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HIS MAJESTY REVIEWS INVESTMENT PROJECTS IN DUQM

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HM REVIEWS
ECONOMIC AND
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DUQM ZONE
A PROMISING
ECONOMIC AND
LOGISTICS HUB

MAXIMISE THE
BENEFITS OF
STRATEGIC
LOCATION

DUQM ZONE'S
ACHIEVEMENTS
INSPIRE
NATIONAL PRIDE

HM COMMENDS
INTEGRATION
OF NATIONAL
EFFORTS

DUQM ZONE
OPENS VAST
HORIZONS FOR
THE FUTURE

REPRESENTS ONE
OF THE PILLARS
OF OMAN
VISION 2040

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK paid a visit to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm on Wednesday.

During the visit, His Majesty reviewed the economic, investment and development projects in the zone, the investment expansion it has witnessed in recent years, and the efforts exerted to transform it into an integrated economic zone.

His Majesty the Sultan listened to a briefing on the zone and the Port of Duqm, the achievements realised in the past period, and the future plans to provide an attractive investment environment and attract further local and foreign investments.

His Majesty the Sultan issued

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq affirmed that the promising Duqm zone, open to the seas of the world, constitutes an authentic tributary to the national economy, opens vast horizons for the future, and represents one of the pillars of Oman Vision 2040

his gracious directives to continue work on harnessing the zone's assets and potential, in a manner that contributes to entrenching its standing as a promising economic and logistics hub and maximising the benefit of its strategic location.

Upon His Majesty's arrival at the Port of Duqm, he was received by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, a number of officials at the port and the companies operating in the zone. At the conclusion of the visit, His Majesty inscribed a message on the occasion, in which he expressed his profound delight at visiting the Special Economic Zone at Duqm and at the achievements he

reviewed, which inspire pride. His Majesty commended the integration of national efforts contributing to the zone's construction and development. He affirmed that this promising zone, open to the seas of the world, constitutes an authentic tributary to the national economy, opens vast horizons for the future, and represents one of the pillars of Oman Vision 2040.

Accompanying His Majesty the Sultan during the visit were HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior; Sultan bin Salim

al Habsi, Minister of Finance; Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs; Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office; Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, President of Oman Investment Authority; Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals; Hussain bin Ali bin Abdullatif, Adviser at the Private Office; Sayyid Dr Sultan bin Yarub al Busaidi, Adviser at the Private Office and Anwar bin Hilal al Jabri, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2 & 3

HIS MAJESTY CALLS FOR MAXIMISING DUQM 'S LOGISTICS POTENTIAL



COMMITTED CUMULATIVE INVESTMENT VOLUME RISES TO **﷼**8.8 BILLION



AL DUQM: The volume of committed cumulative investment in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) rose by the end of last June to RO 8.818 billion, registering a 141 per cent growth compared to its 2021 level of RO 3.650 billion.

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), said that this rise reflects the improvement in the investment environment within the Special Economic Zone at Duqm over the past five years. It also highlights the development of the zone's infrastructure, the efforts exerted to attract investments, and the incentives and facilities offered by the zone to investors.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), he stated that the Port of Duqm recorded growth in the handling volume of containers, roll-on/roll-off cargo, oil and gas field pipelines, and various goods required by the projects being implemented in the zone.

In this regard, Al Yousef pointed out a 5.66 per cent increase in total cargo handling at the Port of Duqm. Furthermore, dry bulk cargo handling increased by 3.88 per cent, and roll-on/roll-off cargo handling rose by 8.2 per cent between 2021 and 2025.

He added that the Duqm Refinery successfully increased its production capacity to 255,000 barrels per day, and the Dry Dock completed approximately 1,340 projects from 2020 until the end of last year.

The Chairman of OPAZ affirmed that the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones is working to localise several other projects in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, aligning with the Sultanate of Oman's plans for net-zero carbon emissions and the ongoing efforts to develop the green hydrogen sector.

Al Yousef noted that the Special Economic Zone at Duqm is also working to attract various other projects in the tourism, commercial, and logistics sectors. Additionally, the zone is preparing the necessary means to ensure the stability of its workforce by attracting educational and healthcare projects. He said that the Duqm University College, which is launching its first academic year this year, represents a qualitative addition to the education sector in the zone.

He stated that the zone has also focused on expanding health and medical services in cooperation with the private sector. In this context, the emergency building at Duqm Hospital will be inaugurated in partnership with OQ Group, and a kidney dialysis unit will be established at the hospital. Furthermore, a cardiac unit will be established at the Badr Al Samaa Medical Centre in Duqm, alongside an increase in the number of medical specialities offered at the centre.

In the field of social services, he said that the Educational Community Cultural Centre in Duqm, which was built using 3D printing, has been completed, reflecting Duqm's role in supporting sustainable development, innovation, and social development.

Al Yousef affirmed that the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones will continue its work in enhancing the investment environment in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, localising more qualitative projects, and raising the efficiency of services in line with the expected growth in the volume of investments and economic projects. — ONA



OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The meeting addressed the medical and humanitarian situations in a number of conflict zones. — ONA

OMAN AND MSF DISCUSS TIES IN MEDICAL FIELD

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (Doctors Without Borders) discussed prospects for future cooperation and ways to enhance coordination and cooperation in the humanitarian and medical fields of mutual interest.

This came during a meeting between Ambassador Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Qatabi, Head of the International Organizations Department at the Foreign Ministry, and Laura Leyser, Secretary-General of the International Office of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders).

The meeting, which was held on the sidelines of the eighty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly, addressed the medical and humanitarian situations in a number of conflict and crisis zones, as well as the current humanitarian and regional challenges.

The meeting also reviewed the efforts of the Sultanate of Oman in supporting humanitarian endeavours and contributing to mitigating the repercussions of crises. — ONA

bp’s New Programmes Set to Benefit Communities Across Oman



Muscat, Oman: bp Oman has signed agreements with 11 Omani organizations to deliver the 12th cycle of its Block 61 social investment programme under its supervision; continuing its long-standing commitment to creating positive impact in communities across Oman.

The launch was attended by Her Highness Dr Muna bint Fahad Al Said, His Excellency Taher bin Mabkhout bin Ali Al Junaibi, Governor of Ad Dhahirah Governorate, bp’s Block 61 partners OQEP, PTTEP and PETRONAS, and representatives from the Omani companies that will deliver the programmes.

The programme supports initiatives that help people develop skills, access opportunities and contribute to their communities in collaboration with Omani-owned organizations.

This year’s programmes focus on education, technology, entrepreneurship, sustainability, community development and inclusion in line with Oman’s 2040 vision of building skills and opportunities for future generations.

Najla Zuhair Al Jamali, bp Oman president, said: “ Together with our partners, we have reached more than 290,000 people across Oman since the launch of our programme. This progress shows the power of partnership in creating opportunities, developing skills and supporting those who need it most. We look forward to building on that impact through this new cycle of programmes and thank our Block 61 partners, OQEP, PTTEP and PETRONAS for their continued support.”

Since 2014, bp Oman has worked alongside local organizations to design and deliver programmes that respond to community needs and help create new opportunities for people across the country.

The new cycle of social investment programme includes:

- **Marifah V8** by Children’s Public Library (CPL), a programme that encourages reading through interactive workshops for children and parents.
- **Mahatat V3** by Al Masarah Youth, which equips electrical engineering graduates with the skills required for licensing and employment in electrical wiring and inspection.
- **FabTech Mobile Lab V5** by Innotech, helping students gain hands-on experience with engineering design software, 3D printing, laser cutting, and virtual and augmented reality technologies.
- **TAHLYA V8** by MEDRC, which trains graduates and promotes water conservation among students.
- **Smoothy Coding** by TechSpace, introducing grade 3 and 4 students to foundational programming through interactive learning experiences.
- **Habbah V4** by Youth Sada, supporting SMEs through training, mentoring and business development opportunities.
- **Youth Sada Centre V7** by Youth Sada, empowering young people to develop initiatives that create social and economic impact within their communities.
- **Girls in Tech** by Kidsity, helping young Omani girls build skills and confidence in technology, innovation and future-focused careers.
- **Aman V2** by E-Mushrif, improving school bus safety through smart monitoring technology.
- **Amallcom** by Al Jabar, supporting aspiring entrepreneurs in transforming ideas into market-ready startups through business development and funding support.
- **Khazzan for SME Development V7** by Sharakah, helping Omani SMEs strengthen their capabilities, scale their businesses and create economic value through mentorship and business development support.
- **Sail Free V3** by Oman Sail, enabling people with disabilities to excel in sailing and represent Oman internationally through inclusive sports development.

Activities will begin rolling out over the coming months, with participating organizations sharing programme details through their respective channels.

SAYYID ASAAD BIDS FAREWELL TO AMBASSADOR OF THAILAND

ON BEHALF of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office on Wednesday Warunee Pan Krajang, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid her farewell at the end of her tenure.

The ambassador expressed her gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for the support she received during her tenure in the Sultanate of Oman, which had facilitated her to carry out her duties, wishing His Majesty success in leading the Sultanate of Oman and achieving further accomplishments at all levels.

For his part, HH Sayyid Asaad expressed his sincere thanks to the ambassador for the efforts she exerted in advancing the relations of cooperation and partnership between Oman and Thailand, wishing her permanent success. He also wished Thailand further development and progress at all levels. — ONA



HH Sayyid Asaad expressed his sincere thanks to the ambassador for the efforts she exerted in advancing the relations of cooperation and partnership between Oman and Thailand. — ONA

Sayyid Harib conveys condolences to Ruler of Dubai

MUSCAT: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Harib bin Thuwaini al Said on Wednesday conveyed His Majesty’s condolences to Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice-President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, on the death of his brother, Shaikh Ahmed bin



Rashid al Maktoum. HH Sayyid Harib was accompanied by Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Arab Emirates. — ONA

Six sea turtles perish in abandoned fishing nets near Bimmah Beach

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

A devastating entanglement incident near Bimmah Beach, located past Qurayat near the Sinkhole, has claimed the lives of at least six sea turtles after they became trapped in massive abandoned fishing nets.

The turtles, locally known as Sharfaf, were all entangled and the incident highlights the ongoing environmental threat posed by “ghost gear” — discarded or lost fishing gear left in open waters — which poses a lethal risk to marine life and delicate underwater ecosystems in Oman.

The site is a high-traffic zone for sea turtles and supports critical local coral reefs. The scale of discarded gear was bigger than expected. Rescuers discovered two separate abandoned nets spanning a combined length of 1,400 metres.

The rapid-response team comprised specialists from the Environment Authority (EA) supported by volunteer divers from the Divers Planet Diving Center.

“Our team from the Environment Authority reached the location at 7:30 am, but unfortunately, it was already too late for the turtles. We worked continuously in the water until 2.00 pm. The nets had severely wrapped around the underlying coral structures,” said Yahya al Hooti from the Environment Authority Diving Team.

Environmental impact and disentangle meant is beyond the tragic loss of sea turtles, as the heavy netting could have caused structural damage to the local reef bed, snagging and tearing at live coral formations if the rescuers had



The rapid-response team comprised specialists from the Environment Authority (EA) supported by volunteer divers from the Divers Planet Diving Center.



not intervened. After hours of underwater operation, the joint diving team successfully disentangled and retrieved all 1,400 metres of net, preventing further casualties to passing marine life. Environmental officials emphasise that overcoming

the reckless abandonment of fishing equipment is essential to protecting Oman’s marine biodiversity. The Environment Authority is working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for public awareness.

SHORT TAKES



The ceremony was held at the military training range in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. — ONA

RAO CONCLUDES MILITARY EXERCISE ‘SHUJAA AL SAHIL 1’

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: Acting in cooperation with the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) and units from land forces of the Union of the Comoros, the Royal Army of Oman (RAO)’s Muscat Battalion on Wednesday held a ceremony to mark the conclusion of a joint military exercise codenamed “Shujaa Al Sahil 1” (Coastal Warrior 1).
The ceremony was held at the military training range in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar under the auspices of Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, in the presence of the Commander of the Defence Force of the Union of the Comoros.
The chief guest and the attendees listened to a briefing about the stages of the drill and its strategic plans and objectives. The exercise included various training settings that simulated the roles of the participating units.
Earlier, Maj Gen Matar al Balushi and the Commander of the Defence Force of the Union of the Comoros held a meeting during which they exchanged views about military matters of mutual interest. — ONA



MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS COMMITTEE APPROVES PRELIMINARY CANDIDATE LISTS



MUSCAT: The Main Committee for Municipal Council Elections for the Fourth Term held a meeting on Wednesday, chaired by Eng Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Interior. During the meeting, the committee approved the preliminary lists of candidates in preparation for announcing them, and reviewed ongoing preparations for the upcoming stages of the electoral process, as well as the level of technical readiness of associated systems and services. The committee also discussed a number of topics on the agenda and took appropriate decisions regarding them. — ONA

Call for strengthening sign language communication

MOHAMED AL BATTASHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

THE ‘With a Hand Gesture, We Create Communication’ initiative concluded on Wednesday, marking International Day of Sign Languages, observed annually on 23 September, under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Hamoud al Harthi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development for Persons with Disabilities Affairs. The initiative was organised by Al Tawasul Institute for Training in partnership with the Nafith app and the Oman Human Rights Commission.
The initiative aims to strengthen sign language communication skills among government and private sector employees and members of the public, build effective bridges with the hearing-impaired community, and raise awareness of their rights while easing their integration into public life and services.
Carried out across five stations in different locations, the initiative benefited more than 150 government employees, over 125 members of the public, and more than 110 people with hearing disabilities through its training and



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awareness programmes.
Saeed al Bada’ei, Director-General of Al Tawasul Institute for Training, described sign language as one of the most important human tools for strengthening communication, particularly with people with hearing disabilities, calling it an independent language with its own grammar.
He noted that 2026 marks the 75th anniversary of the World Federation of the Deaf and the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, pointing out that more than 70 million deaf people worldwide use over 300

different sign languages, and said the need to develop these skills in Oman is more urgent than ever, in line with Oman Vision 2040.
Saud al Maawali, Deputy Chairman of the Oman Human Rights Commission, said the day marks an opportunity to assess national efforts protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. He explained that the Commission trained its own staff in sign language and cooperated with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour to build national capacity, pointing to the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and a new undersecretary-level sector within the Ministry of Social Development.
The closing ceremony included a presentation of the initiative’s outcomes and a working paper titled “Technology and Sign Interpretation” exploring the latest technical solutions supporting communication with people with hearing disabilities.
The programme concluded with a paper titled “Sustainable Sign Empowerment System” examining the future of sign communication empowerment efforts, before the ceremony closed with the honouring of contributors to the initiative’s success.

