of Sayyid Sulaiman bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Chairman of Oman Football Association (OFA), along with other dignitaries and football officials.
Al Shabab head coach Hassan Rustam expressed his delight with the title of Super Cup title. “ We are very proud of this achievement despite limited preparation. The players managed to demonstrate great determination. After securing the HM Cup last season and winning the Super Cup, our fans ambitions have grown and we are targeting more silverware this season.” He ended
Ahmed al Owaisi, Al Shabab club Chairman, praised the club's collective effort and vision. “This success is a result of strategic planning, team spirit, and

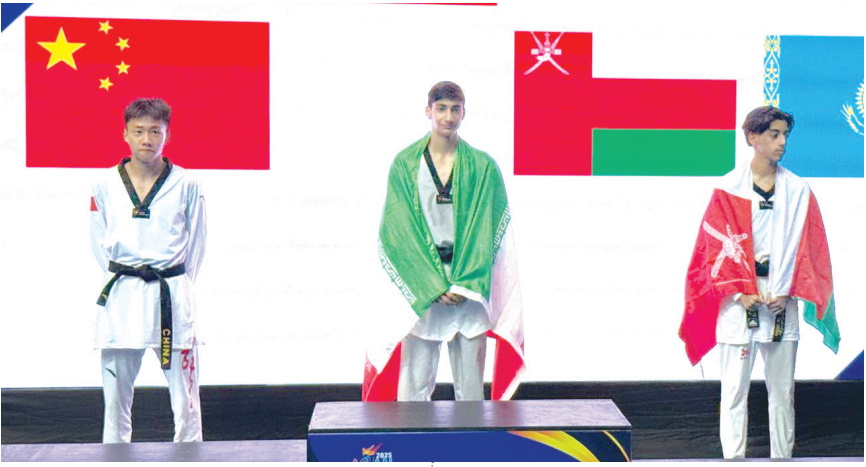
strong technical leadership. Winning both the HM Cup and Super Cup within less than a six month reflects our growing stature. The expectations from our fans are now higher, and we aim to compete strongly both domestically and regionally.”
Oman newly appointed head coach, Carlos Queiroz, and his assisting team attended the match. He noted down several comments on the players who took part in the match. Al Shabab's historic triumph send a clear message as they are preparing for their upcoming domestic and continental campaigns, including their participation in the AFC Challenge Cup. The victory not only adds to their trophy cabinet but also set as a positive tone for the forthcoming events in the season ahead.

Al Balushi wins Asian taekwondo bronze in Malaysia

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

Omani national taekwondo team player, Junior Qaboos al Balushi, achieved a remarkable milestone for Omani sports by securing the bronze medal at the 2025 Asian Taekwondo Championships. The event is currently taking place in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, with the participation of over 1,300 male and female athletes from 44 countries, including 406 junior athletes from 36 nations.

Al Balushi, a member of Al Seeb Stars Taekwondo Academy under Master Waleed al Balushi, competed in the under-51 kg category. He advanced past the first round by draw, then delivered a strong performance in the second round by defeating a Malaysian player. In the semifinals, he faced a tough challenge from a Chinese opponent and, after a competitive bout, settled for a well-earned bronze medal.
Qaboos al Balushi was the only member of the Omani team to stand on the podium at this prestigious continental event, claiming third place and adding a new achievement to Oman's taekwondo history. His performance reflects both his promising talent and the



Qaboos al Balushi was the only member of the Omani team to stand on the podium at this prestigious continental event, claiming third place.

progress he has made, despite the tough level of competition.
The national team delegation included the technical staff led by Master Fahd al Yousfi and coach Adel al Wahibi, as well as Dr Khalid al Mahrami, member of the Oman Taekwondo Committee. All praised Al Balushi's high-level performance against some of Asia's top athletes.
Oman's representation in the championship featured a selection of talented male and female athletes: Muhannad al Balushi, Mutasim al Maskari, Ziyad al Balushi, Dawood al Yousfi, Aws al Sibani, and Qaboos al Balushi, along with female athletes Fida al Barwani, Dania al Abdali, and Rawan al Talai. Their

participation was organised by the Oman Taekwondo Committee as part of its effort to support and develop youth athletes for international competitions.
Eng Faisal al Zadjali, President of Al Seeb Stars Academy and a member of the Oman Taekwondo Committee, described the national team's participation in the 2025 Asian Junior and Youth Championships in Malaysia as honorable and filled with positive signs for the future of the sport in Oman. He especially praised Al Balushi's historic bronze medal, which marks the first youth-level Asian achievement for the Sultanate of Oman.
Al Zadjali emphasised that

the results inspire optimism, noting that the Asian Championships are considered the second most competitive event in the continent after the World Championships. Reaching the advanced rounds is an achievement in itself, given the presence of strong teams like Korea, China and Iran.
He explained that Al Balushi's success was the result of a full year of comprehensive preparation at the academy, which included intensive training programmes, camps, match simulations, and performance analysis. This training model, he noted, is applied to all academy athletes, not just those participating internationally.
He also highlighted the vital role of sports academies in talent discovery and development, pointing to a strategic partnership between Al Seeb Stars Academy and the Oman Taekwondo Committee aimed at supplying the national teams with ready and competitive athletes.
Al Zadjali concluded by noting that upcoming international competitions are on the team's agenda, and that qualifying for the World Championships and the Olympics is among their long-term strategic goals.

WOMEN’S CROWN



Nigeria women players celebrate on the podium after winning the WAFCON title against Morocco. — AFP

NIGERIA DEFEAT MOROCCO TO WIN WAFCON TITLE

ABUJA: Nigeria’s President Bola Tinubu led the football-mad nation in celebrating the women’s squad after a stunning comeback to win a record-extending Women’s Africa Cup of Nations (WAFCON) in Morocco.

The 3-2 victory against hosts Morocco in Rabat confirmed the west Africans as the queens of women’s football in Africa as they pulled off a 10th title in 13 editions.

Tinubu said the team’s “spectacular performance... exemplifies the determination that defines the Nigerian spirit”.

The Super Falcons staged a remarkable comeback from being two goals down to beat Morocco on Saturday night.

“You have lifted our spirits. You are a pride to your generation,” Tinubu told the team in a post-match video call.

“You have achieved the mission the nation dreamed of and prayed for. Nigeria celebrates you.”

Dubbed Mission X, the WAFCON title was a tonic for many Nigerians enduring the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation as the government carries out reforms.

Muhammad Awwal, a taxi driver who relocated to the northern city of Kano to escape the violence of Borno state, the epicentre of the jihadist insurgency, hailed the Falcons for helping Nigerians to “momentarily forget our common problems”.

“Everywhere people erupted in celebration after the final whistle. All our problems were drowned in the frenzy of celebration of the spectacular win,” Awwal said.

“Last night all the problems tormenting us - the high cost of living, banditry and Boko Haram violence - disappeared. It was a great relief, thanks to the Falcons,” he said. Abuja housewife Comfort Zamani, agreed: “Life has not been easy, but at least the girls helped us to forget the hardships even if for only a few hours,” she said.

“They have given us some hope that we should keep fighting and not give up even when things are rough.”

In the densely-populated neighbourhoods of Dako, Kabusa and Galadimawa of the Nigerian capital Abuja, loud cheers tore through the late night to celebrate Nigeria’s two comeback goals.

But the loudest cheers were heard when substitute Jennifer Echegini swept home a free kick with only two minutes left on the clock for the championship-winning goal, and then at full time.

Sunday newspaper carried front page headlines such as “Unstoppable Falcons win 10th WAFCON from two goals down” and “Super Falcons rule Africa again”. — AFP



Oman’s national men’s volleyball team added a new milestone to its continental achievements

Oman clinch historic bronze at West Asia volley

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

OMAN’S national men’s volleyball team added a new milestone to its continental achievements by claiming the bronze medal in the 2025 West Asian Men’s Volleyball Championship, following a well-earned 3-1 victory over Saudi Arabia in the third place playoff held at Isa Bin Rashid Hall in Isa Sports City, Bahrain. This marks Oman’s first-ever medal in this regional tournament at the national team level and comes with a notable jump in the world rankings from 76th to 70th.

The Omani team started strong in the first set, asserting control early on with a solid block from Saud al Maamari, followed by powerful attacks from Mahmoud al Saadi, giving Oman a 4-1 lead. With solid defensive organisation and standout mid-court strikes from Ismail al Haidi, Oman closed the set 25-19.

In the second set, Saudi Arabia capitalised on Oman’s offensive errors and lack of focus to bounce back and take the set 25-20. However, Oman regrouped in the third set, with Youssef al Shukaili excelling at the net and Al Haidi continuing his offensive dominance, leading to a 25-18 win.

The fourth set was closely contested with continuous point exchanges, but Oman’s experience shone in the final moments. Al Maamari and Al Saadi broke the Saudi momentum, sealing the set 25-22 and the match 3-1.

