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Khareef Through a Different Lens

IN BRIEF

ICESCO DELEGATION
TO ADVANCE
CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, will host a delegation from the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) on Tuesday to implement the Civilisation Bridges programme. Running from August 25 to 28 in Dhofar Governorate, the initiative aims to explore the governorate’s rich civilisational, cultural, heritage, and developmental assets, while reinforcing institutional cooperation between the organisation and the Sultanate of Oman to foster civilisational dialogue, cultural diplomacy, and to consolidate partnerships between ICESCO, its Member States and their National Commissions.

The visit is grounded in the programme’s strategic vision of transforming cultural tours from mere field visits into dynamic platforms for civilisational dialogue and institutional engagement. **DETAILS ON P2**

TWO PALESTINIANS
SUCCUMB TO WOUNDS
AFTER AIR STRIKE



Displaced Palestinians gather to fetch water from a cistern at a shelter camp in Bureij, the central Gaza Strip, on Monday. — AFP

Two Palestinians succumbed to their wounds on Monday, while Israeli forces continued their artillery bombardment of areas east of the Gaza Strip. Medical sources reported that a Palestinian man died from wounds sustained in an Israeli air strike on Sunday that targeted a camp for displaced people west of Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip.

Another Palestinian man was martyred due to wounds sustained in an Israeli air strike that targeted an area in Gaza Port several days ago. Israeli artillery also shelled farmland south of the Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip.

SAYYID SHIHAB PRESIDES OVER RECITAL OF PROPHET’S BIOGRAPHY AT AL ALAM PALACE



On behalf of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, presided over a ceremony held on Monday at Al Mawlid Hall in Al Alam Palace for the recital of the Biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), on the occasion of the Prophet’s Birth Anniversary. The recital was attended by some Royal Family members, ministers, senior military commanders and heads of diplomatic missions of Islamic countries in Oman. — ONA

US VOWS TO CUT EVERY ‘ECONOMIC LIFELINE’ OF IRAN

Further penalties would trigger a tighter squeeze on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Monday laid out plans for the “economic asphyxiation” of Iran, expanding Washington’s secondary sanctions threats and warning of dire consequences for countries that decline to join the pressure campaign.

Bessent’s address comes almost six months into a war on Tehran that has ground to a stalemate, with stalled peace talks and Iran preventing most traffic through the crucial Strait of Hormuz.

“Around the globe, our objective is to sever every economic lifeline that sustains this tyrannical regime until Tehran stands alone,” Bessent told a press conference.

“We are going to hold everyone accountable, and this is economic asphyxiation of this regime.”

He added that countries not joining US sanctions would “share in the isolation” of Iran, and noted that Trump is making phone calls to top leaders with requests to stop their interactions with Tehran.

The Treasury Department said on Monday that it has “issued determinations against five critical sectors - digital assets, technology, gold, aviation, and shipping - that the Iranian regime uses to try to prop up its failing economy.”

Bessent, meanwhile, vowed that any entity “that facilitates money laundering on behalf of Iran will be removed from the US dollar system.”

Asked if Chinese banks dealing with Iran could be targeted, Bessent said: “no one is above the reach of US sanctions.”



People walk past shops at a market area in Tehran on Monday. Iran responded with defiance to a US threat of the ‘single greatest financial offensive ever’, saying it was an admission of military defeat. — AFP

“Around the globe, our objective is to sever every economic lifeline that sustains this tyrannical regime until Tehran stands alone.”

SCOTT BESENT
US Treasury Secretary

The Treasury chief earlier declared that an “economic D-Day” had begun against Tehran, in a column for the Financial Times.

The United States and Israel triggered the Middle East war with a massive wave of bombing against Iran on February 28, sparking Iranian retaliation across the region.

Trump’s war in Iran, which has pushed energy prices higher worldwide, is about to hit its six-month mark. While heavy fighting has subsided, diplomatic efforts to end the war have stalled and oil and

raw material shipping through the Strait of Hormuz remains blocked, keeping energy prices elevated.

The US has maintained sanctions against Iran for decades, most of which have been aimed at curtailing the country’s oil revenues, aviation sector, cryptocurrency, procurement of weapons components and other military hardware, and cutting off funding for business enterprises controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, a dominant force in the Iranian economy. — Agencies

Scenic flights to broaden Dhofar tourism beyond Khareef

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 24

Dhofar will add aerial sightseeing to its tourism offering in early September, with a four-day helicopter programme covering some of the governorate’s main coastal, mountain and heritage attractions as the Khareef season begins to give way to Al Sarb.

The programme, scheduled from September 3 to 6, will offer 15-minute and 30-minute flights over locations including Al Haffa, Salalah Port, Atin Plain, Ain Jarziz, Taqah,

Samharam and Wadi Darbat.

The initiative adds a different type of visitor experience at a point when Dhofar’s tourism activity traditionally begins to shift away from the peak Khareef period.

The 15-minute western route is planned to pass over Al Haffa Beach towards Salalah Port, Khor Waterfall, Atin Plain and Ain Jarziz. A longer 30-minute route extends eastwards to Taqah and the archaeological site of Samharam before passing Wadi Darbat, Ain Sahalnoot and Ain Jarziz.

Shared flights are priced at RO 42



The four-day helicopter programme will connect coastal, mountain and heritage sites as the governorate moves into Al Sarb season.

per passenger for the shorter route and RO 85 for the 30-minute journey. Private charters accommodating up to eight passengers are priced at RO 250 and RO 500 respectively.

The limited programme is being operated by Al Sharqiya Aviation in partnership with Al Baled Resort Salalah by Anantara, which will serve as the departure and arrival point. The announcement does not indicate whether the service will continue beyond the four-day period or develop into a permanent tourism product.

Its timing, however, gives the

initiative a wider tourism context. Early September marks the transition from Khareef towards Al Sarb, when much of the greenery remains while cloud and mist conditions begin to ease, potentially extending the period in which visitors can experience Dhofar’s seasonal landscape.

The flights will remain subject to weather, aviation regulations, operational clearance and passenger availability, according to the organisers. Routes and durations may also change depending on operating conditions.

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The initiative aims to explore the governorate's rich civilisational, cultural, heritage, and developmental assets.

ICESCO DELEGATION TO ADVANCE CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

SALALAH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, will host a delegation from the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) on Tuesday to implement the Civilisation Bridges programme.

Running from August 25 to 28 in Dhofar Governorate, the initiative aims to explore the governorate's rich civilisational, cultural, heritage, and developmental assets, while reinforcing institutional cooperation between the organisation and the Sultanate of Oman to foster civilisational dialogue, cultural diplomacy, and to consolidate partnerships between ICESCO, its Member States and their National Commissions.

The visit is grounded in the programme's strategic vision of transforming cultural tours from mere field visits into dynamic platforms for civilisational dialogue and institutional engagement.

This approach enables ICESCO leaders and experts to gain direct insight into the national experiences of Member States, familiarise themselves with their cultural distinctiveness, national institutions, and development initiatives, and identify emerging avenues for collaboration and partnership.

The visit agenda includes a series of site visits and meetings highlighting historical landmarks, heritage sites, and cultural institutions, alongside reviews of select development initiatives and projects. The delegation will also examine local best practices in the domains of culture, heritage, tourism, archaeological site preservation, and community participation in civilisational and developmental progress.

Furthermore, the visit will facilitate exchanges with officials and stakeholders active in heritage, tourism, culture, and development sectors, thereby promoting the sharing of expertise and experience, identifying new collaborative opportunities between ICESCO and Omani national institutions, and strengthening alignment between the organisation's programmes and the developmental and cultural priorities of its Member States.

The outcomes of the visit are expected to define new areas of cooperation, enhance the exchange of expertise and best practices, and support joint initiatives within ICESCO's areas of competence, thereby strengthening the organisation's field presence and consolidating its position as a leading platform for civilisational diplomacy and cultural development across the Islamic world. — ONA

ROP warns of strict penalties for reckless driving and drifting

YUSEF BIN SALEM AL HABSI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

The Directorate-General of Traffic at the Royal Oman Police (ROP) stresses that reckless driving, drifting and stunt driving constitute serious legal violations as they endanger the lives of motorists and other road users and disturb public order.

Brigadier Eng Ali bin Sulayem al Falahi, Director-General of Traffic at ROP, said that reckless driving and drifting are punishable under the Traffic Law by imprisonment, impounding of modified vehicles and fines.

He urged citizens and residents to report such incidents immediately by contacting the police operations centre or any police station, where reports are received and dealt with promptly.

Al Falahi added that roads are designated for safe travel and serving all users, not for stunts or showing off. He explained that, based on fieldwork and available statistics, the 17-30 age group is generally linked to these violations.

The Director-General of Traffic said that the Traffic Law deters the phenomenon of reckless driving.



Reckless driving and drifting are punishable under the Traffic Law by imprisonment, impounding of modified vehicles and fines.

BRIGADIER
ENG ALI BIN
SULAYEM
AL FALAHI



The law also imposes a prison sentence of not less than ten days and not more than two months, and a fine of not less than RO 100 and not more than RO 500.

Article (49) of the Traffic Law stipulates that anyone who performs reckless driving and drifting on the road or in undesignated areas shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding three months and a fine not exceeding RO 500, or by either of the two penalties.

The Traffic Law also prohibits car

or motorcycle races, displays for advertising or promotional purposes, processions, or any other activities that cause traffic congestion or disruption except with prior authorisation from the relevant authorities.

Anyone driving vehicles in groups that disturb public order without a permit is punishable by imprisonment

GRAND MUFTI URGES PROPHET'S TEACHINGS

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

HIS EMINENCE Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamed al Khalili, Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, has urged Muslims to use the commemoration of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) birthday as an opportunity for spiritual reflection, learning and gratitude, while avoiding extravagance and practices inconsistent with Islamic teachings.

Mawlid Al Nabi, observed on 12 Rabee Al Awwal in the Islamic calendar, falls on Tuesday, August 25, this year.

In remarks ahead of the occasion, Shaikh Al Khalili stressed that the commemoration should focus on the Seerah, the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and on expressing gratitude to Allah the Almighty for sending him as a mercy to humanity.

He urged Muslims to draw lessons from the Prophet's character and conduct, particularly his emphasis on compassion, justice, honesty, patience and unity.

The Grand Mufti also cautioned against turning the occasion into an exercise in extravagance or public display, stressing the importance of observing Islamic principles in commemorating the Prophet's birthday. The occasion, he noted, should encourage Muslims to strengthen their understanding of the Prophet's Sunnah and apply its values in their daily lives.

Omani scholars have likewise highlighted the importance of studying the Prophet's biography and drawing practical lessons from his life. They said his teachings continue to offer guidance in family life, business, social relations and community affairs.

They also emphasised that expressing love and respect for the Prophet should not be limited to the commemoration itself, but should be reflected throughout the year through ethical conduct and adherence to the Sunnah.

Oman will mark the occasion through activities organised by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, including religious and cultural programmes, Quran recitation sessions and public lectures focusing on the Prophet's life and teachings.



Muslims need to draw lessons from the Prophet's character and conduct, particularly his emphasis on compassion, justice, honesty, patience and unity. It is important to observe Islamic principles in commemorating the Prophet's birthday. The occasion should encourage Muslims to strengthen their understanding of the Prophet's Sunnah and apply its values in their daily lives.

SHAIKH
AHMED BIN
HAMED
AL KHALILI

TAQAH CELEBRATES PROPHET MUHAMMAD 'S BIRTHDAY



The event was attended by citizens and residents of Dhofar Governorate.

TAQAH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, celebrated the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) for the year 1448 AH in the Wilayat of Taqah, Dhofar Governorate, on Monday.

The event was attended by a crowd of citizens and residents of Dhofar Governorate, who reflected on the noble life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and its rich human values, recalling its enduring place in the hearts of Muslims.

The event was held at the Mosque of Shaikh Mustahil bin Ahmed al Mashani in the Wilayat of Taqah under the auspices of Salim bin Musallam Qatan, Vice-President of the State Council, in the presence of several dignitaries and a large crowd

of citizens and residents.

The celebration included a variety of religious and cultural segments, beginning with a recitation of verses from the Holy Quran. This was followed by a visual presentation highlighting aspects of the life and wisdom of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), including its lessons, wisdom, and inspiring examples.

The commemoration of the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) embodies the importance of his life as a source of values and principles that guide Muslims. It also provides an opportunity to reflect on the actions and the noble character of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and highlights his mercy, tolerance, honesty, trustworthiness, and kindness towards others.

Mosques across Oman are also expected to host lectures and sermons highlighting the Prophet's role as a teacher, statesman and moral guide, with emphasis on values such as tolerance, unity, compassion and community service.

Community organisations are also preparing charitable and social initiatives to coincide with the occasion.

The commemoration provides

an opportunity to reflect on the Prophet's message and his example, and to translate those teachings into everyday conduct, scholars said.

Shaikh Al Khalili called on Muslims to make the occasion a starting point for continued reflection, learning and practice, stressing that the values associated with the Prophet's life should guide people not only during Mawlid but throughout the year.

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SHORT TAKES



The workshop is being organised by the Environment Authority.

MUSCAT WORKSHOP DISCUSSES CLIMATE ADAPTATION PLAN

MUSCAT: A workshop on the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) formulation project convened in Muscat to address the latest developments concerning climate change scenarios and their cross-sectoral implications. Organised by the Environment Authority (EA) and spanning three days, the workshop brings together a broad spectrum of relevant stakeholders to examine national priorities and needs in the domain of climate adaptation. The platform further enables participants to exchange views, expertise and proposals, thereby enriching the project's outputs and ensuring their alignment with sectoral requirements and overarching national priorities. The workshop presents the key findings and deliverables generated thus far by the National Adaptation Plan project, while also identifying national priorities, challenges, gaps and needs pertaining to adaptation to the impacts of climate change. The main objective is to foster active stakeholder participation and integration, support the final stages of developing a comprehensive national adaptation framework, and strengthen the capacity of sectors and communities to address current and future climate risks and impacts, thereby elevating overall preparedness and climate resilience. It is noteworthy that this workshop is convened as part of the Environment Authority's ongoing efforts to enhance coordination and integration among national entities, advance sustainable development pathways, and stay abreast of evolving climate dynamics. These efforts collectively contribute to reinforcing Oman's adaptive capacity to climate change effects while mitigating their adverse consequences across all sectors. — ONA



EA holds workshop on management plan for Biosphere Reserve

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority on Monday organised a specialised workshop for members of the 'National Committee for the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme'. The workshop aimed to review updates in the National Committee's tasks and activities. It also discussed a draft plan for the management of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Biosphere Reserve. The workshop looked into

the outcomes of the 38th session of the MAB Council, the Sultanate of Oman's participation in a related international meeting in the Republic of Paraguay and Oman's participation in the MAB Youth Forum. The members of the National Committee were briefed about the main components of the draft management plan (for Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Biosphere Reserve) and measures to



The workshop reviewed updates in the National Committee's tasks and activities.

