

OMAN

دولة عمان

DAILY

Observer

FROM THE ARCHIVE

OMAN'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

More

3

VOL. 45, NO. 276

PAGES 20 | BAISAS 210

2010000387405

IN BRIEF

HM’S GREETINGS
TO INDONESIA
PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Prabowo Subianto of the Republic of Indonesia on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to Indonesia for continued progress and prosperity. His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations of cooperation and partnership further growth and expansion in a manner that serves mutual interests.

SQU PROGRAMME
GETS INTERNATIONAL
ACCREDITATION

The Sultan Qaboos University's programme of Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Science (with Clinical Training) has received international accreditation for the second time after meeting the standards and requirements. This constitutes the third consecutive international accreditation cycle for the aforementioned programme, conducted at the College of Medicine and Health Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University, during the 2025-2029 period. The accomplishment was unveiled after an international external quality assurance assessment that was conducted by the Institute of Biomedical Sciences in the United Kingdom. It was officially approved by the Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education on April 8, 2025.

DETAILS ON P2

GREECE FIGHTS WILDFIRES



A firefighting Bell 206L LongRanger helicopter refills water from the sea during a wildfire on the Greek island of Skyros, in Aegean Sea, on Sunday. After largely escaping the heatwave temperatures that blanketed much of Europe earlier this summer, Greece has been hit with several major wildfires since late July, fuelled by unusually strong winds. — AFP

OQEP’s net profit exceeds 19.4% to touch **₹** 199m

MUSCAT: OQ Exploration and Production (OQEP) achieved a 19.4 per cent growth in its net profit during the first half of 2026, reaching RO 199 million. This has surpassed the revenue growth rate of 12 per cent, reflecting the company's efficiency in controlling costs despite the increase in production levels.

This revenue growth is

attributed to the increased sales volume of crude oil and condensates, which reached 11.6 million barrels, in addition to an 8 per cent increase in the average realised oil price, reaching \$80.9 per barrel.

The company also achieved a 14.1 per cent year-on-year increase in adjusted cash flow from operating activities, reaching RO

331.2 million in the first half of 2026, driven by higher commodity prices and increased sales volume.

The audited financial results indicated that the company invested RO 132 million as capital expenditure since the beginning of the current year. This includes RO 128 million in oil and gas assets investments, and RO 3.5 million in exploration expenditures,

reinforcing the company's growth strategy and the execution of further future works.

The return on capital employed rose to 67.0 per cent, compared to 51.5 per cent in the first half of 2025, representing an increase of 30 per cent. This confirms the profit growth and the efficiency of capital allocation adopted by the company. — ONA

Trump’s envoys to push
for Gaza peace plan

COUNTRIES CONDEMN ISRAEL’S REJECTION OF GAZA PLAN

DONALD

TRUMP’S envoys meet with Egyptian, Qatari and Turkish

mediators in Cairo on Sunday, a diplomatic source said, in a bid to advance the US president's Gaza peace plan, even as Israel pressed on with air strikes in the enclave.

Hamas officials were present at some of the meetings between mediators and with Trump's envoy and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and Nickolay Mladenov, Trump's Board of Peace envoy for Gaza, the diplomat said.

A senior Israeli official said that Kushner and Mladenov were scheduled to meet on Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who on August 9 said Trump's latest road map for Gaza peace was 'unacceptable'.

Meanwhile, five Arab countries together with Türkiye, Pakistan and Indonesia on Sunday condemned Israel's rejection of Trump's plan for Gaza.

In a joint statement, the countries including Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE, said the rejection threatened Trump's intensified efforts to end war in Gaza.

SEVERAL INJURED

After scaling back its attacks in the enclave earlier this month, Israel's air strikes have resumed in the past few days.

The Israeli military said on Sunday that its aircraft targeted a fighter in Khan Yunis, in southern Gaza. At least five Palestinians were



Palestinians walk past the rubble of residential buildings destroyed during the war in Gaza City on Sunday. — Reuters

Trump announced last month that there had been a breakthrough in his plan to end the war, to which both Israel and Hamas had agreed

injured in the strike which had hit a tent encampment, medics in the enclave said.

Trump announced last month that there had been a breakthrough in his plan to end the war, to which both Israel and Hamas had agreed.

Hamas said it had agreed to the plan to avoid a resumption of the war, but added that implementation of the deal would depend on Israel

first meeting its own commitments, including withdrawing its forces and halting attacks.

An October ceasefire halted major fighting in a devastating two-year war in Gaza that began on October 7, 2023.

Israeli fire has killed more than 1,250 Palestinians in Gaza, most of them civilians, since October.

— Agencies

Shaath viewpoint... An experience soaring above the sea

RAKHYUT: Shaath Glass Viewpoint in the Wilayat of Rakhout, Dhofar Governorate, has unveiled a striking new identity that reinforces its standing as one of the governorate's premier tourist destinations.

A modern development project has added an exceptional feature to the area's breathtaking natural landscape: a glass observation platform that offers visitors the chance to gaze upon steep mountain slopes and the Arabian Sea from a dizzying height, where the blue the ocean meets the green of the mountains and the vast

horizon beyond. Situated on the slopes of Mount Sajer, part of the Qamar (Moon) Mountain range in Rakhout, the Shaath Glass Viewpoint commands a view of the sea from an elevation exceeding 1,000 metres. It lies approximately 80 km from the city of Salalah via the main highway connecting Salalah to the wilayats of Rakhout and Dhalkhut.

The new project has imbued the location with a distinct touristic dimension, featuring a glass platform measuring 10 metres in length and 12 metres in width, complemented by viewing decks,



The glass observation platform offers visitors the chance to gaze upon steep mountain slopes and the Arabian Sea from a dizzying height.

seating areas, rest stops, pedestrian pathways, vehicle parking, service facilities, retail zones, a children's play area, and an open-air amphitheatre.

The glass platform is distinguished by its design, which allows visitors to stand suspended above the natural terrain and take in an uninterrupted panoramic view of the sea and mountains — an experience that blends exhilaration, contemplation, and photography. This comes as Dhofar Governorate continues to see growing interest in natural sites that combine

geographical assets with modern tourism infrastructure.

Ahmed Said Baqi, owner of Sajer Investment Company, the project's developer, stated that the construction of the glass platform adhered to multiple engineering and technical specifications, encompassing structural and environmental studies, load and wind analysis, safety assessments, and risk management protocols. These were complemented by soil testing prior to construction, as well as testing of the steel framework and glass panels. — ONA

FROM THE ARCHIVES

THE REPORT AND PICTURES CAPTURED A PERIOD WHEN OMAN’S DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS WERE EXTENDING BEYOND THE COUNTRY’S GROWING TOWNS AND CITIES TO REMOTE COMMUNITIES. IT DESCRIBED INITIATIVES AIMED AT IMPROVING HEALTHCARE, LITERACY, AGRICULTURE, ANIMAL HUSBANDRY, WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION, SANITATION AND BASIC VILLAGE INFRASTRUCTURE.

OMAN 'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

SAUD AL ANSARI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

MORE than four decades ago, the Observer (August 12, 1984) documented an important chapter in Oman's social and rural development journey through a field report titled "Working for an Improved Quality of Life."

Written by Clifford Anthony, with photographs by Fathy Romia, the report took readers from Muscat to Al Rustaq and then into remote villages including Al Hasha and Al Khadra, offering a first-hand account of the National Community Development Programme (NCDP).

The report captured a period when Oman's development efforts were extending beyond the country's growing towns and cities to remote communities. It described initiatives aimed at improving healthcare, literacy, agriculture, animal husbandry, women's participation, sanitation and basic village infrastructure.

At the time, the programme was operating across 105 villages and 54 settlements, serving a population of around 32,500 people, with an Omani field team comprising 53 social workers, 11 health workers and 23 office staff.

The article highlighted the work of health workers who travelled between remote villages, literacy classes that enabled residents to move from using thumb impressions to signing their names, and women's centres where Omani women received training in home economics, handicrafts, embroidery, spinning and weaving.

It also recorded the programme's agricultural extension work, including the introduction of new crops and modern farming methods, as well as veterinary interventions that treated 7,483 cattle over two years.

Perhaps most significantly, the report showed how development was being pursued through community participation. Local development committees had been established, and villagers themselves contributed to projects involving aflaj maintenance, wells, meeting halls, Quran schools, roads, and women's centres.

The figures preserved in the article provide a valuable snapshot of Oman's development priorities in the early 1980s. The report noted that 260 local projects had been implemented at a total cost of RO 3,620,836, with public contributions accounting for 49 per cent.

The closing scene of the report is particularly symbolic. On the journey back from Al Khadra, the team stopped to view a newly constructed 20-metre underground falaj, which the reporter described as a testimony to the progress being made under the National Community Development Programme.

More than 40 years later, the article serves not merely as a record of individual projects, but as a historical window into the foundations of Oman's approach to rural development and community participation.

FACTFILE

At the time, the programme operated across 105 villages and 54 settlements

The programme served a population of around 32,500 people

Omani field team comprised of 53 social workers, 11 health workers and 23 office staff

260 local projects had been implemented at a total cost of RO 3,620,836

Public contributions of the projects cost accounted for 49 per cent





خريف
ظفار
KHAREEF
DHO FAR

From misty mountains to miniature London, giant observation wheels and farm escapes, Khareef Dhofar Season 2026 is adding a new layer of creativity, entertainment and adventure to its natural charm

IDRIS AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

FOR decades, Khareef has drawn visitors to Salalah with the promise of mist-covered mountains, lush landscapes and cool weather.

In 2026, however, Dhofar's summer attraction is taking on a new identity, blending its natural appeal with creative landmarks, entertainment and experiences designed for a new generation of visitors.

One of the season's most unexpected attractions is a miniature London at Ittin Square. Complete with replicas of Big Ben and the classic red telephone booth, the installation has added an unusual urban touch to the mountains of Dhofar. Artificial snow falling around the mini landmarks has made the scene even more surreal, prompting visitors to joke that they have travelled from Salalah to London.

The snow experience features two night shows, at 9 pm and 10:30 pm, and quickly gained attention online, with videos of the snowy spectacle attracting visitors eager to experience the unusual scene for themselves.

"Every year, there are new ideas. Omani youth are creative when they are given the opportunity and support," said Ahmed al Ghaithi, a visitor to Salalah.

Adding another new dimension to the season, Salalah Eye, which opened on August 15, is giving visitors a new vantage point to experience Dhofar. The observation wheel features 30 air-conditioned, thermally insulated



WHEN SALALAH MEETS LONDON



cabins, each accommodating up to six people. A full rotation takes between eight and 12 minutes, with views extending up to 42 kilometres horizontally in clear weather.

For blogger Reem al Harthi, the attraction is among the highlights of Khareef Dhofar Season 2026, offering visitors the chance to see the landscape from above.

Meanwhile, Al Gharif is demonstrating how traditional agriculture can become a modern tourism experience. The eco-tourism destination combines farms, gardens, cafés, horses, local heritage and outdoor recreation, transforming an agricultural setting into a place for visitors to spend time and explore.

Its latest addition is free Wi-Fi, introduced through a partnership with Awsar to support youth-led businesses, facilitate their digital operations and enhance the visitor experience.

Social media influencer Maher al Sulaimi described the recent

developments and initiatives across Salalah as one of the biggest changes in Khareef tourism.

He noted that the city is evolving from a destination visited primarily for its weather and natural scenery into one offering a diverse tourism product throughout the day, from nature, adventures, farms and beaches in the morning to cafés and restaurants in the afternoon, followed by a growing range of evening events and promenades.

The evolution suggests that Khareef tourism is no longer defined solely by nature. In 2026, Dhofar is building a broader tourism experience where nature, innovation, culture and entertainment meet.

PURSHOTTAM KANJI
EXCHANGE

Transfer money worldwide instantly via
Western Union using the PK Remit mobile app.

FAST
TRANSFER

SECURE &
RELIABLE

WORLDWIDE
NETWORK

SCAN & DOWNLOAD
PK REMIT APP NOW

GET IT ON
Google Play

Download on the
App Store

SHORT TAKES



Several alternative structural routes have been marked to avoid delays.

WORK BEGINS AT AL JAMI ROUNDABOUT

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

Commuters need to plan ahead to consider alternative routes as Muscat Municipality is implementing the first phase of development works for Al Jami Roundabout, Al Seeb, in a partial closure from August 16 until Sunday, August 23. The municipality has requested the public to adhere to the diversions and directional signs and exercise caution during this week.

To bypass the partial closure at Al Jami Roundabout and minimise delays in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, one can utilise several alternative structural routes depending on the commuters’ starting point and destination. One of the major highway alternatives is the Muscat Expressway route, as with this route one can completely bypass local arterial bottlenecks in Al Seeb if one is commuting long distances between Muscat, Halban or Barka. The Sultan Qaboos Road is ideal if one is travelling east-west parallel to the coast; keeping in mind that local exits near central Al Seeb may experience heavier secondary traffic. If travelling near the waterfront or heading toward Al Mouj, one suggestion is to use Al Seeb seafront road to loop around the inner residential blocks.

Indian Social Club Oman celebrates India’s 80th Independence Day



Balwinder Singh was honoured as ‘Indian of the Year’ in recognition of his contribution to community service and philanthropy

MUSCAT: Indian Social Club Oman (ISC Oman) celebrated India’s 80th Independence Day with a cultural programme attended by members of the Indian community in Oman.

The event was attended by Prashant Pise, Ambassador of India to Oman, as chief guest, along with several community figures, including Kiran Ashar, Dr Mohammed Ali, Aftab Patel and Mohnish Behl.

The Ambassador conveyed Independence Day greetings to the Indian community in Oman.

Welcoming the gathering, Suhail Khan, Chairman, ISC Oman, extended his greetings and highlighted the significance of the 150th anniversary of India’s national song, ‘Vande Mataram’, and its enduring association with the country’s freedom movement and national identity.

A highlight of the celebrations was the presentation of the ‘Indian of the Year’ award to Balwinder Singh in recognition of his longstanding contribution to community service and philanthropy.

Singh has been involved in charitable and community initiatives for several decades. Accepting the award, he thanked ISC Oman and described the recognition as one of the most memorable moments of his time in Oman.

The celebrations featured a range of cultural and musical performances highlighting India’s linguistic and regional

diversity.

The Muscat Singers – Open Mic Group of ISC performed a medley of patriotic songs, followed by performances by various ISC groups.

The Club’s 16 Linguistic Wings presented folk and cultural performances representing different regions of India, showcasing the country’s diverse traditions and the spirit of unity in diversity.

Rangrez, the artists’ group of ISC, also displayed a collection of paintings by members of the Indian community.

The event was organised with the support of the ISC Management Committee, staff and volunteers, including General Secretary K M Shakeel, Treasurer Shameer PTK, Entertainment Secretary Shalini Karthik, Cultural Secretary SDT Prasad and Community Welfare Secretary Santhosh Kumar.

Proposing the vote of thanks, Joint General Secretary Manoj Ranade thanked the Ambassador, officials and staff of the Embassy of India, Linguistic Wing conveners, committees, members, sponsors and supporters for their contribution to the celebrations.

The Independence Day celebrations highlighted the community’s cultural diversity and its continued efforts to promote social and cultural engagement in Oman.

Forum highlights investing in human resources

THE ACTIVITIES of the sixth forum of the Omani Society for Human Resource Management commenced on Sunday in Salalah under the theme “People First: Impact Starts with People.” The two-day event features the participation of several executive leaders, experts, and specialists in the fields of leadership, human capital, institutional development, and digital transformation from within the Sultanate of Oman and abroad.