Official match statistics revealed Oman’s clear superiority in offensive efficiency, scoring 95 points to Saudi Arabia’s 83. Oman



Oman and Saudi Arabia players in action.

registered six direct service aces and five successful blocks, offsetting 14 service errors thanks to strong mental focus and defensive coverage. Ismail al Haidi emerged as the match MVP, tallying 20 clean offensive points.

Qatar Claims Gold; Al Haidi wins Best “Spiker 2” Qatar clinched the championship title after a thrilling 3-2 victory over Bahrain in the final. Oman’s Al Haidi was awarded Best “Spiker 2” for his composed performance and ability to shift the game tempo, particularly in the bronze medal match.

In a post match statement, Al Haidi expressed his joy, calling the award a

result of collective team effort from the preparation phase onward. “This award isn’t mine alone, it belongs to everyone who supported me and stood behind the team. We played as one family, and our fighting spirit was the key to our success,” he said.

The tournament’s awards highlighted standout performances across all positions, with Qatari star Renan Ribeiro being named the Best Player of the Championship. The award for Best Setter went to Bahrain’s Mahmoud Al Afia. The Best “Spiker 4” honour was shared between Bahrain’s Mohammad Yaqoob and Qatar’s Nikola, both of whom impressed with their powerful attacking contributions. In the Best “Spiker 3” category, the award was jointly claimed by Bahrain’s Hassan Al Warqa and Qatar’s Bilal Abu Nabout. Qatar’s Mahmoud Naji received the Best Libero award. Notably, Oman’s Ismail al Haidi earned a well-deserved place among the elite by winning the award for Best “Spiker 2,” recognising his impactful role and balanced play, particularly during the third-place match against Saudi Arabia.

Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) President and West Asia Vice-President, Eng Ibrahim Al Maqbali hailed the bronze medal as the result of a clear developmental plan and team effort. He noted the challenges Oman faces due to the disparity in professional resources, explaining, Our players participate as amateurs, while others rely on full-time professionals. We hope for partial player releases to aid future growth.

Al Maqbali also praised Omani media coverage, stating it provided a significant morale boost for the players throughout the championship. He concluded by emphasising the importance of maintaining this momentum in upcoming tournaments.

India draw fourth England Test as Gill leads tourists’ resistance

MANCHESTER: England and India drew the fourth Test at Old Trafford on Sunday after a fine rearguard action by the tourists.

India, who had been 0-2 in their second innings, finished on 425-4 in reply to England’s first-innings 669, with skipper Shubman Gill, Ravindra Jadeja and Washington Sundar all making hundreds before the teams shook hands after tea on the last day.

England still lead this five-match series 2-1 ahead of next week’s finale at the Oval. This match was a personal triumph for England captain Ben Stokes as he became just the fourth England cricketer to score a hundred and take five wickets in the same Test, his 141 on Saturday following a haul of 5-72 in India’s

first-innings 358.

Stokes is now only the third cricketer in Test history to have both scored 7,000 Test runs and taken 200 wickets after outstanding West Indies all-rounder Garfield Sobers and South Africa’s Jacques Kallis.

But he appeared to be in pain while bowling Sunday, repeatedly clutching the top of his leg -- a worrying sign for England given the all-rounder’s history of hamstring trouble.

England’s Joe Root, meanwhile, leapfrogged former Australia captain Ricky Ponting into second place in Test cricket’s list of all-time leading run-scorers while making 150 -- his 38th hundred at this level.

India resumed on 174-2 with KL Rahul 87 not out and Gill 78 not out.



India’s Ravindra Jadeja celebrates after reaching his century. — Reuters

The pair had come together with India in dire straits at 0-2 after Chris Woakes struck with successive deliveries in the first over of the innings.

Stokes brought himself on to bowl at the start of Sunday’s play.

Already the leading bowler on either side this series with 16 wickets at 24.75, Stokes almost had Gill caught for 81 by a leaping Ollie Pope at short cover. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES

India 1st Innings 358 (S Sudharsan 61, Y Jaiswal 58, R Pant 54; B Stokes 5-72, J Archer 3-73)

England 1st Innings 669 (J Root 150, B Stokes 141, B Duckett 94, Z Crawley 84; R Jadeja 4-143)

India 2nd Innings 425-4 (R Jadeja 107 no, S Gill 103, W Sundar 101 no)



McLaren’s Australian driver Oscar Piastri drives ahead of McLaren’s British driver Lando Norris races during the Formula One Belgian Grand Prix at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit in Spa. — AFP

PIASTRI BEATS NORRIS IN RAIN-HIT BELGIAN GRAND PRIX

OSCAR Piastri passed McLaren teammate and title rival Lando Norris with a bold early move to win the rain-delayed Belgian Grand Prix and extend his Formula One lead to 16 points on Sunday.

Charles Leclerc was a distant third for Ferrari as reigning champions McLaren celebrated their sixth one-two finish in 13 races and the third in a row.

The race at Spa-Francorchamps was red-flagged after an initial formation lap and delayed by an hour and 20 minutes due to the weather, with standing water and heavy spray affecting visibility.

Piastri was not in a mood for hanging around when the racing got going with a rolling start after four laps behind the safety car.

The Australian charged through the spray to slipstream Norris through the daunting Eau Rouge and scythed past on the uphill straight.

“I knew lap one would be my best chance of winning the race. I got a good exit out of Turn One, lifted as little as I dared out of Eau Rouge,” he said.

“The rest of the race we managed really well. I struggled at the end. Maybe the mediums were not the best for the last five or six laps. We had it mostly under control.”

If Norris had a battery issue, the Briton asking over the radio why he had “no pack” before his race engineer assured him it was coming back, he was not looking for any excuses afterwards.

“Oscar just did a good job. Nothing more to say. Committed a bit more through Eau Rouge, and had the slipstream and got the run,” he said.

“So nothing to complain of. He did a better job in the beginning, and that



Winner McLaren’s Australian driver Oscar Piastri lifts the first place trophy. — AFP

was it. Nothing more I could do after that point. I would love to be up top, but Oscar deserved it today.”

Piastri pitted on lap 12 of 44 to switch from intermediates to medium tyres and Norris followed a lap later, but opting for hards, before both then went to the chequered flag on a one-stop strategy.

Piastri crossed the line 3.415 seconds clear of Norris, who had been chasing a third win in a row and managed to reduce the gap in the final laps with putting the ever-calm Australian under too much pressure.

Reigning champion and Saturday sprint winner Max Verstappen finished fourth, in Red Bull’s first grand prix since the dismissal of team boss Christian Horner, with George Russell fifth for Mercedes.

Williams’ Alex Albon held off Ferrari’s seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton to secure sixth.

Liam Lawson was eighth for Racing Bulls with Gabriel Bortoleto ninth for Sauber and Pierre Gasly securing the final point for Alpine. — Reuters

PIASTRI WINS AT SPA TO GO 16 POINTS CLEAR OF NORRIS

SIXTH MCLAREN ONE-TWO OF THE SEASON

LECLERC PUTS FERRARI BACK ON THE PODIUM

VERSTAPPEN FOURTH IN RED BULL’S FIRST GP WITHOUT HORNER

HAMILTON RACES BACK TO SEVENTH

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Salalah to host Oman’s next iconic coastal destination

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 27

CONSTRUCTION has officially commenced on a major new tourism project along Dhofar’s southern coast, with the first phase of development valued at around RO 90 million, according to site observations and project documentation.

The project, titled ‘Boutique Hotel Salalah and Marina,’ is being spearheaded by Al Wathba Hospitality, and is set to transform over 2.5 million square metres of coastal land into a premium tourism and leisure destination.

A prominent signboard at the project site – visited this week by Observer – confirms that construction activities are underway, with early works and land preparation already visible.



The new development will play a significant role in diversifying Dhofar’s tourism economy beyond the seasonal khareef influx. Picture for illustration only.

The development will include a luxury beachfront hotel, an integrated marina and supporting tourism infrastructure designed to enhance Salalah’s year-round appeal.

Design and engineering responsibilities are being handled by

leading international firms.

The architectural vision is led by Benoy and Opini, while the main engineering consultancy is Tusker, a firm known for infrastructure and environmental planning.

Execution of marine works has

been assigned to MDC Dredging & Marine, in partnership with Al Fairuz, according to details on-site.

The location, situated west of central Salalah, is part of a broader national push to develop high-impact tourism assets in Dhofar, in line

with Oman Vision 2040. The strategy aims to expand the tourism sector’s contribution to GDP and promote the governorate as a key gateway for sustainable economic diversification.

Initial visuals on the project board suggest a design that integrates natural landscapes, palm-lined promenades and luxury coastal amenities, preserving the environmental character of the surrounding area.

The inclusion of solar-powered site lighting reflects an emphasis on modern and eco-conscious development.

Industry observers note that this development could play a significant role in diversifying Dhofar’s tourism economy beyond the seasonal khareef influx, offering a high-end option for both regional and international travellers.