Oman and China discuss human rights cooperation

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Prof Rashid bin Hamad al Balushi, Chairperson of the Oman Human Rights Commission, received Quan Yuan, Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of China to Oman, and his accompanying delegation at the Commission's headquarters. The visit aimed to provide the Chinese delegation with a closer understanding of Oman's experience in the field of human rights and the key features of the draft National Human Rights Strategy.



The Chinese delegation learnt about the key features of Oman's draft National Human Rights Strategy.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to exchange expertise and best practices in human rights. During the meeting, the Chinese delegation presented China's National Human Rights Action Plan (2026–2030), outlining its key objectives and priorities. The two sides discussed ways to advance human rights efforts and strengthen mechanisms for cooperation and the exchange of expertise. The meeting also addressed ways to further develop bilateral relations and enhance joint cooperation.

Fostering environmental awareness among children

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, AUGUST 24

ENVIRONMENTAL awareness moved from theory to practice in Suhar as 30 children aged seven to 12 participated in 'Yasmina by Jusoor', an interactive initiative aimed at building practical environmental knowledge and fostering a lasting sense of responsibility towards nature. Held at Beedar Nursery in Suhar, an agricultural nursery owned by an Omani entrepreneur, the initiative gave children an opportunity to explore plants, understand their needs and experience planting first-hand. Through a series of educational and creative activities, the participants learned basic plant care and home gardening. Each child also took a plant home to nurture, extending the learning experience beyond the event. For Hawraa al Ajmi, an 11-year-old sixth-grade student, the hands-on approach was among the highlights of the programme. "I am 11 years old, and participating in Yasmina by Jusoor was a very enjoyable experience. What I liked most was being in nature and taking part in the activities instead of just sitting and listening," she said. "We learned how to plant, how much water a plant needs



The initiative also reflects Jusoor's approach to building community partnerships.

and how to care for it so that it grows healthily." Jaber bin Sulaiman al Busaidi, Executive Manager of Jusoor, said the initiative was based on the belief that practical experiences can help children develop responsible environmental behaviour. "Yasmina by Jusoor starts from a simple idea: when a child plants a seedling with their own hands, they develop a stronger desire to care for it and protect the environment around them," he said. The initiative seeks to promote practical environmental awareness among children,

introduce them to basic plant care and home gardening, and encourage them to take responsibility for nurturing a plant. It also aims to support Omani entrepreneurs and talents involved in the programme, highlight Jusoor's contribution to environmental and social responsibility, and extend the initiative's impact through educational digital content. Its impact will be assessed through pre- and post-activity surveys designed to measure changes in the children's environmental knowledge. The initiative also reflects

Jusoor's approach to building community partnerships. Alongside the Omani-owned nursery, the event involved an Omani digital artist who produced live artwork, an Omani entrepreneur responsible for the event's branding, and a local media production house that documented the experience. 'Yasmina by Jusoor' forms part of the foundation's wider environmental awareness campaign, with digital educational content continuing until the end of October 2026. The campaign is also part of Jusoor's social responsibility practices aligned with the ISO 26000 guidelines on social responsibility. In May 2026, the foundation received recognition for the alignment of its practices with the guidelines. The recognition reflects Jusoor's efforts to integrate environmental and social considerations into its initiatives, strengthen stakeholder engagement and develop community programmes aimed at delivering measurable and sustainable impact. Through Yasmina, these principles are translated into a simple but meaningful experience — helping children understand that caring for the environment can begin with the responsibility of nurturing a single living plant.

on the framework of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Biosphere Reserve's plan and the reserve's buffer zones. It also discussed a proposal to organise an interactive workshop to review programmes of conservation and environmental survey and to monitor climate change and sustainable ecotourism, as well as programmes of education, public awareness and stakeholder engagement. — ONA



خريف
ظفار

KHAREEF
DHO FAR



Common Kestrel



Paradise Fly Catcher



Delicate tree mushrooms

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijuchermanoman

WHEN the Khareef clouds roll across Dhofar, they do more than turn its mountains emerald green. They transform the landscape into a photographer's playground - softening the light, filling valleys with mist and waterfalls with rain, while bringing a remarkable burst of life to forests and hillsides.



Green
Chameleon

FROM MIST-SHROUDED MOUNTAINS AND WATERFALLS TO TINY MUSHROOMS AND RAIN-SOAKED BIRDS, SALALAH'S VETERAN PHOTOGRAPHERS FIND A DIFFERENT STORY IN EVERY FRAME

KHAREEF THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS

For veteran photographers in Salalah, however, Khareef is not simply about spectacular views. It is about slowing down and looking closer.

Dr Ziaul Haque, who has spent years photographing Dhofar's natural world, says some of the season's most extraordinary sights are hidden in plain view.

As drizzle and fog settle over the mountains, tiny wild mushrooms emerge on the trunks and branches of ancient trees, creating delicate patterns of ivory, amber and translucent fans against moss-covered bark.

"Khareef truly makes Dhofar a photographer's paradise," Dr Zia says, pointing to the easily missed world above the forest floor.

These arboreal fungi, he notes, thrive on the moisture retained by tree bark and play an important role in recycling organic matter within the forest ecosystem. Their fleeting appearance also offers photographers an intimate alternative to the familiar images of waterfalls and green mountains.

"Slow down and look up," is the message behind his work. Beyond the sweeping vistas is a miniature world waiting to be discovered.

For wildlife photographer Sajid Hussain, the magic of



“Slow down and look up. Beyond the sweeping vistas is a miniature world waiting to be discovered.”

DR ZIAUL
HAQUE
Wildlife
photographer

Photographs by
Dr Ziaul Haque,
Sajid Hussain
and
Seeso Varghese

Khareef lies in a similar shift in perspective. "The landscape becomes a living ecosystem filled with movement and hidden moments," he says.

The rains bring birds, insects and animals into renewed activity. A bird vanishing into the mist, an insect resting on wet vegetation or an animal grazing against a green hillside can become as compelling as any panoramic mountain view.

"Khareef is not only about photographing how beautiful Salalah becomes. It is about photographing how alive it becomes," Sajid says.

Seeso Varghese describes the season as a blessing that transforms Dhofar into a lush, vibrant wonderland. For photographers, the combination of mist, greenery, saturated colours and soft natural light creates conditions that are difficult to replicate at any other time of year. Weekend expeditions into the mountains often bring encounters with birds at their most photogenic - from kingfishers adding flashes of colour to the green landscape to paradise flycatchers tending their tiny nests.

After rainfall, even a simple act such as a bird shaking water from its feathers can become a striking frame.



Arabian Eagle Owl



Arabian Partridge



Kingfisher

Through the lenses of Salalah's photographers, Khareef becomes more than a season. It is a constantly changing gallery - from the grandeur of Ayn Khor's waterfalls to the intricate mushrooms clinging to wet tree bark, and from mist-covered mountains to the delicate movements of birds.

For those willing to look beyond the obvious, Dhofar's greatest Khareef stories may be hiding in the smallest details.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A giant screen shows news footage of Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. — AFP file photo

CHINA’S XI LIKELY TO VISIT INDIA WITH BIG DELEGATION

NEW DELHI: Chinese President Xi Jinping is likely to attend next month’s BRICS summit in New Delhi with a large delegation, three sources said, in what would be his first visit in seven years. India is hosting the September 12 to 13 summit, where Xi’s presence would be watched less for the BRICS agenda than for what it signals about Beijing and New Delhi’s efforts to stabilise relations. “Chinese officials are busy finalising hotels and security protocols,” one of the Indian sources with direct knowledge said.

Two other Indian sources said Xi was likely to be accompanied by a delegation of about 400 officials, compared with fewer than 200 officials the last time in 2019. Officials from both countries are expected to use the summit to explore ways to expand engagement while managing long-standing differences over the border and regional security issues, the sources added.

India’s foreign ministry said that National Security Adviser Ajit Doval will meet Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi for talks on Tuesday. “Doval, India’s Special Representative (SR) on the India-China Boundary Question, arrived in Beijing on a two-day visit earlier this afternoon,” the ministry said. — Reuters

IRAQ PUSHES BACK DEADLINE FOR FACTIONS TO DISARM



Iraqi special forces personnel secure the Baghdad International Airport road in Baghdad. — AFP

BAGHDAD: A senior Iraqi official pushed back a September 30 deadline for factions to hand over their weapons, without offering an explanation for the move or providing a new date. Iraq has come under pressure from the United States to rein in armed factions, particularly those close to Iran.

For several months, Iraq’s government has stood by its deadline, but on Sunday, the security adviser to the prime minister, Qasim al Araj, told state media the process would only begin at the end of next month. “September 30 is the date for the international coalition to depart, not the deadline to hand over weapons,” Araj told the Al Iraqiya broadcaster, referring to the coalition of US-led forces.

Government spokesman Haidar al Aboudi had made a similar announcement to local media on Friday, despite announcing in June that factions had until the end of September to disarm. September 30, he said, was “the date for the international coalition to end its presence, not the deadline for armed factions... Perhaps people are confusing the two.” — AFP

CEASEFIRE VERIFICATION MISSION HEADS TO EAST DR CONGO

KINSHASA: A mission to verify a fragile ceasefire between the Democratic Republic of Congo’s army and the Rwanda-backed M23 armed group was deployed to the eastern DRC on Monday, UN and government sources said. The eastern DRC has been riven by decades of conflict, with multiple armed groups fighting over its mineral-rich territory, including the M23, which seized further swathes of the region last year.

The two sides signed a US-

brokered peace agreement late last year in the Qatari capital Doha, but fighting has continued. On Sunday, the Swiss government announced in a statement that the DRC and M23 had agreed on a road map for peace talks, following negotiations held in Switzerland.

The statement also said that military experts from the member countries of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) would be tasked with verifying violations of a

ceasefire to which the parties have committed. The mission, the first of its kind, was deployed on Monday by UN helicopters to Minembwe in South Kivu province, which has seen intense clashes in recent months, according to UN and government sources. The Swiss talks, held behind closed doors from August 17 to August 21, included representatives from the United States, Qatar, Switzerland, the African Union Commission and Togo, serving as African Union mediator. — AFP

Iran warns to fine tankers in latest Hormuz escalation

IRAN said it had blacklisted 45 tankers that had broken its rules for crossing the Strait of Hormuz, and would take action against any vessels transferring loads with them, escalating its threats over the key waterway six months into the war. The named vessels could be fined, detained and have their cargoes confiscated.

The warning was issued within days of the US threatening Iran with “the toughest sanctions in history”, and Iran saying its response to any new US threats would be “devastating”. The restricted list includes very large crude carriers, liquefied natural gas and liquefied petroleum gas tankers, and clean product vessels, among others. Some of the named ships are owned by the United Arab Emirates’ ADNOC Logistics and Shipping (ADNOC L&S), ADNOC’s subsidiary Navig8 Tankers, and Saudi Arabia’s national shipping carrier Bahri.

Any vessels involved in ship-to-ship transfers with the named vessels could be added to the blacklist, the Iranian X post added. The post did not spell out what it meant by Iran’s rules, but Tehran has in the past said ship-owners should get its clearance to transit the strait and said ships should pay for security and other services. The US

The warning was issued within days of the US threatening Iran with “the toughest sanctions in history”, and Iran saying its response to any new US threats would be “devastating”. The restricted list includes very large crude carriers, liquefied natural gas and liquefied petroleum gas tankers



People walk near a billboard depicting US President Donald Trump on a building in Tehran. — Reuters

has also imposed a naval blockade against Iran-related shipping.

The Gulf supplied about 20% of the world’s daily crude oil and liquefied natural gas before the Iran conflict disrupted tanker traffic. US-coordinated efforts to shuttle tankers quietly through the Strait of Hormuz to fill supertankers waiting just outside it are helping restore some of those export volumes.

US Secretary of Energy Chris Wright said that the “7-day average of oil leaving the Strait is over 8

million barrels a day. Make no mistake, thanks to the US Navy, oil is flowing through the Strait of Hormuz.” Ships owned by Klaveness Ship Management, Stolt Tankers and South Korea’s Sinokor were also included on the blacklist. ADNOC declined to comment, while other shipping firms did not immediately respond to Reuters’ requests for comment. The Strait Authority has said cargo owners should refer to an updated list of vessels deemed non-compliant for voyages relating to the Gulf. — Reuters

TYPHOON NARRA WREAKS HAVOC IN CHINA, VIETNAM



BEIJING/HANOI: Floods and landslides triggered by Typhoon Narra battered northern Vietnam and China’s southern region of Guangxi, as accompanying heavy rains damaged infrastructure and crops. Rising floodwaters prompted China to relocate about 54,000 people, including 8,087 moved to emergency shelters.

Vietnam’s mountainous provinces of Lang Son and Cao Bang received between 236 mm and 300 mm of rain in the 24 hours to Monday morning, triggering floods and landslides. Floods also affected Vietnam’s Quang Ninh, home to the Unesco World Heritage site of Ha Long Bay, inundating parts of the city and disrupting tourism, fishing and transport. The typhoon disrupted daily school and office activities, and snapped power links to nearly 55,000 families, authorities said, while destroying more than 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of rice and other crops. — Reuters

WRONG-WAY ACCIDENT

British police arrest 12 after deadly crash



British police said that they had arrested 12 people after a car pursued by police crashed while driving the wrong way on a major road, killing five youths and two officers. The deaths came as officials warned of a trend for young people to carry out dangerous driving stunts to post on social media. Police in the Cleveland area of northeast England said there was “no evidence to indicate that filming of the activities has taken place for the purposes of TikTok”. — AFP

UNACCEPTABLE TARGETS

2 UN peacekeepers killed in S Sudan ambush



Two peacekeepers were killed in an ambush in Jonglei state of South Sudan. The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) said the attack by “unidentified armed individuals” happened as a patrol was heading to the town of Pajut, and could “constitute war crimes”. “Two peacekeepers were killed in the attack, while seven others were injured, including three peacekeepers, two South Sudan National Police Service personnel and two civilian staff,” it said in a statement. — AFP

COUNTLESS DISASTER

Indonesia earthquake toll reaches 100



The death toll from an earthquake that hit eastern Indonesia reached 100 on Monday, the disaster agency chief said, as relief operations continued for a 10th day. The death toll reached 100 as more people undergoing treatment succumbed to their injuries, disaster agency chief Suharyanto said in a press conference, adding more than 1,600 people were injured. Authorities were distributing aid using helicopters, trucks, and motorcycles, Suharyanto said. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES



US Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters are seen at Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek. — AFP

S KOREA SAYS US CANCELS JOINT DRILL OVER IRAN WAR

SEOUL: South Korea said on Monday that the United States had cancelled a large joint amphibious landing exercise scheduled for next month due to constraints on force availability caused by the war with Iran. The biennial Ssangyong drills involve marine forces from South Korea and the United States and are designed to strengthen combined operations, typically involving warships, aircraft and ground forces rehearsing amphibious landings.