Faisal bin Hamoud al Siyabi, Chief Executive Officer of the Omani Society for Human Resource Management, affirmed that the selection of the theme “People First” stems from a firm conviction that the human element is the most influential factor in the success of institutions. He pointed out that the society continues its mission as a national platform that contributes to building innovative work environments.

The forum aims to highlight the importance of investing in human resources, review the latest practices in developing the employee experience, and exchange expertise between the public and private sectors, in addition to discussing the impact of digital transformation on the future of work.

The forum witnessed a panel discussion titled “How to Bring People Back to the Heart of Institutional Decisions,” featuring the participation of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar; Taher bin Mabkhout al Junaibi, Governor of Al



The forum witnessed a panel discussion titled ‘How to Bring People Back to the Heart of Institutional Decisions.’ — ONA

Dhahirah; and Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North. The session was moderated by Dr Ghalib bin Saif al Hosni, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the society. It addressed the role of the human element in decision-making and the alignment between institutional development and future requirements.

The programme included the presentation of several working papers covering various topics. These included “Institutional Intelligence” by Said bin Abdullah al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development; “Transitioning from the Digitalisation of Services to the Humanisation of Digital Systems and Services” by Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, Chairman of the Dhofar Municipality; “Resilient Leadership in an Era of Transformation” by Hanan bint

Abdulrahman al Saif, General Manager of ZRG Partners Arabia Ltd.; and “Strategic Dialogues for the Future of Work and People” by Mohammed bin Othman al Aiban, Senior Vice-President of Human Capital at the Saudi Environment Fund.

Additionally, a paper on “Human Capacity Building from a Training Perspective” was presented by Faisal bin Abdullah al Nahdi, Director of the Training and Development Center at the State Financial and Administrative Audit Authority. This was presented alongside a paper titled “Human Capital: From an Operating Cost to a National Value” by Noura bint Abdulmohsen al Raaidan, and another titled “The Family as the Core of Protection and Empowerment” by Radhiya bint Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Director-General of Social Protection Policies at the Social Protection Fund. — ONA

Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education

الهيئة العامة لضمان جودة التعليم

TENDER NOTICE

The Internal Tender Committee of the Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education (OAQA) hereby announces the issuance of the following tender:

Tender Number	Tender Title	Company Grade	Tender Fee	Date		
				Distribution Till	Last Day to receive Clarifications	Bid Submission Date
28/2026	Developing the Authority's website and social media accounts	Companies and institutions specialized in Information Technology, registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority, classified under Grade (First,Second,Third)	OMR 25	27 Aug 2026	31 Aug 2026	14 Sep 2026

The Oman Authority for Quality Assurance of Education (OAQA) is hereby inviting all local, specialized bidders to participate in this TENDER as per the following instructions, in addition to all terms of TENDER enclosed in the TENDER documents

For project brief, please visit the below link:

etendering.tenderboard.gov.om

Purchase of Tender Documents

- Companies specialized in this field and registered with the Projects, Tenders, and Local Content Authority under the grade specified above, and wishing to participate in the aforementioned tender, shall obtain the relevant Tender Documents through the Authority's e-Tendering portal (Esnad) via the website below:(https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om) no later than the date specified in the above table, subject to the payment of the prescribed document fee through the electronic payment gateway available on the website.

Submission

- All Proposals should be SUBMITTED ONLINE AT e-TENDERING System **etendering.tenderboard.gov.om**
- Tenders submitted shall remain valid for a period of ninety (180) days from the date of submission via the electronic portal
- The Internal Tender Committee reserves the right to cancel or reject any tender without stating the reasons
- Tenders must be submitted through the above-mentioned website no later than 10:00 a.m. on the specified closing date
- Any tender received after this deadline shall not be accepted
- The Internal Tender Committee shall not be bound to accept the lowest-priced tender or any other tender

Correspondence Tender Inquiry

- All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online through the eTendering System ONLY

Tendering System Inquiry

- All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and 24402200

www.oaaqa.gov.om

X@OAAQA_OM

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



First aid responders and residents rush to the site of an Israeli airstrike in the southern Lebanese village of Deir Al Zahrani. — AFP

Israel vows to go after Hezbollah despite US-brokered deal

TEL AVIV: Israel vowed on Sunday it would hit Hezbollah again if threatened, as it identified what it described as a commander killed in strikes a day earlier that also left several children dead. Israeli strikes on Saturday killed 11 people in southern Lebanon, according to authorities, in the deadliest attacks since a deal was reached in June aimed at ending hostilities. Israel said the strikes were a response to Hezbollah setting off explosive drones inside a so-called “security zone” in southern Lebanon, seriously injuring three Israeli troops, including an officer.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said a “whole family” had been killed in the strike in the village of Ansar, with Lebanon’s health ministry reporting that three children and two women died. Imran Riza, the UN humanitarian coordinator for Lebanon, condemned the strike. “Children and civilians continue to pay an unacceptable price. International humanitarian law is clear: civilians must be protected at all times,” he said. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office accused Hezbollah of deliberately placing civilians in harm’s way. Lebanon and Israel signed a US-brokered deal in which Lebanon’s army will gradually take over security in southern areas occupied by Israel. — AFP

Bangladesh says PM will not visit India until Hasina extradited



TARIQUE RAHMAN
Bangladesh PM

DHAKA: Bangladesh said on Sunday that Prime Minister Tarique Rahman would not visit India until New Delhi extradited Sheikh Hasina, the Bangladeshi former premier who fled during a 2024 uprising. The countries have had a strained relationship

since deadly anti-government protests brought down Hasina’s government and prompted her to escape to neighbouring India, where she remains. She faces the death penalty in Bangladesh after being convicted of crimes against humanity, and Dhaka has repeatedly requested her extradition.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday, foreign ministry official A K M Shahidul Karim played down media speculation about a possible trip by Rahman to India next week. “We are of the view that a propitious environment needs to be created for the visit,” Karim told reporters. “To this end, we have urged the Indian authorities to expedite their efforts to extradite Sheikh Hasina and other fugitives.” Officials from Bangladesh and India have been in contact in recent weeks about the possibility of a visit by Rahman, Karim said. “But the process has been vitiated by Sheikh Hasina’s open media interactions, despite her being a convict in crimes against humanity.” Karim also said the government would pursue a “Bangladesh First” foreign policy rooted in sovereignty and non-interference while seeking mutually beneficial ties with India and other countries. — AFP

DEADLIEST DISASTER

Toll in Zimbabwe ferry capsizing rises to 80



Another eight bodies were retrieved from Zimbabwe’s Lake Kariba on Sunday to take the death toll from this week’s ferry capsizing to 80, police said. “The Kariba RIDA boat accident death toll is now 80 following the recovery of eight more bodies on August 16, 2026,” the police said in a statement. Officials say the boat was authorised to carry 90 people but was packed with 114 adults, five crew members and an unspecified number of children. — AFP

OVER 700 HUMANITARIAN AID TRUCKS ENTER AFGHANISTAN FROM PAKISTAN

KABUL: More than 700 trucks carrying international humanitarian aid arrived in Afghanistan via Pakistan despite a near-total closure of the land border between the two countries following clashes in October, the United Nations said on Sunday. The convoy was carrying “food and other critical humanitarian items,” Olga Cherevko, spokeswoman for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Afghanistan, said.

United Nations Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator for Pakistan Mo Yahya said on X that “seven hundred and twenty-four trucks of humanitarian cargo have crossed into Afghanistan through Torkham, reaching families who need it most”. He also thanked Islamabad and “all those who made it possible to keep the humanitarian lifeline open”.

Acute child malnutrition has reached critical levels in Afghanistan this year, the World

Food Programme (WFP) warned in early August. Following deadly earthquakes last year, several climate-related disasters this year and the return of millions of Afghans from Iran and Pakistan since 2023, nearly 14 million Afghans are facing acute hunger, according to WFP.

The conflict with Pakistan has severely disrupted logistical routes for delivering humanitarian aid, WFP Deputy Executive Director Carl Skau said in May. — AFP

Thousands evacuate after Indonesia quake kills 53

AROUND 5,000 people have been evacuated after a magnitude-7.7 earthquake rocked eastern Indonesia, killing at least 53, blocking roads and causing landslides, authorities said on Sunday. They added that more than 130 people had been injured, many with broken bones.

Saturday’s quake was the Southeast Asian nation’s deadliest since a 2022 quake killed hundreds in West Java.

More than 3,300 people in Indonesia’s Sikka region — one of the hardest-hit — self-evacuated or were in a sports arena, according to the country’s national disaster mitigation agency, known as BNPB. Some residents were stranded outside collapsed homes under makeshift tents made out of tarpaulin, while others received treatment in a tent outside the local hospital. A sprawling archipelago of 290 million people, Indonesia straddles the “Pacific Ring of Fire”, a seismically active zone where tectonic plates meet, triggering frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

At a now-closed port in Maumere, littered with debris from a collapsed roof and walls, residents said they were scared of aftershocks. The disaster agency said on Sunday nearly a thousand aftershocks had



Women with children sit in a shelter at a makeshift evacuation centre at a stadium in Maumere, Indonesia. — Reuters

More than 3,300 people in Sikka self-evacuated or were in a sports arena. Some residents were stranded outside collapsed homes under makeshift tents made out of tarpaulin, while others received treatment in a tent outside the local hospital

been recorded since the quake. Nearby, hundreds of residents filled a sports stadium, which has been designated as an evacuation spot.

As the sun was setting, residents stood in line to get warm drinks. Some mothers hooked pieces of clothing to tent frames to form makeshift cradles for their babies. Other children played soccer outside. One of these mothers was Lisda, 22, who chose to be in a tent with her twin babies due to the fear of sleeping inside her home.

Inside another tent, Yuvienta Saen, 67, recounted her misfortunes. As she felt the quake during her morning prayer, she had to choose

between her paralysed husband and herself. The area of the quake was hit in 1992 by a magnitude-7.5 earthquake that caused extensive destruction, Indonesia’s geophysics agency said.

Margaretha Movaldes Da Maga Bapa, head of the region’s disaster mitigation agency, said the quake had brought back memories. “We’ve had quakes often. But this one really brings back the trauma of the one from 1992,” she said, referencing the trucks bringing aid and tents. Suryaman, a rescue agency official, said the priority was clearing rubble in the most-affected areas of Manggarai, East Manggarai and Nagekeo to find people possibly still trapped under rubble.

Suryaman said the agency had not received missing person reports but added that landslides and aftershocks were impeding the search. More than 3,500 military and police officers have been deployed to the region, Cabinet Secretary Teddy Indra Wijaya said in a statement. Power supply was nearly fully restored, but authorities were still working on fixing distribution lines, state utility firm Perusahaan Listrik Negara said on Sunday. The East Nusa Tenggara government has declared an emergency for the province, BNPB said, a move that allows authorities to mobilise resources and funding. — Reuters



KUSHNER, HAMAS IN EGYPT FOR GAZA PLAN TALKS

CAIRO: Donald Trump’s envoy and son-in-law Jared Kushner discussed the US leader’s plan for Gaza with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el Sisi on Sunday, hours after Hamas chief Khalil El Hayya met with Cairo’s spymaster. Kushner and El Hayya, both in the Mediterranean city of El Alamein, held separate talks on the implementation of Trump’s post-war plan for Gaza, which has largely been stalled since a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas was declared last October.

The meeting between Kushner and Sisi “emphasised the need for all parties to fulfil their obligations under the Gaza Strip ceasefire agreement”, according to presidential spokesperson Mohamed El Shennawy. Kushner is set to travel to Israel, which publicly rejected the 15-point road map after Hamas had already agreed to it.

The Hamas delegation, in a meeting with Egyptian intelligence chief Hassan Rashad, “reaffirmed commitment to completing US President Donald Trump’s plan”. A Hamas official said that the talks would cover “the latest developments in the negotiations and the efforts being made to compel Israel to abide by the agreement, which includes the 15-point road map, and to begin its implementation”. — AFP

CROSSING LINES

South Korea says it fired warning shots



South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said on Sunday that warning shots had been fired when North Korean soldiers violated the military demarcation line. “Recently, on the Eastern Front, North Korean forces crossed the military demarcation line, prompting our military to fire warning shots according to operational procedures,” a JCS statement said. “Our military is closely monitoring North Korean movements while maintaining a firm military readiness posture.” — Reuters

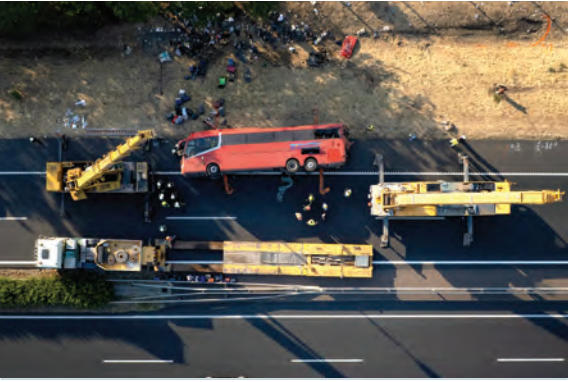
SCORCHING SUMMER

Fires break out on island near Athens



Two people died and hundreds were evacuated on Sunday as two fires broke out on the Greek island of Salamis near Athens, the fire department said. A fire department spokesman said that “two bodies were recovered” from the Peristeria beach area in the south of the island, as the service announced that hundreds of people had hurriedly been evacuated an hour earlier. The civil protection ministry issued four evacuation orders in short succession as the fires broke out. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Rescuers and officials work at the wreckage of an overturned Polish tourist bus, about 150 km east of the Hungarian capital Budapest. — AFP

12 KILLED AS POLISH BUS VEERS OFF HUNGARY HIGHWAY

BUDAPEST: A Polish bus crashed into a ditch on a Hungarian highway early on Sunday killing 12 people and leaving at least 10 with critical injuries, officials said. The coach, heading from Serbia to Poland, crashed at 01:00 am (23:00 GMT Saturday) on the M3 highway near Mezokeresztes, about 140 kilometres east of Budapest, according to police. The bus, with 57 passengers and two drivers, “left the road, ended up in a ditch, and came to a stop on its side,” the national disaster management agency said in a social media post. Hungary’s Interior Minister Gabor Posfai said the driver had been detained and media quoted police as saying he had fallen asleep at the wheel. A Polish diplomat, Andrzej Osiak, told a press conference that five of the injured were fighting for their lives. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said he had ordered a special flight to be sent to collect the passengers on the bus who could travel. Eleven people were declared dead at the scene and another person died in hospital, the disaster agency said. The ambulance service said 37 people suffered minor injuries and were taken to hospitals in four cities. — AFP

HURRICANE LALA LEAVES HAWAII



Hurricane Lala was pulling away from Hawaii’s Big Island early on Sunday, as heavy rain and strong winds struck the US Pacific state and officials warned of potentially dangerous flooding. “Damaging winds will persist across portions of the Big Island of Hawaii overnight, with the strongest winds expected in areas of higher terrain,” the National Hurricane Center said at 11:00 pm local time, warning that the coast would be hit with “large and dangerous waves.” Lala strengthened into a Category 1 hurricane on Saturday, generating winds of up to 75 miles per hour. — AFP

HOPES FADE IN COLOMBIA QUAKE AS MORE BODIES RECOVERED

BOGOTA: Hopes of finding survivors of the earthquake that struck western Colombia five days ago were dwindling, as more bodies were pulled from buildings that collapsed due to the 7.4-magnitude quake that left hundreds dead or missing. The earthquake struck just after 7:30 am in San Jose del Palmar, toppling apartment buildings and damaging schools, churches, hospitals and homes from the Pacific port of Buenaventura to

Colombia’s coffee-growing region and major western cities. Around 290 people have died with 140 more missing and nearly 4,000 more injured, according to official estimates late on Saturday. More than two-thirds of the deaths were concentrated in the cities of Cali and Pereira. “We have only one site where there are signs of life,” Cali fire captain Alberto Hernandez said. “At the other locations, we are unfortunately in the phase of recovering bodies.”