Tanmia Liquidity Fund	
صندوق التنمية للسوق Tanmia Liquidity Fund	Fund Management Body Report For the quarter ended June 30 th , 2025
Dear Unitholders, We are pleased to present the report for Tanmia Liquidity Fund for the period ended June 30, 2025.	
Role of the Fund During the second quarter of 2025, the Fund continued its active role in supporting market liquidity and deepening trading activity in the Muscat Stock Exchange , in line with its strategic objectives and the Exchange’s vision to elevate its classification among emerging markets. The Fund contributed to strengthening key performance indicators, boosting investor confidence, and improving the efficiency of trading in listed securities.	
Fund and Market Performance The Muscat Stock Exchange witnessed notable growth during the second quarter of the year, as reflected in the following: • A return growth of 3.06% compared to the first quarter. • An increase of 4.70% in the total return index, reflecting improved investor sentiment and higher liquidity. • Total trading value on the Exchange reached OMR 917.2 million, compared to OMR 559.12 million in the same quarter of 2024, marking a growth of 64.05%. • The Fund’s trading value during the period reached OMR 367.34 million, reaffirming its pivotal role in stimulating market activity.	
Summary of the Fund’s Financial Performance For the Period Ended 30 June 2025	
Particulars	For the Quarter Ended 30th June 2025 RO
Total value – Buy	197,675,382
Total value – Sell	169,999,357
Total value of trades during the period	367,341,739
Total Net Asset	98,320,881
Number of outstanding units	101,867,227
* Fund operations began on 16th May 2024	
Outlook Based on the positive performance of the market in the first half of 2025, we believe the Muscat Stock Exchange is on a steady path toward greater maturity and investment attractiveness. The Liquidity Development Fund intends to continue its leadership role through: • Supporting initiatives aimed at enhancing the market’s classification. • Deepening partnerships with regulatory authorities and other funds. • Increasing engagement with investors. • Contributing to the creation of a sustainable investment environment and added value for all stakeholders.	
In Conclusion On behalf of myself and the members of the Fund’s Board of Directors, I extend our highest expressions of gratitude, appreciation, and loyalty to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik – may Allah protect and preserve him – for his noble leadership and far-sighted vision in advancing economic development and reinforcing the foundations of financial stability, which are positively reflected in the development of capital markets and the prosperity of the investment sector in the Sultanate of Oman. We also extend our sincere thanks to the regulatory authorities for their continued support, to our valued unitholders for their trust, and to the Fund Manager for its ongoing efforts in achieving the Fund’s objectives.	
Chairman of the Fund’s Board of Directors	
Managed By: Oman National Investments Development Company S.A.O.C (Tanmia)	
 الشركة العمانية لتنمية الإستثمارات الوطنية Oman National Investments Development Company	

OTTCO named champion for green ammonia storage in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 27

OMAN Tank Terminal Company (OTTCO), a subsidiary of OQ, has been designated as a ‘National Champion’ for central green ammonia storage. This designation, announced by Hydrom – the master planner of Oman’s green hydrogen sector – places OTTCO among a select group of predominantly state-owned utilities and energy companies tasked with developing and operating shared infrastructure, also known as Common User Infrastructure (CUI), to support the country’s emerging gigawatt-scale green molecules industry.

Confirmation of OTTCO’s new status came in a recent interview given by Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani, Managing Director of Hydrom. Highlighting Hydrom’s pivotal role in advancing the Sultanate of Oman’s green hydrogen ambitions, he noted: “We advise the government on policies and regulations to support a robust and investment-friendly framework. We lead auction processes and manage contracts.

“In parallel, we also serve as custodians of the Green Hydrogen Strategy, overseeing land master planning and the sector’s long-term vision. Once projects are awarded, developers take the lead on execution, while we ensure coordination – especially for shared infrastructure.

“TO DO THAT, WE WORK CLOSELY WITH ‘NATIONAL CHAMPIONS’ – KEY PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ENTITIES ENTRUSTED WITH SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES ACROSS THE HYDROGEN VALUE CHAIN.” “OQ Alternative Energy leads investment. Nama Water Services oversees water and power. OQ Gas



OTTCO’s flagship asset – the Raz Markaz Crude Oil Terminal in Duqm

Networks is responsible for gas transport. Oman Electricity Transmission Company manages power transmission. Most recently, Oman Tank Terminal Company was named National Champion for central green ammonia storage,” he added.

The move underscores the growing importance of green ammonia as both a versatile carrier of green hydrogen and a low-carbon fuel, particularly for hard-to-decarbonise sectors.

Produced from renewable hydrogen and nitrogen, green ammonia (NH₃) is safer and more efficient to store and transport than pure hydrogen.

It can also be used directly as a carbon-free fuel in shipping, power generation and possibly industrial heating, offering a cleaner alternative to fossil fuels.

The maritime sector, in particular, is showing strong interest in ammonia as a zero-carbon bunker fuel, while green ammonia also provides a cleaner substitute for the global fertiliser industry, which is a significant source of CO₂ emissions.

ADVERTORIALS

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



The project seeks to enrich sports, social, and cultural activities in Kumzar Village

Bank Muscat introduces community sports project in Kumzar Village in Musandam

MUSCAT: In a significant stride towards sustainable development and social responsibility, Bank Muscat proudly announced the inauguration of the first integrated social sports project in Kumzar Village, Musandam Governorate.

This initiative, in collaboration with the Office of the Governor of Musandam, underscores the Bank’s dedication to enhancing the quality of life in local communities and developing sports infrastructure across the Sultanate of Oman.

The project seeks to enrich sports, social and cultural activities in Kumzar Village by establishing a modern football turf designed to host a variety of events and recreational endeavours.

Strategically located with stunning views of the Strait of Hormuz, the playground is equipped with state-of-the-art safety features, lighting and artificial turf, creating an ideal environment for individuals of all ages and serving as a vital recreational hub for the village’s residents.

Eng Mohammed bin Saif al Jabri, Assistant Director General, Musandam Municipality, emphasised the significance of this integrated project as a successful example of partnership between the public & the private sector.

He said: “This project reflects the government efforts to provide bespoke services to the coastal areas, such as Kumzar, which is distinguished by its unique location and culture. The football turf is a pivotal addition that addresses the needs of the youth, providing a secure and well-equipped setting for both sports and social activities. I would like to extend gratitude to Bank Muscat for its robust support and collaboration in bringing this project to fruition. It will surely be a perfect gathering place for the community and a venue for various social events and activities”.

Talib Saif al Makhmari, Head-Community & Media Relations, Bank Muscat, expressed pride in the Bank’s role in actualising this project, which reflects its unwavering commitment to bolstering local sports infrastructure throughout the Sultanate of Oman. He highlighted the partnership with Musandam Governor’s Office as a testament to the Bank’s dedication to supporting local communities.

“We would like to express sincere gratitude to the Governor’s Office for their diligent efforts in facilitating the procedures necessary for the successful implementation of this project. This initiative transcends being merely a sports facility; it serves as an open social centre that fosters unity and collaboration among residents, illustrating a successful model of public-private partnership”, he added.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Kumzari, Deputy Chairman of the Municipal Council of Musandam Governorate, expressed his enthusiasm for the project, stating, “We, the people of Kumzar Village, are thrilled with the opening of this integrated sports and social project, marking a historic advancement in enhancing our community’s quality of life”.

GCC COUNTRIES RECORD \$587.8 BILLION IN NOMINAL GDP

MUSCAT: The latest data released by the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf revealed that the nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries reached \$587.8 billion by the end of Q4 2024, up from \$579 billion at the end of Q4 2023, reflecting a growth rate of 1.5%.

The data indicated that the contribution of non-oil activities to the GCC’s nominal GDP reached 77.9% by the end of Q4 2024, compared to 22.1% from oil activities. The manufacturing sector contributed 12.5% to the GDP, while wholesale and retail trade accounted for 9.9%.

The contribution of the construction sector reached 8.3%,

while public administration and defence logged 7.5%, finance and insurance 7% and real estate activities 5.7%.

Meanwhile, other non-oil activities contributed 27%. Compared to Q3 2024, the nominal GDP of the GCC countries recorded a growth of 1.3% in Q4 of 2024, reaching \$587.8 billion, up from \$580.1 billion in Q3.

Last chance to avail Lexus summer benefits

THIS is your last chance to buy your dream Lexus with incredible benefits of up to 10 years/100,000 km of free service and first-year registration. Discover the dynamic lineup at Lexus Oman showrooms and explore the luxury, performance and state-of-the-art technology that defines every Lexus vehicle. Avail the exclusive offer before it ends on July 30, 2025.

The summer offer brings great experiences with great savings. Own Lexus’ new LX 700h — now equipped with sustainable hybrid capabilities.