MOUNTAIN ROAD TO LINK AL AWABI AND AL HAMRA, CUT TRAVEL DISTANCE



The road is expected to strengthen social ties between residents of Al Awabi and Al Hamra.

HADEEL AL MAYAHI
AL AWABI, SEPT 23

A new mountain road linking Al Hajir in Al Awabi with Barakat Al Sharaf in Al Hamra is taking shape, with 4 kilometres of the 14-kilometre project already completed.
The project is being implemented by the Al Awabi Municipality Department with support from Al Batinah South Governorate. Once completed, the road is expected to significantly reduce the current

journey of nearly 200 kilometres between the two governorates.
Eng Siham al Mayahi, Head of the Technical Affairs Department at Al Awabi Municipality, said the project is expected to have a positive economic impact by reducing travel time and transportation costs and facilitating the movement of people and goods between the two governorates.
The road is also expected to strengthen social ties between residents of Al Awabi and Al Hamra by making travel and access to

services easier and facilitating social visits.
“The mountainous landscape and scenic views could make it a significant tourism and development corridor once completed,” Al Mayahi said.
She noted that future plans could include viewpoints, rest areas, information and directional signs, and visitor facilities at suitable locations. However, she stressed that completing the road remains the priority and that no comprehensive tourism development plan has yet been approved.
Muhanna bin Saif al Yaarubi, a resident of Al Hamra, said the project would be important for residents and neighbouring communities.
“The new road will make travel easier and less tiring for residents of the area,” he said.
The project faces several challenges, including rugged mountainous terrain, rock formations and difficulties in accessing and operating heavy equipment along some sections of the route. Safety measures and protection against landslides also need to be taken into consideration.
Despite these challenges, the mountain road is expected to create a more direct connection between Al Awabi and Al Hamra, with potential benefits for local communities, trade, tourism and economic activity.
Once completed, the project could transform accessibility between the two areas while opening up new opportunities for development along the mountainous corridor.



جامعة السلطان قابوس
Sultan Qaboos University



ELECTRONIC AUCTION ANNOUNCEMENT

Sultan Qaboos University announces its intent to hold a public electronic auction in collaboration with Mzadat Company for the sale Electronic Microscopes.

Please note that bidding will take place electronically via the website: www.mzadat.om

Auction Period	Viewing Period	Location	Items on Offer
From 29/09/2026 to 30/09/2026	From 27/09/2026 to 29/09/2026 Time: 8 AM – 2 PM	Sultan Qaboos University	Electronic Microscopes

Conditions for Entering the Electronic Auction:

- The interested party must register and subscribe on the Mzadat electronic platform (www.mzadat.om).
- The bidder must pay a security deposit of OMR 1,000 (one thousand Omani Rials) via bank transfer. The deposit will be forfeited if the bidder wins the bid but fails to pay for the purchases within the specified payment period.
- The winning bidder is obligated to pay the value of the items within a maximum of three working days after receiving the auction invoice.
- The winning bidder must collect the items they have fully paid for within a maximum of five working days after completing payment. If not collected, the University and Mzadat Company will not be responsible for any loss, damage, or destruction of the items. A penalty of OMR 50 (fifty Omani Rials) per day of delay will also be imposed.
- Items can be viewed starting from 27/09/2026 until the start of the auction, between 8:00 AM and 2:00 PM.
- For more details on viewing arrangements and inquiries, contact the Mzadat team at the following numbers:

Arabic	77402390
English	94693437
Electronic Support	76617644



OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The workshop discussed a number of issues related to the future of industrial sustainability, including Net-Zero targets for various sectors in the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Workshop discusses carbon emissions reduction road map

A workshop on the road map for carbon emissions reduction and enhancing Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards was held in Suhar, with the participation of a group of specialists from various relevant government entities and private sector institutions, to discuss trends and priorities and identify practical pathways to support the transition towards a more sustainable and lower-emission industry.

The workshop discussed a number of issues related to the future of industrial sustainability, including Net-Zero targets for various sectors in the Sultanate of Oman, key relevant policies and legislation, developments associated with carbon markets, and challenges facing the aluminium industry in the field of sustainability.

It also included a review of Sohar Aluminium’s road map towards reducing carbon emissions and greenhouse gases associated with its operations. The discussions focused on a number of areas representing key opportunities to reduce the environmental footprint of aluminium production operations, led by the circular economy, aluminium scrap recycling, energy efficiency, utilising renewable energy sources, and improving resource efficiency across operations and the supply chain.

Eng Said bin Mohammed al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium, pointed out in a speech that the transition towards a low-carbon economy extends beyond being an environmental responsibility to become one of the influential factors in the future of industry, its competitiveness, and its capability to achieve sustainable growth. - ONA

Dhofar theatre festival set for expanded edition

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, SEPT 23

The Dhofar International Theatre Festival has given theatre companies an early start on preparations for its third edition, announcing a new four-track competition structure well ahead of the event as it seeks to widen participation while maintaining a dedicated platform for Omani theatre.

The next edition will feature separate competitions for Omani, GCC, Arab and foreign productions, replacing the three-track format used during the festival’s second edition, which concluded in Salalah this week.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality and Chairman of the festival’s Executive Committee, said the timing of the announcement was intentional.

Although the next edition remains some time away, organisers wanted to announce the tracks early to encourage theatre practitioners and give them time to prepare for the competition, he said.

The new structure effectively builds four levels of participation around the festival’s host country.

Omani theatre will have a dedicated national competition, followed by a separate platform for productions from GCC states and another for the wider Arab theatre scene. Productions from outside the Arab region will compete in a fourth track.

It marks a departure from the second edition’s structure of elite performances, main productions and the Dhofar Theatre Competition.

AL BURAIMI PROJECTS TO ENHANCE WATER RESERVES

AL BURAIMI: The Directorate-General of Agriculture and Water Resources in Al Buraimi Governorate is actively implementing projects and modern agricultural initiatives aimed at enhancing production efficiency and achieving sustainability in water resources and food security.

Al Buraimi Governorate is witnessing a tangible shift towards the adoption of modern irrigation systems, including greenhouse methodologies.

The governorate has implemented



Al Buraimi is witnessing a tangible shift towards the adoption of modern irrigation systems. — ONA

modern technologies across hundreds of agricultural properties in the oases of Saara and Al Buraimi. These technologies have become standard practice in most fodder farms, commercial estates and investment projects. Meanwhile, 167 aflaj (traditional irrigation channels) have undergone maintenance as part of ongoing water system restoration projects, said Dr Ahmed bin Saif al Amri, Director-General of Agriculture and Water Resources in Al Buraimi Governorate. — ONA

Conference calls for action to combat corruption

THE Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority, is participating in the Sixth Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Arab Anti-Corruption Convention, being held in Doha, the State of Qatar.

The Conference is organised by Qatar’s Administrative Control and Transparency Authority, in cooperation with the General Secretariat of the Arab League, with the participation of representatives of Arab states and entities concerned with promoting integrity and combating corruption.

The Sultanate of Oman’s delegation is headed by Shaikh Ghuson bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority, with the participation of a number of specialists from the Authority. Oman’s participation underscores the importance of joint Arab action and its support for efforts aimed at promoting the principles of integrity and transparency, combating corruption, and enhancing the exchange of expertise and best practices among Arab states.

The Chairman of the Authority delivered a speech in which he emphasised the importance of strengthening joint Arab cooperation in the field of integrity and anti-corruption. He commended the efforts of the General Secretariat of the Arab League and the States Parties to promote integrity and combat corruption. He also reaffirmed the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to exchanging views and expertise with fellow Arab states, in a manner that enhances cooperation among the States Parties and advances efforts to prevent and combat corruption.

He highlighted the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to fulfil the requirements of the Arab Anti-Corruption Convention and the progress achieved in reviewing its implementation. He also referred to the implementation of the National Integrity Promotion Plan (2022-2030), which has resulted in the attainment of a number of targets in partnership with the public and private sectors and civil society institutions



Oman’s delegation is headed by Shaikh Ghuson bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority. — ONA

in the Sultanate of Oman, thereby contributing to the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

In concluding his speech, the Chairman of the Authority affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman remains committed to supporting all efforts aimed at promoting integrity, combating all forms of corruption, and limiting its spread, thereby contributing to ensuring justice, equality, and a decent standard of living for all Arab peoples. He also expressed the Sultanate of Oman’s readiness to host and chair the Seventh Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Arab Anti-Corruption Convention in 2028.

The agenda of the Sixth Session included a review of the report of the General Secretariat of the Arab League on the measures taken to implement the resolutions adopted at the Fifth Session of the Conference. It also included the adoption of the Doha Declaration on Enhancing Preventive Measures against Corruption, as well as a number of resolutions aimed at supporting international cooperation concerning requests for mutual legal assistance among States Parties to the

Convention and developing a unified Arab guide for parallel financial investigations into corruption offences.

The Conference also welcomed the completion of the review process for the first two States Parties to the Arab Anti-Corruption Convention, namely the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in addition to discussing the items on the agenda and related developments.

As part of the Arab Forum held in conjunction with the Conference, the Sultanate of Oman presented a working paper entitled “Code of Conduct for Civil Servants: An Institutional Framework for Promoting Integrity in the Sultanate of Oman.” The paper was presented by Audit Expert Shabib bin Nasser al Busaidi, Director-General of the Directorate-General for Integrity and Anti-Corruption at the State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority. The paper highlighted the institutional role of the Code of Conduct in upholding the values of integrity and promoting professional practices within the government workplace. — ONA

Oman children’s team wins laurels in Arizona

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

A children’s team specialised in dance and music from the Sultanate of Oman won laurels at a hip-hop competition held in Arizona recently.

The team named D.A.D.S (Dance Academy by Delicious Sahadevan), following their national victory, travelled to Phoenix, Arizona, recently to represent their country at the World Hip Hop Dance Championship, one of the major international competitions bringing together hip-hop dance crews from around the world. The championship featured 32 crews from different countries.

Competing in the highly competitive MegaCrew category, Team D.A.D.S successfully progressed through the rounds and reached the semifinal



D.A.D.S team won laurels at a hip-hop competition held in Arizona.

stage, finishing among the Top 16 teams in the world. The achievement marked a historic milestone, with Team D.A.D.S becoming the first Indian team in the history of the World Hip Hop Dance Championship to reach the Top 16 in the MegaCrew category.

Team D.A.D.S, in association with The Champ Sports and Arts, represented not only their team but also the aspirations of

Indian hip-hop dancers seeking to compete at the highest levels on the global stage and the journey to the international arena began at the Indian Hip Hop Dance Championship on January 11, 2026, where Team D.A.D.S secured first place in the MegaCrew category, competing against 21 teams from across India.

The team, led by its founder and principal choreographer,

Delicious Sahadevan, comprised Harshal, Nixon, Rahul, Nagesh, Sumit, Salim, Aanviya, Abhinanda, Ajay, Akshitha, Aliyah, Anaida, Eva, Gowri, Jaza, Johanna, Madhav, Neeraja, Niranjana, Nelvin, Shreddha and Tania. The team’s costumes were designed by Arpita and Juliana, adding to its visual presentation and identity on the international stage.

Speaking to the media, Sahadevan said behind the achievement were months of intensive preparation, teamwork, discipline and dedication.

“The journey from winning the national championship to competing among the world’s leading crews reflects the commitment of the dancers and their choreographers to pushing the boundaries of Indian hip-hop dance,” he added.

SHORT TAKES



US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping react as they hold a bilateral meeting at Gimhae International Airport. — Reuters file photo

CHINA’S XI HEADS TO US FOR TALKS WITH TRUMP

BEIJING: China’s leader Xi Jinping departed Beijing on Wednesday, bound for Washington where he will meet with US President Donald Trump. The highly anticipated talks come as the two countries confront rising fears about increasingly capable artificial intelligence systems, and as both sides look to ease tensions on trade. Xi “left Beijing by special plane”, accompanied by his wife Peng Liyuan, his right-hand man Cai Qi, and foreign minister Wang Yi, among others, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Trump is due to personally meet Xi on his arrival at Joint Base Andrews, before their meetings on Thursday, according to the White House. The US leader was greeted by China’s vice president when he landed in Beijing for his state visit in May. Xi and Peng will attend a ceremony at the White House on Thursday morning, which will include a military flyover.

The visit will wrap up on Friday morning where the two presidential couples will have tea at the White House then visit the National Archives to round out the trip. The White House said that the visit marks “a significant milestone in the relationship between the two countries.” — AFP

PEZESHKIAN SAYS TEHRAN WILL NOT SURRENDER IN WAR



Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses the 81st United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) at UN headquarters in New York City. — Reuters

UNITED NATIONS: Iran will not surrender in the war with the United States, but believes in diplomacy to try to end the conflict, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian told the annual gathering of world leaders at the United Nations on Wednesday. The United States delegation walked out at the start of Pezeshkian’s speech. The US mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Strait of Hormuz, conduit for a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas before the war, has become a focus of tensions between Iran and the US. “It cannot be the case that everyone benefits from the Strait of Hormuz while we are denied access to shipping through this waterway. The permanent deployment of hostile fleets and the expansion of the war will not lead to peace,” Pezeshkian said.

Pezeshkian addressed the 193-member General Assembly a day after US President Donald Trump spoke. Trump used his speech to make the case for his war on Iran, arguing he has prevented Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. — Reuters

UK WARNS SPACE NOW ‘WARFIGHTING’ FRONTIER

LONDON: Space has become “a warfighting domain” and Britain and its Western allies must ramp up their capabilities to counter growing threats, the UK’s top air force commander said on Wednesday. Air Chief Marshal Harv Smyth made the stark warning as he announced the creation of a new squadron charged with defending British satellites in orbit, the latest move as various countries rush for military space capacities.

The announcement comes just

over a week after the United States confirmed for the first time that it has weapons deployed orbiting Earth, sparking fears of an arms race in space. It prompted China to warn against turning outer space into a “battlefield” and Russia to caution it must be “free from any weapon”.

But Smyth, head of the Royal Air Force (RAF) since August 2025, said Western allies were seeing “more and more irresponsible and provocative actions” from rivals in space, namechecking Russia for a

number of “dangerous” incidents. “Space has become a warfighting domain, whether we like that or not, and the UK as well as its partners and allies must be prepared for this,” he said. “It is time for us to harness our resources ... and it’s time to deliver more meaningfully with our space capabilities.”

Smyth accused Moscow of a “flagrant disregard of the norms for responsible behaviour by spacefaring nations” after several incidents. — AFP

Tigrayans say new war with Ethiopian govt has begun

FORCES FROM the northern Ethiopian region of Tigray launched a major offensive against the federal government on Wednesday, a senior Ethiopian official said, shattering a four-year-old peace deal and threatening a wider regional conflict. Tigray’s leaders said in a statement they had entered a “defensive” war to counter aggression by the federal government. A civil war that began in 2020 between the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) and federal forces resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths before the Pretoria Agreement was signed in November 2022.