With over 2 million inhabitants, Cali is Colombia’s third-biggest city. Rescue workers continued through the morning to sift through mountains of shattered concrete, bricks and metal to find those who remain unaccounted for, while others were cleaning their neighbourhoods armed with brooms and shovels. Hernandez said they would likely finish recovering bodies by Sunday, after which they will begin using heavy equipment to clear the debris. — Reuters

Russia and Ukraine trade massive wave of air strikes

RUSSIA CARRIED out a wave of air strikes on Ukraine overnight, killing two people at a steel plant, and Kyiv launched a heavy drone attack on the Moscow region that killed one person and set ablaze a warehouse used by Russia’s leading e-commerce retailer. Romania, which borders Ukraine, said an F-18 fighter on a Nato air policing mission had shot down a drone that breached its airspace during the latest attacks. It did not specify the origin of the drone, which entered from Moldova, but a Nato spokesperson said it appeared to be Russian.

Russia struck Ukraine’s largest grain export port on the River Danube near the Romanian border last week after stepping up attacks on Ukraine in recent weeks. Ukraine has also intensified attacks on Russian targets including oil refineries, and both sides have struck commercial vessels in the Black Sea.

In the latest attacks since Russia’s attack on Ukraine in February 2022, Russian forces struck Ukraine’s biggest steel plant overnight in the industrial city of Kryvyi Rih, President Volodymyr Zelensky’s home town. At least two people were killed and 14 injured, Ukrainian officials said. “As a result of the attack, key production facilities in the power generation and blast furnace sectors have been damaged, and the plant’s production processes have been partially halted,” ArcelorMittal Kryvyi Rih said on Telegram.

A Russian missile strike on Kyiv early on Sunday caused fires in at least two districts of the capital, Mayor Vitali Klitschko said. The city’s military administration said three people were injured. Tymur Tkachenko, the Kyiv region’s governor, said three others, including a child, were injured in



Burning Wildberries warehouses following a Ukrainian drone attack in Koledino, Moscow region. — Reuters

Russia struck Ukraine’s largest grain export port on the River Danube near the Romanian border last week after stepping up attacks on Ukraine in recent weeks. Ukraine has also intensified attacks on Russian targets including oil refineries, and both sides have struck commercial vessels in the Black Sea

drone attacks across the region. Russia’s Defence Ministry said it had downed 822 Ukrainian drones throughout the country in the latest attacks. Moscow region Governor Andrei Vorobyov said an 83-year-old man had been killed in what he described as one of the largest Ukrainian drone attacks on the Moscow region since the start of the conflict. He said several people were also injured in the Podolsk area, and that a warehouse belonging to Russia’s largest online retailer, Wildberries, had been struck. Video filmed by reporters after the strike on Wildberries’ Koledino warehouse showed a large plume of smoke over the site, about 45 km (28 miles) south of Moscow. Ukraine has been targeting Wildberries, which it accuses of handling military goods, in recent weeks as part of

a wider bid to damage Russian economic infrastructure it sees as underpinning Moscow’s military campaign. One person was also killed in a drone strike on a bus near the southern Russian city of Belgorod, the regional governor said. The Belgorod region borders eastern Ukraine. Ukraine’s military said it had also hit a missile fuel production facility in Russia’s Rostov region overnight. Russia did not immediately comment on the report. In the fourth incident this year in which a drone has strayed into its territory, the Romanian defence ministry said an F-18 jet that is part of a Spanish Nato contingent had shot down a drone over Romania at 5:01 am. The ministry said that fragments from the destroyed drone appeared to have fallen in an uninhabited area between two villages. Russia did not immediately comment on the incident. Ukraine said on Saturday its long-range strikes had hit a Russian military airfield and a rocket centre that Kyiv says supports Russia’s nascent Starlink-style satellite internet network. President Volodymyr Zelensky said Flamingo cruise missiles struck the rocket facility, about 900 km from Ukraine’s border, as part of Kyiv’s campaign to pressure Moscow to end the more than four-year war by targeting sites deep inside Russia. “It is important that Russia’s war potential be reduced. Peace is needed, and this must be evident in Russia - through concrete damage to specific facilities,” he said in a post on X. He said the airfield hosted aircraft used to attack Ukraine. Ukraine’s General Staff said direct hits were recorded at both the airfield in Russia’s Nizhny Novgorod region and the Progress rocket and space centre in Samara region. It said the strikes had sparked fires at both sites. — Reuters

Belgium’s biggest wildfire on record heads towards Germany

BRUSSELS: Firefighters worked through the night to battle Belgium’s biggest wildfire on record, which by Sunday morning had burned 3,000 hectares of land and was heading towards the German border, local authorities said. The blaze in the High Fens, a nature reserve in the east of the country, has been burning and firefighters from across Belgium and neighbouring Germany and Luxembourg have sought to contain it, as have the army and farmers. Responders on Sunday were focused on the front line of the fire moving towards Germany and were hopeful that cooler, more humid weather would support efforts to contain it. The fire is more than double the size of a blaze in 2011 that burned close to 1,400 hectares, data from the European Forest Fire Information System showed. The German town of Monschau, near

Responders on Sunday were focused on the front line of the fire moving towards Germany and were hopeful that cooler, more humid weather would support efforts to contain it. The fire is more than double the size of a blaze in 2011 that burned close to 1,400 hectares



A firefighter works next to charred trees in the area affected by a wildfire near Malmedy, Belgium. — Reuters

the Belgium border, said on Sunday that the fire was not expected spread to German territory but significant smoke pollution was likely. “It has therefore been decided to advise residents in the areas

close to the border to leave these areas,” a statement on the town website said. The EU deployed three helicopters and two water bomber aircraft from around Europe on Saturday after Belgium requested emergency reinforcements. Local authorities said the defensive line protecting evacuated villages from the fire was holding on Sunday, though residents who had been evacuated on Saturday were told they should not yet return to their homes. “No homes have been affected at this stage, although the fire remains close and smoke levels are significant,” the office of the governor of Liege said in an update. The blaze ignited as European countries including Belgium suffered their fifth heatwave of the summer this week. Scientists say that human-caused climate change has increased the likelihood of the hot and dry conditions that allow wildfires to spread faster and burn longer. Local authorities asked residents of several villages to evacuate their homes as

a precaution on Saturday, due to changing winds and smoke in the area. Tourists staying in the area were advised to leave, while a children’s summer camp was also evacuated, Belgian Defence Minister Theo Francken said in a post on X. The terrain of the nature reserve was making it difficult for emergency services to attack the fire at close range using their usual resources, the Liege governor’s office noted. European countries including Belgium suffered their fifth heatwave of the summer this week. Scientists say human-caused climate change has increased the likelihood of the hot and dry conditions that allow wildfires to spread faster and burn longer. The EU coordinates the deployment of extra resources pooled from European countries, when a country requests emergency help. The aircraft sent to Belgium on Saturday were from the Czech Republic, Sweden and the Netherlands, EU Crisis Commissioner Hadja Lahbib said in a post on X. — Reuters

OPINION

Instapoetry gives poetry a new digital life



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University

IF YOU are not enough for yourself, you will never be enough for someone else,” writes Rupī Kaur, a popular Instagram poet, against a blank white digital backdrop with a doodle of two people framing the page. It is just the kind of format of poetry that draws both critics and followers in equal measure.

Derided by many for being inauthentic, poetry on Instagram, or Instapoetry, is catching on among multiple demographics, reflecting a time when philosophy and personal therapy is encapsulated for the scrolling generation.

Instapoetry usually describes poems “written specifically for being shared online, most commonly on Instagram,” according to researchers who are studying this form and its appeal to a global audience. The poems typically use fewer than 100 words, are divided into very short lines, and are accompanied by aesthetically pleasing or disturbing visuals.

It is easy to understand the appeal of Instapoetry. It is short, utterly readable in the 30 seconds that are said to be the attention span of most of us who are on digital platforms, and yet offers a point of view or an opinion that is distinctive and catches the mood, attitudes, and predispositions of its readership, however fleetingly.

Most themes of Instapoetry involve self-care, emotional trauma, recovery and resilience in the face of mounting personal or social challenges. These are topics that are immediately relatable to a generation that faces global uncertainties.

At the same time, it is the brevity of the form that makes it immediately attractive. The minimal text, eye-catching fonts with little use of punctuation, accompanied by a little drawing or photograph to catch the mood, all make it readable and relatable.

The interactive nature of this form is central to why it is so popular at this present moment. At its very core, Instapoetry is targeted at a particular readership that rewards the poet through their comments.

Criticism of Instapoetry is varied. It is yet to be accepted as a legitimate form of academic text, seen more as a passing fancy and offering a ‘self-help aesthetic’ rather than a well-thought-out treatise on life and art.

This genre of literature has been dismissed as “cliché, banal, derivative, portentous, repetitive, and manipulative” by academics and critics. It has been derided for lacking thoughtful depth, rigour of expression and being of fleeting interest. It is also seen to appeal via aesthetics and commercial considerations rather than artistic authenticity.

Most themes of Instapoetry involve self-care and resilience in the face of mounting personal or social challenges

More sustained critique of Instapoetry, however, lies elsewhere. The form is seen to be more focused on lamenting marginalisation, targeting communities or individuals who see themselves outside mainstream society. In so doing, there is a charge that such poetry is generalising trauma, removing the complexities of individual contexts and making it a one-size-fits-all kind of experience.

However relevant these critiques may be, there is no denying the popularity of this genre for audiences today. For one, it is a very democratic form that is not subject to gatekeeping by publishers and a niche readership.

Anyone can share poetry of this format and create a unique following.

The format also decries critics who suggest that readership in literature is reducing, if not disappearing.

If anything, poetry has seen a new life through this popular format.

In its ability to bring together a host of digital registers like hashtags, visuals, innovative punctuation and a unique aesthetic, whether appealing or disruptive, Instapoetry is reflecting a moment in literary history. Whatever its future may be, it is undeniably a form that has captured the angst of its current readership.

UK PARLIAMENT REOPENS FARAGE PROBE AFTER POLL SUCCESS

LAETITIA COMMANAY & JO BIDDLE

The UK parliament’s sleaze watchdog resumed its probe into a \$6.7-million gift to hard-right politician Nigel Farage just hours after he was re-elected as an MP in a snap by-election.

Farage easily regained his eastern English parliamentary seat Clacton, which he first won in 2024, taking 63 per cent of the votes cast in a contest shunned by the major parties who branded it a stunt.

His main rival, joke candidate Count Binface, netted nearly 27 per cent of the ballots - a larger than expected share.

The anti-immigration Reform UK leader had triggered Thursday’s polls by resigning last month from the Westminster seat over the investigation into his finances, which was subsequently paused.

His by-election win led to the automatic re-opening of the inquiry by Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Daniel Greenberg.

The watchdog is examining allegations that Farage and Reform’s deputy leader, Richard Tice, failed to declare financial gifts. They deny any wrongdoing.

The parliamentary probe focuses on the £5-million donation to Farage from the cryptocurrency billionaire Christopher Harborne who lives in Thailand.

Farage could also face an investigation over support provided by convicted fraudster George Cottrell, a long-time ally.

And London police have confirmed the start of an investigation last year into donations to Reform before the 2024 election.

“It is a convincing, overwhelming win, with more votes than we got in the General Election of 2024,” he said in a statement.

“The voters in Clacton have stuck up two fingers to the entire political establishment.”

Binface - the alter ego of comedian Jon Harvey - exceeded expectations, taking 9,455 votes, on a reduced turnout of 44 per cent compared with nearly 59 per cent two years ago. By-elections typically see lower turnout, however.

Analysts had anticipated a win for Farage but underestimated the appeal of the self-styled “intergalactic space warrior” from planet Sigma IX, who campaigns wearing a rubbish bin on his head.

“The moral victory is already mine,” Binface said at the counting centre early on Friday.

— AFP

Summer break boosts students’ mental health

AT THE end of the school year and as the summer months begin, an opportunity arises to reflect on the importance of joy and resilience in supporting overall well-being.

At the same time, the diverse circumstances that influence mental health and psychological well-being among individuals and families should be acknowledged.

Although summer experiences vary considerably from one household to another, this period is widely recognised as offering valuable opportunities for rest, recovery, personal growth, and the enhancement of emotional well-being. Consequently, understanding how the summer vacation can promote healthy development and psychological resilience has become an increasingly important area of educational and public health interest.

Supporting positive mental health and well-being during the summer months can be facilitated through the establishment of realistic and manageable daily routines that provide structure and predictability without attempting to replicate the academic demands of the school environment.

The involvement of children in planning daily activities is encouraged, as it promotes a sense of autonomy, belonging, and personal responsibility. Because the needs and circumstances of families vary, summer routines should be designed to reflect each family’s unique priorities, interests, and sources of joy, calmness, and meaning.

Furthermore, healthy lifestyle practices should be incorporated into everyday life, including regular physical activity, nutritious eating, outdoor experiences, opportunities



DR ZAINAB AL AJMI

The writer is with the Ministry of Education

An important consideration in promoting mental health and well-being during the summer vacation period is the growing role of digital resources and technology-supported interventions

for play, and meaningful learning through cultural activities, traditions, cooking, creative expression, and the development of practical life skills.

Equally important is the promotion of self-care, family connectedness, and community engagement, all of which contribute to emotional resilience, psychological well-being, and healthy development throughout the summer vacation.

Another important consideration in promoting mental health and well-being during the summer vacation period is the growing role of digital resources and technology-supported interventions. The increasing availability of digital mental health resources has created new opportunities to support adolescents and young adults in developing coping skills, enhancing mental health literacy, and accessing psychological support.

Mobile applications and online platforms can serve as accessible tools that complement traditional mental health services by providing evidence-

informed guidance and self-directed strategies. For example, MindShift CBT, developed by Anxiety Canada, applies cognitive behavioural therapy principles to help individuals recognise anxiety-related thoughts, develop effective coping strategies, and improve emotional regulation.

Similarly, the Managing Your Stress and Anxiety During Covid-19 resource developed by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) provides practical strategies to support stress management and psychological well-being during periods of increased uncertainty and disruption (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), 2020). In addition, various institutions (summer learning centres, youth summer programmes, and community summer programmes) offer accessible educational and psychosocial resources, such as videos, quizzes, and informational materials, to promote mental health awareness and resilience among adolescents and young adults. Collectively, these technology-supported resources and interventions demonstrate the potential of digital approaches to foster emotional well-being, encourage help-seeking behaviours, and strengthen resilience among adolescents and young adults.

In summary, the summer vacation period should not be viewed merely as time spent watching television or using electronic devices; rather, it represents an opportunity for recovery, mental health promotion, and psychological well-being.

It provides valuable time for relaxation, emotional renewal, and the release of stress accumulated during the academic year, while also creating a positive foundation for the upcoming school year.