As powerful as ever, the LX comes equipped with a twin-turbocharged 3.5L V6 engine, producing 341 horsepower and 790 Nm of torque, paired with a 10-speed automatic transmission. The hybrid system offers increased fuel efficiency of up to 10.6 km/l, without compromising performance.

The new Lexus LX 700h prioritises reliability and durability, ensuring excellent performance on every terrain.

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Own Lexus’ new LX 700h — now equipped with sustainable hybrid capabilities.

you can also get your hands on the dynamic UX 200 — one of Lexus’s top-selling premium SUVs.

Fitted with a turbocharged 2.0 engine, the UX 200 radiates finesse and versatility, making your journeys smooth. On purchase, get 7 years/70,000 km of free service along with free 1st year registration.

Unbeatable in its league, the RX range provides high-performance and high-value vehicles to suit today’s needs.

The RX 350h combines a

2.5-litre sustainable engine with fuel consumption of 20.7 km/l.

Similarly, the RX 500h F Sport features a powerful 2.4-litre turbocharged engine, delivering a combined power of 366 hp, mated to a 6-speed automatic transmission. Offering luxurious interiors and an exhilarating city-life experience, the ES is a sedan that makes a striking appearance on the roads.

Indulge in sublime comfort, spaciousness and advanced intelligent safety technologies. Available with two powertrain

options: the ES 350 is powered by a 3.5-litre, V6 engine that produces 298 hp and the ES 250 boasts a 2.5-litre engine.

For the more daring, the world-class luxury coupe, LC 500, is made for those who live life with full vigour.

Powered by a high-performance 5.0L V8 engine paired with a 10-speed automatic transmission, the LC 500 portrays the finest Takumi craftsmanship, blending modern technologies with decades-old craftsmanship.

VODAFONE OMAN INVITES EVERYONE TO ‘LIVE IT RIGHT’ THIS KHAREEF

MUSCAT: Vodafone is returning to Dhofar this Khareef with a renewed vision for the season. Under the theme ‘Live it Right’, the 2025 campaign builds on the company’s long-standing commitment to bringing people together in ways that are meaningful, accessible and memorable through seamless digital connectivity, purpose-led community engagement and hospitality rooted in place.

“Each year, Khareef Dhofar becomes an opportunity for us to deepen our presence, not just through visibility, but through value”, said Usama al Saifi, Vodafone Oman’s Head of Brand and Communications. “‘Live it Right’ is our response to evolving expectations in Dhofar Governorate and a reflection of how we see technology, culture and community coming together.

Whether it’s through a stronger network, smarter products, or engaging spaces, our aim is to show what Khareef is all about”. Bringing this



The main highlight is Vodafone’s Viewpoint at Samharam Resort in Awqad.

vision to life, ‘Live it Right’ introduces immersive spaces designed to deliver interactive and memorable experiences for Khareef visitors across Dhofar. These include eight unique activation zones in key locations such as Al Haffa, Ittin and Al Dahareez. The main highlight this year

is Vodafone’s Viewpoint at Samharam Resort in Awqad, held in collaboration with local SMEs “Estikana” and “Ladh”.

This social hub serves as a physical extension of the campaign message, offering a haven where digital and real-world connections come together and where everyday stops become moments of recharge, reflection and simple pleasure.

Complementing the experience, Vodafone’s 5G network continues to be a driving force behind the season. As Oman’s only fully digital network, it offers high-speed, low-latency 5G connectivity across key areas in Dhofar, supporting the movement, pace and spontaneity that define Khareef. From coastal roads to mountain peaks, the network ensures that residents and visitors stay connected with ease and reliability.

Supporting this is Makani Internet, Vodafone’s portable connectivity solution that adapts to life on the move, allowing users to stay online wherever the season takes them.

BankDhofar, Desert Spark to drive next-gen digital transformation

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, one of Oman’s most technologically advanced financial institutions, has announced a strategic partnership with Desert Spark SPC, a next-generation technology and investment company, to accelerate its digital transformation journey.

The collaboration marks a significant step towards modernising the bank’s core architecture while aligning with Oman Vision 2040 and In-Country Value (ICV) objectives.

Oman-based Desert Spark specialises in enabling digital

transformation across the Middle East and neighbouring markets through strategic investments and cutting-edge solutions, focusing on AI, cloud computing, microservices, open banking and e-government.

By bridging international tech expertise with regional needs, Desert Spark helps businesses, governments and communities thrive in the digital era.

At the heart of the partnership is a bold initiative to support BankDhofar’s transition from a traditional monolithic IT architecture



The collaboration marks a significant step towards modernising the bank’s core architecture

to a microservices-based ecosystem.

This shift aims to enhance agility, scalability and customer experience, positioning the bank to respond more dynamically to changing market demands and rapidly evolving customer expectations.

“This initiative represents a key milestone in our transformation road map”, said Dr Tariq Saleh Taha, Chief Information Officer of BankDhofar.

“By partnering with Desert Spark, we are gaining access to world-class capabilities in microservices, cloud and AI, enabling us to streamline

operations and deliver more personalised, responsive services to our customers.

This collaboration reinforces our commitment to technological leadership and long-term value creation”.

Desert Spark brings over two decades of global experience supporting leading financial institutions, giving it deep insight into the complexities of banking operations and the specific challenges that come with modernisation.

BUSINESS

RENEWEDCOMMITMENT



This growth reflects the bank’s commitment to supporting Oman Vision 2040.

DEVELOPMENT BANK
LOAN APPROVALS
RISE 13% TO RO 110
MILLION IN H1 2025

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 27

DEVELOPMENT Bank has approved 3,716 loans worth RO 110 million (\$286 million) during the first six months of 2025, marking a 13% increase compared to the same period last year.

This growth reflects the bank’s commitment to supporting Oman Vision 2040 by promoting economic diversification and strengthening the private sector across the country.

“The loans and programmes we provide contribute substantial added value to our national economy”, said Hamad al Harthy, MSME Chief & Portfolio Management, Development Bank. “We’re helping meet food security requirements, reduce reliance on imports and encourage entrepreneurs to pursue new opportunities.”

The bank’s success stems from its tailored approach that recognises the unique needs of businesses at different stages of development. “We craft solutions that align with their business strategies”, Al Harthy explained, enabling both start-ups and established companies to grow and expand their operations.

Building on this comprehensive strategy, H1 financing was distributed across key economic sectors that drive national development.

Manufacturing received the largest allocation at RO 38 million (\$99 million) reflecting the sector’s important role in reducing import dependence.

General professional services attracted RO 19 million (\$49 million) while traditional sectors also saw strong support with fisheries receiving RO 14 million (\$36 million), agriculture RO 9 million (\$23 million) and mining RO 8 million (\$21 million). This sector-focused approach was matched by broad geographical reach across Oman. Muscat Governorate received RO 25 million (\$65 million) while regional development was supported through considerable allocations to Al Batinah North Governorate at RO 18 million (\$47 million) and Al Sharqiyah South Governorate at RO 14 million (\$36 million).

Al Batinah South Governorate received RO 11 million (\$29 million) and Al Wusta Governorate RO 8 million (\$21 million) ensuring development opportunities reach communities nationwide.

The increased lending demonstrates the bank’s commitment to supporting businesses of all sizes, from start-ups and SMEs to large corporates. This approach enables entrepreneurs to implement projects across growth-driving sectors while maximising local value creation and contributing to Oman’s strategic economic goals.

As part of a broader ecosystem of government organisations aligned with Oman Vision 2040, Development Bank continues to provide support and incentives to strengthen national industries and promote in-country value. “Our shared goal is sustainable and inclusive progress”, Al Harthy concluded.

“We’re proud that our support is helping ambitious, growing companies fulfil their potential while driving economic transformation”.

Development Bank (DB) is a key enabler of economic growth, providing innovative financing solutions to support Oman Vision 2040 and the transition to a diversified, sustainable economy.

TARIFF PAUSE

S Korea seeks agreeable US trade package



South Korea will prepare a trade package that is mutually agreeable with the US ahead of minister-level meetings planned next week and a US tariff-pause deadline of August 1, the presidential office said on Saturday.

It will include shipbuilding, a sector of interest to US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, who discussed the matter with South Korea’s Industry Minister Kim Jung-kwan. — Reuters

CEOTALK

Building a regional brand
with Omani values

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 27

TARIQ Mohamed al Balushi, CEO of Molecules LLC, embodies the belief that business success lies not just in profit, but in purpose. His journey from a curious young innovator to the head of a fast-growing multi-sector Omani company is a testament to resilience, continuous learning and a strong commitment to national pride.

“I’ve always believed that business should be about creating value and making a difference — not just generating revenue”, Al Balushi says. “Innovation, leadership and problem-solving were natural passions for me from a young age and over time, these passions guided my path into entrepreneurship”.

In an exclusive interview with *Oman Observer*, Al Balushi shared how Molecules LLC — a 100% Omani factory — evolved from a startup into a diversified company operating in pharmaceuticals, FMCG, medical supplies, cosmetics and more.