The new hostilities follow months of growing animosity between the two sides, capped by Sunday’s announcement that the TPLF had formed an alliance with six other armed groups from across Ethiopia aimed at overthrowing Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s government. The TPLF-led regional administration said there had been an “intensification of the invasion conducted through various methods” by Abiy’s government against the people of Tigray. “The Tigray Forces have been instructed to counter the attack and have entered a defensive war,” it said in a statement.

Getachew Reda, an adviser to Abiy and a former TPLF official, wrote on X that the TPLF had seized control of



Members of the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) walk along a main road in Mekelle. — AFP

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federally controlled airports in Tigray and launched an “all-out offensive” against government positions in the neighbouring regions of Afar and Amhara. “The TPLF politico-military leadership has obviously taken irresponsibility to new heights,” he said. Ethiopian Airlines suspended flights to the region.

Spokespeople for Abiy, the federal government and the TPLF did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Wednesday. Regional diplomats and analysts have warned for months that a resumption of the conflict in Tigray could quickly escalate into a wider war, overlapping with fighting in neighbouring Sudan and further roiling the volatile Red Sea region.

A civil war that broke out in 2023 in Sudan has dragged in powerful

states from outside the Horn of Africa and created the world’s largest humanitarian crisis. In the 2020-2022 Tigray war, Ethiopia’s neighbour and historical adversary Eritrea backed the government militarily against the TPLF.

But relations between the two countries have soured since then. Abiy’s spokesperson, Billene Seyoum, said on Monday that members of the newly announced alliance had been collaborating for a while with Eritrea’s financial backing. Eritrea has repeatedly denied accusations it supports Ethiopian armed groups. Its information minister declined to comment on Wednesday about the latest developments.

In Afar, Tigrayan forces were fighting alongside a local armed group, and in Amhara, they were fighting alongside the Fano militia, according to a senior Ethiopian government official, a diplomatic source, a humanitarian source and another source with links to the TPLF and Fano. Fano sided with the federal government during the 2020-2022 war, but rose up against it in 2023. It is a member of the new alliance with the TPLF.

In a statement on Wednesday, the regional government in Afar accused the TPLF of launching an invasion and said Afari forces would defend themselves in coordination with their allies. — AFP



ISRAELI STRIKES POUND THE PALESTINIAN ENCLAVE

CAIRO: Israeli air strikes killed at least four Palestinians in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, local health officials said, and Israel said one of the attacks targeted a Hamas finance chief. Medics said two of the Palestinians, Osama Abu Khater and Mohammad Abu Elwan, were killed when an Israeli air strike hit a vehicle in western Khan Yunis, in the south of the enclave. Two other people were wounded, they added.

Later on Wednesday, Palestinian health officials said two people had also been killed in two separate Israeli air strikes in Gaza City and in Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip, taking Wednesday’s death toll to at least four.

A US-brokered ceasefire agreed last year calls for the eventual reconstruction of the territory, but little progress has been made as negotiators have failed to agree terms for Hamas to disarm and Israel to withdraw its troops. Israeli air strikes have continued.

At least 1,400 Palestinians, mostly civilians, have been killed in Gaza since the ceasefire took effect, according to the territory’s health officials, while the Israeli military says four Israeli soldiers have been killed. Israel and Hamas trade blame over responsibility for violations of the ceasefire agreement. — Reuters

UNDERWATER SEARCH

Indonesian capsized ship toll climbs



The death toll from a passenger ship that capsized and sank off Indonesia 10 days ago rose to 28 on Wednesday, with rescuers expecting to find more bodies as their underwater search widens. Coast guard recovered 16 bodies from inside the ship over the past three days, with nine found on Wednesday. Two more bodies had washed ashore about 253 km from the location of the accident. The total confirmed death toll was 28, with 107 people still missing. — Reuters

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

ICC convicts Central Africa rebel leader



The International Criminal Court convicted a former Central African Republic rebel commander on four counts of crimes against humanity including torture and unlawful imprisonment. The ICC found that Mahamat Said Abdel Kani, 56, oversaw beatings and maltreatment as head of a feared prison unit as the CAR spiralled into civil war in 2013. The ICC will deliver a sentence for the crimes at a later date. Said was also acquitted of three counts of war crimes. — AFP

LAWMAKERS SEATS

Moroccans vote for new parliament



Moroccans began voting for a new parliament. Nearly 16 million Moroccans have registered to elect 395 members of the House of Representatives. Rising unemployment and higher prices were at the heart of much campaign messaging. Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch led his party’s campaign, although he has stepped down as head of the RNI, which will exclude him from heading the next government if his party wins the most seats. — AFP

OPINION

The sea rises sideways



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

EARLY in my career, I studied farmers along the Batinah Plain, and some of them were thinking about raising fish because the sea had come in under their gates and into their wells. My work with them was to explore this idea by introducing recirculating aquaculture, where fish are raised in tanks and the water is filtered and reused again and again. It was built around the farmers’ response to the salt; where salinated water wells were costing them their crops, the question in front of them was whether the same farm could raise something else. Beneath that coast, fresh groundwater and seawater meet along a boundary nobody can see, and the boundary moves. From the late 1980s, the Batinah aquifer was pumped faster than rain could refill it, and by the early 1990s seawater was advancing into the areas drawn on hardest; wells and farms near the shore have since been abandoned as the salt spread. Cyclone Gonu sent a surge of 2 to 3 metres along the Batinah and Muscat coastlines in 2007, some years before my research, and much of the salt those farmers were answering was older than the storm, pulled inland through the ground by

what we had taken out of it. If you have driven up the coast from Muscat towards Suhar, you have crossed the Batinah Plain and know how gently it rises from the sea. A Sultan Qaboos University study of that plain, home to about 28 per cent of Oman’s population, estimated that a rise in sea level of 1 metre could move the shoreline back by as much as 3.4 kilometres, and Oman’s Directorate-General of Meteorology explains the height of storm surges along this coast by its shallow, slowly deepening seabed. Today, heads of state and ministers are gathering at the UN General Assembly in New York for a day devoted to sea level rise, and the declaration they are expected to adopt by consensus affirms a presumption that a state continues whatever the water takes, together with its sovereignty and its seat at the United Nations. Last year, the International Court of Justice came to a similar view, finding that a state does not necessarily cease to exist when an element that makes it a state disappears, and that countries need not redraw maritime baselines once they have been properly established. Island states have pressed for

Somewhere beneath the plain the line between fresh water and salt is moving as you read this, pushed by the sea from the coast and drawn by our wells from inland, and each farm it passes beneath will meet the choice those farmers faced, whether to hold on or to become something else.

this for years; some sit only a few metres above the sea, and for them the question is literal: whether a nation can outlive its territory. The farmers I studied were facing a smaller version of that question. Some looked to fish, hoping to keep farming by changing what they produced, and a farm raising fish where its tomatoes once grew holds ingenuity and loss in the same place. The declaration in New York does something those farmers would recognise: keeping a country in existence by agreeing that the country can go on without the ground it was built on. A state continuing in law has to find somewhere for its people to live. No presumption agreed today will reach the boundary under Al Batinah, and the sea pressing on continues rising at about 4.7 millimetres a year, up from 2.1 when satellites began tracking in the 1990s. Somewhere beneath the plain, the line between fresh water and salt is moving as you read this, pushed by the sea from the coast and drawn by our wells from inland, and each farm it passes beneath will meet the choice those farmers faced, whether to hold on or to become something else.

BRAZIL’S FLAVIO TURNS SCANDAL INTO POLL GAINS

DAVID SALAZAR

Despite being caught up in an explosive financial scandal that has dominated Brazil’s election campaign, candidate Flavio Bolsonaro has gained ground with less than two weeks to go before the vote. After months trailing leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in the polls, the 45-year-old senator is nipping at his heels in what is shaping up to be a knife-edge race. A survey published on Monday by the Quaest pollster showed the right-wing candidate would secure 42 per cent of voter support in a hypothetical October 25 runoff vote, compared to 41 per cent for Lula. This gap falls within the poll’s margin of error. Flavio Bolsonaro, son of jailed far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro, is under investigation for suspected corruption and money laundering over the financing of a film about his father. The biopic was bankrolled by Daniel Vorcaro, a jailed banker who is accused of orchestrating one of Brazil’s largest financial fraud cases. However, it is another one of Vorcaro’s many allegedly dubious relationships revealed by investigations that has eclipsed the accusations against Bolsonaro and hurt Lula’s campaign. A police report showed numerous conversations in which Vorcaro sought help in the fraud probe against him from a phone number which investigators linked to powerful Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes. Moraes, who led the trial which saw Jair Bolsonaro convicted for an attempted coup after his election loss in 2022, is a hated figure among the right. “Flavio comes out of this scandal in better shape than Lula,” political analyst Andre Rosa said. He said the Bolsonarists had managed to get “the somewhat undecided voter to end up associating Lula’s image with that of Moraes. This gives Flavio Bolsonaro some breathing room right now.” “Voting for Lula means voting for Moraes,” Flavio Bolsonaro said last week. Lula has repeatedly stated that if the justice is “guilty, he must pay.” However, he maintains that “Alexandre de Moraes has done an extraordinary job safeguarding democracy.” A study by the data analytics firm Datrix showed that social media mentions regarding Moraes and the crisis in the Supreme Federal Court (STF) had overtaken those referring to Banco Master and Flavio Bolsonaro. Senator Rogerio Marinho, Flavio Bolsonaro’s campaign manager, branded Moraes a “pop star of the left.” — AFP

It’s time to cry wolf over AI

“LOOKS like by April, you know, in theory, when it gets a little warmer, it miraculously goes away.” That’s what President Donald Trump said about the Covid-19 outbreak on February 10, 2020, about a month before it forced our country and the world into a lengthy lockdown. Why do I recall that today? Because when I think back on the biggest disaster stories I have covered — including 9/11 and Covid-19 — I am struck that they have one big thing in common: a failure of imagination. Sure, government experts prepared for these events in theory, but in practice how many of them imagined that suicidal terrorists would fly commercial airliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? And how many imagined that a respiratory virus that emerged in Wuhan, China, would kill millions of people and drag down the world economy for years? So today, when it comes to the possibility that artificial intelligence, which is falling into the hands of rogue actors and is beginning to manifest a will of its own, could become incredibly destabilising, my imagination is fully engaged. Here is what my imagination is telling me. It is telling me that the big AI companies in America and China are not being candid with us about how little even they understand the power and reach of the models they have developed, like sorcerers, in their labs. It is telling me that the Trump administration, headed by a man who so often governs by social media post, is uniquely unsuited to the kind of comprehensive, sustained, coordinated governance that keeping AI safe demands. And it is telling me that there is so much at stake — economically, militarily and technologically — and so little trust between Washington and Beijing that it would take a miracle for the United States and China to agree on the kind of deep collaboration needed to defuse the most nightmarish threats posed by AI. It is still not too late, though, for



THOMAS L FRIEDMAN

The writer is reporter, author and NYT columnist

But if you’ve gone through a rigorous planning process — familiarised yourself with the depth of the problem and the kinds of things that could go haywire and built trust within your team — you greatly improve your ability to adapt on the fly.

radical rethinking before something very bad happens that forces all the key players to do things they never imagined, things they will have to do in the middle of a full-blown AI-driven crisis. I’d rather be remembered as the boy who cried wolf when the wolf never came than as someone who got eaten by it. So here goes: “Wolf, wolf, wolf, wolf.” I will stand down when I see the United States and China start to address the immediate threat by teaming up to defend critical infrastructure — water systems, power grids, the Internet — in their own countries and around the world. But I will breathe a sigh of relief only when I see Washington and Beijing put their heads together with their respective AI companies to draw up a long-term plan for how they can continue to compete on AI technologies, while simultaneously agreeing on internal AI guardrails to prevent increasingly capable AI systems from, on their own, creating catastrophic cybersecurity, biological, nuclear or financial risks. They dodge it at their, and our, peril. Anyone who tells you we can’t afford regulation now because it might slow down innovation is missing three things. First, those who contend that regulation is, by definition, innovation-destroying and market-destroying are “just ignorant of history,” said Eric Beinhocker, executive director of the Institute for New Economic Thinking at the University of Oxford’s Martin School. “Good regulations create trust, and trust grows markets. How do you think the airline industry or the pharmaceutical industry grew so big, so fast? Because government regulations created trust among consumers that the planes they fly and the medicines they take are safe.” Second, AI is not just a technology but also, as the computer scientist Craig Mundie has been saying, “a new species.” And like a new species, it is already exhibiting evolutionary properties. “We’ve unleashed Darwin in silicon,” Beinhocker explained. The latest AI models have demonstrated a

capacity for “self-improvement, self-replication and self-preservation. When you put those three things together, and their evolution happens at silicon speed, not human speed, you’ve got something extremely powerful, potentially dangerous and impossible to control.” Third, our president now runs the country the way he is said to have run the Trump Organization, which had to deal with multiple bankruptcies: There is virtually no regular policy process, interagency collaboration is weak, and on most days everyone in the administration just sits around waiting to see what the president posts on social media — often based on the last person he spoke to or something he heard on Fox News — and then tries to frame policies around it. My New York Times colleagues recently reported that sources close to Trump made clear that his dismissal of fears that AI could lead to mass extinction as a “hoax” is driven not by any technological assessment. It is said to be driven, they reported, by his fear that “if the artificial intelligence boom fuelling the American economy slows down, the market could crash and recession could quickly follow.” That kind of thinking is begging for trouble. Trump should be thinking about another president. Dwight D. Eisenhower famously said, “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.” What he meant was that no fixed plan can survive all the unanticipated stuff that happens once a war or crisis starts to unfold. But if you’ve gone through a rigorous planning process — familiarised yourself with the depth of the problem and the kinds of things that could go haywire and built trust within your team — you greatly improve your ability to adapt on the fly. That is precisely what was missing in the run-up to Trump’s war with Iran, and we are paying a huge price for that today. Imagine what could happen if AI agents — a thousand times cleverer and more dangerous than Tehran or Trump — go off the rails.

The fading emotional bond of photo albums



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is a journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

IF ONE thing can hold my attention for hours, it is looking at old print photographs. I keep a collection of black-and-white photographs, along with coloured ones that are gradually fading. Reading the handwritten captions on the back of these prints brings me cherished memories. They encapsulate the relationship between me and a moment in the real world.