How nature teaches us to grow and heal



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is an author, translator and communications professional

In A world consumed by deadlines, noise, and endless distractions, humanity often searches far and wide for wisdom, peace, and purpose. However, some of life’s greatest lessons have always existed around us in forests, oceans, skies, and fields. Nature, in its silent brilliance, continues to teach truths that modern life mostly forgets.

Take the trees, for example. They stand tall not because they grew quickly, but because they understood patience. A tree spends years strengthening its roots before reaching impressive heights. Through storms, changing seasons, and harsh conditions, it continues growing steadily and without complaint. The wind offers another lesson about adaptability. It changes direction freely, sometimes moving gently and other times with unstoppable force. The wind does not fear transformation, nor does it apologise for changing course.

Human beings could learn much from this quiet resilience. In a culture obsessed with instant success, trees remind us that meaningful growth takes time. Strength is built slowly, often in silence and hidden struggle. Many people spend years feeling trapped by their past decisions, old identities, or fear of starting over. Like the wind, human beings are capable of moving differently,

choosing new paths, and reinventing themselves when necessary.

Flowers, too, speak a profound truth. Their beauty does not last forever, nor are they expected to bloom throughout every season. There are periods of blossoming and periods of rest. Yet modern society often pressures individuals to remain constantly productive, successful, and emotionally strong. Flowers remind us that rest is not failure. Some seasons are meant for healing, reflection, and preparation before growth begins again.

Then there is the ocean — perhaps nature’s most honest reflection of human emotion. At times calm and gentle, at others aggressive and disordered, the sea demonstrates that strength and softness can exist together. People are often taught to hide weakness as though emotions weaken them. The ocean challenges that belief. True strength is not the absence of emotion, but the ability to carry depth without losing oneself.

Above us, the clouds carry another important message. When they become too heavy, they release their burden through rain. In doing so, they clear the sky and nourish the earth below. Human beings, however, often hold onto stress, grief, and emotional pain for too long. Nature teaches that release is necessary. Letting go of

Human beings could learn much from this quiet resilience. In a culture obsessed with instant success, trees remind us that meaningful growth takes time. Strength is built slowly, often in silence and hidden struggle

emotional weight is not weakness, but it is renewal.

The stars reveal themselves only in darkness. During daylight hours, they remain hidden, though they never disappear. Their presence becomes visible only when the world grows dark. It is a lesson many people encounter during difficult times. Hardship often reveals strengths, perspectives, and resilience that comfort never could. Darkness, while painful, can also reveal hidden light. And finally, there is the sun. Every evening it disappears beyond the horizon, and every morning it rises again without fail. No matter how long the night lasts, the dawn eventually returns. Few lessons are more hopeful than this.

Human beings experience failure, heartbreak, uncertainty, and loss, yet the possibility of beginning again always remains. Like the sun, people are capable of rising after even the darkest nights.

The greatest lessons in life are not always found in books, classrooms, or conversations. Sometimes they are written across the sky at sunrise, hidden in the silence of forests, carried by the waves of the sea, or whispered gently through the wind. Nature has always been speaking to humanity, reminding us how to live, how to heal, and how to rise.

JAPAN AIMS FOR THE MOONS OF MARS

KYOKO HASEGAWA

Japanese scientists are readying a mission to Mars’ moons to retrieve samples that may unlock the origins of the Solar System and life on Earth, although a rival Chinese mission aims to make it back first.

The unmanned Martian Moons eXploration (MMX), set to blast off from Tanegashima Space Center in the coming months, could also lay the groundwork for humans visiting the red planet.

The spacecraft, revealed to the media last Thursday, will stay in Mars’ orbit for around three years and will attempt to land on Phobos.

It will collect at least 10 grammes (0.35 ounces) of material from the surface of Phobos, while the IDEFIX rover - the French name for comic hero Asterix’s dog - will conduct surface observations.

The spacecraft will also observe Deimos, the other of Mars’ moons - but without landing — before a return capsule heads back to Earth to land in Australia in around 2031. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) hopes that the mission will reveal how Mars and its moons formed, a key piece of knowledge in working out how the Solar System was born.

One theory for the origin of the Martian moons — the “giant impact” hypothesis — is that they formed after a celestial body collided with Mars.

The “capture” hypothesis meanwhile postulates that the moons are asteroids from the outer Solar System that were captured by Mars’ gravity.

Determining which is right will help reveal “how a habitable environment for life might have arisen on the terrestrial planets”, JAXA said, referring to the four rocky worlds closest to the Sun — Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars.

“MMX will shed light on the transport mechanisms that delivered water, volatiles, and organic compounds from the outer Solar System to the inner rocky planet region - processes that may have played a key role in making these worlds habitable,” said Patrick Michel, a French astrophysicist working on IDEFIX.

“If Phobos and Deimos are indeed remnants of these early delivery systems, they may hold clues to the origins of life itself, or to be more correct, to the transport of the materials that were key to the emergence of life on rocky planets,” he said.

JAXA said that the mission will also explore the possibility of using Phobos as a “natural space station” by establishing the technology required for a round trip to Mars — something “essential for crewed Mars exploration”. MMX is a collaboration with France’s National Centre for Space Studies (CNES), the German Aerospace Center (DLR), Nasa and the European Space Agency (ESA) as well as a score of universities and tech companies.

The development of the spacecraft’s landing legs was particularly difficult as gravity on Phobos is extremely low, according to Akinari Uehara, a Mitsubishi Electric engineer. “We have to prevent the (probe) from falling down by having the legs cushion the impact of landing,” Uehara said. Japan’s unmanned Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) - the “Moon Sniper” — tipped over after touching down on Earth’s Moon in 2024, but still transmitted data and survived several two-week lunar nights. — AFP

Who really turns on the light?

INSIDE

THE Royal Opera House Muscat, a person stands beside a light switch. He presses it and a lamp comes on. It is an utterly ordinary act. Yet ask who turned on the light and the answer opens onto one of the largest arguments in modern thought.

Was it the person, acting through the switch? Was it the electrical network, with its generators, engineers, software and regulators? Or did both the person and the network act within a larger order that gave them their powers in the first place?

These are not merely competing explanations of a lamp. They are three ways of imagining humanity’s place in the world. We may call them premodern, modern and postmodern, provided we do not mistake those labels for sealed historical periods. All three can coexist in one society, and sometimes in one mind.

In a premodern account, pressing the switch is not a complete explanation. The hand acts, the mechanism works and electricity passes through the wire, but none of these causes possesses a wholly independent power. Each operates within a cosmic or divine order that gives things their existence, capacities and regularity.

This does not mean that premodern thinkers denied natural causes. Greek, Islamic and Christian philosophers produced sophisticated and conflicting accounts of causation. What they broadly resisted was the idea that nature formed a closed, self-sufficient system, or that human beings occupied its sovereign centre. Human action mattered, but it took place within an order humanity had neither made nor mastered.

Modernity redrew the scene. A cosmic order gradually lost its role as the immediate explanation of natural events. In its place emerged the knowing and willing human subject, facing a world that could be observed, measured and reshaped.

The modern switch presents a beautifully simple sequence: intention, pressure, illumination. The person wills, then acts; the tool



HAMAD SINAN AL GHAIITHI

The writer is an Omani evolutionary biologist, translator and editor

Modernity taught us to see ourselves as masters of the world. The networks we built reveal how little we act alone

carries that intention to its object; the desired result follows. Nature became intelligible as though it were an autonomous system whose laws could be discovered and put to use.

Yet the simplicity of the switch conceals an entire world. We see the finger, the switch and the lamp. We do not see the power station, transmission grid, maintenance teams, regulators, natural resources or political decisions that made the light possible. The network is not absent from modernity; modernity built it. But when it works smoothly, it vanishes behind the interface, allowing the result to appear as the direct expression of an individual will.

Press the switch again. This time the lamp remains dark.

Perhaps the bulb has failed, a circuit breaker is off, or a fault lies at the power station. Perhaps the cause is not technical at all, but an administrative decision or an energy-saving policy. The person has performed the action he believed sufficient, but the result is not his will made visible. The failure reveals what normal operation concealed: light is produced by the meeting of people, machines, institutions, resources and rules. The individual remains part of the scene, but is no longer its sole author.

The assault on the self-sufficient human subject began within modernity itself. Darwin returned humanity to natural history. Freud exposed the limits of our conscious command over ourselves. Marx tied ideas and actions to material and social conditions. Later thinkers argued that language, culture and institutions do not merely transmit our intentions; they help to form them. We do not enter the world as complete selves who simply use language to announce a pre-existing will.

Our choices take shape within a language we did not choose, customs that preceded us and institutions that define the field of what is possible. Nor is nature merely passive matter awaiting our command.

It resists, surprises and imposes limits. Tools open some possibilities and close others. Institutions do

not simply execute decisions; they shape the conditions under which decisions are made.

This is the postmodern moment in its most useful sense: not the lazy claim that nothing is true or that every moral judgement is relative, but the recognition that the human being is not master of self, language, history or nature.

Here postmodernity comes, paradoxically, close to the premodern world. Both remove humanity from the centre of the universe, but they do so in opposite ways. The premodern view limits human sovereignty by placing it beneath a transcendent will and cosmic order. The postmodern view disperses agency among structures, bodies, technologies and environments within this world.

In the premodern view, human beings are limited because they inhabit a cosmos with order, meaning and purpose. In the postmodern view, the human being is a node within relationships that may have no unified will or final purpose. The first removes humanity from the centre by appealing to a higher centre. The second leaves no fixed centre at all.

This distinction matters beyond philosophy seminars. Our arguments about artificial intelligence, climate change, economic inequality and political responsibility still turn on where we place agency.

Do we blame an individual, a machine, an institution, a market or a system? If an algorithm produces an injustice, who acted? The programmer, the company, the data, the regulator, or the network formed by all of them?

Recognising distributed agency need not abolish personal responsibility. It can make responsibility more exacting.

When the lamp comes on, the story seems settled. In fact, the light hides the question. Who really turned it on: the hand, the network, or the order that allowed hand and network to work?

How we answer determines more than our account of a lamp. It shapes what we mean by truth, freedom and moral responsibility, and what parts of the world we must ignore to make any answer look simple.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



Students participating in the Serdal Leadership and Skills Development Programme.

OQ COMPLETES SERDAL, EMPOWERS 188 LEADERS

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

The Serdal Leadership and Skills Development Programme, one of OQ’s social investment programmes, the global energy investment group, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education represented by the Career Guidance and Student Counselling Center and implemented by Oman Sail, has successfully concluded its activities.

The programme provided 188 students from Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah North, and Al Dakhiliyah governorates with a transformative learning experience designed to develop leadership qualities and essential life skills.

The programme’s closing day was attended by Dr Khamis bin Salim al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, alongside senior representatives from OQ and the Ministry of Education, who had the opportunity to review the programme’s outcomes and learn more about the skills and experiences gained by the students throughout their participation.

The programme engaged students from Grades 9 to 11, including 94 male and 94 female participants, through a series of activities and practical challenges aimed at strengthening leadership, communication, teamwork, problem-solving and decision-making skills. The experience also encouraged initiative, self-confidence and a deeper appreciation of Omani values and identity.

By combining knowledge with hands-on application, Serdal provided participants with meaningful opportunities to discover their potential, broaden their perspectives and build readiness for the opportunities and challenges ahead.

The high levels of engagement and commitment demonstrated by the students throughout the programme reflected its positive impact on their personal growth and leadership development.

Said al Badaai, Head of Social Investment at OQ, commented, “We are proud of the positive outcomes achieved through the Serdal Programme and the progress demonstrated by the participating students. These results reaffirm the importance of investing in young people as the nation’s greatest asset and a key driver of sustainable development. OQ’s support for initiatives such as Serdal stems from our commitment to contributing to the development of capable and future-ready human capital.

We also value our fruitful partnership with the Ministry of Education and Oman Sail, which has enabled us to deliver a meaningful learning experience that supports national development priorities.”

Zahrán bin Nasser al Maghdari, Director of Career Planning and Programs Department from the Ministry of Education, commented, “The successful conclusion of the Serdal Programme, which empowered 188 students across four Governorates, is a testament to the strength of our partnership with Oman Sail and OQ.

At the Ministry of Education, we believe that holistic development is key to nurturing the leaders of tomorrow. Seeing both male and female students from diverse backgrounds excel in these leadership challenges reinforces our.



Students participating in the Serdal Leadership and Skills Development Programme.

Seeb, Al Nasr book inaugural Jindal Youth League final

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

SEEB AND Al Nasr booked their places in the final of the inaugural Jindal Youth League after overcoming Al Khabourah and Saham respectively in the semifinals, setting up an all-Group One contest for the title.

Seeb continued their impressive campaign with a convincing 4-1 victory over Al Khabourah, maintaining the momentum that saw them dominate Group One with a perfect record during the preliminary stage.

The Group One winners entered the semifinals having won all six of their matches, scoring 31 goals and conceding only two. They carried that attacking form into the knockout stage, scoring four more goals to move within one victory of completing an outstanding campaign with the title.

Al Khabourah, who qualified for the semifinals as runners-up in Group Two, saw their run come to an end after a competitive campaign in which they collected 11 points from six group matches.

The other semifinal produced a much tighter contest as Al Nasr overcame Group Two winners Saham following a penalty shootout.

The two sides could not be separated in regulation time, with the match ending 1-1 before Al Nasr prevailed 4-3 on penalties to secure second place in the final.

Al Nasr had finished second



Seeb secured a place in the Jindal Youth League final with a 4-1 win over Al Khabourah.



Al Nasr advanced to the final after defeating Saham 4-3 on penalties following a 1-1 draw.

The two sides have already met once during the group stage, when Seeb secured a 4-1 victory over Al Nasr.

in Group One behind Seeb, collecting 13 points from six matches and scoring 28 goals. Their semifinal victory keeps alive their hopes of ending the competition by overcoming the only team to finish above them in the preliminary stage. Saham, meanwhile, bow out after an impressive campaign. They topped Group Two with 15 points from six matches, recording five victories and suffering just one defeat before being edged out in the shootout.

The final will now bring together the top two sides from

Group One, with Seeb looking to complete an unbeaten campaign and Al Nasr aiming to claim the inaugural title.

The two sides have already met once during the group stage, when Seeb secured a 4-1 victory over Al Nasr. However, the final presents a different challenge, with the championship to be decided in a single match.

With both teams demonstrating strong attacking form throughout the competition, the title showdown promises an exciting conclusion to the first edition of the Jindal Youth League.

SEKTIIOUI ADDS THREE PLAYERS AS OMAN CONTINUE TRAINING CAMP IN MUSCAT

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

Oman head coach Tarik Sektioui has added three players to the national team’s ongoing domestic training camp as the Red Warriors continue preparations for the 27th Arabian Gulf Cup in Jeddah.

Al Harith bin Zaid al Mukhaini, Said bin Sulaiman al Alawi and Turki bin Abdullah Bait Rabie have been called up to join the squad, giving Sektioui additional options as he continues to assess players ahead of the regional tournament.

Their inclusion takes the number of players involved in the camp to 31, following the initial 28-man squad announced ahead of the gathering, which began on August 14 and will continue until August 24.

The Red Warriors, meanwhile, continued their programme with their second training session of the camp, with the players working under Sektioui and his technical staff as preparations gradually gather pace.

The latest additions provide another opportunity for the coaching staff to evaluate players who have progressed



Oman players in action during a training session as the Red Warriors continue their domestic camp in preparation for the 27th Arabian Gulf Cup in Jeddah.

through Oman’s age-group national teams. Said al Alawi, in particular, has featured in Oman’s youth set-up and was part of the national youth team programme, while Turki Bait Rabie has previously been involved with Oman’s Olympic team.