He emphasised that the company’s mission is to build a strong Omani brand with a footprint that extends across the region. “Our vision was clear from the start: unite multiple sectors under one umbrella brand that people can trust”, he said. “Key milestones like opening our new factory and establishing global partnerships have been transformational.

These are not just business decisions — they are statements of intent to show what Oman can offer the world”. Managing growth, however, was not without its



Focus on learning, remain humble and don’t be afraid to take risks. Work with purpose, treat people with respect and stay consistent—because success doesn’t come overnight.

**TARIQ MOHAMED
AL BALUSHI**
CEO, Molecules LLC

challenges. Al Balushi recounted the difficulty of scaling operations while preserving quality and internal cohesion. “As we expanded into new sectors and countries, the pressure to maintain control was immense”, he noted. “The solution came down to three things: clear communication, the right people and a well-grounded strategy.

Those principles helped us navigate through complexity”. Reflecting on the company’s progress, Al Balushi considers the team culture his proudest achievement.

“Seeing Molecules grow is rewarding, but what truly matters to me is the culture we’ve built”, he said.

“We’ve created an environment where everyone believes in the vision and takes ownership of their role. That’s what sustains growth — not just systems or products, but people who are motivated and aligned”.

As a leader, Al Balushi sees his role as a cultural architect. “Culture starts at the top. I lead by being present, listening and appreciating contributions”, he explained.

“When we launch new projects or navigate challenges, I’m actively involved — not just to guide the process, but to show that we’re in it together”.

Looking ahead, Al Balushi’s vision is to solidify Molecules as a regional leader known for quality, innovation and trust. “We aim to grow our manufacturing capacity, increase exports and bring more Omani-made products to international markets”, he stated. “But we also want to be a platform for local talent. Oman has incredible potential — we want to tap into that by creating jobs and building skills”.

For aspiring CEOs and young entrepreneurs, Al Balushi offers a simple yet powerful message: stay grounded. “Focus on learning, remain humble and don’t be afraid to take risks”, he advised. “Work with purpose, treat people with respect and stay consistent — because success doesn’t come overnight”.

Despite the demands of running a multi-sector company, Al Balushi is intentional about maintaining balance in his life. “Leadership can be overwhelming, but I’ve learned to set priorities and take time to recharge”, he shared. “I invest in personal development — through reading and reflection — and my faith and family are central in keeping me grounded”.

As Molecules sets its sights on regional expansion, Al Balushi is optimistic about the company’s — and Oman’s — future.

“We want to be an example of what Omani companies can achieve on a global stage”, he said. “We’re building more than a business. We’re building a legacy that reflects Oman’s values and potential”.

RIAL OMANI
STRENGTHENS
AS LIQUIDITY
AND LENDING
INDICATORS
IMPROVE

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

TOTAL trade between countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and France amounted to \$29.7 billion in 2023, according to a recent report by the GCC Statistics Centre.

The figure represents an 8.42% dip in comparison to 2022’s figure of \$32.2 billion.

Exports from countries of the GCC to France experienced a remarkable slide of 24.04%, amounting to \$13.9 billion in 2023, in comparison to \$18.3 billion a year earlier.

Mineral fuels, oils and waxes represented 81.3% of exports

MUSCAT: The rial Omani’s effective exchange rate index rose by 1.3 per cent to 119.1 points by the end of May 2025, compared to 117.6 points during the same period last year, signalling improved currency strength.

Preliminary figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) highlighted strong growth across key monetary indicators in Oman. Domestic

liquidity (M2) surged by 6.9 per cent to reach RO 25.376 billion, up from RO 23.730 billion recorded in May 2024.

Despite this increase in liquidity, the total value of issued currency saw a slight decline of 0.8 per cent, dropping to RO 1.614 billion from RO 1.627 billion a year earlier.

Narrow money supply (M1) rose sharply by 13.9 per cent to RO 7.148 billion, compared to RO

6.275 billion in the corresponding period of 2024. In terms of credit activity, total loans and financing provided by commercial banks and Islamic windows grew by 8 per cent, reaching RO 33.563 billion, up from RO 31.082 billion a year ago. Deposits by the private sector also saw healthy growth, increasing by 7.4 per cent to RO 21.911 billion, compared to RO 20.399 billion in May 2024. — ONA

GCC-France trade hits \$29.7 billion in 2023



Exports from countries of the GCC to France experienced a remarkable slide of 24.04%, amounting to \$13.9 billion in 2023.

with a total value of \$11.3 billion. This was followed by miscellaneous items, representing 7.8% of exports with a value of \$1.1 billion and

aircraft, spacecrafts and parts representing 3.6% of exports with a value of \$0.5 billion.

Machinery and mechanical appliances accounted for 2.9% of exports, followed by precious stones and metals which made up for 2.2% of exports valued at \$0.3 billion.

Inorganic chemicals represented 2.2% of exports with a value of \$0.3 billion.

Imports from France into the countries of the GCC on the other hand experienced a 13.67% increase in 2023, amounting to a total of \$15.8 billion in comparison to \$13.9 billion in 2022. Miscellaneous items made up for a majority of

imports at 43.7% with a value of \$6.9 billion, followed by imports of machinery and mechanical appliances which made up for 17.7% of imports with a value of \$2.8 billion.

Oils, resinoids, perfumery and cosmetics made up for 13.8% of imports valued at \$2.2 billion, followed by precious stones and metals which represented 10.1% of imports with a value of \$1.6 billion.

Moreover, pharmaceutical products represented 8.9% of imports valued at \$1.4 billion; and lastly electrical machinery and equipment made up for 5.7% of imports with a value of \$0.9 billion.

US ALTERNATIVE

China proposes new global AI organisation



China said on Saturday it wanted to create an organisation to foster global cooperation on artificial intelligence, positioning itself as an alternative to the US as the two vie for influence over the transformative technology.

China wants to help coordinate global efforts to regulate fast-evolving AI technology and share the country’s advances, Premier Li Qiang said at a conference in Shanghai. — Reuters

FORWARD MEETING

EU chief to meet Trump on trade talks



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen headed to Scotland on Saturday ahead of a meeting with US President Donald Trump on Sunday afternoon, a spokesperson said.

Trump, in Scotland for a few days of golfing and bilateral meetings, told reporters upon his arrival on Friday evening that he was looking forward to meeting with von der Leyen, calling her a highly respected leader. — Reuters

OPINION

The hidden cost of AI: Cognitive lethargy



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

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

THE world stands at a technological crossroads, with an unprecedented proliferation of large language models (LLMs), such as ChatGPT, drastically altering and reshaping the very essence of human existence.

It has permeated the lives, homes, work and play spaces of people. Over 378 million people worldwide are estimated to be active users of AI, including LLMs like ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude and Copilot.

The use of AI-generated large language models experienced a significant global surge in 2025. Hundreds of millions of people worldwide use these tools daily for academic, personal and professional purposes.

Considering the rapid growth and development of AI, it becomes crucial to understand the cognitive implications of the widespread use of LLMs in educational and informational contexts.

Today, there is substantial evidence-based research to show that, although it enhances the accessibility and personalisation of education, the prolonged and frequent use of AI tools for information reduces people's critical thinking capacity. So, the integration of LLMs in learning ecosystems presents a complex duality.

Recently, the research from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has raised concerns for the education sector, educators and learners. The study suggests

that the increased use of AI systems may raise serious concerns regarding human intellectual development and autonomy.

The usage of LLMs provides users with singular responses that will inadvertently discourage lateral thinking and independent judgment. Instead of becoming seekers of knowledge, we are leaning towards passive consumption of AI-generated content.

In the long run, this world will lead to superficial engagement, weakened critical thinking and less long-term memory formation, as well as a shallower understanding of the material. This will lead to a decrease in decision-making skills and it will create a false perception that learning is effortless and simplified, decreasing student motivation and reducing the interest in individual research.

The increased use of ChatGPT will affect student learning, performance, perception of learning and impact higher-order thinking. The MIT research suggests that while AI tools can enhance productivity, they may also promote a form of meta-cognition laziness.

The fundamental principle of research inquiry is compromised as students rely heavily on digital tools for information gathering.

The students will fall prey to Echo Chambers, where users of ChatGPT become trapped in self-reinforcing information bubbles, filtering out contradictory evidence. Echo Chambers can impact the foundation of

The use of AI-generated large language models experienced a significant global surge in 2025. Hundreds of millions of people worldwide use these tools daily for academic, personal and professional purposes.

academic discourse and debate.

Furthermore, the sophisticated functioning of the algorithms leaves the users unaware of information gaps in the research, degrading the standard of scholarly outcomes.

These research findings have many implications for various stakeholders in the education sector and beyond.

The role of the professor is evolving from a source of knowledge to a facilitator and guide. The curriculum must be adapted to digital literacy and changing patterns with a focus on security and safety.

