

O M A N
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PAGES 20 BAISAS 200

SUNRISE 05:38 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:16 AM

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MAGHRIB 06:53 PM

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INBRIEF

OMAN AND HONG KONG DISCUSS JOINT INVESTMENTS

Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), met with John Lee Ka-chiu, Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of bilateral cooperation between Oman and Hong Kong in the economic, trade and investment sectors, and touched on available opportunities to strengthen the partnership between the two sides. This meeting took place during Al Murshidi's current visit to Hong Kong. He praised the existing relationship between Oman and Hong Kong, emphasising the importance of continuing reciprocal visits and enhancing cooperation in areas that serve the mutual interests of both sides.

DETAILS ON P15

OPEC+ COUNTRIES TO RAISE OUTPUT BY 547,000 BPD

Saudi Arabia, Russia and six key members of the Opec+ alliance said on Sunday they will increase production by 547,000 barrels a day in a move which analysts say aims to regain market share amid resilient crude prices. Iraq, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Algeria and Oman, along with the Saudis and Russians — together called the Voluntary Eight (V8) — currently produce about 41-42 million barrels a day, so the increase is about 1.5 per cent. Analysts said there was unlikely to be a major impact on prices, with the Brent reference oil currently selling at about \$70 a barrel. "The eight participating countries will implement a production adjustment of 547,000 barrels per day in September 2025 from August 2025 required production level," said a statement released after a meeting where the hike was agreed.

RAFO BAND SECURES FIRST PLACE



The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) band achieved first place overall in the Grade Four category of the World Pipe Band Championships held in the Scottish city of Dundonald. This new accomplishment adds to the RAFO band's distinguished history of artistic excellence on the world stage. It reflects the high level of professionalism the band has attained and highlights the dedicated efforts of its members in delivering polished musical performances.

A digital platform gives access to home healthcare services

SHINAS: A student team from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Shinas has developed an innovative digital health platform named 'Meaad', aimed at simplifying access to home healthcare services across Al Batinah North Governorate.

The platform allows patients and visitors to easily book medical appointments while providing comprehensive information about

doctors and clinics. Featuring a flexible and user-friendly interface suitable for both elderly users and tech-savvy youth, Meaad also ensures high transparency in pricing. Leveraging artificial intelligence, it enhances user experience by suggesting appropriate services.

To date, the platform has served over one million users, including patients, doctors and consultants,



The 'Meaad' platform has achieved several milestones.

alongside more than 460 medical centres and clinics across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Muadh bin Murad al Maamari, CEO of Nahj Foundation, stated that the team faced several challenges given the novelty of the idea. However, continuous coordination with relevant authorities and presenting a comprehensive vision helped highlight its importance in

this vital sector.

He added that work is currently under way to expand the platform by introducing new services such as medication delivery and virtual consultations, in addition to enhancing integration with government health institutions. The company also aims to cover all governorates by next year while exploring plans for future expansion into the Gulf market. — ONA

HIS MAJESTY RETURNS HOME



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik returned home, following a private visit to the United Kingdom (UK). May the Almighty Allah grant His Majesty success to achieve further progress and accomplishments. — ONA

MORE DIE OF HUNGER AS ISRAEL KILLS 40 IN GAZA

175 Palestinians, including 93 children die of starvation

SIX more people died of starvation or malnutrition in Gaza over the past 24 hours, its health ministry said on Sunday, as Israel said it allowed a delivery of fuel to the enclave, in the throes of a humanitarian disaster after almost two years of war.

The new deaths raised the toll of those dying from what international humanitarian agencies say may be an unfolding famine to 175, including 93 children, since the war began, the ministry said.

Egypt's state-affiliated Al Qahera News TV said two trucks carrying 107 tonnes of diesel were set to enter Gaza, months after Israel severely restricted aid access to the enclave before easing it somewhat as starvation began to spread.