Sektioui is using the current gathering to broaden his options and assess the competition for places before moving into the next phase of preparations. The camp also gives the coaching staff valuable time with the locally available players ahead of decisions on the squad that will represent Oman at the Gulf Cup.

The Moroccan coach has combined experienced internationals with a number of younger players during the current camp, continuing his efforts to shape the team ahead of his first major tournament in charge of the Red Warriors.

Oman will compete in Group A at Khaleeji 27 alongside hosts Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait. The Red Warriors will open their campaign against Iraq on September 23 as they begin their bid for a third Arabian Gulf Cup title. The Jeddah tournament will run from September 23 to October 6.



Ittihad Fanja crowned champions of the 2026 Amateur League Shajjaa Fariqak after defeating South Al Batinah's Shabab Al Maragh 4-2.

ITTIHAD FANJA CROWNED AMATEUR LEAGUE CHAMPIONS

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

ITTIHAD

FANJA crowned champions of the 2026 Amateur League “Shajjaa Fariqak” after defeating South Al Batinah’s Shabab Al Maragh 4-2 on penalties in the final at Al Seeb Sports Stadium.

The match ended goalless after 90 minutes, with neither side able to convert its scoring opportunities. The final brought together a large crowd, along with officials from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the Oman Football Association, as well as representatives of the participating teams.

Ittihad Fanja started the match strongly and enjoyed a slight advantage during the opening stages, Shabab Al Maragh gradually grew into the game and created several attacking opportunities through its midfield, but the final pass and

finishing remained lacking. Ittihad Fanja also produced a number of attacking moves, but Shabab Al Maragh’s defensive organisation and the performance of goalkeeper Hussein al Farsi prevented the team from breaking the deadlock.

The second half witnessed a higher tempo and improved tactical play from both sides, both teams introduced substitutes in an attempt to strengthen their attacking options, while several chances were created at either end.

However, neither team managed to find the decisive goal during the second half or the six minutes of added time. With the score still 0-0, the final was decided by a penalty shootout.

Ittihad Fanja converted all four of their penalties through Mounis al Raqadi, Ayham Khalfan al Raqadi, al Asim Anbar al Harthy and Al Azhar Adel al Hadabi.

Shabab Al Maragh scored twice through Ayoub al Balushi and Salem al Yahmadi, while Al Musab Al Siyabi and Mahmoud al Balushi missed their attempts. Fanja United consequently secured a 4-2 victory on penalties and claimed the Amateur

League title for the first time.

The decisive stage of the 2026 Amateur League began on August 4 and concluded on August 15, featuring 10 community teams that had qualified from different governorates across Oman. The closing ceremony included the presentation of gold and silver medals to the champions and runners-up, along with awards for the match officials and the winners of the competition’s media coverage award, media Al Seeb from Muscat won first place, while Tripod Media from South Al Batinah finished second.

Individual awards were also presented. Mohammed Salah al Busaidi of Al Nasr from Al Buraimi won the Golden Boot after scoring two goals, while Salem al Yahmadi of Shabab Al Maragh was named Best Player and Ahmed al Hadabi of Fanja United was selected as Best Goalkeeper.

Ittihad Fanja captain Hani bin Khalifa Al Hadabi received the championship trophy, bringing a memorable end to the team’s historic campaign.

Oman junior tennis players complete Cairo training camp

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

Oman’s junior national tennis players have completed an overseas training camp at Smash Academy in Cairo, Egypt, as part of the Oman Tennis Association’s programme to develop young players and prepare them for upcoming international competitions.

The camp, held for the second consecutive year, featured 13 boys and girls from Oman’s Under-10, Under-14 and Under-16 national teams. The programme focused on improving the players’ technical and physical levels while providing valuable competitive exposure ahead of future assignments.

The Under-14 squad comprised Munther al Amri, Emad al Rahbi, and Reema al Hashmi, accompanied by team official Mohammed al Dairi.



Under-16 player Abdulrahman al Rahbi said the camp had provided an important learning experience.

The Under-10 group included Omar al Shaibani, Hatim al Rahbi, Hood al Hashmi, Fayadh al Hilali, and Ali al Riyami, with Ahmed al Balushi serving as head of the delegation.

The first group to attend the camp featured

the Under-16 players Abdulrahman Al Rahbi, Moataz al Mazroui, Areen al Azkawi, Salma al Riyami and Talia al Busaidi, accompanied by delegation head Sarah bint Abdulmajid al Balushi.

Ahmed al Balushi said the camp had achieved



its technical objectives and offered the players a comprehensive development programme.

“The camp was successful and achieved its technical goals by helping improve the players’ levels. The programme also included

sessions on mental preparation and nutrition,” he said.

“Our players contested friendly matches against players from Smash Academy and other academies, which provided them with valuable experience. They also went through intensive training sessions under specialised coaches.”

Al Balushi expressed hope that the programme would help the young players deliver strong results in upcoming international competitions while also improving their positions in the international rankings.

Under-16 player Abdulrahman al Rahbi said the camp had provided an important learning experience.

“I am happy to have taken part in this training camp. We benefited greatly from the intensive training sessions and the many friendly matches we played.

We are looking to build on this experience and achieve good results in our upcoming competitions,” he said.

Areen al Azkawi also praised the programme and thanked the Oman Tennis Association for providing the players with the opportunity to train in Cairo.

“We thank the Oman Tennis Association for organising this training programme and the national team officials for their efforts in facilitating our participation,” she said.

“We have seen clear improvement in our technical level thanks to the facilities and the expertise of the coaches at the academy.”

The Cairo camp forms part of the association’s ongoing efforts to strengthen Oman’s junior national teams by providing young players with intensive training and international exposure at an early stage of their development.

SPORTS

ARSENAL ROUT MAN CITY IN COMMUNITY SHIELD MASTERCLASS



Arsenal’s Martin Odegaard lifts the trophy as he celebrates with teammates after winning the FA Community Shield Action. — Reuters

ARSENAL powered to a 3-0 win against Manchester City in the Community Shield on Sunday, delivering a swaggering statement of intent ahead of their Premier League title defence. Mikel Arteta’s side used the annual curtain raiser to the English top-flight season as an opportunity to prove their long-awaited title triumph has done nothing to sate their appetite for success.

The Gunners took just 24 seconds to show new City boss Enzo Maresca the standard required to keep up with the champions. Riccardo Calafiori’s quick-fire opening goal was followed by a clinical Kai Havertz header before half-time.

Arsenal overwhelmed sloppy City with their trademark intensity and Martin Odegaard netted after the interval to cap a resounding victory.

The glamour friendly at Cardiff’s Principality Stadium also allowed Arteta to parade Arsenal’s close-season recruits.

Bruno Guimaraes, signed from Newcastle for £75 million (\$101 million), slotted into midfield with ease, while Christos Tzolis, lured from Club Brugge for £34 million, gave a lively display including two assists.

The north Londoners will start a campaign as champions for the first time since the 2004-05 season.

Already installed as favourites to win their first successive English titles since the 1930s, Arsenal look primed for a sustained spell as the Premier League’s preeminent force.

Their vibrant performance was the perfect warm-up before promoted Coventry visit the Emirates Stadium for the opening game of the Premier League season on August 21. It was a dispiriting wake-up call for Maresca, who will have noted how much more dynamic and cohesive Arsenal looked compared to his spluttering team.

Pep Guardiola won 20 trophies in a glorious decade in Manchester, including the FA Cup and League Cup in his farewell season, but City haven’t won the title since 2024 and finished seven points behind Arsenal in second place last term.

Hand-picked to succeed Guardiola after quitting Chelsea in January following a turbulent reign lasting

less than two seasons, Maresca now knows it will take a huge effort to close the gap on Arsenal, starting with City’s opener at home to Bournemouth on August 23.

RAMPANT ARSENAL

Arteta believes his players are still “hungry” for trophies, with their painful Champions League final loss to Paris Saint-Germain on penalties in May providing motivation for this season.

The Gunners took less than a minute to underline Arteta’s point with a beautifully crafted opener.

Myles Lewis-Skelly featured in Arsenal’s midfield despite being linked to Chelsea and Manchester United and the teenager showed why he is in demand with a deft pass that split the City defence.

Calafiori surged onto Lewis-Skelly’s ball, evading City’s woeful marking to slot a composed finish past Gianluigi Donnarumma from 12 yards.

The left-back’s goal was the quickest in the Community Shield since 1968 and rampant Arsenal struck again in the 27th minute.

Martin Odegaard was gifted space to float a cross to the far post and Tzolis, left unmarked by Abdukodir Khusanov, headed it back into the six-yard box, where Havertz climbed above Ruben Dias to nod home.

In his first showpiece occasion for City after his £116 million move from Nottingham Forest, England midfielder Elliot Anderson struggled to exert any influence. City talisman Erling Haaland was largely anonymous, wasting two good chances in the first half.

Arsenal captain Odegaard showed his Norway teammate how to do it three minutes after half-time.

Tzolis rolled a pass into Odegaard’s path and he slalomed through the City defence before leaving Donnarumma embarrassed with a clever dummy and close-range finish.

Only City, in 2019, have gone onto become Premier League champions among the previous 15 winners of the Community Shield.

On the evidence of their stroll in the Cardiff sunshine, Arsenal’s 18th Community Shield victory won’t be the last silverware lifted by Odegaard this season. — AFP



Arsenal’s Norwegian midfielder Martin Odegaard reacts after scoring their third goal during the English FA Community Shield football match between Arsenal and Manchester City at The Principality Stadium. — AFP

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE
7,535.356

BUSINESS

SHORTTAKES

Duqm Summer Series opens with focus on intelligent machines

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

Women have caught up with men in their use of AI chatbots. They have not yet caught up in how often they use them, how confident they feel or how much value they believe the technology brings to their work.

That distinction will frame “Intelligent Machines”, the opening session of the 2026 Duqm Summer Series at Crowne Plaza Duqm, on August 23 at 7.30pm.

The session brings together four Omani women working across computer science, data and intelligent systems: Dr Fatima al Raisi from the Department of Computer Science at Sultan Qaboos University; Amna al Sinani of Future Data;



HANAN AL SIYABI

Beylasan al Ruzaqi of Onsor; and Dr Aziza al Zadjali of Star Labs. Research published by Pew Research Centre in June found that 47 per cent of women now use AI chatbots, close to the 50 per cent recorded among men. In 2024, women trailed men by 11

percentage points. Women have closed that gap in two years. The more interesting question is what they are doing with the technology now that they have access to it.

Men remain more likely to use chatbots every day, at 27 per cent compared with 20 per cent of women. Among employed adults, 40 per cent of men use them for work. For women, the figure is 35 per cent.

The widest difference concerns productivity. Thirty-five per cent of men believe chatbots make them more productive, compared with 25 per cent of women. Confidence may help explain why.

Only 15 per cent of women describe themselves as very or extremely confident using chatbots. Twenty-two per cent of men say the same.

Using AI regularly gives people time to work out where it helps and where it falls short.

They learn how to ask better questions and how to challenge an answer that does not look right.

The benefit comes less from opening a chatbot than from knowing what to do with it. Without that confidence, equal adoption can conceal an unequal return.

“AI is often presented to employees as something already decided. A new tool arrives with an expectation that people will adapt to it. Those expected to use the system may have had little say in the problem it was built to solve.

Increasing the number of women using AI is only part of the work.

ARA petroleum explores biofuel and biohydrogen

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

OMANI upstream energy company ARA Petroleum is exploring the potential to produce biofuel and biohydrogen by converting large volumes of oilfield produced water from its operations into useful resources, as part of efforts to advance its decarbonisation and circular-economy ambitions.

The Muscat-headquartered company, part of The Zubair Corporation portfolio, outlined the initiatives in its newly published 2025 Sustainability Report, highlighting produced water as both a growing operational challenge and a potential resource for low-carbon energy production.

ARA said produced water intensity across its operations increased sharply in 2025, rising from 0.19 cubic metres per barrel of oil equivalent (m³/boe) in 2024 to 0.30 m³/boe — a 60.2 per cent increase. The rise was attributed primarily to a substantial increase in water production from its Block 44 and Block 31 operations, coupled with a modest increase in overall hydrocarbon production.

ARA is the sole operator of Blocks 44 and 31, which comprise three fields and 16 wells and currently produce more than 0.6 million barrels of oil equivalent per day, according to the report.

“A key challenge lies in the high salinity of our produced water, which makes treatment and reuse technically complex and resource-intensive”, ARA said, adding that it is investing in research and development to better understand the challenges and identify innovative and sustainable treatment solutions.

One potential application under consideration is the cultivation of Camelina sativa, an oilseed crop that could provide a feedstock for biofuel production while simultaneously helping to manage



Oilfield produced water-to-energy system (Picture for illustration only).

The proposed system would begin with an assessment of produced water to determine its suitability for treatment, followed by dark fermentation to generate initial hydrogen and intermediates.

produced water.

Under the proposed biofuel project, ARA plans to dedicate land within an oilfield environment to Camelina cultivation, with appropriately treated produced water reused for irrigation. The company said Camelina’s tolerance of salinity, limited water availability and arid and semi-arid conditions makes it potentially suitable for cultivation in Oman, while its high oil content offers a feedstock for biofuel production.

ARA envisages a nature-based, closed-loop system combining soil amendments, treated-water reuse and low-input cultivation to convert oilfield by-products into productive resources. At scale, Camelina cultivation could also help manage produced water and brine while reducing environmental impacts and supporting regulatory compliance.

A second initiative focuses on biohydrogen, using produced water as the basis for an integrated biological process designed to generate hydrogen alongside other

value-added products.

The proposed system would begin with an assessment of produced water to determine its suitability for treatment, followed by dark fermentation to generate initial hydrogen and intermediates. Photo-fermentation would then be used to enhance hydrogen production.

The process would also incorporate biochar production from sludge, potentially providing a route for carbon capture and additional value creation. Treated water could subsequently be reused for agricultural purposes, creating a closed-loop system linking waste management, clean-energy production and water reuse.

ARA said the biohydrogen concept could provide a scalable and potentially economically viable pathway for converting oilfield waste streams into clean energy, usable water and value-added by-products, while supporting the company’s broader transition towards lower-carbon and more resource-efficient upstream operations.

Seasonal kingfish ban seeks to secure Oman’s fisheries income

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

The seasonal ban on fishing, possessing and trading kingfish along all coasts of Oman has taken effect, with the measure set to remain in force until October 15, 2026, as the Sultanate of Oman moves to protect stocks of the economically important species during its breeding and growth season.

Production indicators for 2025 reveal the economic importance of kingfish, with total production reaching 19,743 tonnes, valued at RO 44.4 million.

The average retail price was approximately RO 2.25 per kilo. According to data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, kingfish production is primarily concentrated in Al Wusta and Al Sharqiyah South Governorates. Al Wusta

Governorate recorded 8,241 tonnes, representing 41.74 per cent of total production, while Al Sharqiyah South Governorate produced 8,239 tonnes, or 41.73 per cent.

The remaining coastal governorates recorded 3,264 tonnes, representing 16.53 per cent, bringing the combined contribution of Al Wusta and Al Sharqiyah South to approximately 83.5 per cent of total kingfish production in the Sultanate of Oman.