The technological developments call for monitoring academic integrity. Students must adopt a balanced approach to protect their higher-order thinking.

Artificial intelligence is here to stay and will impact all sectors, creating new career opportunities and displacing traditional employment pathways. Evidence suggests that if left unchecked, the world risks turning learners into mere editors of AI-generated text, rather than actual creators and thinkers.

While advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence, have immense potential and offer unprecedented opportunities for enhancing human learning and access to vast volumes of information, they also have the power to impact cognitive development, long-term memory building and intellectual independence; and demand caution and critical consideration.

TRUMP AUTO
TARIFF U-TURN
GIVES EVERYONE
WHIPLASH

KATRINA HAMLIN

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP’S auto tariff U-turn is making everyone carsick. His latest deal cuts US tariffs on Japanese vehicle imports to 15% from a previous total of 27.5%, offering respite to companies that haven’t invested heavily in Stateside production. But relief could be short-lived.

Although Trump set out to support US manufacturers like General Motors, Ford Motor and Stellantis, the Detroit Three hailed the move as a “bad deal” for American workers and industry. It’s perhaps most helpful for Mitsubishi Motors, which Citi estimates made nearly three quarters of its US-sold autos in Japan in 2024.

Before Wednesday’s deal, the \$4 billion group looked to be in a dire position, as it has no major manufacturing hubs outside Asia. Meanwhile, shares in peers Mazda Motor and Subaru, which made around half their vehicles destined for American roads at home, rose by more than 15% on Wednesday.

The status quo is unexpected for other reasons too. Trump himself signed the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement in 2020, sanctioning the continuation of largely duty-free trade between the trio.

The US is the largest single market not only for the major American marques but also for Toyota, Honda Motor and Nissan Motor; and all of them have factories throughout the region to take advantage of the USMCA.

Those Mexican- and Canadian-made cars still face duties of 25%. Some can handle sharp turns. Toyota, for example, sold 2.3 million cars in the US in the 12 months to the end of March and produced 2.1 million cars in North America, but it doesn’t depend solely on local facilities.

In fact, it imported from Japan 24% of cars sold in the US in 2024, per Citi. The world’s largest carmaker is also more profitable than Honda or Nissan — its operating margin was around 10% in its most recent financial year — meaning it can more easily absorb the extra costs from heftier duties.

There will be more twists. On Sunday, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said Trump will “absolutely” renegotiate USMCA. Japanese and US automakers are also watching closely to see whether Seoul can argue for lower levies for Hyundai and Kia.

Those brands accounted for over a tenth of the American market in the first six months of this year, Cox Automotive reckons. And the Hyundai group’s local production capacity covered only 40% of the cars they sold there last year, per Moody’s. For now, they face 25% rates, with tariffs already costing Hyundai Motor more than \$600 million, the company said on Thursday.

— Reuters

Rise in Ireland’s financial
services jobs after Brexit

THE number of jobs in Ireland’s financial sector has seen a major increase from 35,000 in 2015 to just over 60,000 now, an increase of almost 70 per cent, according to a consultation paper published by the Department of Finance. It credits Brexit with some of that increase, pointing out that the sector in Ireland has thrived since Britain voted to leave the European Union in 2016.

“Ireland is now home to many global financial giants, many of whom have chosen it as their EMEA (Europe, Middle East, Africa) head-quarters”, the paper says. ‘Post Brexit, Ireland experienced a further influx of IFS (International Financial Services) firms relocating from the UK.

Financial services is one of the largest sectors in the UK economy too. It employs 1.2 million people across the country.

It is also one of the UK’s most internationally facing sectors: the UK is the world’s largest net exporter of financial services and the sector accounts for more than half of the UK’s surplus in services export.

The Department of Finance in Ireland concedes that the Brexit bounce is probably over and the financial sector will have to look for other ways to develop in the face of mounting international competition for investment.

“The benefits from Brexit relocations, one of the drivers of growth in the sector in recent years, will likely be limited in the future”, the paper says. “Competition from growing international financial services hubs, such as Singapore and Dubai, is increasing”. Among the other challenges are the green transition, which has led to both Ireland and the European Union making promises on climate and sustainability objectives, which the financial services sector will have to assist with, by channelling investment towards appropriate projects.

Another challenge is to lure more household savings from bank accounts into “productive investments”. The consultation



Men work inside a metal processing plant in Dublin, Ireland. — Reuters



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

The Department of Finance in Ireland concedes that the Brexit bounce is probably over, and the financial sector will have to look for other ways to develop in the face of mounting international competition for investment.

process launched by the Department is to prepare a new “Ireland for Finance” strategy to develop the international financial services sector.

The strategy began in 1987 under the then Taoiseach (prime minister), Charles Haughey, acting on the advice of businessman Dermot Desmond. He introduced policy supports and tax breaks to attract IFS activity into Ireland and the strategy was so successful that it gradually transformed the country into a globally important hub.

The consultation paper says Ireland now hosts about 600 IFS companies and is the sixth-largest exporter of financial services globally; and the third largest domicile for funds.

“Ireland’s market share has continuously grown over decades, as specialisation and expertise in various areas has developed.

Ireland is now home to some of the world’s largest IFS companies in sub-sectors such as banking, funds, asset management, insurance and reinsurance, fintech and aircraft leasing”, it says.

Leveraging off the presence of global tech firms, the country has become a hub for payments firms and a specialist hub for aircraft leasing, with over 60 per cent of the world’s leased aircraft managed from Ireland.

A report by Indecon last year on the impact of the funds and asset management industry concluded that the sector provided almost one billion euros in direct tax revenue in 2023 alone.

The Programme for Government set a target of 9,000 new jobs in the IFS sector by 2030. The new “Ireland for Finance” strategy will aim to meet that, but the Department is cautioning that in the current economic climate, keeping the jobs we have is a key consideration.

A public consultation period will run until 19 September. Stakeholders are being asked for their views on how Ireland can expand the sector, but also to identify any barriers to competitiveness and growth.

BUSINESS

MUSCAT: A specialised training programme on the “Harmonised System and Customs Tariffs” began on Sunday, July 27, 2025, at the Liwa Centre for Science and Innovation.

Organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in cooperation with Credit Oman — the government-owned firm specialising in commercial credit insurance — the four-day event runs from July 27 to 30 and is attended by a number of exporters and representatives from Omani exporting companies.

The initiative aims to equip participants with the knowledge needed to navigate modern customs systems effectively and avoid procedural errors that could disrupt trade operations or result in shipment delays and financial penalties.

Ali bin Khamis al Fazari, an expert and trainer in customs procedures, delivered the programme’s introductory lecture. He explained the stages and steps involved in customs clearance, offering a comprehensive overview of various types of customs data, taxes applied to goods and the different categories of approved customs exemptions.

Ahmed bin Hamdan al Farsi, Media and Marketing Specialist at Credit Oman, gave a visual presentation

TRAINING EMPOWERS EXPORTERS ON CUSTOMS AND TARIFF PROCEDURES

The programme addressed ways to access international markets and showcased Credit Oman’s range of insurance products. These include local credit insurance for domestic sales, export credit insurance for overseas markets and the “Multiple Buyers” policy.



The initiative aims to equip participants with the knowledge needed to navigate modern customs systems effectively.

outlining the company’s role in supporting Oman’s national export ecosystem.

He highlighted the importance of credit insurance as a strategic tool for Omani exporters to reduce commercial risks, allowing them to sell goods both locally and internationally with greater assurance and protection against buyer defaults or non-payment.

Al Farsi also elaborated on the primary categories of risks covered by Credit Oman, including commercial risks such as non-payment by buyers or financial insolvency, as well as non-commercial risks resulting from government-imposed restrictions in importing countries or sudden political and economic events.

Further, the programme addressed ways to access international markets and showcased Credit Oman’s range of insurance products.

These include local credit insurance for domestic sales, export credit insurance for overseas markets, and the “Multiple Buyers” policy, which offers comprehensive coverage for a group of clients under a single contract. This training initiative reflects the ministry’s ongoing efforts to boost exporters’ awareness of customs regulations and procedural requirements.

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

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CHIEF accountant, MBA finance, 9+ years experience in financial statements, auditing, budgeting, VAT, tax, fixed assets, reconciliation, payroll. Seeking a full-time or part-time position in a senior role. Contact: akramhaniffa@yahoo.com / 93988825.