The cancellation follows US President Donald Trump’s order last week to scale down the separate annual Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises, cutting the joint drills from 11 days to five. Trump at the time cited their high cost and said they sent an “inappropriate and hostile” signal to North Korea, while highlighting his relationship with its leader, Kim Jong Un.

“The US Marine Corps formally notified our forces in June that its ability to deploy forces during this year’s Ssangyong exercise would be constrained due to the situation in the Middle East,” Han Seung-jeon, a spokesman for the South Korean Marine Corps, told reporters at a news briefing. Seoul and Washington were continuing consultations on resuming the amphibious exercise, he said, without giving details. — AFP

MASSIVE WILDFIRE NEARS US CITY



Authorities in Nevada urged tens of thousands of people to evacuate and ordered schools to remain closed on Monday as a fast-moving, wind-driven wildfire bore down on the western US city of Reno. Around 42,000 people have been forced to evacuate, and an additional 45,000 have been told to get ready to leave, Reno Mayor Hillary Schieve said. All but one school in Washoe County, where Reno is located, will remain closed on Monday, authorities said. — AFP

FRANCE READIES HIGH SCHOOL PHONE BAN FROM NEW TERM

PARIS: The French government said on Monday it would press ahead with a ban on mobile phones in high schools from the start of the new school year. In July, France’s parliament approved legislation banning both social media access for children under 15 and mobile phone use in high schools. But earlier this month, the country’s top court struck down the social media provision, dealing a blow to President Emmanuel Macron, who had championed the measure. However, the Constitutional

Council did not rule on the separate provision banning mobile phone use in high schools.

On Monday, government spokesperson Maud Bregeon said Macron “has decided to promulgate the law” containing the ban on phones, despite the Constitutional Council striking down its flagship provision, a ban on social media for under-15s. “As a result, the ban on mobile phones in high schools can take effect from the start of the new school year, with a stable, consolidated and statutory legal

framework,” she told reporters after a cabinet meeting.

France has already banned children from using mobile phones in colleges, the schools attended between the ages of 11 and 15, and primary schools. Macron’s office has said the president has no plans to give up on his push to bar children from apps such as TikTok and the government would work on a new draft law. Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu will work on a new version of the legislation at the president’s request, Bregeon said. — AFP

UK PM dismisses Russian threats as Kyiv allies meet

THE United Kingdom will keep providing defence aid to Ukraine despite Russia’s threats, Prime Minister Andy Burnham said on Monday on a visit to Kyiv where allies gathered to discuss support. Air defence supplies are due to be the main priority at the meeting of the Coalition of the Willing, jointly chaired by the leaders of France and Germany, who will participate remotely, and by Britain’s Burnham. Burnham has arrived in Kyiv for his first trip abroad since taking office, alongside other European leaders and EU Council President Antonio Costa. “Despite Russia’s outrageous threats to my country, we will continue our support for Ukraine’s defence,” Burnham said in a speech delivered on Ukraine’s independence day and ahead of the meeting.



Britain’s prime minister Andy Burnham (L) delivers a speech next to President Volodymyr Zelensky (R), outside St. Sofia cathedral in Kyiv. — AFP

Russia has recently pounded Kyiv with ballistic missiles, ripping open apartment blocks and killing dozens in the capital. The escalating Russian strikes have pushed civilian deaths to their highest levels since the first months of Moscow’s 2022 attack. A Russian drone attack on Chernigiv, north of the capital, wounded 15 people, Ukraine emergency services said. “Right now, things are really very difficult for all of us. But there is a force holding us firmly by the hand,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in an address to mark the occasion, adding: “It is the strength of our mutual circle”. He called on allies to give Ukraine “everything it needs to stop this war”.

Also on Monday, the European Union said that it had released another 6.1 billion euros (\$7.1 billion) in military aid for Ukraine to boost its air defences. The finance is part of a 90 billion-euro loan, including 60 billion euros in military aid, that the EU has said will go to Ukraine. Ahead of the talks, Ukraine has forged ahead with its campaign against Russia’s logistics sites, hitting multiple warehouses belonging to e-commerce giant Ozon.

Ozon reported fires early on Monday at its warehouses in Krasnodar and Makhachkala, both in southern Russia, adding that sites in Adygeysk and Nevinnomyssk were evacuated due to threats of drone attack.

Russian authorities also said debris from a Ukrainian drone attack killed two children and wounded nine others. Russian leader Vladimir Putin on Saturday said Kyiv had “opened Pandora’s box” by targeting Russia’s economy and promised further escalation, including against Ukrainian agriculture. Burnham is set to announce that the British government is authorising defence firm MBDA to release classified information needed to help Ukraine and France set up local production of the long-range SCALP missile.

The Kremlin accused London of preventing peace in Ukraine by handing the information to Kyiv and threatened to target and “destroy” facilities producing the missile in Ukraine. On Saturday, French President Emmanuel Macron pledged Paris would deliver new interceptor missiles.

The ballistic missiles Russia has been firing in their dozens are incredibly fast and travel with a high-arching trajectory, making them difficult for Kyiv to intercept. Ukraine relies on advanced systems — chiefly, US Patriot interceptors — to protect its skies. But it has reported a shortage of Patriot interceptors since the United States and Israel went to war with Iran in February, diverting supplies. Ahead of the meeting, Zelensky revealed

the extent of the deficit, releasing usually closely guarded numbers. He said deliveries of crucial Patriot interceptors had halved since 2023. “Over the entire of 2023, Ukraine received 675 missiles, and over all of 2025 — 364, even though Russian missile strikes have increased,” Zelensky said. “For 2026, as currently projected, it is 264,” he added, saying Ukraine was seeking a package of at least 300 for the upcoming winter.

The United States faces its own shortages of the missiles during its war on Iran and has resisted releasing large numbers to Ukraine. Zelensky said Russia could produce around 100 ballistic missiles a month. Ukraine, meanwhile, has accelerated its own campaign of long-range strikes on Russian energy and logistics sites — including oil refineries and retail warehouses.

The Coalition of the Willing is a Franco-British initiative to deliver support to Ukraine and ramp up pressure on Russia. Originally designed as a group of countries that would be willing to deploy peacekeeping troops to Ukraine in the event a ceasefire was reached, it has become a parallel forum for marshalling support to Kyiv as uncertainty persists over US commitments under Donald Trump. — AFP

Trump says to double tariffs on Canada all cars, trucks

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said Monday that he would double tariffs on Canadian vehicles beginning next year, as the neighbouring countries spiral towards an escalating trade war. “On January First, 2027, Tariffs on all Cars, Trucks, both large and small, Automotive Parts, and Steel, will be increased to 50%,” Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. The current US tariff impacting Canadian autos stands at 25 per cent for non-US content, while imported steel to the United States generally faces a 50-per cent duty.

Trump’s latest threat comes after the North American neighbours failed on Friday to reach a deal to avert new 50-per cent US tariffs on select Canadian goods. The duties took effect on Saturday. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has since announced retaliatory tariffs targeting the United States after walking away from what he called a “bad deal.”

The new Canadian tariffs will target US steel and dairy industries, while also covering sectors like agricultural

Trump’s latest threat comes after the North American neighbours failed to reach a deal to avert new 50-percent US tariffs on select Canadian goods. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has since announced retaliatory tariffs targeting the United States



Shipping containers are seen in the Port of Montreal in Montreal, Quebec. — AFP

equipment, pulp and paper, as well as electronics. Canada’s response is set to take effect on September 8. The White House had alleged “discriminatory treatment” by Canada against US automobile and dairy products in rolling out the 50-per cent tariffs. Trump delayed their implementation by three days last week as Washington and Ottawa

intensified talks towards a deal.

Top Canadian negotiator Dominic LeBlanc and his team were at US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer’s office in Washington for hours on Thursday and Friday. However, both sides failed to reach an agreement after talks that continued late into Friday night. The latest duties hit about 5.5 per cent of Canadian goods

entering the United States, or some \$20 billion worth of products ranging from hockey sticks to cement.

On Monday, Trump charged that “Canada has been ripping off the United States of America for years” and added that “we don’t need Canada, they need us.” Greer told the New York Times on Saturday that the Trump administration had offered to eliminate a 10-per cent tariff on softwood lumber, and reduce the 25-per cent autos tariff.

Washington was also ready to cut steel tariffs from 50 per cent to 25 per cent for the majority of Canadian steel, according to Greer. Carney said in a statement late Friday that he had decided to suspend trade talks with the United States, and Greer told CBS on Monday that both sides have yet to schedule further negotiations.

Besides the latest tariffs fight, the United States and Canada also have to agree on revisions to the US-Mexico-Canada free trade agreement (USMCA) which Trump has declined to renew in its current form. — AFP

OPINION

Rising divorce rates put family stability in focus



MARRIAGE HAS long been a cornerstone of Omani society. Beyond the union of two individuals, it often brings together extended families and creates the environment in which children are raised, values are nurtured and future generations are shaped.

Recent data, however, point to a growing need to examine marital stability and the factors contributing to divorce in Oman.

According to data released by the Supreme Judiciary Council, 7,719 Omanis married foreign nationals over the past three years, including 640 Omani women who married non-Omani men.

Between October 29, 2023, and June 30, 2026, 1,226 divorces were registered among Omanis married to foreign spouses — roughly one divorce for every six marriages recorded during the period.

The trend is not limited to marriages between Omanis and foreigners. Divorce filings across Oman have also increased, rising from 3,828 in 2023 to 4,122 in 2024 and 4,208 in 2025 — an increase of nearly 10 per cent over two years.

Muscat Governorate recorded 6,651 marriage contracts and 1,220 documented divorces in 2025, the highest figures among

the governorates.

Behind these statistics are human costs that extend well beyond court filings. Divorce can have emotional, social and financial consequences for couples and, particularly, for children.

Said bin Rashid al Maktoumi, Head of Family Counselling at the Department of Family Guidance and Counselling at the Ministry of Social Development, said divorce rates are important social indicators that require continuous monitoring and analysis.

He stressed that analysis should go beyond statistics to examine the causes and circumstances surrounding individual cases. Such assessments, he said, can help develop preventive and therapeutic programmes aimed at strengthening family stability.

In response to these challenges, the ministry has introduced initiatives such as the year-round Life Companion counselling programme. Delivered by qualified specialists, the programme provides engaged couples and newlyweds with guidance on managing disagreements and addressing marital challenges before they escalate.

The programme covers areas including partner compatibility, setting realistic expectations, effective communication, household financial management, positive parenting and understanding mutual rights

Divorce can have emotional, social and financial consequences for couples and, particularly, for children.

and responsibilities.

With changing social dynamics and an increase in marriages between Omanis and foreign nationals, the programmes also place emphasis on cultural understanding and adaptability, helping couples navigate differences in backgrounds, expectations and family traditions.

The consequences of family instability can be particularly serious for children. A recent report published by the Public Prosecution in its Society and Law journal highlighted the case of two siblings, aged 14 and 16, who became victims of digital human trafficking after leaving their home following persistent physical and emotional abuse.

According to the report, the siblings sought refuge and interaction through digital gaming platforms after being deprived of a safe home environment. They were subsequently groomed by predators who exploited their vulnerability and arranged for their disappearance before law enforcement authorities intervened.

The case illustrates how children facing instability, neglect or abuse can become vulnerable to risks beyond the family environment, particularly in an increasingly connected digital world.

Addressing divorce therefore requires more than monitoring the number of cases.

BANGLADESH GAS CRISIS HITS INDUSTRY, HOMES, TRANSPORT

SHEIKH SABIHA ALAM

The giant structures of Bangladesh’s Ashuganj fertiliser factory have stood silent for more than a year, as a natural gas crisis shuts industries, triggers power cuts and sparks protests over fuel shortages.

Machinery once ran round the clock, using natural gas to produce urea that farmers depended on to grow crops for the country’s 170 million people.

Now the state-owned factory, which once employed more than 1,200 people and produced more than 1,000 tonnes of fertiliser a day, is a rusting shell.

Ashuganj closed in March 2025, with the country battered by a gas shortage sparked by a plunge in production owing to underinvestment in ageing fields and exploration, while the US-Iran war has choked imports from the Middle East.

“Only the skeleton of the factory remains,” said Md Bazlur Rashid, 59, who spent his entire working life at Ashuganj, built near the eastern Titas gas field. “It has lost its life.”

The factory is one of six major urea fertiliser plants that have been forced to close down or restrict operations because of gas shortages.

Trade union leader Md Abu Kawsar said the shutdowns had cost workers their jobs while threatening an industry linked to food security.

“You cannot simply let these factories sit idle and allow them to deteriorate,” he said. “Reviving them could also help save foreign currency.”

But the consequences of the gas shortage extend far beyond fertiliser production. Hundreds of factories, including textile plants, are cutting production or shutting.

At home, domestic piped gas is often cut.

Power plants turning gas into electricity are struggling to meet demand, creating regular blackouts.

The government issued electricity-saving measures in August, including ordering shopping malls to close an hour earlier.

Electricity generation, industry and captive power plants account for more than three-quarters of Bangladesh’s gas consumption.

Households, which account for just over a tenth of the country’s gas consumption, have also been hit.

“We don’t get a drop of gas overnight,” said housewife Nargis Begum, 50, who lives close to the Ashuganj factory. — AFP

Our daily choices shape the future we create

ONE PRACTICE that has helped me over the years is using a habit tracker, as discussed in a previous essay. It is a simple device, but it reveals something important: which habits I actually keep and which ones I merely intend to keep.

And that difference fascinates me because it underscores why some people can make significant changes almost overnight while others remain stuck in the same patterns for years, sometimes decades.