These figures highlight the economic importance of the kingfish segment of fisheries, not only in terms of direct production value but also through its connection to a wide range of economic activities, including fishing, marketing, transportation, storage, freezing, local trade and export, as well as their contribution to supporting the income of those working



Penalties for violating the ban include a fine of up to RO 300.

in the fisheries sector.

The ban, implemented during the breeding and growth season, aims to allow for the replenishment of fish stocks, reduce depletion of fisheries and support the sustainability of production levels in the coming years, thus ensuring the continued economic benefit from this marine

resource.

The ban includes the fishing, possession, transportation, sale, purchase, storage, freezing, trading and export of kingfish along all coasts of Oman, in accordance with the provisions of Article (178) of the Executive Regulations of the Living Aquatic Resources Law

issued by Ministerial Decision No (70/2026).

From an economic perspective, protecting kingfish stocks does not mean a permanent halt to activity in the fishing sector, but rather regulating it during a specific period to increase the chances of stock recovery and improve future production.

This also contributes to enhancing the sector’s ability to meet local demand and capitalise on commercial opportunities related to this high-value fish.

Monitoring and adherence to the ban are particularly important in ensuring the decision’s objectives are met. Penalties for violating the ban include a fine of up to RO 300, imprisonment from 10 days to one month, or both, in addition to confiscation of the seized fish or its

equivalent value.

The seasonal ban on kingfish fishing is one application of sustainable fisheries management, which treats marine resources as an economic asset requiring protection to ensure the continuity of its returns.

Maintaining stocks today contributes to securing future fishing, production and income opportunities; and protects the kingfish value chain from the fisherman to the consumer and international markets.

Given the continued importance of seafood products to the national economy, the sustainability of kingfish fisheries emerges as part of the blue economy concept, which seeks to achieve economic returns from marine resources while preserving their natural capacity for renewal.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



From fragrant spices and regional staples to fresh produce, traditional sweets and festive favourites, LuLu's India Utsav brings together the flavours of India under one roof.

LULU CELEBRATES INDIA UTSAV 2026 ACROSS OMAN

MUSCAT: India comes alive at LuLu Hypermarket as India Utsav 2026 gets underway across Oman, turning the celebration of India's 80th Independence Day into a vibrant week of food, culture, traditions and community. More than a retail festival, India Utsav is a celebration of what makes India so wonderfully diverse, from the flavours of its many regions and the energy of its street food to its traditions, art and the stories that connect generations. It also celebrates the warm and enduring cultural ties between India and Oman, built over centuries of friendship and exchange. The festival was inaugurated by Prashant Pise, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, in the presence of LuLu Group senior officials, members of the Indian community and local dignitaries.

Speaking at the launch, the Ambassador highlighted the enduring friendship and close people-to-people connections between Oman and India. Anwar Sadhath, Regional Director – LuLu Hypermarket, Oman said: "India Utsav is our way of bringing a little bit of India to everyone in Oman, not just through food and shopping, but through the sights, flavours and experiences that make India so special. It is a celebration for the Indian community, but also an invitation to everyone to discover, enjoy and celebrate the incredible diversity of India. At LuLu, we are delighted to create a space where cultures come together, families have fun and communities celebrate together". From fragrant spices and regional staples to fresh produce, traditional sweets and festive favourites, LuLu's India Utsav brings together the flavours of India under one roof. Shoppers can explore specially curated displays, live hot-food counters serving regional dishes and street-food favourites, along with a vibrant selection of Indian traditional and contemporary ethnic wear for women, men and children, celebrating the country's diverse styles and colours. India Utsav 2026 is being celebrated at selected LuLu Hypermarket outlets across Oman, with curated products, festive offers and special experiences available throughout the campaign.

Kia Oman offers 2.22pc rate and two free EMIs

AS the Summer Vacation winds down and schools reopen, we know your priorities shift, which is why we are bringing you a whole new purchase experience and have made owning your next Kia easier than ever. Because you deserve more than just a great car. Kia Oman announces the launch of its 'New Identity, New Savings' campaign, marking an exciting new chapter for the brand with a lineup of special benefits designed to make owning a Kia more rewarding than ever. At the heart of the campaign is a reduced interest rate of 2.22% for financing deals of 2 to 4 years and 3.33% for 5 years agreements. These rates apply to the Sportage, Seltos, Sonet, K4 and K3 (2026 MY) and are available exclusively to individual retail customers, subject to credit approval and clearance by select finance companies (Terms & Conditions Apply). Adding further value to this offer, Kia will cover the first two EMIs for customers financing under the reduced interest rate scheme, translating to savings of up to RO 605 on a Sportage for a 5-year deal. Customers can also benefit from a Welcome Bonus of up to RO 2500, adjusted directly against the price of the vehicle as a special discount, in addition to the standard Cash Gift offer already applicable on eligible models. To provide continued peace of mind after purchase, all models come with a service package of 30,000 km or three years, whichever comes first (30,000 km or two years for EVs). One year of complimentary registration is also included on all models,



At the heart of the campaign is a reduced interest rate of 2.22% for financing deals of 2 to 4 years and 3.33% for 5 years agreements.

with the exception of EVs. Today's Kia line-up brings together design, technology and performance to match every lifestyle. The Sonet leads the way in the city with its compact, efficient character, while the Sportage L takes things further with a spacious, high-performance edge for those who need more room to roam. The Seltos, K3 and K4 add a sharper, more connected feel to everyday driving and Kia's EV range, including the EV6 and EV9, stands at the forefront of the brand's electric future, delivering sustainable performance without compromise. Kia Oman invites customers

to visit their nearest showroom before the offer ends to explore the 'New Identity, New Savings' campaign and discover more than just a car. Reliable International Automotive LLC (RIA), the official distributor of Kia in Oman, continues to deliver a rewarding ownership experience for customers. The company was ranked #1 by Kia in 2024 for Sales Customer Satisfaction in the Middle East and Africa, reflecting its commitment to providing exceptional products, facilities and customer service across the Sultanate of Oman.

Sohar Islamic unveils corporate prepaid card

MUSCAT: As organisations place greater emphasis on financial oversight and efficient expense management, Sohar Islamic is continuing to broaden its portfolio of Sharia-compliant payment solutions. Reinforcing this approach, the bank has launched its new Corporate Preloaded Card, offering businesses and public sector institutions a secure and structured way to manage spending across day-to-day operations. Commenting on the launch, Fahad al Zadjali, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Sohar Islamic, said, "As organisations continue to evolve, effective financial management increasingly depends on the ability to balance operational agility with robust oversight.



The introduction of the Corporate Preloaded Card reflects our commitment to providing practical, Sharia-

compliant solutions that empower businesses to manage spending with greater control, transparency and efficiency. By enabling organisations to allocate spending authority within clearly defined parameters, the solution supports stronger governance while simplifying day-to-day financial operations. At Sohar Islamic, we remain focused on developing innovative banking solutions that respond to the changing needs of our clients and contribute to their long-term growth and success". Translating this philosophy into a practical solution, the Corporate Preloaded Card is designed to accommodate a broad range of organisational structures and operating

models, enabling businesses and public sector institutions to issue multiple cards under a single primary account for approved employees. The card supports a wide range of business-related expenses, including official travel, government and statutory payments, vendor settlements, procurement activities, office-related purchases and both in-store and online transactions. To support effective financial governance, the Corporate Preloaded Card can also be configured to align with each organisation's internal policies, giving businesses the flexibility to determine how cards are utilised, including the ability to apply spending controls and merchant category restrictions where required.

Bank Muscat announces 20 new winning sports teams

In a continuation of its leadership journey in corporate social responsibility and sustainability; and building on the remarkable success of its Green Sports Programme in supporting local sports teams across the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the names of the 20 winning sports teams selected under the 2026 edition of the programme. The announcement was made during the semi-final match of "Cheer Your Team" amateur football tournament which took place at Seeb Stadium in Al Khoudh. The event witnessed a huge turnout from fans and enthusiasts of the local sports sector. The latest edition of the programme saw a strong competition among sports teams from various governorates



across the Sultanate of Oman, bringing the total number of beneficiary teams since the programme's launch to 243, while the total number of beneficiaries has exceeded 70 thousand members of these community teams. This year's edition attracted applications from 96 sports teams, reflecting the programme's growing popularity and the strong interest among local teams in benefitting from the support it offers. The overwhelming response underscores the continued success of the Green Sports Programme and its positive impact on community sports. Bank Muscat remains

committed to implementing this initiative on an annual basis while closely monitoring each project through to completion to ensure the desired outcomes are achieved. The winning teams for the 2026 edition are as follows: • **Lighting Category:** Zakiyt Sports & Cultural Team in the Wilayat of Izki, Al Shabab Team in the Wilayat of Al Hamra, Bidbid Sports Team in the Wilayat of Bidbid, Saih Al Maashi Sports and Cultural & Social Team in the Wilayat of Bahla, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate; Al Awan Sports & Cultural Team in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah, Al Mabrah Sports & Cultural Team in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq, Al Nasr Sports & Cultural Team in the Wilayat of Suhar, Al Ittifaq Sports & Cultural Team in the Wilayat of Saham, Harmoul Sports & Cultural Team in the Wilayat of Liwa, Al Batinah

North Governorate; Al Misfah Sports Team in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, Soor Al Sahel Team in the Wilayat of Al Musannah, Al Batinah South Governorate; and Al Hosn Sports Team in the Wilayat of Bausher, Muscat Governorate. • **Natural Turf Category:** Shabab Al Nahdah Sports Team in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, Muscat Governorate, Al Shabiba Sports and Cultural & Social Team in the Wilayat of Samayil, Al Irtibat Sports Team in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, Al Nujoom Sports & Cultural Team in the Wilayat of Shinas, Al Batinah North Governorate, Al Hijr Sports & Cultural Team and Al Hayyal Sports & Cultural Team in the Wilayat of Ibri, Al Dhahirah Governorate; and Al Ittihad Sports & Cultural Team in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

SHORTTAKES



Oman registered vehicles reach 1.9 million

OVER 1.8 MILLION VEHICLES REGISTERED IN OMAN

The total number of registered vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman reached approximately 1,896,956 vehicles by the end of June 2026, marking an increase of 5.5 percent compared to the end of June 2025.

Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) revealed that the number of private vehicles reached 1,503,239, while commercial vehicles amounted to 281,217.

The number of rental vehicles stood at 44,817, and taxis reached 28,859, in addition to 11,764 government vehicles and 10,961 temporary vehicles.

Motorcycles recorded the highest growth rate among all registration types at 10.7 percent, bringing their total to 9,005 motorcycles by the end of June 2026, compared to 8,712 motorcycles at the end of June 2025.

Furthermore, the data indicated that the number of vehicles weighing less than 3 tons reached 1,720,196. Meanwhile, vehicles weighing between 7 and 10 tons accounted for 80,736, and those weighing more than 10 tons totaled 54,912 vehicles. — ONA

Raysut Cement posts profit as revenue rises

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

RAYSUT Cement Company SAOG returned to profit in the first half of 2026, posting a group net profit after tax of RO 2.7 million against a loss of RO 2.8 million a year earlier, as revenue rose 22 per cent and the company continued work on a capital restoration plan required under company law.

Revenue for the six months to June 30 climbed to RO 50.584 million from RO 41.404 million in the corresponding period of 2025, according to the board of directors' report on the unaudited group results. Gross profit rose 76 per cent to RO 8.854 million, while EBITDA increased 193 per cent to RO 8.313 million.

The group swung to an operating profit of RO 3.453 million from an operating loss of RO 140,000 a year earlier. Finance costs eased 16 per cent to RO 1.997 million.

The half-year figures include a one-off gain. The board said the company engaged an independent expert during the period to review the remaining useful life of production assets at the Salalah plant and that the revised estimates produced a positive adjustment of RO 83 million that has been incorporated into the H1 2026 results. The adjustment accounts for close to a third of the reported net profit.

The board described the period as confirmation of a wider turnaround, citing what it called a third consecutive operationally positive quarter and attributing the



'The strength of our core business is visible in our operational cash generation': Raysut Cement

Revenue for the six months to June 30 climbed to RO 50.584 million from RO 41.404 million in the corresponding period of 2025, according to the board of directors' report on the unaudited group results.

improvement to tighter governance, a leaner organisational structure, disciplined cash management and the structured resolution of legacy liabilities.

"The strength of our core business is visible in our operational cash generation", the report said, pointing to the EBITDA increase as evidence of improved commercial discipline and margin recovery.

The company is meanwhile pursuing a capital restoration plan approved at an extraordinary general meeting, in compliance with Article 147 of the Commercial Companies Law.

The board said it is negotiating a secured shareholder loan, describing the structure as non-dilutive and intended to inject liquidity to settle legacy liabilities and fund maintenance capital

expenditure. Raysut also flagged cost pressures during the half.

The board cited regional shipping constraints and port congestion that pushed up maritime freight rates, alongside inflation in UAE raw material prices and a temporary regional shortage of coal in May and June. It said management responded by adjusting fuel and raw material sourcing, reorganising regional logistics and maintaining flexible pricing.

Looking to the second half, the board struck what it termed a position of cautious optimism, acknowledging geopolitical uncertainty and potential shifts in supply and demand while pointing to infrastructure development and urbanisation in Oman and the UAE as supportive of cement demand.

Oman's phased e-invoicing to give advantage to local business firms

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUGUST 16

Oman's proposed mandatory electronic tax invoicing framework that will be implemented in phases from April 2027 is a bouquet of advantages to the businessmen in the country and can yield advantages galore, according to experts.

Oman's Tax Authority has earlier issued Decision No 189/2026 amending key provisions of the Executive Regulations of the Value Added Tax Law, introducing a mandatory electronic tax invoicing framework and the decision amends the Executive Regulations issued under the VAT Law promulgated by Royal Decree No 121/2020 introducing new provisions governing how tax invoices must be generated, secured, retained and exchanged electronically.

Fawtara, Oman's new eInvoicing



Francesco Colavita

mandate, arrives in three dated waves: Phase 1 in August 2026 for the 100 largest taxpayers, Phase 2 in February 2027 for all large VAT-registered businesses and Phase 3

in August 2027 for every remaining VAT-registered business, including SMEs, with no turnover threshold and no permanent exemption.

Speaking to the Observer, Francesco Colavita, SVP MEAPAC, JAGGAER said that this move is simply a head-start, and not a starting point and for most Omani businesses, the mandate that applies to them is still more than a year away and it would be easy to read that gap as breathing room.

It should instead be read as a head-start that will not be offered twice.

"Because Fawtara does not simply digitise the invoice a business already produces, it changes how that invoice is created, checked and reported. Every invoice will need to be generated in a structured, machine-readable format, validated by an accredited service provider and reported to the Tax Authority in real time for business-to-business

sales, or within 24 hours for consumer sales.

That is a different way of working and it cannot be bolted on in the final weeks before a deadline", he said. According to him, businesses waiting for their phase before starting, are mistaking the deadline for the starting gun. By the time Phase 3 is confirmed, accredited providers and IT teams will be stretched thin serving every SME in the country at once.

Early movers get to choose their provider properly, test their systems without pressure and fix data problems on their own schedule rather than the Tax Authority's.

"It is worth being honest about what the minimum viable version of Fawtara compliance looks like, because for many businesses this will be the default path: register with an accredited provider, connect just enough of the existing system to generate a valid invoice, pass the

checks and stop there", said Colavita, adding, "While this keeps a business on the right side of the mandate and avoids penalties, it treats eInvoicing as a cost of doing business rather than an asset and leaves most of the available value on the table".