COGAT, the Israeli military agency that coordinates aid, said later in the day that four tankers of UN fuel had entered to help in operations of hospitals, bakeries, public kitchens and other essential services. There was no immediate confirmation whether the two fuel trucks had entered Gaza from Egypt.

Gaza's health ministry has said fuel shortages have severely impaired hospital services, forcing doctors to focus on treating only critically ill or injured patients.

Fuel shipments have been rare since March, when Israel restricted the flow of aid into the enclave.

UN agencies say airdrops are insufficient and that Israel must let in far more aid by land and open up access to the territory to prevent starvation among its 2.2 million people, most of whom are displaced amidst vast swathes of rubble.



A Palestinian child poses for a picture from inside a shelter in the Daraj neighbourhood in Gaza City on Sunday. — AFP

UN says airdrops are insufficient and that Israel must let in far more aid by land and open up access to the territory to prevent starvation among its 2.2 million people

COGAT said that during the past week, over 23,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid in 1,200 trucks had entered Gaza, but that hundreds of the trucks had yet to be driven to aid distribution hubs by the UN and other international organisations.

Meanwhile, Belgium's air force dropped the first in a series of its aid packages into Gaza on Sunday in a joint operation with Jordan, the Belgian defence ministry said.

On Friday, France started to airdrop 40 tonnes of humanitarian aid. The Gaza government media office said on Sunday that nearly

1,600 aid trucks had arrived since Israel eased restrictions late in July. However, witnesses and Hamas sources said many of those trucks have been looted by desperate displaced people.

Palestinian local health authorities said at least 40 people had been killed by Israeli gunfire and air strikes across the coastal enclave on Sunday. Deaths included persons trying to make their way to aid distribution points in southern and central areas of Gaza, Palestinian medics said.

SEE ALSO P6

OMAN

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AWARD-WINNING
RAO BAND
TRIUMPHS AT
SCOTTISH
MILITARY
CONTEST

EDINBURGH: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) Music Band continues its triumphant march across Scotland, winning eight prestigious awards in the Dundonald competition – part of its lead-up to the World Championship in Glasgow on August 16.

Among the honours, the RAO Band was named Best Team Outside the UK, and won Best Dressed Team, as well as First Place in Discipline and Military Infantry categories. The ensemble also secured top positions in the Second and Third Team levels for musical performance.

Warrant Officer Mohammed bin Khamis al Amri clinched the First Place Shield, Sergeant



Nader bin Jumaan Bait Jabali earned the Third Place Cup and Captain Hamid bin Suleiman al Ghafri was awarded Fourth Place.

Colonel Ahmed bin Salem al Shakiri, Director of the RAO Music Band, remarked: “This accomplishment affirms the musical and technical excellence of our band. It also reflects the leadership’s commitment to presenting the Royal Army of Oman with honour on international platforms - showcasing our cultural, artistic and military heritage to the world.” – ONA

ABRAJ

ENERGY SERVICES SAOG

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Abraj Energy Services SAOG, I am pleased to present the condensed interim financial statements for the six-month period ended 30th June 2025.

The Company specializes in providing services for Oil and Gas Wells, during and post wells construction.

From building a wider service portfolio, Abraj now focuses on strategic top-tier services coupled with strong operational efficiency to realize maximum financial returns and sustainable growth. Abraj continues to benefit from the strength of long-term contracts in generating sufficient cash flow for growth.

Abraj Energy services SAOG Performance:

Operational performance:

We are pleased to report strong and steady HSE performance companywide, with all key indicators well within target thresholds. The Lost Time Injury Frequency (LTIF) stands at an impressive 0.20, and the Total Recordable Case Frequency (TRCF) at 0.69, reflecting the effectiveness of our proactive safety initiatives and the ongoing commitment of our workforce. Our performance has been externally recognized through several prestigious awards from our clients, including the Zero Harm Award and the Road Traffic Safety Award from Occidental, highlighting our leadership in operational safety and road traffic management.