This fascination has led me to read and think more deeply about the relationship between our daily actions and the lives we eventually create.

The more I read, the more convinced I become that our future is shaped less by the plans we make than by what we repeatedly do. This is not my idea. Many writers and thinkers in the field of personal development have made a similar argument: if you want a glimpse of your future, look carefully at your habits today.

Recently, I came across a thread on X by Dan Koe that returned me to this question from a slightly different angle. His central argument, again one shared by others, is simple: perhaps you are not getting what you want because you have not yet become the person who would naturally create that life.

You may say you want something, but do you actually want to be the person required to achieve it? And, more importantly, are you practicing the habits that person would practice?

In other words, change requires more than a new plan; it requires an identity shift. If you want to become productive, for example, you cannot simply wish for productivity.

You begin to embody the identity of a productive person: you protect



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

Change happens when we keep choosing, to honour the future we claim to want, even when nobody else is watching or applauding us

your time, make decisions, complete tasks, and stop treating every distraction as an emergency.

The same principle applies to wealth, health, writing, or any other ambition. The point is not to pretend you already possess what you want. It is to begin living according to the mindset and behaviours of the person capable of sustaining it.

But once we begin thinking about identity in this way, another question naturally follows: how do we actually become that person?

Eventually, much of this comes down to decisions. Make them, respect them, and stop reopening questions that have already been answered. And close open loops.

I once spoke with a professor who was upset because she was growing older while many items remained on her bucket list. I suggested something radical: remove some of them. Perhaps the reason she had not done them was simply that she no longer wanted to. Once she allowed herself to cross them off permanently, she said she felt lighter.

Some unfinished goals are not

failures; they are simply open loops draining energy.

This idea of respecting a decision reminds me of the most memorable lesson I learned about keeping them. It came from a Saudi student I studied with at Georgetown University. She had decided to eat dessert only once a month, on the last day. She simply stuck to it. When I asked how, she answered: self-respect. She knew why she had made the decision, what she hoped to achieve, and therefore respected her own word.

That stayed with me because perhaps every lasting habit begins there.

One decision, respected repeatedly, becomes a habit. Habits gradually create evidence for a new identity. And that identity, over time, opens the door to a different future.

The challenge, of course, is that no one decision transforms us.

Change happens when we keep choosing, especially on ordinary days, to honour the future we claim to want, even when nobody else is watching or applauding us.

When human carelessness threatens marine life



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

DOES MANKIND take nature for granted? We talk about conflicts in economics and in power trying to challenge each other, but one group that is currently suffering is marine life. Conflicts can disrupt ecosystems.

The earth is already facing challenges with climate change. But that does not stop man from polluting the ocean.

Sometimes it could be a mishap, but the ones to suffer are the marine life.

The oil leak from the grounded tanker Caroline Bezengi has raised concerns for the marine life.

Oman Water Society’s Chairman, Zaher al Sulaimani, says it is a catastrophe where the damage is not only for the sealife and fishery industry but also for all the environment in the area and the seawater, which is the source of drinking water. It is a real tragedy.

The Environment Authority is taking the necessary steps to tackle the pollution scientifically. There have been instructions for the fishermen to stay clear. But environmentalists are deeply concerned about a specific species — the Arabian Sea humpback whale, the world’s only non-migratory humpback population.

Ishani P Cooney, a marine microbiologist and scientific diver, told WIRED Middle East that unlike other populations, it cannot relocate from contaminated feeding grounds.

The Arabian Sea humpback whale is one of

the most studied cetaceans of Oman.

They do not migrate, and throughout the year they remain right here in Oman.

The Arabian Sea humpback whale has a special place in my heart because one of my first interviews on Radio Oman was on this wonderful creature. The interview was with none other than the dedicated marine biologist Robert Baldwin, marine conservationist, and the author of the books ‘Whales and Dolphins of Arabia’ and ‘Marine Life of Arabian Seas’, among others.

The Arabian Sea humpback whale is a feeding and breeding resident of Oman, and according to experts, it could have been isolated for about 70,000 years. They are protected in Oman, just as all wildlife in the country. The Arabian Sea humpback whale subpopulation is classified as Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

For a nation that takes pride in its natural wealth, this is indeed a difficult situation. Oman has numerous nature reserves where citizens play an important role in conservation and protection.

The Environment Authority has just launched the new edition of the ‘Guardians of the Environment’ programme for the year 2026 at the Turtle Reserve, with the participation of volunteers from various governorates of Oman.

Here too, we can see a combination of experiences that combines volunteer work, environmental awareness, and contribution to protecting wildlife and preserving its natural resources.

Environment safety must be etched in our thoughts and actions and is not a job for the specialists. Our awareness should not be just about our immediate surroundings

However, all that is on land; it is a different situation when it comes to the ocean that has international users.

Ahmed al Mahrouqi, who is into the preservation of heritage, reflected on how certain plastics and other wastes from ships wash up to the shore.

Environment safety must be etched in our thoughts and actions. It is not a job for specialists. Our awareness should not be just about our immediate surroundings. It is time to learn to look at the big picture. The seawater is also a source of drinking water through the desalination process.

There are many initiatives that have been taken to protect marine mammals, and one of them is the conservation efforts for the Arabian Sea humpback whale that are anchored by a newly approved international framework and dedicated field initiatives led by Oman and local organisations.

In March 2026, the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) officially endorsed a regional Conservation Management Plan (CMP), which was subsequently approved by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) Scientific Committee in June 2026 to coordinate protection across the northern Indian Ocean. Another national initiative is the habitat monitoring, where the Oman Environment Authority actively tracks whale pods and habitat health near Masirah Island.

The national workshop held in July 2026 significantly upgraded emergency rescue protocols for stranded or tangled marine mammals.

EUROPE’S HOTTEST TOWN FEELS CLIMATE CHANGE

DANILO ARNONE & GISELDA VAGNONI

Five years after Florida registered Europe’s highest-ever temperature, residents say extreme heat is no longer measured by records but by its impact on daily life, keeping people indoors, reducing social interaction and threatening livelihoods.

The August 2021 record of 48.8 degrees Celsius turned the Sicilian town into a symbol of Europe’s warming climate as the continent emerged from Covid-19 restrictions.

Today, increasingly frequent and prolonged heatwaves are driving people indoors, leaving streets and piazzas deserted and prompting some residents to compare the extreme heat to a new form of lockdown.

The shift is visible across the town of 20,000 on the outskirts of Syracuse, the ancient Greek city on Sicily’s southeastern coast. Piazza del Popolo, long Florida’s social hub and lined with cafes, palm trees and municipal buildings, is nearly empty for much of the day.

The heat lingers well into the evening, disrupting a cherished local tradition known as ‘pigghitari u frescu’, when families pull kitchen chairs outside their homes to catch the breeze and socialise.

“It’s awful because many people end up shut indoors. In a way, we are all experiencing another kind of lockdown,” Florida’s culture councillor Serena Spada told Reuters.

“Even people with small children find themselves in this situation. Children cannot go to the park or play outside because, until late afternoon, temperatures are genuinely hostile.”

On August 11, 2021, Sicily’s Agrometeorological Information Service (SIAS) measured a temperature of 48.8 C in Monasteri, a rural district about 5 km from Florida’s centre.

In 2024, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) certified it as the highest temperature ever recorded in continental Europe, a mark that still stands.

“As I walked, I began struggling to breathe and thought: ‘I could die here in the street, with no one around to help me,’” said a resident Ugo Tomasello.

Many residents assumed the record would prove an isolated event. Instead, hot summers became the norm.

While the temperature record drew international attention, climate scientists say individual extremes are less significant than the steady rise in average temperatures.

Reuters Climate Monitor data showed Florida reached 33.3 C on August 12, 2026, 4.1 C above the average for the 1961-1990 historic norm.

“It is really the increase in average temperatures that worries us,” SIAS director Luigi Pasotti said.

— Reuters

The Ceuta crisis is about more than migration

THE SIGHT of 72,000 people rushing into the Spanish enclave of Ceuta from neighbouring Morocco was a blunt reminder that one of the European Union’s most sensitive land borders is in North Africa.

The status of Ceuta and Melilla, another Spanish enclave within Morocco, has been a simmering political dispute between the Moroccan and Spanish governments for many decades. Morocco claims sovereignty over these cities, whereas Spain maintains that they are as much a part of its national territory as Madrid. For centuries, the Muslim dynasties that ruled the western Maghreb and Al Andalus controlled Ceuta, until King John I of Portugal captured it in 1415 — a precursor to European expansion overseas. When the Portuguese monarchy came under the control of the Spanish Habsburgs in 1580, so, too, did Ceuta. Following the restoration of Portuguese independence in 1640, the city remained loyal to the Spanish monarchy.

As the great French historian Fernand Braudel observed, the Mediterranean should be understood as a historically interconnected theatre, shaped by migratory, commercial, cultural, and political exchanges that long predate the modern nation-state. From this perspective, the Strait of Gibraltar is not merely a border but a liminal zone between two shores of the same sea that have long been in close, if often conflictual, contact.

To support its sovereignty claim, Morocco points to precolonial history and the continuity of the Moroccan Sultan’s authority over extensive territories in the western Maghreb. Moroccan historians, notably Abdallah Laroui, have also emphasised the need to avoid mechanically applying the territorial categories of the contemporary nation-state to precolonial societies.

The modern European conception



Migrants gather near a makeshift beach camp in Ceuta. — Reuters



MOHA ENNAJI

The author is a professor at Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University

This experience offers a lesson for Morocco: even longstanding territorial disputes can invite cooperation. They can be eased through gradual negotiations, confidence-building measures, and other mechanisms that divorce, at least temporarily, questions of sovereignty from the practical necessities of everyday life

of the border as a precisely demarcated, legally recognised line does not always correspond to the forms of sovereignty that prevailed in the Maghreb before colonisation. The Sultan’s authority was exercised to varying degrees through relations of allegiance, taxation, religion, and political affiliation, without necessarily taking the form of uniform administrative control. It is within this context that Morocco’s claims concerning Ceuta, Melilla, and other Spanish territories on the North African coast should be examined.

Following Moroccan independence in 1956, the question of colonial-era borders became a topic of national debate. Moroccan nationalists, particularly Sultan Mohamed V, advocated the recovery of territories considered to have been detached from Morocco during the colonial period. This policy unfolded amid a broader push for decolonisation, resulting in Spain relinquishing Tarfaya in 1958 and Sidi Ifni in 1969.

Yet Ceuta and Melilla remained under Spanish control, with these former colonial territories eventually becoming part of the EU’s external border. EU efforts to clamp down on migration in recent

years have thus transformed these cities, imbuing them with a strategic importance comparable to their historical and military significance.

This change helps explain the paradoxical nature of the Morocco-Spain relationship. Despite strong economic and trade relations and close cooperation on security and migration, the territorial dispute remains a source of conflict. In a study of Morocco’s claims to Spanish territories in Africa, the University of Cambridge’s Jamie Trinidad emphasises that the legal arguments vary for each territory, meaning that Ceuta, Melilla, the Chafarinas Islands, and the islet of Perejil are not analogous cases.

Consider Gibraltar, which is frequently invoked in Moroccan political discourse. The process of determining Gibraltar’s status after Brexit, which required close cooperation between the UK, the EU, and Spain, demonstrates that a longstanding territorial dispute can end in joint management, even when fundamental positions on sovereignty remain divergent.

This experience offers a lesson for Morocco: even longstanding territorial disputes can invite cooperation.

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SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Oman players during a training session in Dubai ahead of the FIBA Asia Cup 2029 Pre-Qualifiers.

OMAN READY FOR FIBA ASIA CUP 2029 QUALIFIERS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Oman’s national basketball team concluded their external training camp in Dubai on Monday as they enter the final stage of preparations for the FIBA Asia Cup 2029 Pre-Qualifiers First Round.

The camp, which began on August 16, formed the final phase of the national team’s build-up to the continental competition. Following the conclusion of the camp, the delegation moved to the official team hotel designated by the organisers ahead of the start of Group A action in Dubai on Wednesday.

Under national head coach Mohammed al Owaisi, Oman used the camp to improve physical, technical and tactical readiness while strengthening cohesion among the players ahead of the official matches.

Oman are drawn in Group A alongside Bahrain, hosts UAE, Kuwait and Nepal. The First Round is being played during the August 24-September 1 international window, with Group A matches in Dubai running from August 26 to 31. The top three teams will advance to the Second Round.

Oman begin their campaign against Kuwait on Wednesday before facing Bahrain on Thursday. They return to action against hosts UAE on August 30 and conclude their Group A programme against Nepal on August 31.

The Dubai camp followed an earlier domestic preparation phase and featured daily training sessions and four friendly matches designed to test the players’ readiness and allow the coaching staff to assess different tactical approaches and combinations.

Oman defeated Sharjah Club 56-52, edged Maxreem Academy 55-53 and beat JAM Sports Academy 64-58 before narrowly losing their fourth friendly against Maxreem Academy 70-67.

The matches also helped the players adapt to a compact competitive schedule similar to what they will face during the qualifiers.

The 12-player squad comprises Hadid Bait Bakhit, Rasheed al Zahaibi, Ahmed al Halhali, Ayman al Muharrami, Ahmed al Maamari, Abdulrahman al Shuaibi, Osama al Riyami, Bassam al Busaidi, Ahmed al Sinani, Zakaria al Wahaibi, Abdulrahman al Maamari and Mazen al Hadidi.

The delegation is headed by Said al Habsi, Oman Basketball Association board member and Acting General Secretary. Ghassan al Busaidi serves as team manager, while Al Owaisi is assisted by Ammar al Kathiri and Khalid al Harthi. Sulaiman al Musallami is the physiotherapist, with Ammar al Balushi serving as video analyst and team photographer.

Al Habsi said the Dubai camp achieved several important objectives despite the relatively short preparation period.

“The camp was very important and, through the collective efforts of the players, technical staff and administration, we were able to provide the team with the right conditions to play strong matches and prepare properly,” he said.

He added that the friendly schedule was planned to resemble the rhythm of the qualifiers, helping the players adjust to short recovery periods between matches.

Al Habsi expressed confidence in the squad’s ability to compete for a place in the Second Round, stressing that the players have the technical qualities required and now need to translate their preparation into performances on court.

Seeb lift inaugural Jindal Youth League trophy

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

SEEB were crowned champions of the inaugural Jindal Youth League for Under-15 players after defeating Al Nasr 2-0 in the final at Al Seeb Sports Stadium.