Oman is now the third country in the Gulf to mandate E-Invoicing, following Saudi Arabia and the UAE. According to him, three governments independently reaching the same conclusion is a strong signal that structured, real-time invoicing delivers genuine value, not just administrative tidiness.

"But how much of that value a business captures depends entirely on how well it prepares. Treated as a checkbox, Fawtara returns exactly what a checkbox returns. Treated as an opportunity to fix data, connect systems and build real visibility, it returns considerably more", Francesco added.

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

German firms cut US investment



German companies slashed investments in the United States to a three-year low in the first half of 2026, as Trump administration policies fed uncertainty between the transatlantic trading partners.

First-half direct investments plunged by nearly two-thirds year-on-year to €4.3 billion (\$5 billion), the lowest level since 2023, according to calculations by the German Economic Institute, or IW, seen by Reuters. — Reuters

ENERGY POLICY

India sets targets to boost cooking gas



India has set a maximum daily cooking gas production target of 63,810 metric tonnes for state-run and private refineries to ensure domestic supplies and build buffers after US-Israeli war against Iran disrupted supplies of the essential fuel. India has set production targets for individual refiners with Reliance Industries Ltd's (RELI.NS), opens new tab domestic-market-focused refinery tasked to produce 18,000 tons a day of LPG. — Reuters

TAX COMPLIANCE

India opens tax amnesty



India's tax amnesty scheme for small taxpayers to declare certain undeclared foreign assets of up to 50 million rupees (\$523,889) opens on Sunday and will be available until December 31, the government said.

Taxpayers with undisclosed foreign income of up to 10 million rupees (\$104,778) can use the scheme until December 31, 2026, by paying 30% tax and an equal amount as a penalty.

— Reuters

OPINION

AI ushers in a new era of creative destruction



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

The writer is an assistant professor at College of Banking and Financial Studies

JOSEPH Schumpeter, an Austrian-born economist, describes capitalism in his 1942 book ‘Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy’ as a dynamic process. Schumpeter writes that through this continuous process, new firms, products, technologies and methods of production are continuously replaced with new ones. Schumpeter states that it ‘destroys’ old economic structures while creating new ones, a process known as creative destruction. Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt jointly shared half of the 2025 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel for the model of sustainable economic growth through creative destruction. Their model explained how repeated innovation can increase productivity and sustain long-term economic growth. Capitalism is dynamic, never stagnant; it produces innovations that replace old technologies, firms, products and sometimes even employment. Economic growth is driven by more workers participating in the economy, greater investment in machinery, infrastructure and factories, better education and skills; and higher productivity, producing more value with the same amount of time, labour and resources. In the long run, sustained growth in productivity and income per person depends importantly on technological progress and productive investments. Fundamentally, technological progress is necessary but not the only determinant of economic growth. An efficient ecosystem and diffusion of technology are important. Creative destruction is part of the innovation process. A new technology allows an economy to produce goods or services faster, more cheaply, or of higher quality.

When it replaces an inefficient old method, total productivity can rise. However, new technologies render previous technologies, business models, tasks and some jobs ineffective and obsolete, creating tension between innovators and incumbent firms. It can also create adaptability challenges for employees whose skill sets are no longer industry-relevant. Actors that expect to lose from technological change may try to slow adoption through lobbying, protecting existing markets, or raising barriers to entry. Nevertheless, evidence shows that, despite the challenges, economic growth can occur with sustained technological development through creative destruction, a part of the innovation process, when accompanied by competition, innovation, investment, skill development and support for displaced workers. When technologies like artificial intelligence emerge and diffuse across almost all industries, the world experiences the opportunities and challenges of creative destruction. However, new technologies not only take away jobs; they also create new occupations, transform existing roles and enhance workers’ productivity. In this process, growth is driven by new talent, entrepreneurs and new innovators entering the market. The innovation ecosystem must accept failure and provide support at every stage from conceptualisation to commercialisation and scale-up. Governments should enforce competition policy effectively to prevent anti-competitive conduct, reduce unnecessary barriers to entry and limit the ability of incumbent firms or vested interests to block innovation. The IT revolution of the mid-1990s and early 2000s illustrated creative destruction in practice. Internet-based firms such as Amazon and Google

Creative destruction is part of the innovation process. A new technology allows an economy to produce goods or services faster, more cheaply, or of higher quality. When it replaces an inefficient old method, total productivity can rise.

emerged and transformed established industries. Investment in information and communication technologies contributed to faster US productivity growth. Over time, however, the increasing concentration of digital markets raised concerns about whether competition policy could keep pace with technological change and preserve opportunities for new entrants. At present, artificial intelligence is creating a new wave of creative destruction. With broader applicability across industries, it could become a general-purpose technology. As with other general-purpose technologies, like electricity and information technology, the full economic value of AI will depend on complementary downstream innovations, digital infrastructure investment, organisational redesign and the development of human skills. At the upstream end of the AI value chain, advanced chips, cloud computing, data centres and foundation models are concentrated in the hands of a small number of powerful firms. Amazon Web Services, Microsoft Azure and Google Cloud are major providers of cloud infrastructure for developing and deploying AI systems. This concentration can support large-scale investment, but it can also create risks for competition, access and innovation by new entrants. The world has seen earlier technological transformations and AI is the current tide, with uncertain outcomes. It is disrupting established business models and pushing the future of work into uncharted territory. To ride the tide, we cannot rely on the technology itself; we need an ecosystem in which institutions and governments promote open competition, broad access to infrastructure and skills, responsible innovation and support for workers and firms adapting to change.

HEATWAVES IN EUROPE EXPOSE INSURANCE GAP

SIMON JESSOP, REBECCA DELANEY & VALENTINA ZA

For more than a century, cafes in the Italian city of Padua have welcomed customers for an early evening drink, or aperitivo, encouraging them to sit outside and socialise before dinner. As Europe bakes under its fifth heatwave of the year, the traditional 6-7 pm slot has all but disappeared as people seek air-conditioning indoors, cutting sales for many hospitality businesses. Adding to the pressure, extreme heat often falls outside traditional business interruption insurance, exposing a growing protection gap for companies across Europe. Moody’s has published estimates that last summer’s European heatwaves cost €43 billion (\$50 billion) in lost economic output while generating only about €500 million of insured payouts. In Padua, aperitivo often now starts later, “which means that the outdoor seating areas, the terraces, the spaces outside... are left unused and empty”, said Federica Luni, president of hospitality association APPE Padova. According to a survey of about 600 hospitality businesses in the city and its province, more than 80% reported turnover declines of around 20% during the recent heatwave. Heatwaves are increasingly taking a toll on Europe’s economy, reducing productivity, curbing consumer spending and raising operating costs. For insurers, such losses can be difficult to cover because they often stem from indirect operational disruption rather than property damage. “Heat in itself is not a traditionally insured risk”, said Swenja Surminski, managing director for climate and sustainability at Marsh. “Extreme heat rarely causes catastrophic physical damage the way a flood or a storm does, but the financial operational disruption that it triggers can be just as severe”. A 2023 survey of 9,000 small and medium-sized firms for Europe’s insurance regulator found 28% held business interruption cover as part of their property insurance, while 17% had non-damage business interruption protection covering events such as strike action. The protection gap is widening as the economic costs of extreme heat mount. Trains are delayed, agricultural yields fall and factory cooling costs rise, while workers often struggle to maintain productivity during prolonged spells of extreme temperatures. — Reuters

Made in Oman drives competitiveness

THE Sultanate of Oman continues to strengthen the position of national products through the “Made in Oman” initiative, one of the key initiatives of the Industrial Strategy 2040. The initiative aims to enhance the competitiveness of the industrial sector and strengthen the presence of Omani products in local, regional and international markets, while building a strong national identity for products made in Oman. At its core, the initiative seeks to establish a strong national identity for Omani products and expand the national brand, increasing consumer confidence in Omani products locally and regionally. This identity is built on quality, authenticity and competitiveness, while encouraging consumers and institutional buyers to recognise the value of locally manufactured products. Quality and standards are therefore central to the success of “Made in Oman”. The initiative supports manufacturers in adopting better technical and quality practices and improving product standards, enabling Omani products to meet market requirements and compete more effectively in regional and international markets. Another important dimension is the empowerment of small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises. Through incentives and support services, the initiative seeks to help these enterprises increase their production capacity, strengthen their competitiveness and access new markets. Supporting SMEs is essential to building a broader and more resilient industrial base in Oman. Creating stronger domestic



ENG JASIM SAIF AL JADEEDI

The writer is Director of the Technical Office of Under-Secretary of Commerce and Industry, MoCIIP

The initiative seeks to establish a strong national identity for Omani products and expand the national brand, increasing consumer confidence in Omani products locally and regionally.

demand represents another key pillar of the initiative. Increasing the presence of Omani products in government purchases, projects and tenders can create sustainable market opportunities for national manufacturers and strengthen the connection between public-sector demand and domestic industrial production. At the same time, “Made in Oman” promotes the development of local content by encouraging the use of Omani raw materials, services and national talent throughout production processes. Expanding local content can strengthen domestic value chains, increase industrial linkages and create greater opportunities for Omani companies across the manufacturing ecosystem. Strengthening industrial supply chains is also an important component of the initiative. Connecting manufacturers with logistics and technology service providers can improve efficiency and productivity, while creating stronger relationships between manufacturing and supporting industries. Such linkages are essential for developing an integrated and competitive industrial ecosystem. Beyond the domestic market, the initiative seeks to expand Omani exports by opening new markets and strengthening the global competitiveness of national products. Greater access to international markets will provide Omani manufacturers with opportunities to expand production, diversify their customer base and develop stronger regional and international industrial partnerships. The future competitiveness of

Omani industry is also closely linked to innovation and the development of new national products. Supporting industrial innovation, improving productivity and strengthening production capabilities can help Omani manufacturers move towards higher-value products and compete more effectively in increasingly demanding markets. Ultimately, “Made in Oman” aims to move the national product beyond being simply a locally manufactured product to becoming a high-value, trusted and competitive product with a strong national identity. Its success depends on an integrated approach that combines quality, domestic demand, SME development, local content, industrial supply chains, innovation and export development. Through this approach, “Made in Oman” can become more than a national mark. It can serve as a platform for strengthening local value chains, supporting Omani manufacturers and SMEs, expanding exports, attracting quality investments, stimulating industrial innovation and creating opportunities for Omani talent. It can also contribute to stronger regional and international industrial partnerships and enhance the productive and competitive capacity of Omani industry. In this way, the “Made in Oman” initiative supports the broader objectives of the Industrial Strategy 2040 and Oman Vision 2040, positioning national products as an important driver of industrial development, economic diversification and sustainable growth.

CLASSIFIEDS

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

SIT. WANTED

SALES professional with 5 yrs Experience in Medical sector. Graduate, Available in Muscat. akhilmanu777@gmail.com Contact: 76323324

OPERATIONS Support / Tendering / Contract Management / Procurement professional with 18+ years' Oil & Gas experience. NOC & driving license available. 96227272, jijilmathew@gmail.com

LOGISTICS Documentation Executive. Indian male, 25 years, BBA, PG Diploma in Logistics & SCM and have 2 years of experience in this field. Seeking a position in Logistics field +968 7506 9882 Mail: shafazhussain18@gmail.com

15+ experience in building material, project sales & Trade market, deal with corporate project customers, looking for a suitable job. Contact 78384283

INDIAN male MBA Graduate with 15yrs experience in Oman seek suitable senior position in finance office admin., sales DTC. Contact: 94158080

INDIAN electrical engineer more than 20 years experience in "MEP" construction field in Oman seeks suitable job. Contact: 92919281

INDIAN Male, BSc, 20 years experience seeks suitable position as System Administrator / System Engineer. Contact: 93642216

ACCOUNTS/ SALES Indian male (b com) having 2+ years of experience in India accounts sales looking for suitable placement, join immediately. Contact: 76324360

MECHANICAL engineer with 11+ years experience in projects & marketing in Oman having valid driving licence. Seeking suitable placement. Contact: 91162085

ALL SEASON AYURVEDA CLINIC

The most efficient and authentic Ayurvedic Treatment & Medicine, Panchakarma, Yoga, Kalari, Massage Dhara etc... Rehabilitation, Marma Therapy & Post Delivery Care

Zaher Building, 1st Floor, Flat 8A, Al Khuwair Service Road, Near Al Zawawi Mosque & Burger-King

Tel: 24475280, GSM: 95371664, 92504980, Website: www.siddhayur.com

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (Cockroaches), Public Health Chemicals, Agriculture Chemicals, Snake Repellent, Rodent Baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309

pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

SIT. WANTED

LOOKING for SUPPLY CHAIN / SALES jobs Indian male 24 years. Commerce graduate, Experience in logistics, procurement and sales in reputed company in Oman.Valid Oman D/L. Contact +96891121694, issacantony2002@gmail.com

INDIAN male, 10 year experience in Oman as Coordinator have Driving licence. Contact: 95645241

DESKTOP support engineer, 6+ years experience, skilled in Windows/ Server/ Ubuntu, Network configuration, M365 & Google workspace admin. Contact: 99639710, jay.prajapati5655@gmail.ci

EXPERIENCED Accounts & Finance Candidate Seeking Suitable Opportunity. Expertise in Accounts, Invoicing, Reconciliation & Reporting. Contact: 75177637

LOOKING for Pipeline Engineer with 8 Years Experience offer salary: 200 OMR Phone : +96896965333 Email : sultanalhabsi701@gmail.com

LOOKING for warehouse manager role. Indian male, 14 years GCC experience with driving licence. Available to join immediately. Please contact: 92991621

SENIOR Logistics Coordinator seeking opportunity. 8 years' experience in Import, Export, Customs Clearance & Freight. PH +968 92267276

SIT. WANTED

LOOKING for part time or full time Accounts/ Finance job. 20yrs experience in Muscat. Upto finalization & Audit. Please contact: 92065499

LOOKING for part time OR full time Accounts/ Finance job. 20yrs experience in Muscat. Upto finalization & Audit. Please contact: 92065499

SENIOR Accountant: Indian male 20 years experience in Oman, shipping & logistics, Trading & contracting upto finalisation, cont: 95915852

Accounts & Finance professional with 7+ years' experience in reporting, revenue assurance, audit, compliance & ERP. Contact: 90159392

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325

www.orbit-oman.com

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

Lost Bill of Lading Notice

Six Construct LLC, registered under Commercial Registration No. (9014276), has lost Bill of Lading No. (GBTJSOH039/056) on 20/7/2026. Whoever finds it should hand it over to the nearest branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry or contact the following number: +968 99229518.