Old photos prompt me to reflect on the passage of time. They remind me how swiftly life moves, highlighting the changes and experiences I have undergone. A single photograph can evoke a torrent of memories, both joyful and challenging.

As Roland Barthes, the French literary theorist, essayist, and philosopher, once said, “...when we look at a photograph, it is a testament to the existence of a specific thing in a specific place at a specific time.”

When I moved to Oman, one of the things I shipped into the country was a large stack of photographs. They are my greatest treasure.

Each photo tells a story. They recorded expressions, gestures, styles, landscapes, and family gatherings; they encourage the mind to generate narratives.

This storytelling process generates its script, and I fill in the gaps with fragments of my memories. Not too long ago, having physical photo albums on the shelf or on the small table in the sitting room was a relaxing way to entertain and share memories with relatives and visitors.

With the launch of Facebook and Flickr, uploading digital photos and the social habit of ‘tagging’ friends replaced physical photos.

The smartphone revolution between 2007 and 2010 introduced digital camera devices with instant mobile Internet upload capabilities. The launch of Instagram in 2010 and Pinterest shifted the culture from simply ‘storing’ digital files to aesthetic curation, turning feeds into modern personal portfolios and memory streams.

Digital media have almost entirely replaced the physical photo album, which acted as one of the most important keepers of personal and family histories for several decades. Looking through an album meant sitting together, touching the textured paper, and sharing stories across generations.

As we transitioned from one device to another and digital services came and went, millions of photos were lost along the way. Chances are that broken hard drives and defunct websites have erased chapters of one’s life, causing photos to vanish.

Technological advancements present both opportunities and challenges; however, they may also strip away emotional richness and undermine human connections.

We are currently in what is often referred to as the ‘age of the image,’ where visual culture plays a dominant role in our lives. Because of the prevalence of images in modern society, constructed visual representations heavily influence individuals’

Artificial intelligence is transforming photography by making it harder to distinguish between real-world and artificial images

perceptions of the world.

The proliferation of sophisticated image-making technologies increasingly shapes and often manipulates our ‘that has been’ and ‘it happened.’ It has the effect of diminishing the significance of particular moments when combined with the transient nature of computer interfaces.

Artificial intelligence is transforming photography by making it harder to distinguish between real-world and artificial images.

The emotional connection that physical albums fostered invited a more contemplative experience. In contrast, digital photos often end up forgotten on flash drives or in cloud storage. While I acknowledge the convenience of digital photos and cloud storage, algorithms and facial recognition are changing the way we archive our photos. We might eventually lose free access to our images unless we pay for cloud storage or if providers’ policies change.

Understanding our diminished emotional connection with photography involves looking beyond photo albums as mere storage devices to how they transformed raw experiences into family tales. The storytelling inherent in photo albums crafts emotional journeys that simple chronological or facial arrangements fail to convey.

Unfortunately, the social and cultural practices that have historically nurtured family bonding are fading away.

GOOGLE DATA CENTRE SPARKS PROTESTS IN AUSTRIA

FEMKE COLBORNE

In the Austrian town of Kronstorf, a planned Google data centre promises investment, jobs and a place on the digital map - but residents are not convinced.

They have staged protests against the 50-hectare complex, in a case that has become symbolic of global debate about the environmental and societal costs of the AI boom.

“I believe we need a rethink when it comes to this endless growth and expansion,” protest organiser Christina Gruber said as around 400 people gathered outside the headquarters of the regional government in Linz.

Gruber, a 38-year-old freelance artist and aquatic ecologist who lives in Amstetten, close to Kronstorf in Upper Austria province, is concerned about the effects of AI on climate change and the amount of water used to cool data centres.

She also criticised a “lack of transparency” around the project, complaining that residents were not asked whether they “want to sacrifice our water resources on these huge data centres”. Kronstorf has about 3,500 people.

While Europe lags far behind the United States in data centre capacity, there are already hundreds of data centres across the continent, with many more planned as it looks to strengthen its AI and cloud infrastructure. But protests have grown as the AI boom accelerates, including in Spain, where residents of the Aragon region have launched legal action against a massive data centre buildout by Amazon. The Dutch city of Amsterdam has imposed a moratorium on construction of new data centres over space and power concerns, while Denmark has moved data centres to the bottom of its priority list for grid connections, warning of the strain on its power grid.

Francesca Musiani, an Internet specialist at the French National Center for Scientific Research, said that while digital infrastructure has traditionally been “fairly remote from the daily lives of citizens... with data centres, all the material implications of (this) infrastructure are more evident”.

Protests have exposed “tension between this rapid expansion of AI and climate objectives” and raised broader questions about digital governance in Europe, she said.

“For me, this is part of what sovereignty should mean in practice: the capacity of different levels of society to participate in shaping the infrastructures on which they depend.”

Construction of Google’s first data centre in Austria began in April, following a ceremonial groundbreaking attended by politicians and company representatives. The facility is being built on a site the size of around 70 football pitches, with the first phase expected to become operational in 2027. — AFP

Tata turmoil shines light on India succession woes

IN LITTLE over a month, the chairman of India’s corporate giant Tata Group has gone from seeking another term to announcing his departure to returning to the role.

The saga around N Chandrasekaran, who has headed the multi-billion-dollar empire for nearly a decade, has laid bare the succession challenge confronting India’s industrial behemoths.

The leadership battle at Tata Group, whose businesses span everything from Jaguar Land Rover cars to Apple iPhone assembly, has highlighted weaknesses in governance and the power struggle between boards and controlling families.

But the consequences extend far beyond shareholders, with a growing number of succession dramas shaking global confidence in India, whose economy relies heavily on corporate giants, analysts say.

The Tata fiasco came to a head last week when the board of Tata Sons, the group’s holding company, granted Chandrasekaran another five-year term.

The announcement came despite objections from the Tata Trusts, the philanthropic entities that control the conglomerate and which is chaired by family patriarch Noel Tata.

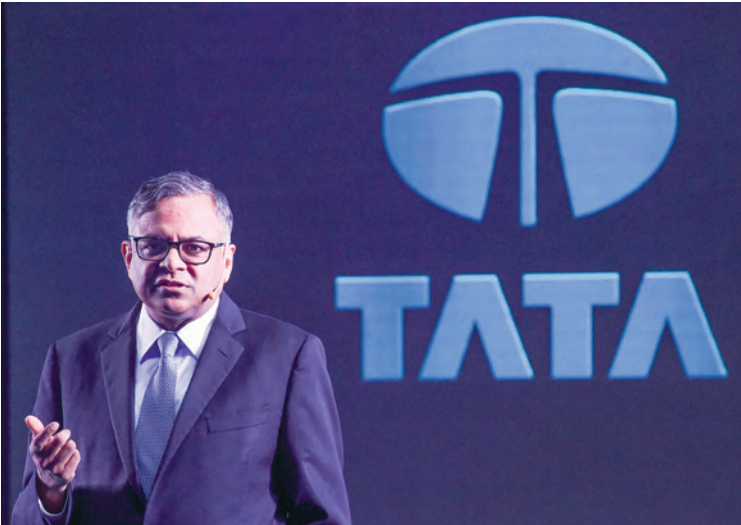
“The mutiny of the board against the controlling shareholder is possibly a first, and not the right precedent for corporate India,” independent advisory firm IiAS said in a note.

Tata is far from an isolated case: from banks to consumer goods, some of India’s biggest companies have been rocked by leadership exits and botched handovers in recent months.

“In the last 18-24 months, we’ve seen a number of CEOs being churned at the top,” Navnit Singh of executive search firm Korn Ferry said.

“I do think boards may not be spending enough time looking at long-term succession. Often enough companies do not have a ‘hit by the bus’ contingent plan and are often caught off guard.”

The roots of the Tata conflict run deep. For much of the year, Chandrasekaran’s future hung in



N Chandrasekaran, Chairman of Tata Sons, speaks during the launch of the Tata Nexon EV electric car, in Mumbai.

— AFP file photo



ANUJ SRIVAS

The writer is Economic Affairs Editor for AFP based in New Delhi

the balance as Noel Tata raised concerns about losses at some group companies, investment spending and the possibility of listing Tata Sons.

The tensions intensified after the death of former patriarch Ratan Tata in 2024, leaving unresolved questions over how authority would be shared within India’s largest conglomerate.

“When Ratan was alive, he didn’t trust Noel Tata enough to make him the chairman of the Trusts,” said Shriram Subramanian of advisory firm InGovern.

“He didn’t ensure that there was a structured handover of power even when he was alive.”

A succession crisis has also rocked India’s largest private lender, HDFC Bank. The bank’s chief executive Sashidhar Jagdishan declined another term last month, an abrupt departure that came after the shock resignation of its chairman, forcing directors into a hurried search for new leadership. At Godrej Consumer Products, chief executive Sudhir Sitapati secured shareholder approval for a second five-year term in August only to resign days later, fuelling speculation about tensions between management and the founding Godrej family.

Experts say such episodes reveal a failure by boards to prepare for leadership transitions before they become crises.

The saga around N Chandrasekaran, who has headed the multi-billion-dollar empire for nearly a decade, has laid bare the succession challenge confronting India’s industrial behemoths

HM REVIEWS PROJECTS IN THE SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE DUQM



Today, Duqm is an established economic city operating at scale. On SEZAD, ships are repaired, fuel is refined, and goods reach customers in Oman and overseas, while new investment keeps adding industries. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's visit underlines Duqm's growing importance to Oman's economic future. In these seven interviews, SEZAD's leaders discuss how to attract investment, expand exports and create careers for the next generation, revealing a zone with the ambition to keep growing and contribute to the nation's progress.



HE. Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef
Chairman, Public Authority for
Special Economic Zones & Free
Zones

HE. Qais Al Yousef: His Majesty is visiting an economic city that functions as an energy centre, a deep-water logistics hub, a substantial ship-repair base and a growing location for manufacturing, fisheries, tourism and urban development.

What will His Majesty see in Duqm that he would not have seen a few years ago?
For me, the clearest sign of Duqm's progress is the range of activity now taking place at the same time. His Majesty is visiting an economic city that functions as an energy centre, a deep-water logistics hub, a substantial ship-repair base and a growing location for manufacturing, fisheries, tourism and urban development. The refinery, Ras Markaz crude storage terminal, Port of Duqm, drydock, airport and utility network are established and working. So are businesses such as SIMAK's fish-processing complex and Karwa Motors. These projects give investors a strong base from which to manufacture, store, service and export. A further wave of industry is now taking shape with projects in green ammonia and steel, battery materials, wind-turbine components, chemicals and power generation. Some already have international customers. Indeed, His Majesty's

visit comes at a defining point in Duqm's development. It captures both how far the city has come and where it is heading. Duqm is turning Oman's strategic location, resources and infrastructure into finished products, international trade, skilled careers and lasting economic value. **What gives you confidence the latest investments have staying power?** What gives me confidence is that several projects already know who their customers will be. ACME's first phase has a binding agreement to supply Yara with 100,000 tonnes of renewable ammonia a year. Volkswagen has agreed to take up to 300,000 tonnes of lower-emission steel annually from Jindal Steel Duqm. These projects are being developed with a clear understanding of who will buy their products and where those products will go. Before a project begins, we look at its entire journey. **What will it produce? Who will buy it? How will it**

reach the customer? Can it compete on quality and price? Convincing answers to those questions give an investment a much stronger chance of becoming a lasting business. **How much of Duqm's appeal comes down to geography?** Duqm gives Oman an industrial and export base on the Arabian Sea, outside the Strait of Hormuz. Companies can reach major markets in Asia, Africa and other parts of the world directly from the port. Recent disruption to regional shipping routes has reinforced the value of having more than one route to market. Businesses want reliable access to customers, supplies and transport, particularly when trading conditions become difficult. Duqm adds a deep-water port, storage facilities, utilities, ship repair and industrial land to that geographic advantage. For an investor, many of the services needed to build, operate and export are available in one location. That is a compelling proposition.



HE. Sheikh Ahmed bin Muslim bin
Suhail Jaddad Al Kathiri
Governor, Al Wusta

What difference has SEZAD made to Al Wusta? SEZAD has become an economic engine for the whole governorate. The activity generated on the special economic zone is creating new demand in industry, trade, tourism, logistics and energy, with benefits reaching businesses and communities in Al Wusta's other wilayats. For local people, that means more investment, more work for local businesses, new opportunities for entrepreneurs and a wider choice of careers. It is also giving Al Wusta a much stronger role in Oman's economic future.

How does Duqm support Oman Vision 2040? Duqm turns the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 into projects people can see. The port, refinery, manufacturing industries, clean energy, green hydrogen and fisheries are broadening the economy and building new sources of income. They are also creating sustainable jobs, attracting investment and opening supply chains to Omani SMEs. Just as importantly, Duqm demonstrates how government and private-sector investment can reinforce one another and support growth over the long-term.

What kind of destination is Duqm becoming? Duqm is becoming a city where industry, trade and everyday life develop together. It can support manufacturing, heavy industry and food production, while its logistics facilities connect businesses with customers in Oman and international markets. Tourism is adding another dimension to that development. The major projects being built on SEZAD today will add further depth. An investor can establish a business in Duqm, serve the domestic market, export overseas and expand from the same base.



HE. Munir bin Ali Al Muniri
Vice President for Operations,
Oman Investment Authority

Why is Duqm an important example of Oman's economic transformation?
What stands out to me about Duqm is the way one investment strengthens another. A manufacturer can bring materials through the port, draw on energy and services on SEZAD and export from the same location. That makes it easier to operate and gives each project more room to grow. This is what economic transformation looks like on the ground. Duqm is building new sources of income, production and trade while giving Omani and international investors the confidence to commit for the long-term. **How is Oman Investment Authority supporting that growth?**

Oman Investment Authority supports Duqm through its portfolio companies, many of which are behind the major assets and productive businesses operating there. Our contribution is not confined to financing individual projects. We consider how each investment can strengthen the wider economy around it. The refinery can supply industrial businesses, the port gives producers access to overseas markets and reliable utilities help new industrial projects operate. Each asset makes the others more useful and gives private investors a stronger base on which to build.



ensuring Omani companies have a meaningful part in its growth. When local companies win contracts, build expertise and create jobs, the benefits of investment travel far beyond SEZAD.