First-half goals from Ahmed al Sarhi and Osama al Dhamri proved enough to seal the title for Seeb, who completed an impressive campaign by overcoming their Group One rivals in the championship decider.

Seeb started the match brightly and looked to impose themselves from the opening minutes, although Al Nasr responded with several attacking moves of their own and created opportunities to threaten the opposition goal.

Both sides showed plenty of energy during the early stages, with Al Nasr enjoying some promising spells before Seeb gradually gained greater control of proceedings.

The breakthrough came following a set-piece situation when Ahmed al Sarhi rose to meet a high ball and directed a header into the net to give Seeb the lead.

The goal boosted Seeb’s confidence as they began to dictate the tempo and create further opportunities in the attacking third.

Their advantage was doubled in the 25th minute through Osama al Dhamri, who converted a direct free-kick from the edge of the penalty area to make it 2-0.

Al Nasr attempted to respond before the interval, but Seeb’s defensive organisation ensured they went into the break with their two-goal advantage intact.

Al Nasr returned for the second half with greater urgency and enjoyed more possession as they searched for a route back into the contest. They pushed players forward and applied pressure around the Seeb penalty area, but the eventual champions remained composed at the back.

Seeb also continued to pose a threat on the counterattack and came close to extending their lead on several occasions. A set-piece effort cleared the goalkeeper but went over the crossbar, while another promising attacking move ended without a finish.



Seeb players celebrate together after being crowned champions of the inaugural Under-15 competition.



Seeb and Al Nasr players battle for possession during the Jindal Youth League final.

Al Nasr pressed forward in the closing stages in search of a goal, but Seeb’s defence held firm. At the other end, the champions created further openings but were unable to add to their first-half tally.

After four minutes of added time, the referee brought the contest to an end, confirming Seeb as the first champions of the Jindal Youth League.

The closing ceremony was attended by Dr Faisal bin Abdullah al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of the Social Protection Fund, and Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Yahmadi, Secretary-General of the Oman Football Association.

The ceremony began with the Oman Football Association presenting a commemorative gift to Dr Faisal al Farsi, who then honoured the match officials.

Al Nasr players were presented with the runners-up medals before Seeb received their championship medals.

The celebrations concluded with Seeb captain Muadh al Mahrami lifting the Jindal Youth League shield, bringing the inaugural edition of the competition to a close.

Oman Sail, ELB&T join forces for Asian Games push

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Oman Sail has signed a strategic partnership agreement with South Korean company ELB&T Ltd, in cooperation with its local strategic partner National Symbols LLC, to become Gold Partners supporting Oman’s national 49er and 29er sailing teams under the High Performance Programme ahead of the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games in Japan.

The partnership will provide the two national teams with comprehensive support covering specialised training camps, equipment, logistics, travel and accommodation, technical coaching, insurance and technical assistance, as well as a final preparation camp in Japan before the Asian Games.

Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said the partnership reflects the organisation’s belief that meaningful investment in sport goes beyond financial support and must include



From the Official Partnership Signing Ceremony

investment in human capital and the development of national talent. He expressed confidence in the two teams’ ability to compete strongly in Japan, with the ultimate ambition of reaching the podium and challenging for Asian Games medals.

Al Jabri also welcomed ELB&T as a new international investor in Oman, describing its involvement as a reflection of the company’s

confidence in the country’s investment environment and its commitment to contributing to Oman’s development.

Dr John Kim, Chairman of ELB&T Ltd, said the company was proud to join Oman Sail as a Gold Partner. He highlighted Oman’s rich maritime heritage and praised the young sailors for embodying values of discipline, ambition and commitment that align with

ELB&T’s focus on innovation, excellence, precision and international cooperation.

The partnership will also have a community dimension. Following the Asian Games, Oman Sail will launch a sailing experience programme for school students in Al Duqm, introducing young people to sailing and helping identify new talent. The initiative supports Oman Vision 2040 objectives related to youth empowerment, community participation and the development of national capabilities.

The 29er team is following an intensive programme of training camps and international competition, including preparations in Ras Al Hadd, participation in the 29er European Championship in the Czech Republic and Oman Sailing events, before travelling to Gamagori, Japan, for its final acclimatisation camp ahead of the Asian Games, scheduled for September 26 to October 4.

SHORT TAKES



Salalah Club squad in action.

SALALAH SET FOR FBMA BASKETBALL CUP CHALLENGE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Salalah are continuing their preparations for the 3rd Fatima Bint Mubarak Academy (FBMA) Basketball Cup for Ladies 2026, as the Omani side gear up to compete against leading Arab teams in Abu Dhabi.

The tournament will be held from August 27 to 31 at the Fatima Bint Mubarak Ladies Sports Academy in Abu Dhabi, with seven Arab teams taking part in the third edition.

Salalah have stepped up their preparations through intensive daily training sessions at the indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The programme has focused on improving the players’ physical and technical readiness, developing individual and team skills and strengthening cohesion within the squad.

The coaching staff have also emphasised tactical work and implementing the systems the team will rely on during the competition.

The preparations come amid strong administrative and technical support aimed at providing the squad with the best possible conditions ahead of the tournament. The team features a combination of Omani players and professionals from Lebanon, giving the squad a blend of local talent and international experience.

Salalah have been drawn in Group Two alongside Qatar’s Al Gharafa, Kuwait’s Fatayat Al Oyoun and Jordan’s Al Moqawloon.

The Omani representatives will begin their campaign against Al Gharafa on Thursday, August 27, at 5 pm. They will face Fatayat Al Oyoun the following day at 3 pm before concluding their preliminary-round fixtures against Al Moqawloon on Saturday. Salalah will represent the Sultanate of Oman with a 12-player squad. The delegation is headed by Asma al Bassami, while Nelly Tanius Saliba is the head coach, assisted by Marwa al Ajmi. Nada al Zadjali serves as the team physiotherapist. The squad comprises Shams Al Duha Al Khanjari, Ghadeer Al Ismaili, Fatma al Numani, Ruba al Kalbani, Buthaina al Maamari, Reem al Shirawi, Sumaya al Falahi, Noor al Balushi, Rima al Mughairi, Cynthia Michel Riz, Lea Elias Khalil and Nancy Raymond al Maalouf.



Said al Hajri, President of the Oman Athletics Association, with Dr Ali bin Abdullah al Marzouqi, Vice-President of the OAA.

Oman Athletics strengthens drive to raise standards

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

THE Oman Athletics Association (OAA) is stepping up preparations for upcoming sporting commitments, focusing on strengthening the readiness of national teams, developing athletes and creating the conditions needed to achieve strong results at regional, continental and international competitions.

The Association is continuing its efforts to develop athletics in Oman by supporting athletes, enhancing technical programmes and providing promising talents with opportunities to gain valuable competitive experience. The initiatives form part of a broader strategy to raise the standard of Omani athletics and strengthen the country’s presence on the international sporting stage.

Said al Hajri, President of the Oman Athletics Association, said the Association remains committed to developing the sport and establishing a sustainable pathway that enables athletes to progress from the grassroots level to elite competition.

said the coming period represents an important stage for Omani athletics, with a number of major regional and international

events on the calendar. The Association, he added, is working closely with technical teams and athletes to ensure the national teams reach the highest level of readiness and are capable of competing effectively.

Dr Ali bin Abdullah al Marzouqi, Vice-President of the Oman Athletics Association, said hosting international competitions represents an important gain for Omani sport, both by giving athletes the opportunity to compete alongside world-class competitors and by developing the experience of technical, administrative and officiating teams. He said such events provide Omani athletes with valuable exposure and help raise their standards, particularly ahead of major Asian competitions, while also strengthening national expertise through direct experience with international standards in event management, officiating and administration.

Al Hajri also stressed the importance of long-term athlete development, noting that success in athletics requires continuous preparation, careful technical planning and exposure to high-level competition. He added that the Association is placing particular emphasis on identifying young talent and providing the support needed to develop and refine their abilities.

The Association’s programmes include intensive training camps, participation in domestic and international competitions, and technical preparation designed to improve athletes’ performances across different disciplines. Particular attention is also being given to developing a new generation capable of representing Oman at major championships in the years ahead.

The Association president praised the efforts of the technical and administrative teams and the athletes for their commitment and dedication, stressing that cooperation among all stakeholders is essential to sustaining the growth and development of athletics in Oman.

The Association is also seeking to strengthen partnerships with relevant institutions and sports organisations to create a supportive environment for athletes while expanding opportunities for competition, development and experience.

As preparations continue, the Oman Athletics Association hopes to translate its development programmes into stronger performances and a more prominent international presence for Omani athletes. Its strategy reflects an ambition to build a more competitive and sustainable athletics system while contributing to the wider development of sport in Oman.

Unbeaten Qurayat face Al Amerat in Junior Hockey final

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Qurayat and Al Amerat advanced to the Group One final of the 2026 Oman Junior Hockey League following convincing semifinal victories at the Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat on Sunday.

Qurayat maintained their perfect record with a 4-0 victory over Al Bashayer, while Al Amerat defeated Seeb 4-1 in the second semifinal. The two sides will meet in the group final at the same venue at 8 pm on Wednesday.

The final will be a repeat of their preliminary-round encounter, which Qurayat won 3-1. However, Al Amerat have since responded strongly by securing three consecutive victories and

will be looking to reverse that result when the teams meet again.

Qurayat made a fast start against Al Bashayer and opened the scoring through Said al Fazari in the 10th minute. Mouter al Rujaiabi doubled the advantage from a penalty corner two minutes later, giving Qurayat a 2-0 lead at the end of the opening quarter.

Qurayat maintained their attacking momentum in the second quarter, with Al Rujaiabi adding his second goal of the match from open play in the 17th minute. The goal sent Qurayat into half-time with a comfortable 3-0 advantage.

Al Bashayer attempted to reorganise and reduce the deficit, but Qurayat remained disciplined in defence while continuing



Action from the Group One semifinal between Qurayat and Al Bashayer, which Qurayat won 4-0.

to create opportunities. Al Fazari completed his brace from a penalty corner in the 41st minute, extending the lead to 4-0 during the third quarter.

Neither side scored in the final quarter as Qurayat controlled the closing stages and preserved another clean sheet.

The victory was their fourth in succession, taking their tournament tally to 24 goals scored and only two conceded.

In the second semifinal, Al Amerat overcame Seeb 4-1 after a goalless opening quarter.

Al Abbas Sulaiman broke the deadlock with a field goal in the 20th minute before Khazrag Sbit struck in the 30th minute to give Al Amerat a 2-0 half-time lead.

Al Amerat continued to

apply pressure after the interval, and Al Abbas scored his second goal from a penalty corner in the 39th minute, making it 3-0 at the end of the third quarter.

Seeb showed greater attacking urgency in the final quarter and pulled one back through Mohammed Abdullah, who converted a penalty corner in the 48th minute. Their hopes of a late comeback were ended in the 55th minute when Sbit scored his second field goal to seal a 4-1 victory for Al Amerat.

Wednesday’s final is expected to provide a closely contested conclusion to Group One, with unbeaten Qurayat aiming to maintain their impressive run and Al Amerat seeking a fourth straight victory and revenge for their earlier defeat.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



PSG's Spanish forward Ferran Torres celebrates after scoring his team's first goal during the French L1 football match. — AFP

SPAIN'S WORLD CUP HERO TORRES SAVES PSG'S BLUSHES AT RENNES

PARIS, France: Spain's World Cup winner Ferran Torres scored twice to claim a draw for Paris Saint-Germain as they started the defence of their French Ligue 1 title with a 2-2 draw at Rennes.

Torres came off the bench for his Ligue 1 debut and opened his account for his new club weeks on from scoring the winning goal for La Roja in the World Cup final.

Rennes led at the break after Sebastian Szymanski and Esteban Lepaul scored at Roazhon Park before Torres' clinical interventions, thanks to assists from fellow World Cup winner Fabian Ruiz.

Luis Enrique named two of his big summer signings, 26-year-old Torres and France winger Maghnes Aklouché, on the bench for a game moved from the French capital due to the poor state of the Parc des Princes pitch.

Ex-Rennes attackers Ousmane Dembélé and Desire Doué were joined in the Champions League winners' forward line by Khvicha Kvaratskhelia a week on from losing 1-0 in the French Champions' Trophy to Lens.

Rennes boss Franck Haise gave a league debut to Adrien Thomasson, who joined the Bretons from the coach's former club Lens over the summer.

Well-travelled Thomasson set up the opener by feeding Szymanski, who fired home with a low effort from outside the box 21 minutes after a pinpoint header from Lepaul in the build-up.

Rennes doubled their lead seven minutes before the break despite PSG showing plenty of intent and even having a Doué effort chalked off for offside.

Haise's side's second came on the counterattack with a break from winger Moussa Al Tamari and a delicate back-heel from the Egyptian wideman helping to set up Lepaul.

PSG were wasteful in attack, failing to hit the target with efforts from Dembélé and Kvaratskhelia, forcing their Spanish boss to bring Torres on for the second half.

With half an hour left, Aklouché and Ruiz were also brought to the fray and 10 minutes later PSG cut the deficit as Torres made the most of a pass from his compatriot to nutmeg Rennes goalkeeper Brice Samba.

Torres and Ruiz combined again with eight minutes to go as the midfielder crossed for the forward to head past Samba.

PSG were on top after Torres' contributions, but they were unable to find a third.



Rennes' French forward Esteban Lepaul celebrates after scoring his team's second goal during the French L1 football match. — AFP

RAPHINHA, LOPEZ HIT BRACES AS BARCELONA TROUNCE ELCHE

SPANISH CHAMPIONS Barcelona cruised to a 5-0 win over Elche on Sunday in their La Liga opener with Raphinha and Fermin Lopez scoring twice each and Anthony Gordon setting up two goals on his debut.

After watching Jose Mourinho's Real Madrid defeat Espanyol 2-1 on Saturday with a late winner, Barca's display warned the Portuguese coach that the Catalans will not relinquish the title easily.

Karim Adeyemi also found the net on his debut as Barca made light work of a vulnerable Elche side at the Martinez Valero stadium.

Hansi Flick started with several regular starters on the bench as they continue to get up to speed following the World Cup.

Teenage winger Lamine Yamal, a key part of the triumphant Spain squad, did start on the right but was far from his best, although it did not matter given Barca's otherwise sparkling display.

"This is a difficult place to go and they're a team that like to have the ball, but we did very well," Raphinha told Movistar.

Brazil international Raphinha lined up as the team's number nine, after Robert Lewandowski and Ferran Torres left the club, and shone.