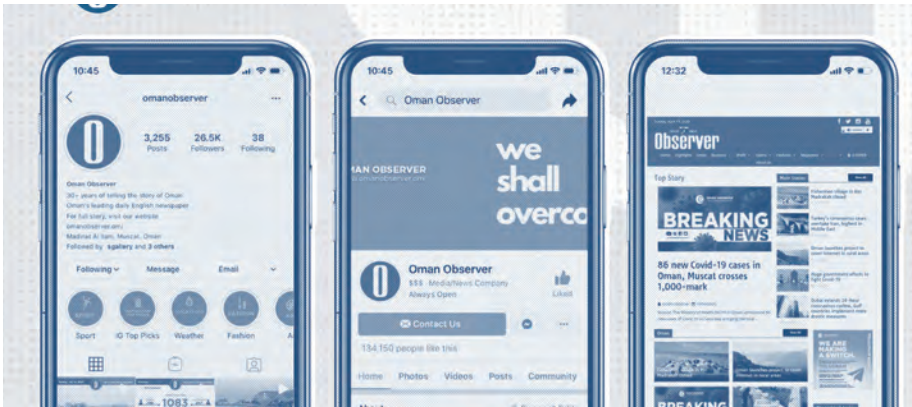
SIT. WANTED

LOGISTICS Experienced in Logistcs,warehouse & Operation incharge Seeking Suitable position with 15 yrs of experience in Logistics,warehouse Management & Supply chain along with hand on Chemical storage, involvement in project operation handling, Also have sales experiance in Mechanical & Instrumentation products. Immediate joiner Valid Oman D/LOL Contact: 95852916

SALES Executive required For working in oil and gas / building materials industry Vehicle Driving license preferred Email: kirit@bustaninternational.com Mobile: 95544641

PAKISTANI male, having diploma in mechanical engineering, 10+ years experience as "sales engineer" in UAE and 15 years experience as "operation manager" in Oman with D/L.Looking for job Contact: 99495131 email: manzoor.Ahmed1997@gmail.com

PROJECT manager (IT) 4+ years experience seeking opportunities in PMO Project Management or business analysis, MS Engineering Mgt. Experience across IT, Banking. Hgher Education & nonprofit sectors. PMP (in progress) currently in Oman. Contact: 95800828



FOR RENT

10000 sqm plus area of open yard fully blacktop with compound wall, wide gate & CCTV for immediate rent in Jifnain. Contact: 99853040

4 Ready made office space for rent in Bank Melli Iran building MBD area Ruwi, opposite Centre point. Contact: 99011352.

SIT. WANTED

INDIAN male B.Tech Mechanical engineer with 3+yrs experience as Project engineer in project execution, commissioning, Auto CAD. Currently in Oman seeking job. Contact: +968 75174368

INDIAN male civil engineer with more than 30 years experience in different ministers, seek immediate suitable position. Contact: 94158080

PROJECT management professional with 20+ years' experience in tendering, business development, business systemisation, ISO QMS, planning and procurement. Possesses managerial and team lead skills. Seeking an opportunity. Contact: 91799438

To advertise in Ministry of Information channels

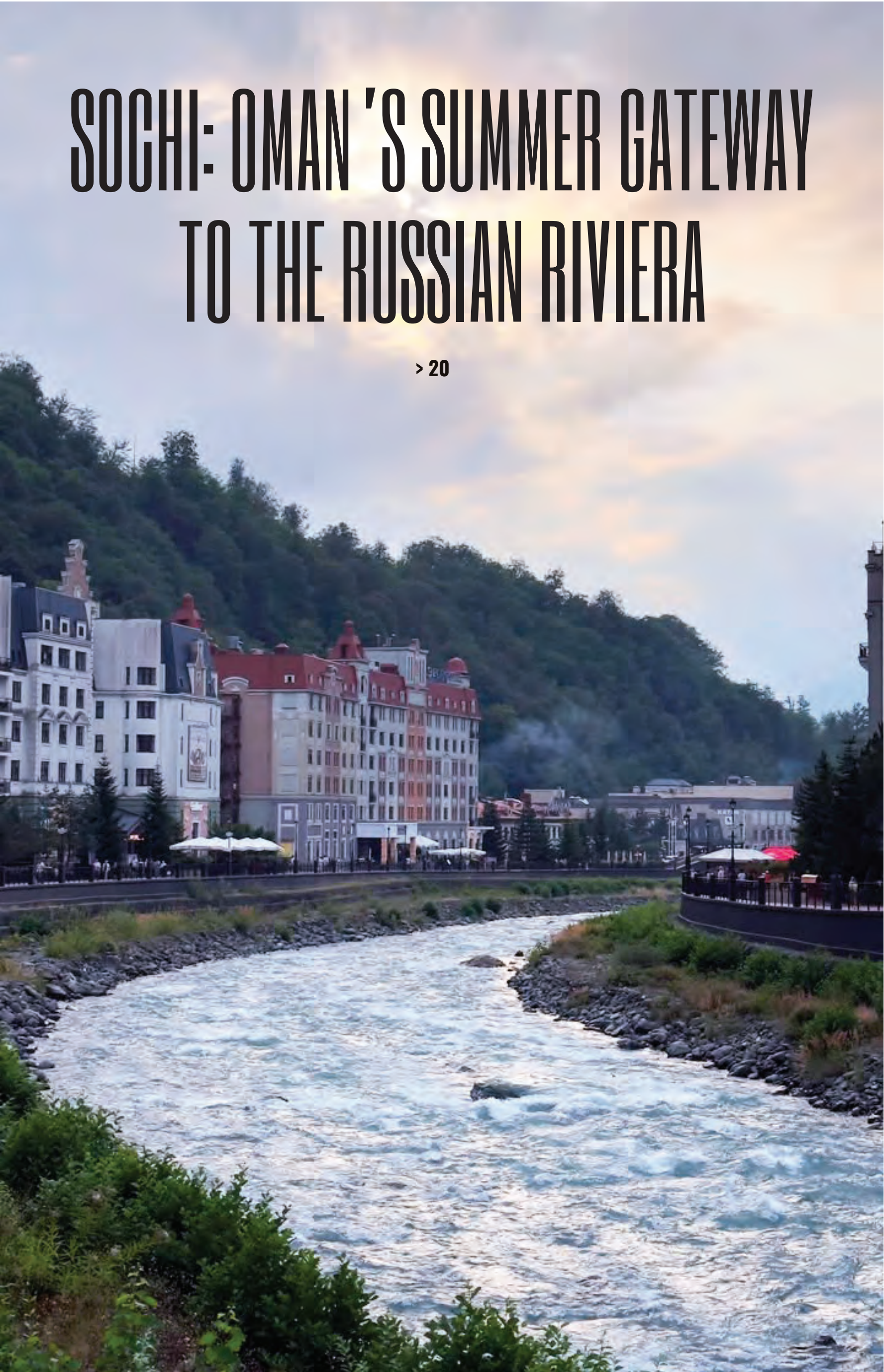


To advertise

71455532- 71455531- 71455530
adv@omaninfo.om
izdihar_info izdihar.info



ART/LIFE



SOCHI: OMAN 'S SUMMER GATEWAY TO THE RUSSIAN RIVIERA

> 20

HISTORICATTRACTION

TOURISTS BEAT THE HEAT WITH ‘MAGICAL’ COLOSSEUM NIGHT TOURS



“It’s a good idea because it’s really hot in the morning and during the day”, said Svetlana Spielberg, who was visiting from the United States. She described the monument as “really beautiful” at night.

The Colosseum in Rome has extended its opening hours into the night this summer, giving visitors the opportunity to explore one of the world’s most famous ancient monuments in cooler temperatures after sunset.

The night tours, which run until 11:00 pm, have proved popular, with all available places sold out. Tourists visiting the monument this week described the experience as both “magical” and “romantic”, particularly as the ancient amphitheatre takes on a different atmosphere when illuminated at night.

“After sunset is a lot more comfortable”, Victor Li, 52, said while touring the arena and the underground passages where animals and gladiators were once held.

“It’s a good idea because it’s really hot in the morning and during the day”, said Svetlana Spielberg, who was visiting from the United States. She described the monument as “really beautiful” at night, adding that the evening setting made the experience “more romantic”.

The Colosseum had previously offered night tours on two evenings each week, but that number has been doubled to four this summer. The additional openings come as Rome and other parts of Italy experience increasingly intense summer heat, prompting some tourists to avoid visiting major attractions during the hottest hours of the day.

“The idea of doubling the night tours and doing them also on Fridays and Saturdays was mainly to give access to visitors that prefer cooler hours”, said Simone Quilici, director of the Colosseum archaeological complex.

The extended opening hours have been made possible through a grant from Italy’s culture ministry. Quilici said the initiative could potentially be extended into September, depending on demand and available resources.

The night visits are guided, with visitor numbers deliberately kept low to preserve the quality of the experience. Only 275 people are admitted each night, a small fraction of the crowds that can gather at the monument during peak periods. The Colosseum can receive as many as 20,000 visitors a day during the busiest periods, making the quieter evening tours an alternative for those looking to experience the site away from the daytime crowds and heat.

Built in the first century, the Colosseum is the largest amphitheatre in the world and one of Rome’s most recognisable landmarks. The vast structure once hosted public spectacles including animal hunts and gladiatorial contests and could accommodate around 50,000 spectators.

For visitors who have seen the monument during daylight hours, the night experience offers a different perspective. — AFP

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



MUSIC FESTIVAL

Lebanese singer Elissa performs during the 60th session of the International Festival of Carthage (FIC) at the Carthage Roman Theatre. — AFP



TV AWARDS

US actor Noah Wyle attends the Television Academy’s Inaugural Televerse Festival at JW Marriott LA Live in Los Angeles. — AFP



FOLK DANCE

Members of dance ensembles dressed in Russian national costumes take part in the Khorovody Rossii (Round Dances of Russia) Festival. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



Road to the region's highest peak: Jabal Shams



Living life on the perch.

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

MONICA BELLUCCI AND FLORIN SERBAN WIN AT LOCARNO FILM FESTIVAL



“You Don’t Belong Here” by Romanian director Florin Serban won the Golden Leopard on Saturday at the 79th Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland, while Italian star Monica Bellucci won an acting award in another movie.

Serban, a leading figure of the Romanian New Wave, said on the festival website that his film was “above all, a portrait of a way of seeing the world that may be disappearing. Or perhaps should disappear”.

The jury honoured Monica Bellucci for her role in “Kettice” by Giovanni Tortorici, a film about teenagers’ search for identity and desire for freedom.

South Korean actress Kim Minhee also won an acting award for “Nowhere to Lay My Eyes”, by Hong Sangsoo, the story of a brother and sister visiting their mother on Jeju Island.

Serban’s dark film clocks in at more than two-and-a-half hours, exploring the relationship between Marius, the head doctor at the hospital in his small hometown and his teenage son Ioan, whom he has raised alone since his wife’s death.

Marius’s world is turned upside down when he learns that the police suspect his son of murder. The festival jury praised the film for the “strength of its writing, the uniqueness of its vision and its exceptional command of film language”.

Seventeen films competed for the Golden Leopard, the highest honour at the film event held every summer in the small Swiss town on the shores of Lake Maggiore. It comes with a prize of 75,000 Swiss francs (\$92,000), shared between director and producer. — AFP

DISNEY OFFERS FANS AN ESCAPIST BUBBLE AT D23 EVENT



Visitors embrace the spirit of Disney through character-inspired costumes at D23.



A Disney fan showcases an elaborate cosplay inspired by a beloved character at D23.



A visitor dressed as Rapunzel poses during the D23 Disney event.

DISNEY devotees lined up for a weekend of escapism at D23, the official fan club’s biennial convention that draws tens of thousands of people to Anaheim for three days, billed as “the Ultimate Disney Fan Event”.

With Disneyland itself just down the road, loyal subjects of the magic kingdom attend galas, buy unique items, trade pins and take photos with some of their favourite costumed characters.

Passes range from \$50 to \$2,500 — a small price to pay to escape the real world, fans say.

“Our world is so chaotic and unstable; and it seems like the bad guys are always winning”, Monica Romero, 37, said. “Even though people make fun of it because it’s like ‘oh, that’s not real life”.

“There’s a reason why we

Some fans bring collectible pieces to trade, like 19-year-old Chase Halon, a Disneyland worker who has amassed countless pins and is still hunting for more treasures.

like it”, she said, adding that the Disney event reminds her “good can always win”.

Thirty-eight-year-old Skyla said she visits “the happiest place on Earth” twice a week, so she looks forward to the presentation that offers updates on the park’s rides and experiences.

“You go into the park and the real world gets to disappear for a while and you just get to enjoy that time and just have happiness”, she said, while dressed up as Lady, the pampered cocker spaniel from the cartoon “Lady and the Tramp”.

PIN-TASIA Celebrities, filmmakers and creatives come to D23 to promote their projects while commercial partners sell Disney-branded merchandise.

Some fans bring collectible pieces to trade, like 19-year-old Chase Halon, a Disneyland worker who

has amassed countless pins and is still hunting for more treasures.

“It’s really fun and super-addicting as well”, he said. “A lot of the stuff that just came out today is pretty hard to find. But a lot of older stuff is also hard to find”.

His prized pin is of the purple dinosaur Figment, which is a limited edition that Halon believes could be worth \$5,000 “give or take”.

The event is also festooned with opportunities to take photos with the fantasy worlds of their beloved characters, from classic princesses and witches to Homer Simpson and “Toy Story”.

At the “Devil Wears Prada” space, they struck a pose for the cover of fictional magazine “Runway”.

In the Pixar world, they stepped into Andy’s room, littered with toys.

Each attraction offered its own opportunity to take a mental vacation from reality. — AFP

FEATURES



SOCHI: OMAN’S SUMMMER GATEWAY TO THE RUSSIAN RIVIERA



A NEW DIRECT OMAN AIR ROUTE FROM MUSCAT OPENS THE DOOR TO SOCHI, THE RUSSIAN RIVIERA, OFFERING OMANI TRAVELLERS A COOLER SUMMER ESCAPE COMBINING BLACK SEA BEACHES, MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPES, FAMILY ATTRACTIONS AND ADVENTURE.

ABDULAZIZ AL FARSI

AS summer temperatures rise across the region, Omanis seeking a cooler escape can now discover a new destination just four and a half hours from Muscat.

Sochi, a city on Russia's Black Sea coast, has gained attention following the launch of direct flights from Muscat by Oman Air. Known as the Russian Riviera, Sochi combines beaches and a seaside atmosphere with mountains, valleys, rivers and lush landscapes, offering Omani travellers a diverse summer getaway.

“Our network continues to evolve as we identify opportunities to connect Oman with high-potential markets”, said Con Korfiatis, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Air. “The launch of Sochi builds on the strong performance of our Moscow services and reflects growing point to point demand between Russia and Oman”.

The new route provides a convenient option for Omanis looking for a destination that offers family-friendly activities, nature and leisure without a long journey. Whether the interest is shopping, dining, sightseeing or relaxation, Sochi offers something for different types of travellers.

The city is also known for its international sporting legacy, having hosted the 2014 Winter Olympics, the Russian Grand Prix

from 2014 to 2021 and matches during the 2018 Fifa World Cup.

One of the city’s highlights is the Grand Marina in downtown Sochi, where visitors can stroll along the harbour, enjoy coffee at waterfront cafés and watch the sunset over the Black Sea.

“I really enjoyed my stay in Sochi; I got the chance to do everything I love”, said Adnan al Amri, an Omani who chose Sochi for his summer holiday.

“My recommendation would be to have your morning coffee next to the Grand Marina, while admiring the cloudy sky and the crystal-clear ocean. My favourite part of my stay was Rosa Khutor and the beautiful views I got to see from above the clouds”.

For nature lovers, Rosa Khutor offers a striking contrast to the coastal city. Surrounded by green mountains, rivers and flower-filled landscapes, the resort provides opportunities for walking, sightseeing and cable car rides, with peaks rising to more than 2,300 metres above sea level.

Families can head to Sochi Park, a theme park featuring rides for children and adults, as well as a dolphinarium, circus and theatre. Meanwhile, adventure seekers can visit Sky Park, home to suspension bridges, zip lines and bungee jumping experiences set amidst mountain scenery.

From the Black Sea waterfront to the Caucasus Mountains, Sochi offers Omani travellers a summer holiday that combines relaxation, adventure and nature, all within a direct flight from Muscat.