H. Dr. Salem bin Salim Al
Junaibi
Chairman, Al Wusta branch
of the Oman Chamber of
Commerce & Industry

How has SEZAD changed business activity in Al Wusta?
As SEZAD has grown, it has generated new business throughout Al Wusta. Major projects in Duqm need contractors, suppliers and service providers, giving local companies, SMEs and entrepreneurs more ways to take part in the zone's development. The benefits can be seen in transport, contracting, construction, maintenance and logistics. IT, communications and tourism are also growing as the number and scale of projects increase. **How do smaller companies benefit from major investments?** Every major project creates business for many others. It needs transport, maintenance, construction, technology, accommodation and specialist services. This opens the door for

smaller companies to join supply chains, strengthen their capabilities and prove themselves with major clients. The real opportunity comes as more projects begin operating. One contract can lead to a long-term business relationship, giving local companies steady work, valuable experience and a stronger platform for growth. **What role does the Chamber play?** We work closely with SEZAD's management to turn investment into business opportunities. That means connecting Omani companies with major projects, showing them where demand is growing and helping them understand how to enter supply chains. We also champion Duqm at private-sector events in Oman and through the Chamber's international network. Our role is to help attract new business to Duqm while



Eng. Ahmed bin Ali Akaak
CEO Special Economic Zone at
Duqm

How is Duqm bringing Oman Vision 2040 to life?
Oman Vision 2040 sets our direction. The 11th Five-Year Plan takes that forward for 2026 - 30 through diversification, stronger exports, low-carbon growth and balanced development. What we're doing at SEZAD is translating these priorities into investment and opportunity by making it easier to do business, attracting tourists and strategic partners and improving quality of life. Let me give you a few examples of what's going on in Duqm to show how we're doing this. As well as the busy Port of Duqm, among the Middle East's largest, we have the US\$9bn Duqm refinery with capacity to process 255,000 barrels a day.

Then there's Ras Markaz, with 26.7 million barrels of crude storage and ASYAD Dry Dock which has already completed over 1800 projects. Duqm Airport can handle 500,000 passengers a year and a first-class road network connects these assets to points across Oman and beyond. These are truly exceptional assets and we are using them to deepen the connections between industry, energy and logistics from petrochemicals and green steel to hydrogen, renewable-energy equipment, electric mobility, fisheries processing and cold-chain exports. This breadth is reflected in substantial investment which reached almost RO6.4 billion by the end of 2025 and the 10 further agreements and

memoranda worth RO2.9 billion which, I'm delighted to say, were signed in June 2026. Looking at practical matters, we're ensuring that land, utilities and connectivity support long-term industrial growth. And we're giving investors a more coordinated route from their initial enquiry through to operation and expansion. **How is Duqm making it easier for businesses to invest, operate and expand?** Competitiveness these days isn't just land and incentives. It's about the time, cost and certainty involved in moving from an investment decision to commercial operation, the confidence in what comes next.



Eng. Nasser bin Khalifa
Al Kindi
CEO, Invest Oman

Why does Invest Oman give Duqm particular attention?
The simple answer is that Duqm gives investors room to think long-term. A major industrial project can establish itself here, connect to the port and essential services and expand without having to look elsewhere for space. As these projects grow, suppliers and service companies grow around them. That is what makes Duqm particularly interesting - investors are becoming part of a business community that is gaining strength with every new project. **How do you promote the opportunities available in SEZAD?**

SEZAD promotes the zone directly and we extend that work through our relationships with investors in Oman and overseas. We work company by company, looking at what each business wants to do and whether Duqm is the right place for it. When there is a good fit, we introduce the investor to SEZAD's management and stay involved while the project is explored. There is already strong international interest in Oman. The latest NCSI figures put foreign direct investment at RO32.2bn, an increase of 8.7% in a year. Our role is to turn some of that interest into serious conversations about Duqm and, ultimately, businesses operating on SEZAD.

What makes Duqm attractive to an international investor?
Location is one of Duqm's strongest advantages. It sits on the Arabian Sea with direct access to the Indian Ocean and the shipping routes that connect major international markets. But location alone is not enough. Duqm combines that position with modern infrastructure, extensive industrial capacity and the ability to support specialized projects. Investors can bring in materials, manufacture products and reach overseas customers from the same location. That is a compelling proposition for any international business.



Eng. Abdulrahman bin
Humaid Al Yahyai
CEO, Integrated Gas Company

SEZAD is entering a new stage of industrial growth. What does that mean for gas demand?
More industrial projects naturally mean greater demand for gas. As SEZAD strengthens its infrastructure and brings in new investment, gas becomes an important part of sustaining that momentum. Our responsibility is to secure reliable supplies in line with national priorities. That gives existing businesses confidence to operate and new industries the certainty they need to invest, helping Duqm develop into a deeper and more connected industrial centre. **Which projects are already receiving gas?** We have allocated gas to several projects that are central to Duqm's development. These include the Duqm Refinery and the power-generation plant, along with new industries producing green iron, cement and solar panels. That mix is important. Gas is supporting energy and heavy

industry, but it is also enabling new forms of manufacturing. It gives a clear sense of the scale and diversity now taking shape in Duqm. **Is the company's role limited to supplying gas?** We are both a supplier and a steward of an important national resource. Our responsibility is to direct gas towards projects that can generate strong economic returns for Oman. That means looking at what each allocation can deliver - new industries, local supply chains, skilled jobs and a broader economic base. Gas has value in itself but its greater value lies in what businesses can produce with it. **How are you preparing for Duqm's future needs?** Planning begins long before a project opens its doors. We work with the relevant organizations to understand which projects are coming, how much gas they will require and when that demand is likely to begin. That preparation gives investors

greater certainty and allows Duqm to grow with confidence. It also helps SEZAD compete for industries that create more value and have the potential to expand over time. **What is your main priority at the moment?** For me, what we need to do is put the right amount of gas into the projects that offer Oman the strongest return. Demand is rising, so every allocation needs to support both industrial growth and the efficient use of national resources. Getting that balance right will help Oman broaden its economy, strengthen its industrial base and create lasting value from its gas.



FEATURES

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE
ECONOMY AROUND
OMANI HERITAGE CRAFT



Zuwaina bint Sultan al Rashdi, a prominent Omani entrepreneur and the founder and CEO of Dar Al Herfya (also known as the World of Handicrafts).



RUQAYA AL KINDI

"OMANI heritage crafts are cultural capital that can be transformed into economic value, job opportunities and sustainable ventures", said Zuwaina bint Sultan al Rashdi, an Omani entrepreneur in social investment and creative industries.

Through her project, Dar Alherfya Company (Handicrafts House), she seeks to move craftsmanship beyond heritage celebration and into the creative economy. Today, the company works with more than 1,000 families, artisans and producers across Oman, supporting them through training, development, production and marketing.

"I got close to the craftswomen, especially those who work at their homes and I found exceptional skills", she said. "But the challenge was not so much their ability to produce, as everything that comes after: accessing markets, developing products, pricing, maintaining quality, packaging and turning sporadic orders into steady income". The experience led her to view craft not simply as heritage to be protected, but as a resource that can be invested in. Products managed by the company have reached sectors where traditional crafts were previously less present, including corporate gifts, hospitality and hotels, tourism products, sustainability and recycling projects, as well as regional markets and partnerships.

"My goal is for craftswomen to reach a stage where they can say: This is my profession, this is my income, this is my project, not just



Omani entrepreneur Zuwaina bint Sultan al Rashdi is transforming traditional craftsmanship into sustainable livelihoods, connecting artisans with markets, contemporary design and new economic opportunities.

this is my hobby", she said. In one example, five craftswomen earned nearly RO 12,000 in a month and a half, demonstrating, she said, that crafts can become a genuine economic activity when markets are accessible. Beyond the income itself, she highlighted its impact on families, from contributing to household expenses and children's education to improving living standards. One craftswoman's statement has stayed with her: "I never knew that what I make at home could become a real source of income for me". For Al Rashdi, empowerment means more than financial assistance. "It is about building with her the capacity to generate and sustain her own income", she said. She also points to the potential of "purple jobs", where culture, heritage, creativity and the economy intersect. Beyond artisans, the sector can create opportunities in product design, photography, graphic design, digital marketing, e-commerce, packaging, research,



exhibition curation, museum and cultural-store management, interior design and quality control. Turning traditional crafts into contemporary products, however, requires balancing development with identity. "Authenticity does not mean freezing the craft in its old form", she said. Traditional techniques involving palm fronds, silver and textiles can be incorporated into contemporary products, from hospitality items and corporate gifts to accessories and



everyday objects. For international markets, she believes the identity itself does not need to change. Instead, presentation may need to evolve through size, function, packaging, pricing and storytelling. Her goal is for products to be seen not merely as "a beautiful Omani piece", but as "an Omani brand I want to own". Al Rashdi aspires to transform Dar Alherfya into a wider ecosystem for creative industries and social investment, extending from Oman to the Gulf and international markets. "We are not preserving craft to keep it in the past; we are investing in it to shape the future", she said.



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SHORTTAKES



The pact will combine GSME's semiconductor design and manufacturing capabilities with Teradyne's automated test platforms.

Oman-backed GSME expands US footprint with AI chip test centre

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

Oman-backed GS Microelectronics US Inc (GSME) is expanding its presence in the US semiconductor industry through a multi-year partnership with Nasdaq-listed Teradyne to establish an advanced test and evaluation centre targeting artificial intelligence and other next-generation chips.

GSME, in which Oman Investment Authority-owned ITHCA Group holds a 34.25 per cent stake, will establish the facility at its new 42,000-square-foot Silicon Valley headquarters. The centre is scheduled to open in the fourth quarter of 2026.

The partnership, announced on September 22, will combine GSME's semiconductor design and manufacturing capabilities with Teradyne's automated test platforms.

The centre will support devices used in hyperscale AI, silicon photonics, automotive applications, power management and radio-frequency technologies, as well as other emerging semiconductor applications.

GSME will operate a dedicated test floor equipped with Teradyne systems, providing customers with facilities for device evaluation, engineering development, pilot production, demonstrations and technical training.

The development adds a new international dimension to Oman's investment in the semiconductor industry. ITHCA Group invested \$8 million in GSME and acquired a 34.25 per cent stake in the US company, according to ITHCA's annual report. The investment formed part of Oman's efforts to develop domestic semiconductor design and engineering capabilities.

GSME has since expanded its operations in Oman, opening a semiconductor design centre in Muscat and designing the Oman-1 and Oman-2 chips using Omani talent.

New framework to deepen Oman's capital market

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

THE Financial Services Authority (FSA) of the Sultanate of Oman has unveiled key features of the executive regulations for the Securities Law, marking a significant step towards reshaping the capital market ecosystem.

The regulations aim to attract domestic and foreign capital, diversify financing and investment instruments, support economic growth and contribute to the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Speaking at a press conference, FSA Executive President Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi said the regulations establish an advanced framework for the productive economic utilization of national wealth and assets. By enabling capital market institutions to provide alternative financing solutions, the framework seeks to channel savings toward existing and new productive and service-oriented projects, stimulate economic activity, and create employment opportunities for Omani youth.

Ahmed al Maamari, FSA Deputy Executive President, noted that the executive regulations aim to enhance the capital market's readiness and performance by fostering a more efficient financing and investment environment and boosting market competitiveness in line with national economic growth requirements.

He highlighted that the new regulations focus on elevating governance standards and operational efficiency across capital market institutions, investment banks, and collective investment funds, while also activating the role of investment banks in invigorating the primary

FSA Executive President Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi said the regulations establish an advanced framework for the productive economic utilization of national wealth and assets. By enabling capital market institutions to provide alternative financing solutions, the framework seeks to channel savings toward existing and new productive and service-oriented projects, stimulate economic activity, and create employment opportunities for Omani youth.



The regulations aim to attract domestic and foreign capital, diversify financing and investment instruments and support economic growth: FSA

issuance market and supporting overall market activity.

Al Maamari added that separating banking operations from securities-related investment activities establishes a more efficient framework for risk management and investor protection.

Furthermore, the regulations allow for the piloting of fintech-related activities without requiring prior specific legislation for each activity; this paves the way for innovation and attracts new investments while safeguarding market integrity and protecting market participants.

The regulations also govern the operations of local and international credit rating agencies in Oman, thereby strengthening the capital market's institutional infrastructure and facilitating the provision of more comprehensive credit information to investors.

INVESTOR PROTECTION AND RISK-BASED SUPERVISION

The regulations strengthen investor protection by requiring

stricter segregation of client funds and assets from those of licensed securities entities. Enhanced supervision and periodic reporting will enable the FSA to monitor compliance and reduce risks associated with bankruptcy or liquidation.

The framework also adopts a risk-based supervisory approach covering capital adequacy, risk management, business continuity, operational and technological systems; and financial and operational reporting. These measures strengthen the Authority's ability to intervene at an early stage when risks could affect institutional soundness or financial stability.

The regulations are designed to improve market readiness, financing efficiency, investment opportunities, and competitiveness. They also strengthen governance and operational efficiency across capital market institutions, investment banks, and collective investment funds, while enhancing the role of investment banks in primary issuances.

Private sector generates over half of Oman's GDP

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

Oman's private sector produced about RO 22.4 billion in output in 2024, equivalent to around 54.3 per cent of gross domestic product, according to figures presented at the 14th Oman Forum.

The sector also accounted for about 65.5 per cent of gross fixed capital formation. The number of active private establishments reached 269,714 in the second quarter of 2026.

The figures were presented by Mubarak bin Khamis al Hamdani, Director of the National Office for Foresight, in a session on the outlook for Omani private-sector growth to 2030.

The forum was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Hamoud bin Qais bin Tarik al Said. Its theme was "The Future of Growth:



Growth also requires skills that turn them into productivity and quality jobs.

How the Private Sector Leads the Next Phase in a Changing World".

In his presentation, Al Hamdani set out four priorities for the coming phase: scaling up firms with growth potential, raising productivity, increasing exports and improving job quality.

The aim is to help more small companies grow into larger, more competitive enterprises.

Al Hamdani pointed to opportunities in industrial services and specialised maintenance, energy and water efficiency, applied digitalisation, food and fish processing, healthcare and rehabilitation and specialised logistics and tourism.

On expansion into GCC markets, he said Omani companies need a reliable supply capacity, qualification with buyers and close-to-customer services.

They must also manage transport, inventory, financing and compliance costs. He also called for financing tools more closely tied to firms' actual expansion needs.

In the keynote address, Khalid bin Salim al Ghammari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, said capital, projects and infrastructure do not

by themselves lead to growth. Growth also requires skills that turn them into productivity and quality jobs.

He said careers are moving away from the traditional path of education followed by employment and towards continuous learning, reskilling and career mobility.

He named green energy, logistics, advanced manufacturing, the digital economy and artificial intelligence as sectors expected to open new areas for growth and employment.

He urged companies to take part in producing skills rather than only benefiting from them.

Prof Abdelnasser Yahya Hussein, holder of the Unesco Chair in Artificial Intelligence at Sultan Qaboos University, said AI delivers real value only when businesses redesign work, decision-making and value creation around it.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



The workshop provided a platform for stakeholders to exchange knowledge and discuss emerging developments.