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

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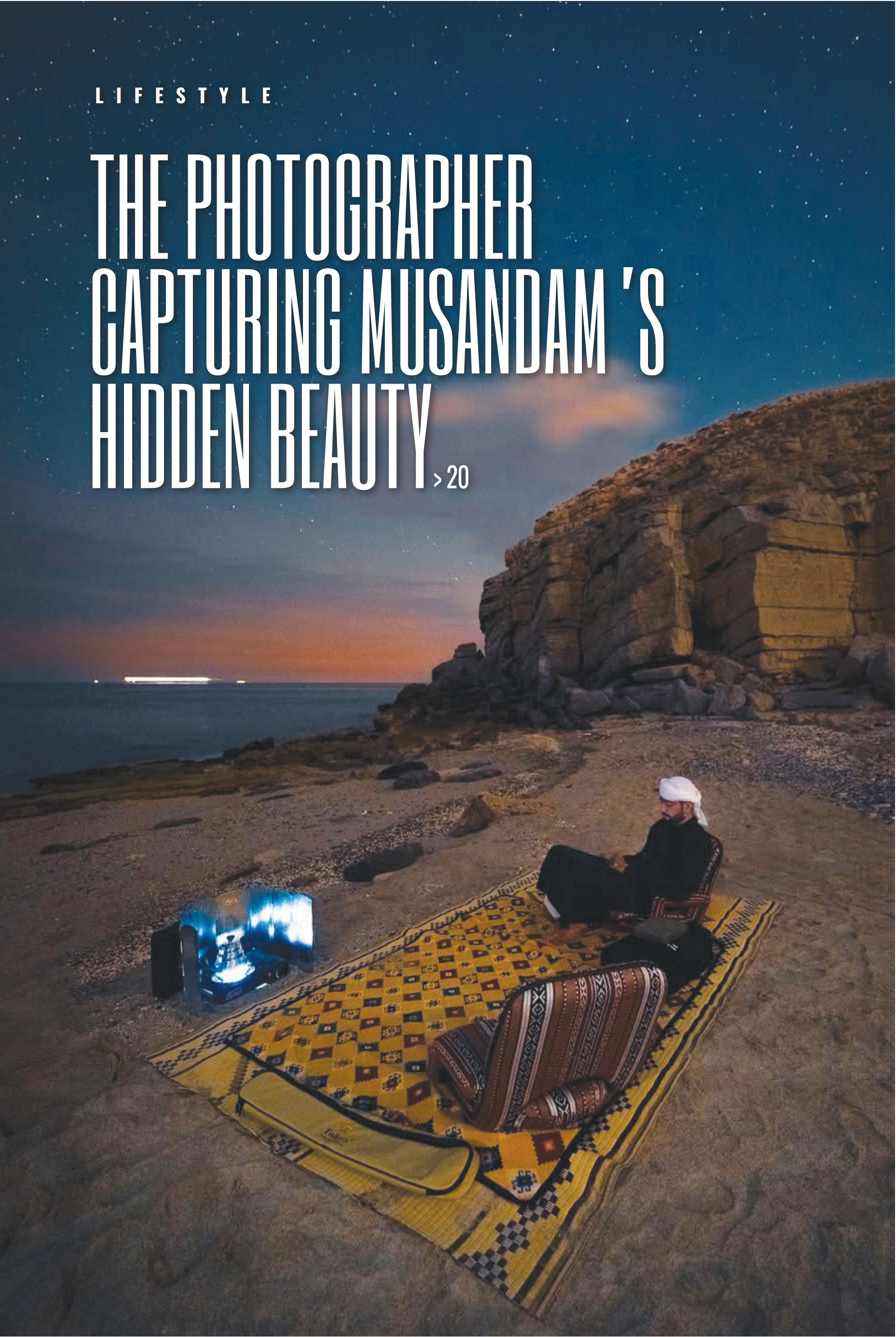
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> 20

ENTERTAINMENT

‘Project Hail Mary’ sends Ryan Gosling and Comic-Con, into outer space



COMIC-CON attendees got their first glimpse on Saturday at the new sci-fi space thriller “Project Hail Mary”, starring Ryan Gosling, ahead of its arrival in US theatres in March 2026.

Gosling was joined on a convention panel by directing duo Christopher Miller and Phil Lord, as well as screenwriter Drew Goddard and book author Andy Weir — whose previous novel “The Martian” was also turned into an Oscar-nominated film starring Matt Damon.

Based on Weir’s 2021 book of the same title, “Project Hail Mary” follows astronaut Ryland Grace (Gosling), a science teacher waking up to learn he was recruited for a space mission to save Earth from an existential solar threat.

Gosling described his character as “a scared guy who has to do something impossible”. “I knew it would be brilliant, because it’s Andy [Weir]”, Gosling told the crowd.

“It took me places I’ve never been. It showed me things I had never seen. It was as heartbreaking as it was funny and I was... not just blown away, but also overwhelmed”. Weir for his part said it was “so cool” to see his book come to life and complimented Gosling for giving “many layers to this character I made up”.

Lord and Miller, the Oscar-winning duo behind the “Spider-Verse” Spider-Man animated films, talked about the challenges of shooting a “crazy ambitious” film which takes place inside a spaceship for the most part.

“We had to build an entire spaceship in two modes of gravity and then we built this entire massive tunnel at scale”, Miller said.

“This is insane, to build a tunnel that was like 100 feet (30 metres) long, filled up an entire stage”.

The event also showcased various clips from the film, receiving a positive response from fans, who noted the bond formed between Gosling’s character and an alien named Rocky.

“The relationship between these two characters is the heart of the movie”, Miller said.

“I loved it”, attendee April Rodriguez, who also read the book, gushed about the film.

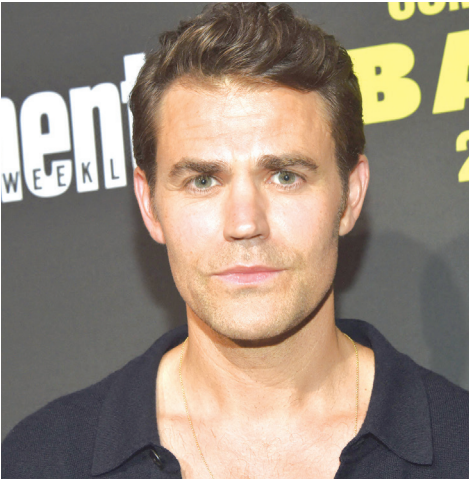
“I just never, like, envisioned it that way. So that was pretty cool”. — AFP

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



FASHION

A model presents a creation by designer Suneet Varma during the FDCI India Couture Week in New Delhi. — AFP



FILM

US actor and director Paul Wesley arrives for the annual Entertainment Weekly Comic-Con Bash at FLOAT at the Hard Rock Hotel in San Diego, California. — AFP



FESTIVAL

Festival-goers play with mud in a mud pool during the 28th Boryeong Mud Festival which runs from July 25 to August 10. — AFP

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World’s smallest snake makes big comeback



A SNAKE so small it could be mistaken for a worm has been spotted in Barbados, nearly two decades after it was thought to have been “lost” to science. The Barbados threadsnake (*Tetracheilostoma carlae*) was found hiding under a rock in central Barbados during an ecological survey in March by the Barbados Ministry of the Environment and National Beautification and conservation group Re:wild. “Barbados threadsnakes are blind snakes, so they’re very cryptic”, said Connor Blades, a project officer with the Ministry of Environment in Barbados who helped make the finding, in a statement. “They’re quite rare also, it seems. There have only been a handful of confirmed sightings since 1889, so there are not many people who have ever seen it, unfortunately”. Measuring just three to four inches long (eight to 10 centimetres) when fully grown — tiny enough to almost fit on a US quarter coin — the Barbados threadsnake is the world’s smallest species of snake.

It is distinguished by orange stripes along its back, eyes on the sides of its head and a small scale on its snout. “When you are so accustomed to looking for things and you don’t see them, you are shocked when you actually find it”, said Justin Springer of Re:wild, who made the discovery alongside Blades. “You can’t believe it. That’s how I felt. You don’t want to get your hopes up too high”. The breakthrough came after more than a year of searching, as the pair upturned rocks trapped beneath a tree root. The tiny snake, which was found alongside an earthworm, was taken to the University of West Indies for careful examination under a microscope — it closely resembles the Brahminy blind snake, an invasive species, so the finding had to be validated — before it was returned to the forest. Only two per cent of the Caribbean island’s primary forest remains intact, with the rest cleared for agriculture since the start of the colonial era 400 years ago. — AFP