Barcelona are still looking for a striker after Atletico Madrid rejected their bid to sign Julian Alvarez.

"I'll leave that to the president," said Raphinha, when asked if Barca needed to sign a number nine. "I am comfortable (anywhere) on the pitch."

Raphinha was cut down in

the box by Victor Chust and stroked home the resulting penalty after 14 minutes to get Flick's team on their way.

Eric Garcia was sharp at the back to ward off a threatening Elche attack, while Barca's Gavi caught the eye in midfield -- admittedly more for his pink haircut, to celebrate Spain's triumph, than for his performance.

Rapid winger Adeyemi, playing on the left, started shakily but grew into the game and doubled Barca's lead before the break after Raphinha unselfishly set him up.

In the second half, former Newcastle United winger Gordon, on as a substitute, teed up Raphinha for his second and then supplied Lopez for Barca's fourth in an electric and impressive cameo.

Youngster Xavi Espot played in Lopez, who endured a difficult summer after missing Spain's World Cup triumph through injury, for his second to seal Barcelona's comfortable triumph.

Flick's high-line defence showed the occasional sign of its usual frailty but goalkeeper Joan Garcia did well when called on to keep a clean sheet.

"We were playing against a great team and you pay for your errors," said Elche defender Chust.

"It was a tough day but I'll take from it that the team didn't stop running."

— AFP



Raphinha celebrates scoring his team's first goal during the Spanish league. — AFP



Lamine Yamal fights for the ball with Elche's Spanish forward German Valera during the Spanish league football match. — AFP

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,497.935

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$97.39
BRENT \$91.19
LIGHT \$85.36



BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES



Port of Duqm's Ro-Ro Terminal has an annual handling capacity of more than 300,000 units.

PORT OF DUQM RECORDS STRONG GROWTH IN RO-RO OPERATIONS

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Port of Duqm has recorded growth in its Ro-Ro operations, handling 34,024 Ro-Ro units through more than 20 vessel calls up to August 2026. Of the total units handled, more than 600 were High and Heavy (H&H) units, highlighting the terminal's capability to accommodate a diverse range of vehicle and cargo types.

The figures mark an important milestone for the port and highlight Oman's growing logistics capabilities and its ability to support the movement of large-scale vehicle shipments.

More than 4,400 units were handled during a single vessel call, demonstrating Port of Duqm's operational capability to efficiently manage high-volume vehicle movements.

The Ro-Ro Terminal has an annual handling capacity of more than 300,000 units, providing the infrastructure and capacity required to accommodate growing vehicle volumes and support the expansion of automotive logistics through Oman. The terminal now handles both import and export Ro-Ro cargo, offering customers greater flexibility and an expanded range of logistics solutions to meet their evolving needs.

Strategically located on Oman's southeastern coast, Port of Duqm provides an important platform connecting Asian markets with regional markets, supporting the efficient flow of vehicles and other cargo between international markets and the region. Its location, combined with its infrastructure and operational capabilities, strengthens Al Duqm's position as a strategic logistics gateway and contributes to Oman's broader ambitions to develop a competitive and integrated logistics sector.

The continued growth in Ro-Ro activity reflects the increasing role of Port of Duqm in supporting vehicle trade and demonstrates the port's readiness to handle large-scale shipments efficiently.

CBO ANNOUNCES AUCTION RESULTS OF GDB-48

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) announced the Auction results of the 84th Government Development Bonds (GDB) issue, which received overwhelming response from investors, worth a total applied amount of RO 164,370,400.

According to a media release issued by CBO's Market Operations Department, the 83rd GDB Issue has received applications amounting to RO 164,370,400 with allotment amount of RO 100,000,000. The average yield was 4.48 per cent at an equivalent price of RO 100.120, while the highest yield was 4.50 per cent at an equivalent price of RO 100.00 and the lowest yield was 4.00 per cent at an equivalent price of RO 103.030.

The issue will be settled this Wednesday August 25, 2026. The 84th GDB issue, carrying a coupon rate of 4.50% p.a., will mature on August 25, 2033. — ONA

Higher oil prices brighten Oman's fiscal outlook

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

A renewed rise in global oil prices has pushed crude well above the assumption underpinning Oman's 2026 state budget, but the impact on government revenue will not be immediate because of the way oil receipts are collected and recorded.

Brent crude was trading at around \$93 a barrel on Monday amidst continued uncertainty over Middle East supplies, compared with the \$60-a-barrel average oil-price assumption used to prepare Oman's budget for this year.

The gap is significant, but the two figures should not be read as a direct measure of additional revenue for the government.

Brent is an international benchmark, while the \$60 figure is a budget-planning assumption. More importantly, Ministry of Finance data show that oil revenue moves through three stages — sale, delivery and financial collection — before it is recorded in the state accounts. The ministry illustrates the process with oil sold in January 2026: the crude is delivered in March and the proceeds are collected in April, around three months after the sale contract is concluded.

That timing means movements in global oil markets can take several months to become visible in reported government revenue.

It is a distinction that becomes particularly important when crude prices move sharply. A rise in the market today does not translate into an equivalent increase in government receipts in the same reporting period — just as a sudden fall would not necessarily be reflected immediately. The Ministry of Finance says oil revenue recorded during the 2026 fiscal year comes



The Ministry of Finance says oil revenue recorded during the 2026 fiscal year comes from sales made between October 2025 and September 2026.

Brent trades near \$93, but higher market prices take time to flow through to government oil receipts

from sales made between October 2025 and September 2026.

Oman's first-quarter fiscal figures illustrate the difference between prevailing market prices and the prices reflected in government accounts.

The average realised oil price during the first three months of 2026 was about \$64 a barrel, while average production stood at around 1.025 million barrels per day. Net oil revenue rose 5 per cent year-on-year to RO 1.535 billion from RO 1.468 billion. Net gas revenue increased more strongly, rising 36 per cent to RO 593 million from RO 436 million.

Total public revenue reached RO 2.985 billion in the first quarter, up 13 per cent from RO 2.635 billion a year earlier. Expenditure increased at a slower rate of 9 per cent to RO 3.010 billion from RO 2.771 billion.

The resulting budget deficit narrowed to RO 25 million from RO 136 million in the corresponding period of 2025.

Development expenditure also increased during the quarter, rising 31 per cent to RO 334 million from RO 254 million.

For the full year, Oman has

budgeted revenue of RO 11.447 billion against expenditure of RO 11.977 billion, leaving an estimated deficit of RO 530 million. The 2026 budget was prepared on an average oil-price assumption of \$60 a barrel.

Net oil revenue is budgeted at RO 5.752 billion for the year, while net gas revenue is estimated at RO 1.961 billion.

The latest rise in crude prices therefore provides a potentially supportive backdrop for Oman's public finances if higher prices are sustained. The eventual impact, however, will depend on realised selling prices, production volumes and the timing of collections rather than the headline market price alone.

That distinction is likely to remain important over the coming quarters as energy markets continue to respond to supply uncertainty in the Middle East.

For assessing Oman's fiscal position, the key measure will be the realised price and volume of crude sales whose proceeds actually enter the government accounts — rather than the oil price quoted on any single trading day.

Expo spotlights Oman's growing bitumen demand

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 23

The 20th edition of the Rex Fuels Global Expo and Conference will be held in Muscat on August 31, bringing bitumen producers, traders, refiners, logistics operators and road contractors together at a time when the Sultanate of Oman is running one of its largest road construction programmes to date.

The one-day event at the Grand Millennium Muscat will examine demand trends and supply chains across the fuels, bitumen, petrochemical, logistics and infrastructure sectors, according to organiser Rex Fuels Management.

The timing is notable for the paving-grade bitumen trade. The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) said in July that 61 road projects were under way nationally, with 22 of them past 70 per cent completion by mid-2026. Road schemes under implementation were valued at about RO 1.2 billion at the



The event is taking place at a time when Oman is running one of its largest road construction programmes to date.

start of the year.

Among the largest is the dualisation of Sultan Said bin Taimur Road, where roughly 400 kilometres between Haima and Thamrait is under construction. Other corridors in progress include Sultan Faisal bin Turki Road linking Khasab, Dibba and Lima, the Eastern Expressway between

Al Kamil W'al Wafi and Sur; and the Izki-Nizwa dual carriageway.

Tendering is close to completion for the 132-kilometre Sinaw-Mahout-Al Duqm road connecting Al Wusta to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, alongside the expansion of the Muscat Expressway.

Maintenance adds a second, recurring source of demand. A resurfacing and repair programme covering 1,244 kilometres of paved roads in Al Wusta, valued at about RO 6.4 million, is currently under way ahead of and during peak Khareef traffic to Salalah.

Organisers said discussion at the Muscat event would extend beyond conventional paving materials to modified binders, performance-based specifications, recycling technologies and longer-life pavement solutions, with Gulf climatic conditions placing particular emphasis on durability and maintenance cycles.

They also pointed to Oman's position on maritime routes linking Gulf markets with South Asia and East Africa, arguing that refinery location, grade availability, storage infrastructure and shipping routes increasingly shape where road projects source their material and that for contractors, consistency of supply can matter as much as price.

BUSINESS FEATURE

DHOFAR
BREWS
A COFFEE
FUTURE



KEY
FACTS

Current investment phase began in June 2024.

Around
25,000
coffee seedlings over roughly two years is the nursery output.

Dawa’iri, Adaini, Khawlani, Hammadi and Matari are the current varieties

Three Brazilian Arabica coffee varieties are under study

Samples sent to France to examine varietal identity; work remains ongoing for genetic work

Shade, protection from strong winds, appropriate fertilisation and careful early-stage management being the main needs

Al Roofoof is prepared to buy Arabica coffee grown by Omani farmers in Dhofar

148

Adaini and Dawa’iri seedlings planted at Qairoon Hairiti in government trials

No commercial coffee volume has been announced; the current project remains in an establishment phase

QASIM AL MAASHANI

BAKHIT BIN MAHAD TABOOK is confident in the agronomy. His Observer interview also points to the next test: protection, time, quality, costs and a market that rewards farmers.

Eng Tabook is unusually firm when asked about the prospects for coffee in Dhofar. “I do not want to say that I merely expect it to succeed”, the Hairiti project director said. “Based on the research carried out here over many years, I am confident that coffee can succeed in suitable parts of the mountain belt”. That confidence matters. But successful cultivation and commercial scale are different tests.

FROM AGRONOMY TO SCALE Tabook’s case for cultivation rests on a research history dating to 1980, when Adaini and Dawa’iri were planted at Qairoon Hairiti. Later trials examined fertiliser, shade and elevation, while the current private project has moved into nursery propagation and larger-scale establishment. He said the nursery has provided around 25,000 seedlings since Al Roofoof began its current investment phase in June 2024. The figure demonstrates propagation and planting capacity; it does not, by itself, quantify farm-level commercial returns. Tabook repeatedly emphasised that young coffee trees require protection from direct sun and

“I do not want to say that I merely expect it to succeed. I am confident that coffee can succeed in suitable parts of the mountain belt. We are prepared to buy Arabica coffee produced by Omani growers in Dhofar.”

ENG
BAKHIT BIN MAHAD TABOOK
Project Director
Al Roofoof’s coffee cultivation project

strong winds. Earlier Qairoon Hairiti trials support that point, with shaded coffee outperforming exposed plants in most reported measurements. Economically, however, shade structures, wind protection, fertiliser, nursery management and several years of care all add to establishment costs before a mature crop can generate meaningful revenue.

COMMERCIAL TEST Tabook said successful establishment depends on careful farm management, appropriate fertilisation and protection during the early years. These requirements are manageable, he said, but they add to the work and cost involved in bringing young trees to productive maturity. For growers, however, cultivation is only one part of the equation. Tabook said the market should be considered from the outset because coffee requires spending on seedlings, fertiliser, shade, protection and continued care, while several years may pass before a farmer begins to see a return. “The first thing any farmer should think about is the market”, he said. He added that Al Roofoof is prepared to buy Arabica coffee produced by Omani growers in Dhofar, potentially giving farmers a route to market as cultivation expands. The scale of the commercial opportunity, however, will ultimately depend on mature-tree yields, production costs, quality and the prices growers can secure. No purchase prices, grading system or commercial production volumes have yet been announced. Tabook rejected the idea that the future should be judged only by

quantity. Hairiti is working with five Arabica varieties and three Brazilian varieties under study, while genetic analysis is being used to examine varietal identity. But a variety name does not automatically create a premium product. Once meaningful production begins, quality will depend on harvesting, processing, drying, grading, consistency and ultimately the cup.

THE FARMER NEEDS A BUYER Perhaps the most commercially important part of Tabook’s interview came when he discussed the market. “The first thing any farmer should think about is the market”, he said. Al Roofoof, he added, is prepared to buy coffee produced by Omani growers in Dhofar. That could become important if the ministry’s farmer expansion programme develops into meaningful production. But the model is not yet complete: buying prices, grading rules, processing arrangements and volumes have not been announced. What would prove success? The next evidence should be numerical: mature-tree yields, establishment costs, labour costs, processing losses, quality scores and the price buyers will pay. Those figures will determine whether coffee remains a distinctive mountain planting, develops into a premium local niche or becomes a wider source of income for growers. Tabook’s interview makes the stage of the story unusually clear. The research has built confidence that coffee can grow in Dhofar. The next phase is to show whether that cultivation can support a viable local coffee value chain.

SHORTTAKES



SAMAYIL INDUSTRIAL CITY LOCALISES 12 NEW PROJECTS

Samayil Industrial City, affiliated with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), received 24 investment applications during the first half of the current year, resulting in the localisation of 12 projects alongside the expansion of two existing facilities, with a combined investment volume exceeding RO 13 million.

These projects will be established across a total land area of 135,000 square metres and span diverse sectors, including packaging materials manufacturing, chemical products, drilling and boring equipment maintenance, furniture and furnishings, metal and wood product processing, equipment repair and maintenance, plastics and polymers, water treatment and purification equipment maintenance, sewage network servicing, marble production, and other high-value-added industries.

Eng Yasser bin Ibrahim al Ajmi, Director-General of Samayil Industrial City, stated that the cumulative total investment in the industrial city exceeded RO 239 million by the end of the first half of this year. Currently, 109 operational projects are established within the city, employing 4,031 workers, with an Omanisation rate exceeding 29 per cent. The total leased area has reached 2,637,402 square metres out of the developed area of 7,773,876 square metres, while the city's overall designated land area stands at 11,889,233 square metres.