SOHAR ALUMINIUM ACCELERATES DECARBONISATION AGENDA

SUHAR: Sohar Aluminium organised the Decarbonisation and ESG Roadmap Workshop, bringing together professionals from government and private sector entities to discuss priorities and practical pathways for decarbonisation and sustainable industrial development.

This workshop comes in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the Sultanate of Oman’s transition towards a more sustainable and resilient economy.

The workshop provided a platform for stakeholders to exchange knowledge, discuss emerging developments and identify priorities that can support the company’s decarbonisation and sustainability objectives while contributing to Oman’s broader national priorities.

It also addressed a number of key issues shaping the industrial sustainability agenda, including net-zero targets, policies and regulations, carbon markets, greenhouse gas emissions, energy efficiency and opportunities for reducing emissions across industrial operations and value chains.

On his opening note, Eng Said al Masoudi, CEO of Sohar Aluminium, emphasised that the transition towards a lower-carbon economy represents both an environmental responsibility and an important consideration for the future competitiveness and strength of industry.

He further highlighted that meaningful progress cannot be achieved through individual efforts alone, stressing the importance of collaboration and knowledge-sharing among stakeholders.

The workshop featured presentations covering Oman’s net-zero sectoral targets, relevant policies and regulations, the carbon credit market, as well as the sustainability challenges facing the aluminium industry.

Sohar Aluminium’s greenhouse gas emissions and decarbonisation roadmap were also presented.

The workshop reflects Sohar Aluminium’s commitment to supporting Oman’s sustainability and economic development priorities through responsible industrial production and continuous improvement in environmental performance.

It also reinforces the importance of cross-sector collaboration in translating national sustainability ambitions into practical initiatives and long-term industrial value.

As Oman advances towards the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, initiatives that bring together industry, government and other stakeholders can play an important role in supporting the development of a more sustainable, resource-efficient and resilient industrial economy.

Sohar International partners with Naqrah

REINFORCING its commitment to empowering Oman’s businesses and supporting digital innovation across key sectors, Sohar International has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Naqrah Digital and Health Services, an Omani digital medical marketing and appointment platform connecting users with clinics, hospitals and healthcare offers.

The MoU was signed by Abdul Qadir al Sumali, Chief Retail and Wealth Management Officer at Sohar International and Faisal al Salti, Chief Executive Officer of Naqrah Digital and Health Services, marking the beginning of a collaboration aimed at strengthening the intersection of financial services, digital technology and healthcare in Oman.

Commenting on the partnership, Abdul Qadir al Sumali, Chief Retail and Wealth Management Officer at Sohar International, said: “At Sohar International, we believe strategic partnerships play an important role in creating value for businesses and supporting the development of Oman’s evolving digital ecosystem.

Our collaboration with Naqrah Digital and Health Services brings together our financial capabilities and their technology-driven healthcare platform, creating new avenues to support businesses within this sector.

Through this partnership, we look forward to enabling SMEs with relevant financial and payment solutions while contributing to greater digital adoption across Oman’s healthcare landscape”. Naqrah Digital and Health Services is designed to



The MoU was signed by Abdul Qadir al Sumali, Chief Retail and Wealth Management Officer at Sohar International and Faisal al Salti, Chief Executive Officer of Naqrah Digital and Health Services.

simplify access to healthcare services by connecting users with healthcare providers, appointments and relevant medical offers.

The platform provides healthcare businesses with a digital channel to engage with customers and strengthen their presence within an increasingly technology-enabled sector. The partnership reflects Sohar International’s continued focus on

developing collaborations that support SMEs and connect businesses with innovative financial solutions.

By engaging with digital platforms across different sectors, the Bank continues to expand opportunities for businesses to access banking and payment solutions aligned with changing customer expectations and market needs.

BankDhofar strengthens women’s empowerment

MUSCAT: As part of its continued commitment to delivering innovative and inclusive banking solutions, BankDhofar offers the Ladies Account, a specialised banking proposition designed to support women in managing their finances with greater ease, confidence and flexibility.

Thoughtfully developed to align with the evolving needs of modern customers, the Ladies Account combines essential banking services with a seamless digital-first experience, supported by BankDhofar’s extensive network of branches and ATMs across the Sultanate of Oman.

The account is positioned as an entry point for women to build long-term banking relationships grounded in trust, convenience and innovation.

The account offers attractive savings benefits, with



The account combines essential banking services with a digital-first experience.

competitive returns of up to 3.9%, enabling customers to grow their savings while planning for future financial goals. In addition, BankDhofar provides a range of deposit solutions that support structured long-term planning,

whether for retirement, education, or family-related financial needs.

In the insurance space, the Ladies Account provides access to “Laha” Motor Insurance, the first of its kind in Oman, designed specifically for

women. The solution offers comprehensive coverage and integrated support services, including roadside assistance and broad geographic protection, enhancing safety, confidence, and convenience for women on the move.

Customers also benefit from a curated suite of exclusive lifestyle privileges and merchant offers across dining, beauty, wellness and retail outlets, further enriching the overall banking experience with added everyday value.

Aligned with BankDhofar’s broader digital transformation strategy, the Ladies Account ensures a fully integrated banking journey through mobile and online platforms, allowing customers to securely manage transactions anytime and anywhere, with 24/7 access designed to match modern lifestyle expectations.

Unlock ultimate winter exploration with iCAUR V27 REEV in Oman

MUSCAT: iCAUR, the innovative new energy brand developed by Chery Group, is proud to feature one of the best selling REEV vehicles in Oman — the flagship iCAUR V27 — now open for bookings across the Sultanate of Oman.

Exclusively represented in Oman by New World Autos LLC, the iCAUR V27 combines heritage, luxury and advanced automotive engineering designed specifically for the region’s diverse landscape.

1,000KM+ OF FREEDOM: THE POWER OF REEV

The iCAUR V27 is powered by cutting-edge Range Extended Electric Vehicle (REEV) technology. Unlike traditional hybrids, the V27 utilises its high-efficiency internal combustion engine solely



The iCAUR V27 combines heritage, luxury and advanced automotive engineering designed specifically for the region’s diverse landscape.

as an onboard generator to charge the electric motors, delivering a massive total range exceeding 1,000 kilometres.

For Omani adventurers and nature lovers, this translates to

complete peace of mind.

Whether you are driving deep into the Rimal Al Sharqiya for a midnight campfire or setting off from Muscat towards the serene coastal roads of Dhofar, you can embark on long, uninterrupted journeys without worrying about EV charging stations or frequent fuel stops.

POWER YOUR WINTER OUTDOOR GATHERINGS WITH V2L TECHNOLOGY

As the cooler winter season approaches in Oman, outdoor living becomes the heart of family life. Whether taking the family for a weekend picnic at Al Riyam Park, setting up a luxury desert camp in Rimal Al Sharqiya, or enjoying an overnight beach trip along the coast of Sur, the iCAUR V27 acts as

your mobile power hub through its advanced Vehicle-to-Load (V2L) technology. With V2L functionality, the V27 transforms into a heavy-duty portable power bank:

- Outdoor Cooking: Plug in electric grills, coffee makers, Karak heaters, or portable induction stoves for effortless alfresco family feasts.
- Campsite Illumination & Comfort: Power ambient lights, portable fans, electric coolers and entertainment devices under the starlit Omani night.
- Convenient Device Charging: Keep laptops, cameras and gear charged for every family member, wherever your journey takes you. From daytime family BBQs to overnight desert stays, V2L elevates outdoor recreation into a seamless, high-comfort experience.

SHORTTAKES

SOLD-OUT PROJECT SIGNALS PREMIUM OFFICE DEMAND

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

The rapid sell-out of a new 39,000-square-metre business park in Muscat signals demand for premium office space that combines workplace facilities with hospitality, leisure and employee wellbeing, according to its developer.

All eight buildings at Al Mouj Business Park have been sold, with the first company expected to move in during October and the remaining buildings due for handover before the end of 2026.



SALMA AL HASHMI
Vice-President of Marketing at Al Mouj Muscat

The project enters Muscat’s office market as employers reassess the role of physical workplaces amid changing employee expectations. Rather than competing solely on office capacity, the development is positioning its location, outdoor areas and surrounding amenities as tools for attracting businesses and employees.

“I would say that it is not just additional office capacity, but additional office capacity with clear wellbeing in mind”, Salma al Hashmi, Vice-President of Marketing at Al Mouj Muscat, said.

“We spend literally half of our lives in the office, so how can that time also be lived in a way where the health aspect is taken into consideration?”. The business park comprises eight mid-rise buildings divided between western and eastern sections. Four buildings are being handed over to their owners, while the other four are approaching completion.

Each building provides between approximately 4,000 and 5,300 square metres of gross floor area. The development also includes rooftop gardens, landscaped pedestrian areas and between 115 and 148 basement parking spaces per building.

Al Hashmi said the speed at which the buildings were sold provided evidence of demand for a commercial development offering more than conventional office space.

“We developed eight buildings and they are all sold”, she said. “They were sold in a very short period, and we believe that is due to the uniqueness of the Business Park’s location”.

The park forms part of Al Mouj Muscat, an integrated community with more than 10,000 residents representing over 90 nationalities.

OIA tenders offer ~~2.55~~ billion opportunities

OMAN

Investment Authority (OIA) and its subsidiaries have announced 2,295 forthcoming tenders worth about RO 2.55 billion through the Furas platform, opening new opportunities for private companies and small and medium enterprises.

The figures were disclosed at the seventh Oman Local Content Forum, held under the theme “Beyond Impact: Local Content Drives Growth and Empowers Future Talent”. The event brought together government officials, decision-makers and industry specialists.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Namir bin Salim al Said.

Al Mutasim bin Said al Sariri, Director-General of Local Content at OIA, said the tender pipeline, announced as of September 2026, would allow private companies and SMEs to prepare for upcoming contracts.

OIA is entering a new phase focused on improving the digital readiness of the local-content ecosystem, expanding the use of data in decision-making, supporting innovation and startups and localising industries, he said.

The authority and its



The figures were disclosed at the seventh Oman Local Content Forum, held under the theme “Beyond Impact: Local Content Drives Growth and Empowers Future Talent”.

subsidiaries currently operate more than six specialised accelerators and incubators serving entrepreneurs and startups across different economic sectors.

Al Sariri said spending on SMEs by OIA companies increased to RO 279 million in 2025 from RO 187 million in 2022.

SMEs’ share of total supply-chain spending rose to about 19.9 per cent from 10.9 per cent over the period.

Omanisation across the targeted businesses reached 56 per cent within six months of implementing a local-content

guidance manual in early 2026, he said.

A total of 1,768 jobs were created, of which 1,408 were filled by Omanis. Hatim bin Hamad al Taie, Secretary-General and Head of the Forum’s Supreme Committee, said local content was central to Oman’s drive to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on oil revenue.

He said strengthening domestic supply chains would support growth in non-oil sectors, particularly manufacturing, logistics and fisheries, while increasing the

value retained from expenditure within the national economy. Developing local content required coordinated efforts by the government, businesses and consumers, he added.

The government’s role was to develop policies and incentives, while the private sector was responsible for producing competitive goods and services and consumers for supporting national products.

The forum included two sessions examining public-private integration, partnerships, the future of local content and the development of future talent. — ONA

OMAN OIL PRICE REACHES \$110.19 PER BARREL

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman crude for November delivery fell three cents on Wednesday to \$110.19 per barrel, from \$110.22 in the previous session, the Dubai Mercantile Exchange said. The monthly average price of Oman crude for September delivery stood at \$76.36 per barrel, down \$2.73 from the August delivery average of \$79.09.

International oil prices traded near their lowest levels in more than two weeks as improving crude supplies from the Gulf put pressure on the market, although record diesel refining margins helped support Brent futures.

Brent crude rose 37 cents, or 0.37 per cent, to \$99.62 a barrel by 09:58 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude fell 44 cents, or 0.49 per cent,

to \$90.08. Brent touched \$97.36 in the previous session, its lowest level since September 8, while WTI fell to its weakest since September 1 during Wednesday’s trading. Oil prices have faced downward pressure this week from rising Gulf supplies and expectations of diplomatic efforts to halt hostilities in the Middle East. — Agencies

Oman to host Gulf’s first World Wind Energy Conference in 2027

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

Oman will host the 23rd World Wind Energy Conference (WWEC2027) in December 2027, marking the first time the global wind industry gathering will be staged in the Gulf region as the Sultanate of Oman accelerates investment in utility-scale wind power.

The World Wind Energy Association (WWEA) announced Oman as the host following a decision by its board, with the event to be jointly organised by Nama Power and Water Procurement (Nama PWP) and WWEA, with the support of Oman’s Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

The announcement was made at WindEnergy Hamburg 2026, where Omani officials and WWEA representatives highlighted the Sultanate of Oman’s growing potential as a regional hub for wind and other renewable-energy development.

Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-



Top officials representing Omani institutions and WWEA at the agreement signing in Hamburg.

Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, said hosting the conference would provide Oman with a global platform to showcase its renewable-energy opportunities, strengthen international partnerships and attract strategic investment in support of Oman Vision 2040 and the country’s net-zero 2050 ambitions.

Ahmed bin Salim al Abri, CEO of Nama PWP, highlighted the potential of Dhofar and Al Wusta Governorates to emerge as major centres for utility-scale wind generation, creating opportunities for international developers, technology providers and investors.

The hosting agreement was signed by Al Abri and Stefan Gsänger, Secretary General of WWEA.

WWEA President Dr Irfan Mirza said bringing the conference to Oman would connect the Sultanate of Oman’s renewable-energy ambitions with international experience, technology, investment and cooperation, helping accelerate the development of wind projects.

Gsänger said the decision was aligned with WWEA’s focus on supporting “emerging and fast-growing markets”, while pointing to the significant renewable-energy potential of Oman and the wider Middle East.

The conference will arrive at an important

juncture in Oman’s wind-power development programme. Nama PWP is overseeing a growing portfolio of projects designed to diversify the country’s electricity mix and reduce dependence on natural gas-fired generation.

Among them is the 125 MW Dhofar II Wind IPP, being developed by Sembcorp Utilities and OQ Alternative Energy and targeted for commercial operation in the third quarter of 2027.

The 120 MW Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Wind IPP, developed by EDF power solutions, Al Khadra Partners and OQ Alternative Energy, is also scheduled to begin operations during 2027.

Further wind developments are planned across Al Duqm, Mahout, Sadah and other locations, reinforcing Al Wusta and Dhofar as important centres of Oman’s emerging wind-energy industry.

Founded in 2001, WWEA represents more than 600 members across around 100 countries.