Annual date harvest season, Al Tabseel, showcases centuries-old techniques

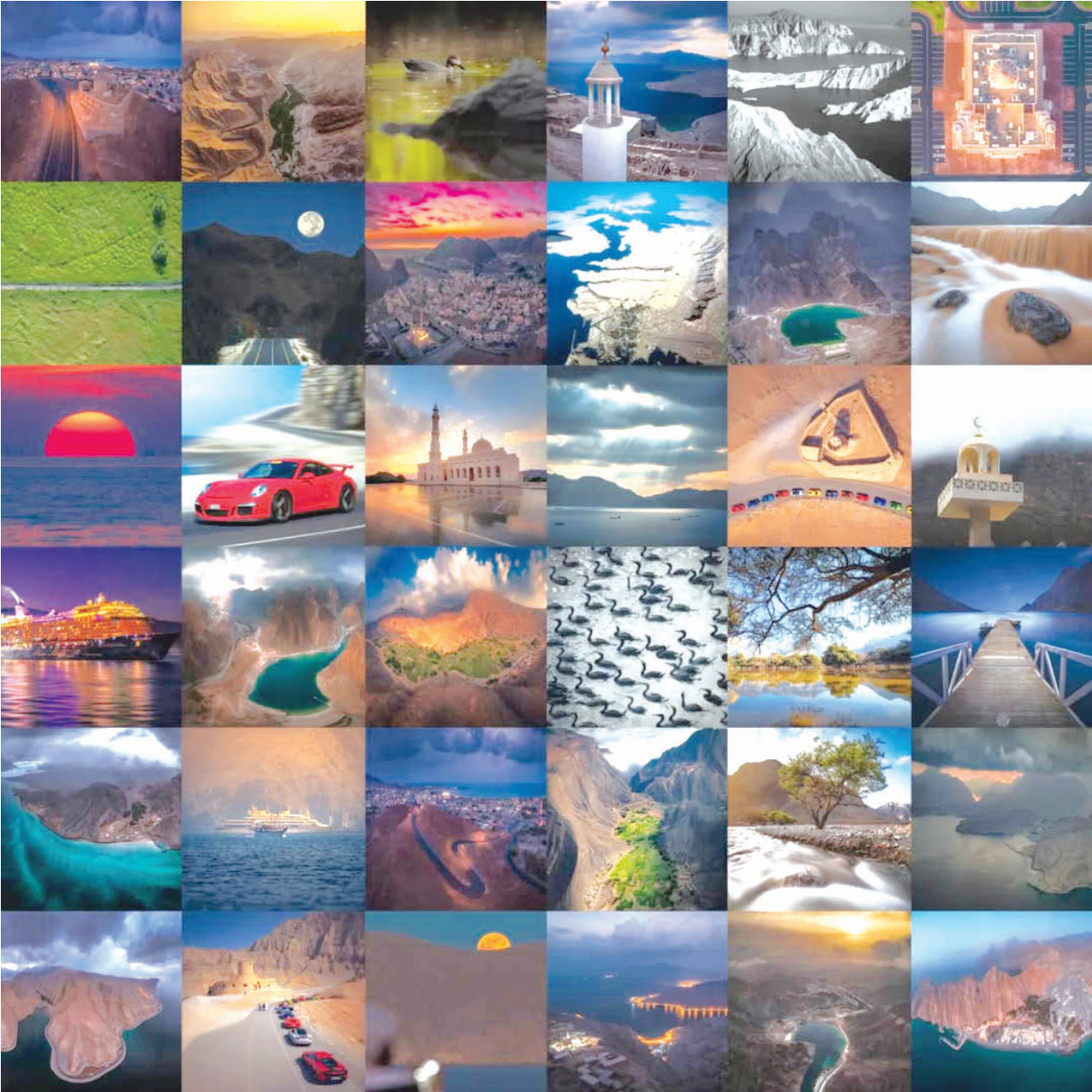
BY KABEER YOUSUF @kabiyousef

FARMS AND villages across Oman are brimming with excitement as the season of Al Tabseel unfolds — a time of jubilant celebration, collective effort and cultural pride deeply rooted in the country’s rich heritage. This annual tradition, which coincides with the peak summer months from late June to late July, transforms local communities into vibrant hubs of activity centred around date harvesting, processing and communal merriment. Al Tabseel is much more than merely an agricultural activity; it embodies Oman’s centuries-old social fabric and farming expertise. The season signifies the harvest of the prized Mabsali dates, particularly from the lush plantations of Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan, renowned for producing some of the finest dates that are not only beloved locally but also exported globally. These dates, distinguished by their bright yellow colour and sweet flavour, are carefully harvested, boiled in large traditional vessels known as Marajel, and sun-dried in open spaces such as Al Mestah — an age-old practice that preserves the dates’ nutritional qualities whilst maintaining their cultural significance. Safa al Balushi, Creative Director of Al Mirani Fort, explains, “Al Tabseel takes place during the hottest months when the Mabsali dates ripen. Farmers gather to harvest, then boil the dates for around half an hour before drying them under the sun for several days. It is a deeply rooted cultural event that brings communities together through traditional songs, storytelling and celebrations once the processing is complete”. The Al Mirani Fort, majestically perched



on the Muttrah Corniche, recently hosted a lively celebration of Al Tabseel, supported by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. The event attracted numerous farmers and artisans from different regions, displaying a remarkable variety of dates and honouring Oman’s enduring agricultural traditions. The gathering exemplified the inseparable link between coastal trade routes and inland farming practices — the historical relationship where dates harvested from oases were transported to coastal markets, bolstering local economies and fostering cultural exchange. “Al Tabseel is a vivid illustration of Oman’s interconnected heritage”, remarks Safa al Balushi. “It reflects the symbiotic relationship between sea and land, between commerce and community and highlights how these traditions have sustained generations of Omanis”. Since ancient times, farmers across Oman have celebrated this season with communal spirit and pride, often inviting entire families to participate in the harvest. Although modern influences have altered some traditional practices, the essence of Al Tabseel endures. Many wilayats continue to value this season as a significant social, cultural and economic event — an annual celebration that unites communities and safeguards their collective identity. According to historians and agricultural specialists, the tradition of Al Tabseel probably dates back several centuries, symbolising Oman’s resilience and harmonious relationship with its natural resources. Today, efforts are underway to preserve and promote this cultural treasure, ensuring that future generations can continue to uphold and enjoy the legacy of their ancestors while sharing the renowned taste and tradition of Oman’s dates with the world.

FEATURES



THE PHOTOGRAPHER CAPTURING MUSANDAM'S HIDDEN BEAUTY

BY ZUWAINA AL SULIEMANI

IN THE NORTHERN reaches of Oman, where towering mountains meet shimmering turquoise waters, photographer Ali Harbi is behind his camera, capturing scenes of Musandam that seem more poetic than photographic. What started over 15 years ago with a humble mobile phone has blossomed into a dedicated visual journey — today, he uses a professional Sony camera and aerial drones to reveal angles few have ever seen.

Ali's passion for photography didn't begin with expensive gear but with an instinctive appreciation for his surroundings, especially during the winter months. As his skills grew and he experimented with different techniques, photography became more than a pastime; it became a mission — to explore, to express and to record the timeless beauty of Oman.

Musandam, with its rugged mountain ranges, clear blue waters and quiet allure, remains Ali's endless inspiration. "This isn't just a place to shoot", he explains. "It's a constant source of ideas. Every view holds a new story, every sunrise reveals a secret". Ali's work has garnered recognition worldwide, including features on CNN and Nat Geo, which have introduced international audiences to Oman's lesser-known beauty. He also becomes an unofficial photographer of Musandam for various organisations such as the Oman Daily Observer, capturing its landscapes for different visual stories. For him, it's about more than personal achievement — it's an opportunity to serve as a "visual ambassador", sharing Oman's stories through his lens.

Through his images, Ali aims not only to showcase nature's beauty but to evoke the feelings it stirs — the gentle whisper of sea breezes, the hush between bird calls and the shimmering light dancing between rocks. His distinctive style has evolved through relentless exploration, self-education and countless hours waiting for the perfect light during dawn and dusk. His compositions strike a balance between technical precision and emotional depth, always seeking unobserved angles and quiet moments others might miss.

One of his most striking photographs depicts Salamah Island and its inhabitants, a seldom-captured landmass in the Strait of Hormuz. Initially aiming for a minimalist shot of its solitude, a spontaneous procession of boats sweeping across the frame added an unexpected, lively dimension. "It was like nature and humanity performing a silent ballet", he recalls.

That fleeting moment, for Ali, encapsulates his ethos: transforming transient scenes into timeless images.

He favours Sony equipment for its blend of professional calibre and field resilience, especially in difficult environments such as rugged hills or coastal cliffs. His use of drones expands his creative horizon, granting breathtaking aerial views of Musandam's jagged coastline. Yet these tools aren't without risk: strong winds and unpredictable weather have already claimed two drones. Still, the awe-inspiring perspectives they produce make every challenge worthwhile.

Post-production plays an equally vital role in bringing his visions to life. Ali mainly relies on Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop to enhance colours and sharpen details, carefully preserving the authenticity of each moment. For video projects, DaVinci Resolve allows him to achieve cinematic colour grading, ideal for field reports and dynamic coverage.

Looking ahead, Ali is developing new projects aimed at narrating Oman's ecological and cultural richness through his photographs. These are more than just pictures; they are visual messages designed to open new windows onto the unseen.

To budding photographers, Ali offers simple but powerful advice: "Don't wait for expensive gear. Start with what you have. Photography isn't about the price tag on your camera but about how you see the world. Keep shooting. Keep feeling. Let your images tell the stories words can't". In every frame, Ali brings Musandam to life — not just as a place, but as a living story told through silence, colour and light.