He further noted that Samayil Industrial City successfully concluded an investment contract during the first half of the year for the construction of labour accommodation and commercial outlets, as well as an agreement for the equipping and operation of a medical fitness examination centre. These efforts are part of the city's ongoing commitment to providing comprehensive services and facilities within the industrial estate, catering specifically to investors and business owners while also benefitting the broader community of the wilayat of Samayil. — **ONA**

Fuel subsidy spending hits 4.6x full-year budget

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

THE Omani government spent RO 162 million on petroleum product subsidies in the first half of 2026 — 4.6 times the RO 35 million allocated for the entire year — as it absorbed the cost of holding domestic fuel prices steady against rising crude and the fastest consumer price inflation in years.

The figure, disclosed in the Ministry of Finance's Fiscal Performance Bulletin for the second quarter, sits alongside RO 323 million disbursed to the social protection system and RO 288 million to the electricity sector by the end of June, RO 773 million across the three largest support headings.

Fuel is the outlier. Spending on the item stood at just RO 17 million at the end of March, implying roughly RO 145 million was released in the April-June quarter alone. Oman realised an average of \$74 a barrel across the first half, against \$64 in the first quarter and the \$60 assumption on which the 2026 budget was built.

The mechanism is set out in the government's own documentation. The Ministry of Finance's guide to the State's General Budget describes the oil products subsidy as designed to stabilise costs amidst global oil price fluctuations and shield consumers from rising prices, meaning the cost to the treasury climbs as crude climbs, for as long as pump prices are held.

It is by far the most volatile line in the subsidy bill.



Oman spent RO 162 million on petroleum product subsidies in the first half of 2026.

Across the 10th Five-Year Development Plan it swung from RO 39 million in 2021 to RO 730 million in 2022, when crude spiked, before easing to RO 370 million in 2023, RO 232 million in 2024 and an estimated RO 90 million last year.

The five-year total of RO 1.461 billion was second only to electricity's RO 2.733 billion within a RO 7.3 billion support envelope.

Direct food support is modest by comparison. The 2026 budget allocates RO 15 million to the food items subsidy, against RO 71 million across the whole of the previous five-year plan.

Protection on food prices

rests mainly on value-added tax exemptions covering 512 basic commodities rather than on direct price support.

Subsidy and social protection allocations for 2026 total about RO 1.571 billion, once future debt obligations of RO 300 million and institutional contributions of RO 35 million are stripped out of the RO 1.906 billion "contributions and other expenses" heading, which accounts for 16 per cent of planned public spending.

Social protection is the largest single line at RO 614 million, expected to reach 1,627,365 beneficiaries this year, of whom 1,306,113 receive child benefit.

A further RO 338 million funds social insurance programmes covering old age, disability and death.

The electricity subsidy is set at RO 509 million, below the RO 566 million estimated for 2025.

The 11th Five-Year Development Plan commits to maintaining subsidy policies for basic goods and services and strengthening the social protection system, with social protection allocations averaging RO 668 million a year to 2030.

The framework assumes \$60 crude throughout and projects annual deficits rising from RO 530 million this year to RO 770 million in 2030.

Oman moves to accrual accounting in major public-finance reform

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 24

Oman's Ministry of Finance (MoF) is preparing to transition the government's financial reporting system to accrual accounting, marking a significant step in the modernisation of the Sultanate of Oman's public-finance management framework.

The ministry is seeking to appoint a qualified consultant to support the transition and develop a rollout-ready national package of accounting standards, policies, procedures and implementation tools based on International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS). According to experts, the move represents a fundamental change from the cash-oriented approach traditionally used in government accounting, under which transactions are principally recognised when money is received



The transition to accrual accounting builds on a multi-year programme of public-finance reforms undertaken by the MoF in line with Oman Vision 2040.

or paid. Under accrual accounting, revenues and expenses are recognised when they are earned or

incurred, while assets and liabilities are recorded when the government obtains or assumes them, regardless of when cash changes hands.

The significance of the transition lies in the much broader picture of public finances that accrual accounting can provide.

Rather than focusing primarily on cash flows and annual budget execution, the system will give the government greater visibility over what it owns, what it owes, the costs it incurs and the resources available to it. According to the MoF, the reform is intended to strengthen the accuracy and completeness of financial reporting, improve visibility over government assets and liabilities and enhance resource management, transparency and accountability.

The adoption of an IPSAS-based framework will also bring Oman's public-sector financial reporting closer to internationally

recognised accounting practices. IPSAS standards are specifically designed for governments and other public-sector entities and provide a common framework for reporting financial performance and financial position.

The transition, however, will involve considerably more than changing accounting entries. The appointed consultant is expected to help develop the national accounting framework, including IPSAS-based standards, accounting policies and procedures, implementation tools and a practical rollout package.

It is also likely to require changes to financial-management systems, reporting processes, data structures and institutional practices, as well as training and capacity building for government finance personnel.

The transition also builds on a multi-year programme of public-finance reforms undertaken by

the MoF in line with Oman Vision 2040. Key reforms included the development of a Government Financial Management Information System, establishment of a Treasury Single Account, creation of a National Asset Register and strengthening of debt-management and macro-fiscal capabilities.

More recently, the Ministry has been advancing the Unified Government Financial System (Maliyah), a modern electronic platform designed to support budget planning, execution, monitoring and reporting.

Importantly, the system has been developed to support the eventual application of accrual accounting, while other reforms include the introduction of programme and performance-based budgeting, the government asset register, expenditure-control initiatives and the updating of the Financial Law's executive regulations.

OIL ON FIRE

Oil falls ahead of new Iran sanctions



Oil prices slipped more than \$1 a barrel on Monday as investors took profits ahead of an expected announcement from Washington about imposing more sanctions on Iran that may further disrupt supplies from the Middle East.

Brent crude futures fell \$1.49, or 1.6%, to \$92.90 by 06:49 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$85.32 a barrel, down \$1.74, or 2%.

— **Reuters**

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold climbs to three-month high



Gold prices hit their highest level in more than three months on Monday as a subdued dollar lent support, while focus shifted to key US inflation data and a speech later this week by Federal Reserve Chair Kevin Warsh.

Spot gold was up 0.8% at \$4,641.27 per ounce, as of 04:27 GMT, after hitting its highest level since May 15 earlier in the session. Prices gained more than 5% last week. — **Reuters**

CURRENCY MARKETS

Dollar slips on debt concerns



A wavering dollar was pinned near multi-month lows on Monday in a market unsettled by the US Treasury's promise to buy back more long-dated bonds, while traders awaited details of sanctions on Iran and on policy speeches this week in the US and Japan.

The Canadian dollar slipped 0.3% in Asia trade, to C\$1.3807 per dollar, after trade talks with the US collapsed and Washington imposed tariffs. — **Reuters**

OPINION

Using VPN in Oman: Legal or illegal?



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

RECENTLY my mom forwarded me a message from her friend that questioned whether the usage of VPN apps in Oman is illegal. For that, I decided to focus this week on answering a few common questions that I trust many people wish to know.

Is using a VPN app illegal in Oman? Why would I need one in the first place? Can someone know that I am using VPN? Can they see what I am doing, where I am going and/ or what services and sites am I visiting? And lastly, should I use a free or a paid VPN app?

These questions have become part of everyday internet use. Some people use them for privacy, others for work, travel or security, while some believe that switching on a VPN makes them completely anonymous, The reality is more complicated.

VPN stands for a Virtual Private Network. Using one creates an encrypted connection between your device and a VPN server. Anything that passes between the connections is supposedly secured/ encrypted. A VPN can also allow you to bypass services that are normally blocked by a local ISP (Internet Service Provider) eg Omantel, Ooredoo, Vodafone, Awasr etc.

VPN can be useful when working remotely, accessing company systems or using public Wi-Fi, because it adds a layer of protection to your internet connection. Does a VPN app/

service, however, make you invisible? Not entirely – therefore be very careful and avoid doing anything that you literally do not want others to know.

The ISP may not be able to see the contents of your encrypted VPN traffic, but it may be possible to identify that you are connecting to a VPN server. The VPN service provider itself may also have information about your connection, depending on its technology and logging practices.

For example, if you log into Google, Instagram, Facebook, your bank or another account, the VPN does not suddenly make you anonymous. The service can still know who you are, because you are logging in using your account credentials.

So is VPN app/service use illegal in Oman? This is where we should avoid simplistic answers. There is a widespread belief that VPNs are simply illegal in Oman.

However, VPN technology itself should not automatically be confused with criminal activity. What matters is how it is being used and whether the underlying activity violates Omani law. A VPN should never be considered a way to bypass the law. If technology is used to commit, facilitate or conceal an offence, using a VPN does not provide immunity.

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) issued a warning about the risks associated with VPN applications. The warning was particularly interesting because

Running a reliable VPN infrastructure costs money. If a service is completely free, it is worth asking how the company makes money and what happens to your data.

it focused not on VPNs as technology, but on which VPN application you choose.

TRA cautioned that some VPN apps may track or share personal information, collect unnecessary permissions, log browsing activity or even contain malware capable of stealing passwords, banking information and other sensitive data. Some may also redirect users to suspicious or fraudulent websites.

In other words, you may install a VPN to protect your privacy and accidentally hand your privacy to someone else. According to TRA, companies that want to use VPN can collaborate and work through the local ISPs.

This brings me to the most common question: free or paid VPNs? Running a reliable VPN infrastructure costs money. If a service is completely free, it is worth asking how the company makes money and what happens to your data. There is no such thing as free lunch, one way or another, your data is used by the VPN service provider to make money.

So what to do? The recommendation is to download VPN applications only from trusted developers and official app stores, review the permissions requested and avoid free ones that lack a clear privacy policy or credible reputation.

If you genuinely need a VPN, I would generally choose an established paid provider with a transparent privacy policy, strong security practices and an independently verified reputation.

HORMUZ DEBATE MASKS REFINED FUEL SHORTAGE

CLYDE RUSSELL

The crude oil market is currently engaged in the wrong debate over how much oil is actually moving via the Strait of Hormuz. It should be debating the constrained flows of refined products around Asia.

US Energy Secretary Chris Wright has repeatedly claimed that much more crude is getting through the disputed strait than vessel-tracking analysts such as Kpler can see.

One of Wright’s claims was that about 15 million barrels per day (bpd) exited the Strait of Hormuz on a day last week, which if true would take volumes close to what they were before the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28.

Wright has also said transits averaged about 9 million bpd over a seven-day period, although he did not specify the exact dates or provide details such as vessel names and intended destinations.

Vessel monitoring services estimate that around 5 million bpd is leaving the Strait of Hormuz, including so-called dark transits and ship-to-ship transfers from smaller vessels to larger tankers in the Sea of Oman.

But the dispute over crude oil volumes is a false debate. If Wright is correct, Asia’s oil imports will start to pick up in coming weeks as the crude he claims is leaving the Middle East arrives at ports. It is considerably easier to track import volumes, so it is merely a matter of time before the market can assess whether Wright is correct or whether his numbers are overstated.

In the meantime, Asia’s refined products markets remain stressed, as shown by sharply lower volumes and extremely elevated refining margins. Asia’s imports of light and middle distillates for August are estimated by Kpler at 5.59 million bpd, in line with the 5.60 million bpd seen in July. However, these volumes are down 21% from the 7.08 million bpd average in the three months to the end of February.

In effect, Asia is having to absorb a drop of 1.49 million bpd of key fuels such as diesel, jet fuel and gasoline.

UNEVEN FALLOUT

The impact is not being evenly spread across Asia, with less wealthy countries shouldering a bigger share of the loss of product volumes.

Indonesia’s imports of light and middle distillates are estimated at 432,000 bpd in August, the lowest in 13 months and down from an average of 533,000 bpd in the three months before the Iran conflict.

The Philippines is expected to see arrivals of 257,000 bpd, down from an average of 362,000 bpd in the three months to the end of February.

Australia, the world’s biggest importer of diesel, is managing to secure similar fuel volumes, with August imports estimated at 863,000 bpd, only slightly below the 880,000 bpd average before the Iran war. — Reuters

Why Sri Lanka’s growth matters to Oman

AN Omani manufacturer weighing a second production line this year faces an arithmetic problem.

The Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030) asks the private sector to create 50,000 jobs a year, on a fiscal framework built at sixty dollars a barrel and a growth target of roughly 4 per cent.

Those jobs must be paid for by selling into markets Oman does not yet serve at scale. Meanwhile, across open water to the east, an economy that defaulted on its debt in 2022 has returned to sustained growth after its worst economic crisis in decades.

The two facts belong in the same sentence. The common reading of Sri Lanka’s recovery treats it as a turnaround story to admire from a distance: 22 million people, a modest consumer market, bilateral trade with Oman of barely \$200–250 million a year. On that arithmetic the island hardly matters to Muscat and it has been treated accordingly.

But the arithmetic prices Sri Lanka as a market, when its real value to Oman is as a platform. A firm producing in Sri Lanka sells into the European Union under the GSP+ preferential trade arrangement, subject to its eligibility and the scheme’s conditions, into India under a free-trade agreement in force since 2000 and across South Asia under SAFTA. No Gulf economy holds that stack of preferences. An Omani company can acquire it by investing there.

What makes this the moment is that the platform is being repriced.

The IMF’s \$3 billion Extended Fund Facility programme has continued to support Sri Lanka’s reform programme, and the country has made significant progress on fiscal consolidation and debt restructuring.

The IMF’s latest combined fifth and sixth reviews, completed in May 2026, record real GDP growth of 5.0 per cent in 2025 and project 3.0 per cent growth for 2026, while gross official reserves stood at about \$6.8 billion at end-2025. The recovery is therefore real, but it is better described as a stabilisation and reform story than as an economy



DR YOUSUF
HAMED AL
BALUSHI

yousufh@omaninvestgateway.com

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

The common reading of Sri Lanka’s recovery treats it as a turnaround story to admire from a distance: 22 million people, a modest consumer market, bilateral trade with Oman of barely USD 200–250 million a year.

that has already completed its turnaround. Exports reached about \$13.6 billion in 2025, while tourism and remittances have remained important sources of foreign exchange.

Foreign direct investment has also recovered, although the pace and composition of investment remain important questions for the next phase of the recovery. Global capital has noticed. Gulf capital, so far, largely has not. Honesty requires four complications. The first is logistics: cargo between Oman and Sri Lanka still moves largely through third-country hubs, adding cost and days to what is a short sea route. Salalah is one of the region’s great transshipment ports and Colombo is South Asia’s; the missing link is commercial, not physical.