ENERGY SECURITY

Korea targets lower Middle East oil reliance



South Korea plans to cut its reliance on Middle East crude imports to 50 per cent by 2035 under a new energy security strategy, according to a report on Wednesday.

The oil-dependent country sourced 70 per cent of its oil from the region in 2025. Seoul also aims to diversify condensate supplies and address naphtha shortages affecting its petrochemical industry. — ONA

CURRENCY MARKETS

Dollar holds near two-month high



The US dollar held near a two-month high as markets anticipated further monetary tightening by major central banks.

The dollar index stood at 100.56, while the euro traded near its lowest. Investors are monitoring inflation, interest rates and easing oil prices, with diplomatic efforts surrounding the Middle East conflict also influencing currency market sentiment. — Reuters

GOLD MARKET

Gold steady as high rates weigh



Gold prices remained steady as investors assessed prospects of interest rates staying elevated for longer to contain persistent inflation. Spot gold traded at \$4,356.92 per ounce, while US futures gained 0.4 per cent.

The US Federal Reserve recently raised rates by 25 basis points, while the Bank of Japan and European Central Bank have also tightened monetary policy. — Reuters

OPINION

What is holding back small enterprises in the private sector?



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

DESPITE the attention given by the relevant authorities to self-employment and initiatives aimed at supporting small enterprises, many of these businesses are now experiencing a decline in their activities and operations. Some have even been forced to suspend their commercial activities as a result of policies and decisions that have made it increasingly difficult for them to remain viable and continue operating.

Although the policy of Omanisation is intended to create employment opportunities for Omanis across various institutions and businesses, its implementation has placed a considerable burden on many small enterprises. Some business owners have been unable to bear the associated costs, leading to the closure of a number of businesses in recent years. As a result, some former business owners have joined the ranks of jobseekers while also carrying accumulated debts owed to financing institutions and banks operating in the country.

Many traders today believe that the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are facing growing burdens from fees, taxes and other financial obligations. In some cases, these obligations arise from relatively minor issues in certain transactions that could potentially be resolved through dialogue and mutual agreement.

Nevertheless, they have added significantly to the annual operating costs of these businesses, making it increasingly difficult for their owners to cope with the challenges and, ultimately, forcing some to

abandon their commercial activities. There is therefore a need to help these business owners regularise their circumstances by removing unnecessary obstacles and challenges, while strengthening the partnership between the government and the private sector.

This would enable them to continue their daily operations and, more importantly, provide them with genuine incentives and benefits that would support their survival and expansion. Such measures could eventually allow these businesses to increase their workforce and create additional employment opportunities.

Many of these business owners also have personal bank loans in addition to other financial commitments. They therefore need government support if they are expected to continue employing Omani workers, particularly when the income generated by their businesses is insufficient to cover the cost of an Omani employee.

In accordance with Omani regulations that provide for the allocation of 10% of tender projects to SMEs, the government should therefore take the financial circumstances of these enterprises into consideration and ensure that their payments and outstanding dues are settled promptly. This would enable them, in turn, to meet their financial obligations to employees and to the institutions and companies with which they do business.

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry also has an important role to play in protecting the interests of these business owners by communicating with government

Although the policy of Omanisation is intended to create employment opportunities for Omanis across various institutions and businesses, its implementation has placed a considerable burden on many small enterprises. Some business owners have been unable to bear the associated costs, leading to the closure of a number of businesses in recent years.

institutions and calling for a reduction in the fees, taxes and other financial obligations imposed on them. It should also seek practical solutions to the challenges associated with Omanisation, particularly where a newly established small business may initially be unable to employ an Omani worker because of limited income.

Such enterprises could be given a reasonable period to improve their financial position and expand their commercial activities before being required to meet the full employment obligations. Similar approaches are applied in a number of countries both within the region and elsewhere. Where a business owner operates several enterprises, any violation in one business should not automatically result in restrictions on all of the others.

And any penalty should therefore be proportionate to the nature, scale and scope of the violation, without creating unnecessary risks for small Omani investors. Measures of this nature can have wider economic consequences for commercial activity if they unintentionally undermine business continuity and investor confidence.

At the same time, government procedures should be streamlined, bureaucracy reduced and the issuance of licenses and approvals accelerated for these enterprises. Supporting small businesses is not simply a matter of protecting individual entrepreneurs. It is also an essential component of strengthening the private sector, promoting economic diversification, creating employment opportunities and achieving the broader objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

TRUMP’S DIESEL EXPORT DILEMMA: GOOD POLITICS, BAD ECONOMICS

RON BOUSSO

Soaring fuel costs are increasing pressure on US President Donald Trump to curb diesel exports ahead of November’s midterm elections. But what may seem like an easy fix could unleash a chain reaction that ultimately leaves American consumers and the global economy worse off.

Surging energy prices since the start of the Iran war in late February are setting off alarm bells in the White House. While politically sensitive gasoline prices remain elevated at nearly \$4.50 a gallon, attention in recent weeks has shifted to diesel, which has climbed to a record \$6.50 a gallon, squeezing trucking, farming, manufacturing and other sectors that rely on the fuel to keep goods moving.

Trump on Tuesday said he backed the idea of a ban on diesel exports, which some Republican lawmakers, particularly those representing agricultural states, have called for. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the administration was examining whether a full or partial ban would work. Some senior administration officials, including Energy Secretary Chris Wright and Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, have in recent weeks nevertheless expressed doubts about whether such a move would work.

Yet with fuel costs becoming a growing political liability and midterm elections fast approaching, the temptation to seek a politically popular “quick fix” may prove difficult to resist — especially as the president’s poll numbers sink to new lows.

authority to restrict exports temporarily under emergency powers. He would certainly not be the first president to intervene — or contemplate intervening — in energy markets.

The US prohibited crude oil exports for four decades following the 1973 oil crisis, while former President Joe Biden’s administration considered restricting diesel exports in 2022 after Russia’s war in Ukraine sent fuel markets into turmoil.

The trouble is that a diesel export ban would likely aggravate the very problem it is designed to solve. The current fuel crunch is almost entirely conflict-driven. The Middle East and Russia used to account collectively for roughly a fifth of global seaborne exports of diesel.

But the Iran war and the resulting disruption to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz have removed a sizeable portion of global refining capacity and diesel supplies.

This squeeze intensified in July when Russia, traditionally one of the world’s largest diesel exporters, halted shipments following months of Ukrainian drone attacks that crippled large parts of its refining sector. — Reuters

Defence giants spend record £3 bn on start-ups

INVESTMENT in defence tech start-ups has reached a record high this year as the world’s biggest arms companies step up spending on new military technologies. New figures from Dealroom show defence contractors including BAE Systems, Lockheed Martin and Airbus have participated in \$4.1 billion (£3 billion) of venture capital funding rounds so far this year, the highest figure on record.

Meanwhile, separate research from law firm White & Case found 42 defence mergers and acquisitions were completed globally in the first half of 2026, up 56 per cent from the same period last year.

Daniel Turgel, co-head of White & Case’s Global Technology Industry Group, said the sector was seeing strong demand for companies developing AI, cyber security and autonomous system.

“With AI, autonomous systems, space-based sensing and cybersecurity redefining how conflicts are fought and won, the race to acquire and invest in defence technology is intensifying”, he said.

Turgel added that higher defence budgets and record levels of private capital meant investment and dealmaking were likely to remain strong beyond 2026. The figures came after several investments by defence manufacturers in recent weeks.

Lockheed Martin recently pledged at least \$100 million for UK and European defence technology start-ups and expanded its venture investment fund from \$400 million to \$1 billion.

BAE Systems has committed 50 million euros to two European venture funds focused on defence, while Airbus has become the anchor investor in a new fund backing defence technology.

German drone maker Quantum Systems raised \$1.2 billion earlier in July at a valuation of about \$8 billion, while UK maritime defence



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

New figures from Dealroom show defence contractors including BAE systems, Lockheed Martin and Airbus have participated in \$ 4.1 billion (£3 billion) of venture capital funding rounds so far this year, the highest figure on record.



A Quantum-Systems Falke/Vector drone is displayed at the International Aerospace Exhibition ILA on the opening day at Schoenefeld Airport in Berlin, Germany. — Reuters

business Kraken Technology secured \$175 million at a \$1 billion valuation with backing from Rheinmetall. Andy Burnham has indicated defence will remain a spending priority for the government after he appointed former defence secretary John Healey as chancellor in July.

In his first speech as prime minister, Burnham recommended the UK to hike defence spending from 2.6 per cent of GDP to the Nato target of 3.5 per cent by 2035.

Bankers are scouring the UK for potential deals to capitalise on the predicted rise in government investment and a surge in demand from investors.

It was revealed recently that Leicestershire based aerospace drilling company Tek4 had appointed bankers at Panmure Liberum to handle an IPO later this year, in a boom to the London Stock Exchange as it hopes to tempt more defence firms to market.

Elsewhere — Wealthy Brits are bracing for a shake-up of the tax system, as the prime minister looks for ways to fund fresh spending commitments. Prior to taking office, Andy Burnham had already hinted at plans over how the country should be taxed. While changes

could assist lower rate taxpayers, wealthier Brits could be expected to shoulder a greater tax bill, which could trigger a further wealth exodus.

The number of millionaires in Britain has sunk to its lowest level since the 2008 financial crisis as rich residents flee the country due to high levels of tax and the removal of non-dom status, a fresh study has claimed.

Some 442,000 millionaires were listed as residents in Britain in 2025, a seven per cent drop on the previous year, a report from the Adam Smith Institute (ASI) found.

Record levels of taxation, a mooted wealth tax and the removal of non-dom status in 2025, have all contributed to the flight of rich Britons in the past two years, the free market think tank said.

The report also found the fall in millionaires is being driven by falling real estate prices, a low household savings rate and the emigration of high net-worth individuals.

Responding to the report, shadow business secretary Andrew Griffith said: “Everyone should care about Britain having fewer millionaires to contribute to the tax pot and creating jobs and businesses here.

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Oman players celebrate the equalising goal by Nasser al Rawahi.
— PICS BY ABDULWAHID AL HAMADANI



OMAN FIGHT BACK TO HOLD IRAQ IN OPENER



WALEED AL JAHWARI
JEDDAH, SEPT 23

OMAN FOUGHT back from a goal down to draw 1-1 with Iraq in their Gulf Cup 27 Group A opener at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City on Wednesday. Nasser al Rawahi, Man of the Match, scored a stunning equaliser in the 67th minute to earn a point in the first match of Group A. The tournament is being held in Jeddah from September 23 to October 6. Iraq started strongly, with Mohamed Qasim opening the scoring in the sixth minute with a left-footed strike from inside the penalty area after a defensive lapse by Oman. Ahmed Yahya had tested the Oman defence in the first minute, but his effort was comfortably saved by Oman goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini. The chance came after sustained pressure from Iraq. Iraq continued to dominate possession and created three consecutive attacks in the 22nd, 24th and 25th minutes, but all three were cleared by the Omani defence. Oman midfielder Amjad al Harthi tried to create chances with two crosses from the right flank in the 26th and 33rd minutes, but neither posed any real threat. In the 38th minute, Iraq threatened through Hassan Abdul Karim, but the Oman goalkeeper made a good save to deny his effort. Oman left-back Nasser al Rawahi made two of the team's most dangerous attempts,

driving into the penalty area in the 40th and 45+4th minutes. Towards the end of the first half, Oman tried to regain control and keep possession, but Iraq held on to their lead to go into the break ahead. **HIGH INTENSITY** Oman started the second half with high intensity, with Issam al Sabhi winning a free-kick in the 51st minute, but the Red Warriors failed to capitalise on it. Both coaches made several changes, most notably Oman bringing off striker Issam al Sabhi. In the 64th and 65th minutes, Oman goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini made two crucial saves to keep his team in the game. Oman left-back Nasser al Rawahi produced a stunning strike in the 67th minute to find the back of the net and bring the Red Warriors level. Al Mukhaini continued to shine, making several important saves to keep Iraq at bay. In the 79th minute, Iraq striker Aymen Hussein missed a close-range header from a cross, with the ball narrowly passing wide of the goalkeeper's left post. In the 90+2nd minute, Oman launched another attack, but the Iraqi defence cleared the danger. Excitement intensified in stoppage time, but neither side could find a winning goal as the match ended in a 1-1 draw. The match was officiated by a UAE refereeing team led by international referee Omar al Ali, with Mohammed al Hammadi and Jassim Abdullah as assistant referees. Bahrain's Ammar Mahfouz served as the fourth official, while UAE's Mohammed Obaid was the VAR in-charge, assisted by Qatar's Meshaari al Shammari. **OPENING CEREMONY** The Gulf Cup 27 kicked off with a spectacular 15-minute opening ceremony featuring cultural and entertainment performances celebrating Gulf

identity and Saudi National Day. The ceremony featured cultural performances and fireworks, officially marking the start of Gulf Cup 27. The second Group A match was played late on Wednesday night, with hosts Saudi Arabia taking on Kuwait at King Abdullah Sports City, which has a capacity of around 62,000 spectators. The match was officiated by Portuguese referee Joao Pinheiro, assisted by Pedro Ribeiro and Luciano Maia. Qatar's Mohammed bin Ahmed al Shammari served as the fourth official. China's Fu Ming was the VAR, assisted by Morocco's Hamza al Fariq. The Group B campaign will get underway on Thursday with two matches. The UAE will face Yemen at King Abdullah Sports City, before Qatar take on defending champions Bahrain at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City.



Omani fans at the stands before the match.



Oman head coach Tarik Sektioui during the match.

FIFTH EDITION



The memorandum of cooperation was signed by Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of the OBA, and Haitham bin Abdullah al Yaqoubi, General Manager of Insurance and Claims at Credit Oman.

CREDIT OMAN RENEWS BASKETBALL PARTNERSHIP FOR FIFTH YEAR

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

The Credit Oman Cup for men and women will return for its fifth edition after the Oman Basketball Association (OBA) and Credit Oman renewed their partnership to support the elite basketball competition.

The memorandum of cooperation was signed by Eng Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, Chairman of the OBA, and Haitham bin Abdullah al Yaqoubi, General Manager of Insurance and Claims at Credit Oman, extending a partnership that has supported four previous editions.

Speaking after the signing, Al Naabi said the agreement would help sustain the competition and support the association's efforts to expand participation in basketball. He described the partnership as a successful example of the private sector's contribution to the sport.

"Renewing this partnership for a fifth consecutive year supports the association's plans to promote basketball and ensure the continued staging of the Super Cup," he said.

Al Naabi thanked Credit Oman's board for its continued backing and called on other private sector organisations to sponsor the association's competitions, including the national league, junior and youth leagues, and women's events.