The second is regulation: approvals are slow, land is hard to assemble and a 484-megawatt wind project was withdrawn in early 2025 amidst contract renegotiation, a reminder that paper terms need protecting. The third is fragility: when Cyclone Ditwah struck in late 2025, the IMF moved within weeks to approve \$205 million in rapid financing, which says as much about thin buffers as about the Fund’s confidence.

And a fourth follows from success itself: arbitrages of this kind narrow as normalisation proceeds. Imports rose strongly as domestic demand recovered, while the IMF’s latest figures show imports of about \$21.5 billion in 2025, up 14 per cent, underscoring both the strength of the recovery and the pressure it places on the external balance. Distress windows close from the inside, quietly, while committees deliberate.

For an Omani investor, the consequence is a short and concrete list. Sri Lanka imported roughly \$5.6 billion of fuels last year; an Omani energy group already supplies its LPG and refined products and fertiliser offtake are the natural extensions. Its luxury tourism supply is thin against 2.36 million arrivals and an Omani-Sri Lankan resort partnership already operates

in Salalah and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar; the template runs in reverse. Food-and-beverage exports grew 37 per cent last year, inviting offtake and cold-chain investment that serves Oman’s food-security programme .

Three Sri Lankan universities are recognised in Oman, with five pending, sketching an education corridor. Each of these creates employment on both shores: packaging, logistics and headquarters functions in Salalah and Al Duqm for Omanis; production and services in Sri Lanka.

And the platform runs both ways, for a company registered in Oman trades across the Gulf as a local firm, which is precisely what a Sri Lankan exporter eyeing GCC demand lacks and what Invest Oman can offer.

Four public indicators will settle whether this is a platform or a mirage. Watch for progress on the investment-protection and double-taxation agreements under discussion; the emergence of a commercially viable direct liner or air-cargo service between Salalah or Sohar and Colombo; Sri Lanka sustaining reserve accumulation from the \$6.8 billion recorded at end-2025; and investment data from the Board of Investment demonstrating that the recovery in foreign capital is durable rather than episodic.

If the treaties stall and the cargo keeps detouring, the platform case fails and Sri Lanka reverts to what sceptics say it is: a small market, far away. Oman’s merchants once knew, earlier than most, when a sea lane was about to matter. The question before Omani boards is not whether Sri Lanka has recovered; the evidence suggests that a meaningful recovery is under way.

What matters now is whether that recovery can be converted into durable investment and trade opportunities — while the preferences, the ports and the prices still line up, or whether Omani capital arrives later, at full price, to find the berths taken. The Indian Ocean has always rewarded the early sail.

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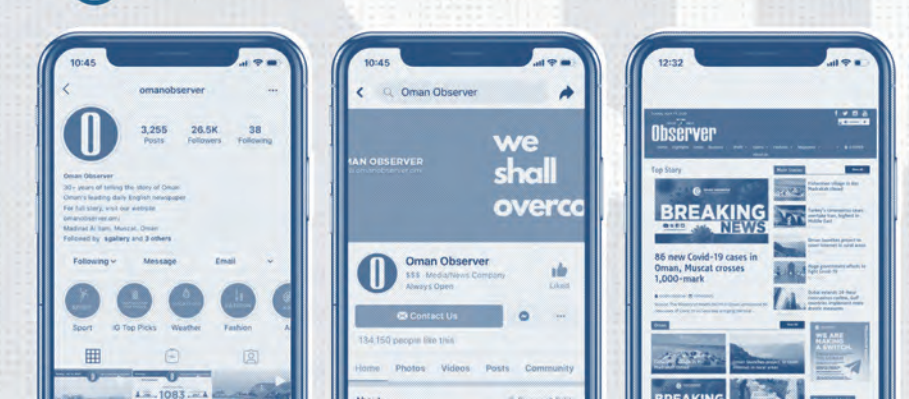
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POP HISTORY

FREDDIE MERCURY MEMORABILIA HEADS TO AUCTION



The items form part of the Reinhold Mack Collection, an 82-lot archive offered by German producer Reinhold Mack. — AFP

A piano and microphone used by Freddie Mercury, alongside early drafts of his songs, are expected to fetch hundreds of thousands of pounds at auction in October.

The items form part of the Reinhold Mack Collection, an 82-lot archive offered by German producer Reinhold Mack, who frequently worked with Queen and his son Freddie Jr, Mercury’s only godson.

The collection includes the Yamaha C3 Grand Piano from Munich’s Musicland Studios, which Mercury played extensively while composing solo material and some of Queen’s biggest hits, including “Crazy Little Thing Called Love”.

It was also used to record “The Game”, “Hot Space” and “The Works”; and was played by artists including Leonard Cohen, The Rolling Stones, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, Donna Summer and Bryan Ferry.

Considered the most significant Mercury-related artefact to reach the market since the 2023 sale of his personal collection, the piano is estimated to fetch between £200,000 (\$272,800) and £400,000.

Also included is the AKG C414 EB microphone used to record Mercury’s lead and backing vocals at Musicland Studios. Favoured by Mack for capturing the singer’s vocal range and layered harmonies, it comes with its original Sennheiser bag and the red XLR cable used at the studio. It is estimated at £40,000 to £80,000.

Early working lyrics handwritten by Mercury for “My Love Is Dangerous” and “Let’s Turn It On”, both from his 1985 debut solo album “Mr Bad Guy”, will also be offered.

The drafts contain alternate and unused lines that differ substantially from the finished songs. The “My Love Is Dangerous” lyrics, headed with the earlier title “Dangerous”, include handwritten chord arrangements on the reverse, while “Let’s Turn It On” appears under the shortened working title “Turn It On”.

The sets are estimated at £3,000 to £6,000 and £1,500 to £3,000 respectively. A teddy bear gifted by Mercury to the Mack family is expected to fetch £800 to £1,600.

Before the Propstore auction, the items will be displayed in a free exhibition at The Cumberland Hotel in London from September 23 to 27.

“Freddie was not only a colleague and close friend; in many ways, he was part of our family”, Mack said.

He recalled Mercury spending time at the family’s Munich home, where he could “escape the pressures of fame, relax and simply be himself”.

“We have carefully preserved these items for decades, not because of their value, but because of the memories they hold”, Mack said.

“The memories we shared can never be auctioned; they will remain with our family forever”.

The two-day auction will take place on October 1 and 2. — dpa

QUICK FEATURES



MURAL

Artist Cristian Juarez, 29, works on a mural painting during the eighth edition of the PigmenTrip Muralism Festival in Ahuachapan, El Salvador. — AFP



CULTURE

Girls wearing traditional clothes smile at each other as they dance during the Ashenda celebrations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. — AFP



MUSIC

Portuguese fado singer Carminho performs her “Eu Vou Morrer de Amor ou Resistir” concert at Vivo Rio in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP

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A robot with the head of Niu Lai, a character from a Chinese animated film Niu Lai, stands on the ground of an exhibition hall during the 2026 World Robot Conference in Beijing. — Reuters

LOW-BUDGET FILM SPARKS CHINA BOX-OFFICE REVOLT



A man uses his phone to photograph a hand-drawn poster for the Chinese animated film Niu Lai at a cinema in Beijing. — Reuters



A hand-drawn poster for the Chinese animated film Niu Lai at a cinema in Beijing. — Reuters

‘TINKER TAILOR’ FILMMAKER JOHN IRVIN DIES AT 86



British filmmaker John Irvin. — AFP

British filmmaker John Irvin, best known for adapting John le Carré’s espionage classic “Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy” for television, has died aged 86, his producer Claire Evans said on Wednesday.

Irvin died peacefully at home on August 11, surrounded by his family, Evans said. He is survived by three children and two grandchildren.

The 1979 BBC miniseries starred Alec Guinness as George Smiley, the restrained intelligence officer tasked with uncovering a Soviet mole within the British secret service. The acclaimed production won Irvin two BAFTAs and earned him an Emmy nomination, establishing his reputation and opening the doors to Hollywood.

He subsequently directed a string of action films and thrillers throughout the 1980s. They included “The Dogs of War”, starring Christopher Walken and Tom Berenger;

the horror film “Ghost Story”, featuring Fred Astaire; “Raw Deal” with Arnold Schwarzenegger; the Vietnam War drama “Hamburger Hill”; and the crime thriller “Next of Kin”, starring Patrick Swayze and Liam Neeson.

Born in northern England in 1940, Irvin began his career working in documentaries and television before moving into feature films. His work eventually spanned five decades and ranged from Cold War intrigue and war dramas to horror, crime and politically engaged cinema.

Later in his career, he worked with Evans on the 2016 film “Mandela’s Gun”, which explored Nelson Mandela’s experience as a guerrilla fighter for the African National Congress before he became South Africa’s first Black president. The project reflected Irvin’s enduring interest in politically charged stories. — AFP

A crudely animated, homemade movie about a baby cow has become China’s most unlikely box-office smash, generating merchandise and memes and a national conversation about the joyful rejection of slick marketing and artificial intelligence by a younger generation.

Made on a shoestring budget and with hand-drawn posters and a reported cost in the thousands of dollars, “The Bull Comes,” or “Niu Lai” in Chinese, grossed the equivalent of more than \$4 million as of Thursday.

In China’s daily box-office rankings, it placed immediately behind “Spider-Man: Brand New Day,” a Marvel Studios sequel that reportedly cost some \$225 million to produce.

“Niu Lai,” which tells the story of a newborn calf, his mother and a leopard cub, flopped in its first week, grossing just over \$1,000, according to local media reports.

Then, with a boost from social and local media, the movie’s wonky animation, awkward storytelling and discussion of its unlikely creators – an amateur animator and his supportive mother – made the movie a viral sensation.

At a recent packed screening in Beijing, bursts of laughter rang out

before the movie started.

“I can’t believe the theatre is full!” one audience member shouted, triggering cheers and laughter from the crowd.

“Other than envying how much money this piece of junk has made, I have no complaints,” said a popular movie blogger on Weibo, a social media platform. The embrace of the movie has become a kind of inside joke for the young, the blogger added.

“And I say - let them laugh. There aren’t that many things left that we can joke about.”

The DIY project tapped into a kind of rebellious mood of the moment, said Remo Zhu, a Chinese director.

“It’s a mood of ... don’t tell me what to do, to watch or eat - I’ll decide that for myself,” he said.

“In a packed theatre full of strangers, it becomes a genuinely interactive, immersive communal experience.”

The movie tells the story of a frail and exhausted newborn calf who struggles to stand up. It is a tale of friendship, courage and loss as the herd faces danger on its journey to find greener pastures. Spoiler: It also may - or may not - be a dream.

The dialogue is slow. Action sequences are clunky. The animation is heavily pixelated.

“It’s not even a movie,” said one reviewer on Weibo. “To call it bad is an insult to bad movies.”

Movie or not, it has become a cultural touchstone and sparked a frenzy of people trying to cash in on its unlikely appeal. There are Niu Lai toys, Niu Lai-masked robots, social media memes and cosplays.

Companies with the word “bull” in their names also saw an increase in their share prices on Monday, drawing an unusual warning from China’s central bank against meme stock investing.

“Going to the movies for a bit of fun is harmless enough, but ... pinning one’s hopes on the word ‘bull’ is not rationality - it is wishful thinking,” a journal run by the People’s Bank of China said on Tuesday.

Aspiring animators hoping to repeat the low-budget flick’s success might also be out of luck.

“These are usually low-probability events: hard to predict and impossible to replicate deliberately,” said Liang Xia, an animation producer based in Shanghai.

“More often, they are driven by a swell of public emotion rather than the content itself. The content may simply serve as the spark that ignites.” — Reuters

FEATURES



SIHAM AL SAIDI

It begins with a bag, not simply resting on a table, but telling a story reaching outside the Sultanate of Oman! Its leather is carefully shaped and stitched by hand, while elements inspired by Oman's traditional safah palm leaf craft find their way into its design. On another piece, the outline of Oman appears alongside Arabic letters, turning a functional accessory into a keepsake of place and identity. Some designs even carry lines of poetry, created especially to mark Oman's National Day.

Behind these details is Khadija al Balushi, the Omani founder of Khiyal, a homegrown brand that is bringing together the timeless character of natural leather with contemporary design and elements of Omani heritage.

Khadija's journey began three years ago with little more than a love for sewing, drawing and handmade crafts. Although she studied commercial law, her real creative outlet was always found in designing, stitching and making things by hand. What began as a hobby gradually evolved into a serious passion for leather craftsmanship.

"I started with a simple love for bags and handmade work", Khadija says. "With time, passion and consistency, it developed into a project that I work on with great love".

Today, each Khiyal bag is handmade using high-quality natural leather, including cowhide and sheepskin. From selecting the leather to cutting, stitching and finishing, much of the process is carried out by Khadija herself. A single bag can take around two weeks to complete, a reflection of the patience required when craftsmanship takes precedence over mass production.

Her approach, however, is not limited to leather. Khadija has increasingly looked to Oman's cultural heritage for inspiration, particularly the traditional palm-leaf craft. By combining leather with safah-inspired textures and forms, she creates a visual dialogue between Oman's past and present.

Among her designs is a bag featuring a map of Oman and Arabic lettering, which has attracted particular interest from international visitors who see the pieces as distinctive souvenirs. Another collection incorporating poetry around Oman's National Day received strong demand.

Khadija has created four designs entirely from her own concepts, while other pieces draw inspiration from international designs, which she then interprets through her own

Khiyal: Where leather carries the memory of Oman



From hand-stitched leather to palm-leaf inspired details, Omani founder Khadija al Balushi is turning traditional craftsmanship into contemporary accessories. Through her brand Khiyal, she creates bags that blend natural materials, Arabic design and elements of Oman's cultural identity, offering customers a piece of heritage they can carry wherever they go.



aesthetic and Omani identity. Her journey reached an emotional milestone when she was invited by Hirfah Omaniah to represent the leather section at the "Identity and Continuity" forum. "That moment touched me deeply", she recalls. "I felt that Khiyal had finally reached the place it belonged". The road has not been without challenges. Leather requires precision, time and careful sourcing, while maintaining quality can be difficult when one person handles most of the production. Yet the growing appreciation for handmade products continues to encourage her. Her dream is to initiate a factory in the future supervising it itself to ensure preserving the dignity of Oman and to reach internationals by participating in international exhibitions. Behind the scenes, Khadija also credits her husband as her greatest supporter. For her, Khiyal is more than a brand. It is an evolving experiment in turning heritage into something people can carry, with a piece of Oman traveling wherever the bag goes.