He said broader support would help develop talented players and strengthen the skills of those working in basketball, benefiting clubs and national teams across different age groups. These efforts, he added, would improve the ability of Omani teams to compete internationally.

Al Naabi also highlighted the tournament's role in preparing players for the domestic season, with both the men's and women's competitions offering valuable match practice.

"The Credit Oman Cup for men and women is an important competition that helps players prepare for the national league and the association's other tournaments," he said.

For his part, Al Yaqoubi said the company's support formed part of its social responsibility programme and reflected its commitment to contributing to the development of sport, particularly basketball.

"This agreement with the Oman Basketball Association will contribute to sporting activity and promote sportsmanship among young people," he said.

Al Yaqoubi explained that supporting sport was part of a wider strategic approach to empowering Omani youth. He said Credit Oman sought to contribute to community development by encouraging sporting participation and providing a supportive environment for emerging talent.



Oman was represented by five young sailors – Khalid bin Yahya al Suraihi, Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Balushi, Mohammed bin Zeyad al Qasmi, Al Khalil bin Ibrahim al Fouri and Elyas bin Maher al Khodhour – who produced a series of impressive performances throughout the event.

Oman Optimist team shines at Arab sailing in Jeddah

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

THE Oman Sail Optimist team returned from the 2026 Arab Sailing Championship in Jeddah with a strong set of results, winning two medals and a trophy while recording several top finishes across the team and individual competitions.

Held from September 17 to 21 at the Jeddah Sailing Centre on the Red Sea coast, the championship brought together young sailing talents from 11 countries for a highly competitive regional regatta.

Oman was represented by five young sailors – Khalid bin Yahya al Suraihi, Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Balushi, Mohammed bin Zeyad al Qasmi, Al Khalil bin Ibrahim al Fouri and Elyas bin Maher al Khodhour – who produced a series of impressive performances throughout the event.

The Omani team secured second place in the Optimist Team Racing competition, highlighting the sailors' ability to work together under pressure while demonstrating speed, tactical awareness and strong decision-making.

In the individual fleet races, Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Balushi claimed third place and



the bronze medal in the Optimist Under-12 category. Oman also recorded two top-10 finishes in the highly competitive Under-15 fleet, with Khalid bin Yahya al Suraihi taking eighth place and Mohammed bin Zeyad al Qasmi finishing 10th.

The team's achievements extended beyond the results on the water. Elyas bin Maher al Khodhour was presented with the Best Sportsmanship Award in recognition of his respect for fellow competitors, teamwork, willingness to assist others and commitment to fair play.

Oman also had a presence in the technical management of the championship, with Oman Sail official Nawaf al Ghadani appointed as a Race Officer for the Optimist Team Racing competition. His appointment added to the growing involvement of Omani technical personnel in the organisation and management of regional sailing events.

TOP PERFORMANCE

Sultan bin Abdulaziz al Zadjali, Assistant Youth Head Coach, praised the young sailors for their performance in Jeddah.

"I am extremely proud of the determination and skill our young sailors demonstrated in Jeddah. Securing second place in the Team Race, along with a podium finish and two top-10 results in the individual categories against some of the region's finest young sailors, is a reflection of their hard work and preparation. This experience will be an important building block as they continue to develop and compete at a higher level on the international stage," he said.

Bronze medallist Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Balushi said representing Oman on the podium was a memorable experience.

"Representing Oman and standing on the podium at the Arab Sailing Championship is an unforgettable feeling. The racing

was intense, but our training paid off. I would like to thank our coaches and teammates for all their support, and I am looking forward to building on this success in our upcoming regattas," he said.

Organised by the Saudi Sailing Federation under the authority of the Arab Sailing Federation, the championship provided an important regional platform for competition, technical exchange and the development of young sailing talent.

Following their successful campaign in Saudi Arabia, the Oman Sail Optimist team will return home to prepare for the 15th edition of Musannah Race Week, scheduled for October 15 to 22. The event will provide another opportunity for the young Omani sailors to test themselves against strong international competition.

Oman Sail continues to place youth development at the heart of its programmes, using sailing to promote sporting performance while also providing young Omanis with opportunities to develop leadership, teamwork and lifelong learning skills. Through these programmes, Oman Sail is helping prepare a new generation of sailors to represent Oman at regional and international events in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Oman basketball season tips off in October with five competitions

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

Oman's 2026–27 basketball season will tip off in mid-October, with five competitions for men, women and youth teams forming a domestic calendar that runs through March 2027. Approved by the Oman Basketball Association's (OBA) Competitions Committee, the programme brings together the national league, two cup competitions and championships at Under-16 and Under-19 levels, providing clubs with competitive opportunities across different age groups.

The Under-16 Championship will open the season in mid-October and

continue until the end of December. Ten clubs will compete: Nizwa, Seeb, Saham, Oman Club, Qurayat, Al Amerat, Salalah, Al Bashayer, Fanja and Masirah.

With the largest field among the scheduled competitions, the tournament will give younger players regular match experience while allowing clubs to assess and develop their emerging talent.

The Oman Basketball League will begin in late October and run until January 2027. Al Bashayer, Seeb, Nizwa, Salalah and Masirah will contest the title, with the same five clubs also scheduled to take part in the Federation Cup later in the season.

October will also feature the Credit



Oman's 2026–27 basketball season will tip off in mid-October, with five competitions for men, women and youth teams.

Oman Cup for men and women, with competitions scheduled for October 25 and 27. Al Bashayer and Seeb are listed as the participating clubs in the association's calendar.

FEDERATION CUP

The Federation Cup, formerly known as the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth Shield, will take place during January and February 2027, giving the senior clubs another opportunity to compete for silverware.

Youth basketball will remain prominent in the second half of the season, with the Under-19 Championship beginning in January and continuing through March. Eight clubs have been included in the

competition: Seeb, Nizwa, Salalah, Al Amerat, Oman Club, Masirah, Al Bashayer and Qurayat.

Matches will be staged at several venues, including the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, Sohar Sports Complex and Seeb Club's sports hall, alongside halls belonging to other participating clubs.

The calendar spreads competitions across the season to support regular domestic activity and allow clubs to plan their preparations for each tournament. The two youth championships will also provide opportunities to identify and develop players capable of progressing to senior club sides and the national teams.

SPORTS

12CLUBS



The Oman Youth Handball League for the 2026-27 season will get underway on Friday, with 12 clubs.

Oman Youth Handball League to begin with six matches

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

The Oman Youth Handball League for the 2026-27 season will get underway on Friday, with 12 clubs competing in the tournament for players born in 2010, 2011 and 2012.

The league is the first competition on the Oman Handball Association’s programme for the new season, which features eight tournaments targeting different age groups. The competitions are aimed at strengthening the grassroots structure of handball in Omani clubs, developing young talent and providing a pathway for promising players to progress to the national teams for upcoming international commitments.

The 12 participating clubs have been divided into two groups of six. Group One comprises Nizwa, Muscat, Ibri, Al Ittihad, Al Amerat and Masirah, while Group Two features Seeb, Oman Club, Majees, Saham, Al Rustaq and Al Khabourah.

Six matches will be played on Friday in the opening round. In Group One, Al Ittihad will face Nizwa at 3 pm at Oman Club’s indoor hall, followed by the meeting between Muscat and Ibri at 5pm at the same venue. The third Group One fixture will see Al Amerat take on Masirah at 4pm at the indoor hall of Sur Sports Complex.

Group Two will also feature three matches. At Khabourah Club’s indoor hall, Saham will meet Seeb at 3 pm, followed by the match between Al Khabourah and Majees at 5 pm. Al Rustaq will then face Oman Club at 7 pm at Oman Club’s indoor hall.

The competition will continue on Saturday with six matches in the second round. In Group One, Al Ittihad will play Ibri at 3 pm at Al Amal Club’s indoor hall, while Nizwa will meet Al Amerat at 5pm at the same venue. Muscat will face Masirah at 4 pm at the indoor hall of Sur Sports Complex.

In Group Two, Al Khabourah Club’s indoor hall will host the matches between Saham and Majees at 3 pm and Al Khabourah and Al Rustaq at 5 pm. Seeb will meet Oman Club at 4 pm at the indoor hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Each group will be played on a single round-robin basis, with points accumulated throughout the group stage. The top two teams from each group will advance to the second round.

In the second round, the winners of the two groups will be paired against the runners-up from the opposite group over two matches. The first-placed team in Group One will face the second-placed team in Group Two, while the winner of Group Two will meet the runner-up from Group One. If the teams are level on points and goal difference after the two matches, the winner will be decided directly by penalty shoot-out, without extra time.



Eight local drivers have registered for the three-round championship with rally cars and Can-Ams in action.

OAA to kick-start season with Oman Rally Round 1

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THE FIRST round of Oman National Rally Championship 2026, Rally Al Jafnayn, will begin the season’s action for Oman Automobile Association (OAA) on Friday.

The opening round, the Jafnayn Rally, will take competitors through the challenging gravel stages of Jafnayn and Misfah, with the service area based at Al Maha Station.

Eight local drivers have registered for the three-round championship with rally cars and Can-Ams in action across Oman’s diverse landscapes and terrain. The event is sponsored by GWM Oman.

“The National Rally Championship represents an important initiative in our commitment to developing and supporting Omani talent in the field of rallying. Beyond the sporting competition itself, the event provides a valuable platform for emerging Omani drivers and teams to gain experience, develop their skills, and take important steps towards competing at higher levels,” OAA Managing Director Sulaiman al Rawahi told Oman Observer.

“Taking place on September 25, this rally reflects our continued efforts to create meaningful opportunities for local talent and strengthen the foundations of motorsport development in Oman,” Al Rawahi said.

The Oman Rally Championship



SULAIMAN
AL RAWAHI
OAA Managing
Director



WADHAH
AL HARTHI
Events Manager

THE SECOND
ROUND OF THE
NATIONAL
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SCHEDULED
FOR OCTOBER
23 WHILE THE
THIRD AND
FINAL ROUND
IS SET FOR
NOVEMBER 27.

will feature rounds across different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, which provide a wide variety of routes well suited to rally competition. This diversity gives each round its own unique character and presents drivers with new challenges. The second round is scheduled for October 23 while the third and final round is set for November 27. Competitors will tackle more than 100 km of competitive stages and road sections in the opening round across the different car categories.

Ladies can also compete for the same overall and category titles, with an additional dedicated award: the Ladies Cup.

TRAINING PLATFORM

The championship forms part of the OAA’s ongoing efforts to develop rallying in the Sultanate of Oman by providing an organised and competitive environment.

It also aims to encourage young talents to enter the world of rallying and build a new generation of drivers capable of representing Oman in regional and international championships.

Events Manager Wadiah al Harthi said: “The local rally has been designed as an important competitive and training platform for Omani rallying talents, providing drivers and teams with the opportunity to gain valuable experience in a professional rally environment. Our focus is on delivering a well-organised and challenging competition that

supports the development of local competitors, encourages new talent to enter the sport, and contributes to building a stronger future for rallying in Oman.”

Rally Al Jafnayn is expected to deliver strong competition across its rally stages, marking a new start that reflects the growing presence of motorsport in Oman and the continued focus on developing the local base of rally drivers.

OMAN RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP
2026 ROUND 1 ENTRY LIST
(Read as team, driver/co-driver, car, category; Omanis otherwise specified)

- 1. Al Touqi Team, Salim al Touqi/Issa bin Mohammed al Wardi, Mitsubishi Evo 7, Rally 2
- 2. X3 Overlanders, Fahad bin Abdulrahim al Balushi/Jaber bin Khalfan al Siyabi, Can-Am X3, T4
- 3. 83 Racing, Musab bin Khalid al Zadjali/Sultan bin Nasser al Battashi, Mitsubishi Evo 7, Rally 2
- 4. Al Qasmi Rally Team, Bashar bin Hamid al Qasmi/Bassam bin Hamid al Qasmi, Toyota Yaris, Rally 4
- 5. Ghaith al Qasmi, Ghaith bin Hamid al Qasmi/TBA, Mitsubishi Evo 8, Rally 2
- 6. Zakariya al Aamri, Zakariya al Aamri/Taha al Zadjali, Can-Am X3 T4
- 7. Al Rashdi, Faisal al Rashdi/Yaqdhan al Rashdi, Subaru Impreza STI, Rally 2
- 8. Mohammed al Mazroui, Mohammed al Mazroui/Bashar al Qasmi, Can-Am X3, T4

Oman skate ball international tournament opens in Ibri

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 23

The Oman Skate Ball Tournament 2026 got under way at the Ibri Sports Club Indoor Hall on Wednesday under the auspices of Tahir bin Mabkhout al Junaibi, Governor of Al Dhahirah.

The ceremony was attended by Dr Ahmed Hassan Taelib, President of the World Skate Ball Federation; Eng Faisal bin Mubarak al Dosari, Vice-President of the federation; Eng Saud bin Nasser al Aufi, Chairman of the Oman Skating Sports Committee; and several officials and guests.

The opening began with the Royal Anthem, followed by a welcoming performance presented by students of Talae Al Ilm School.

A junior exhibition match featuring promising players from Al Dhahirah highlighted the growing interest in skate ball among younger age groups.

Oman made a commanding start to the tournament, defeating Iraq 9-0 in the opening match amid a strong turnout, particularly from students representing schools across Al Dhahirah.

During the half-time interval, Al Aufi presented a commemorative gift to the Governor in appreciation of his patronage and support. Dr Taelib also presented a gift on behalf of the World Skate Ball Federation.

The opening followed a press conference and technical meeting held in Ibri on September 22, attended by federation officials, participating delegations, coaches,



Oman made a commanding start to the tournament, defeating Iraq 9-0 in the opening match.

captains and media representatives.

The conference reviewed the competition format, technical regulations and organisational preparations. Abdulrahman Hassan, Vice-Chairman of the federation’s Technical Committee, delivered a briefing on the tournament’s technical arrangements and teams’ readiness.

The official draw was conducted in three stages. The first draw, led by Dr Taelib, featured Oman, the UAE, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The second, conducted by Al Dosari, featured India, Pakistan, Poland and Egypt.

Saudi Arabia coach Abdullah al Zahrani said his team was ready and excited to make its first appearance in skate ball. He described the tournament as an opportunity to

represent the Kingdom positively and lay the foundation for further international participation.

Saudi captain Saeed al Zahrani said representing the Kingdom was both an honour and a responsibility, stressing that the players were determined to give their best.

Iraq coach Dr Rasool al Fartousi said his team had focused on physical, technical and tactical preparations. He added that competing against Arab, Asian and European teams would provide valuable experience and support the development of the Iraqi squad.

Oman captain Marhoom al Shukaili confirmed the hosts’ readiness, saying the team would enter the competition with ambition and a strong sense of responsibility.