While the overall safety record remains excellent, we continue to prioritize continuous improvement. A single Lost Time Injury (LTI) was recorded at Rig 111 in February, and one recordable incident at Rig 205 in January. Both incidents were promptly addressed, and comprehensive reviews are underway to ensure best practices are reinforced across all sites. Importantly, no systemic issues were identified. Additionally, we successfully completed our ISO 14001 re-certification audit in Q2 2025, further reinforcing our commitment to environmental stewardship and high operational standard.

Drilling and Workover:

The Main highlights to be noted is the signing of key contracts for 6 new rigs for PDO for 6 years. Additionally, the management was able to re-deploy rig-305 back to BP operations by end of this year for a new contract duration of 3 + 2 years.

In terms of operational performance across all active rigs reached a new benchmark, with 99.15% productive time and only 0.85% non-productive time (NPT). All wells were delivered ahead of AFE timelines, reflecting meticulous planning, disciplined execution, and strong cross-functional collaboration. Notably, Rig 211 set a milestone in Kuwait by completing a 1500HP rig move in just 14 hours, showcasing exceptional field agility and coordination.

In terms of asset deployment and cost efficiency, Rig 204 was swiftly redeployed post-CC Energy operations, minimizing downtime and preserving asset value through proactive client engagement. Year-to-date, 167 rig moves have been completed, resulting in cost savings of OMR 160K above budget. Additionally, procurement discipline was strengthened, with a 19% reduction in PO spend and a 21% decrease in PO creation, underscoring robust cost governance.

Well Services:

The Well Services team delivered a strong operational performance, achieving low NPT and high asset utilization across cementing and stimulation operations

Key Financials of your company:

- Revenue has decreased during the six months ended 30th June 2025, compared to the same period in 2024, by 6.4% from OMR 77.9 M to OMR 72.9 M, primarily attributed to stacked rigs. Efforts are ongoing to re-deploy these rigs back to operation.
- Total expenses during the first half of the year 2025 decreased by 5.4% compared to the same period in 2024, from OMR 67.2 M to OMR 63.6 M. This reduction is consistent with the drop in revenue.
- Profit after tax for the six months ended 30th June 2025 decreased by 12.6%, from OMR 10.67 M in the same period of 2024 to OMR 9.327M.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):

In Q2 2025, Abraj reinforced its commitment to social responsibility by supporting educational, cultural, and community development initiatives. These contributions reflect the company's dedication to fostering meaningful impact across its core CSR pillars. In parallel, Abraj is assessing strategic and joint CSR initiatives in collaboration with public and private sector stakeholders to further align its efforts with national development priorities and create long-term shared value.

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

CONDEENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION As at 30 June

	30 June 2025 (Unaudited) RO'000	31 December 2024 (Audited) RO'000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property and equipment	193,532	201,173
Right-of-use assets	3,452	4,081
Intangible assets	131	173
Deferred expenses non-current portion	55	68
Capex advances	2,632	982
Total non-current assets	199,802	206,477
Current assets		
Trade receivables	47,477	40,135
Advances, prepayments, and other receivables	2,143	2,816
Deferred expenses - current portion	95	25
Inventories	28,510	28,416
Cash and cash equivalents	5,801	5,473
Total current assets	84,026	76,885
Total assets	283,828	283,342
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
Capital and reserves		
Share capital	77,020	77,020
Legal reserve	13,338	12,405
Retained earnings	47,983	56,895
Total equity	138,341	146,320
Non-current liabilities		
Term loans - non-current portion	74,415	74,017
Deferred income - non-current portion	819	1,058
Deferred tax liabilities	3,051	3,238
Employees' end of services benefits	2,279	2,398
Lease liabilities - non-current portion	2,720	3,178
Total non-current liabilities	83,284	83,889
Current liabilities		
Term loans - current portion	14,189	16,801
Lease liabilities - current portion	859	1,012
Short term loan	17,000	-
Trade payables	16,173	16,459
Other payables	11,260	14,453
Deferred income - current portion	860	660
Income tax payable	1,862	3,748
Total current liabilities	62,203	53,133
Total liabilities	145,487	137,022
Total equity and liabilities	283,828	283,342

CONDEENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE (UNAUDITED)

	(Unaudited)			
	Three months ended		Six months ended	
	2025	2024	2025	2024
	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000	RO'000
Revenue	36,147	38,682	72,943	77,921
Cost of sales	(27,387)	(28,833)	(54,907)	(57,887)
Gross profit	8,760	9,849	18,036	20,034
General and administrative expenses	(2,116)	(2,333)	(4,204)	(4,149)
Other (expenses) / income - net	70	(330)	(7)	(357)
Operating profit	6,714	7,186	13,825	15,528
Finance costs	(1,563)	(1,573)	(2,983)	(2,983)
Finance income	67	38	146	111
Net finance costs	(1,496)	(1,535)	(2,837)	(2,872)
Profit before tax	5,218	5,651	10,988	12,656
Income tax expense	(794)	(931)	(1,661)	(1,986)
Profit and total comprehensive income for the period	4,424	4,720	9,327	10,670
Earnings per share				
Basic and diluted earnings per share-Baita	5.7	6.1	12.1	13.9

Summit ‘Pathway 25’ on August 25

HIGH school students in Oman are invited to ‘Pathway 25’, a focused half-day career guidance summit scheduled for August 25, designed to help them make informed academic and career decisions.

Organised by educational psychologist Massrat Shaikh, the summit addresses the growing need for structured career planning among youth, especially those who often rely solely on parental influence without understanding their personal strengths or interests.

The event will open with a career interest and aptitude evaluation using a standardised Pearson assessment, followed by a detailed talk on future skills needed for a changing global



The summit addresses the growing need for structured career planning among youth

workforce. Students will then attend a session by Zainul Dhalla, Director of Product & New Ventures at Rihal and a Cambridge graduate, who

will speak on preparing for top-tier universities.

The final talk, delivered by Kate Clarke, Managing Director of Al Ahlam Higher Education Services with over 25 years of experience in Oman, will guide students through the UK and Ireland higher education systems, including the UCAS process and student life abroad.

After the event, students and their parents will be offered a one-on-one session to discuss their personalised career assessment results and build a clear academic road map.

“This summit aims to equip students with the clarity, tools and confidence they need to pursue careers aligned with their potential,” said Massrat. Registration is now open for interested students and families.

FATAL TRUCK COLLISION CLAIMS 3 LIVES

IBRI: Rescue and ambulance teams in Al Dhahirah Governorate responded to a tragic collision involving two trucks in Al Rahba area in the Wilayat of Ibri on Sunday.

The accident resulted in the deaths of three individuals, while a fourth person sustained

critical injuries. Emergency medical teams provided immediate assistance at the scene before transferring the injured victim to a nearby hospital for further treatment.

Authorities have launched an investigation to determine the cause of the accident.



Shabab Oman II sets sail to Denmark for final race leg

OSLO: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) vessel Shabab Oman II departed from Kristiansand Port in Norway, heading towards Esbjerg Port in Denmark. This voyage marks the ship's participation in the fourth and final leg of the 2025 Long Distance Sailing Races, part of its seventh international voyage titled ‘Glories of the Seas 2025’.

The voyage is not merely nautical but diplomatic as well. Shabab Oman II carries a message of friendship and cultural exchange, aiming to strengthen bonds between the Sultanate of Oman and nations around the world. At each international stop, the ship showcases authentic Omani culture, reflecting Oman's maritime legacy and global outreach. — ONA



Shabab Oman II carries a message of friendship and cultural exchange

SHORT TAKES



The accomplishments underscore the centre's vital role in empowering women. — ONA

WOMEN’S GUIDANCE CENTRE ACHIEVES MILESTONES

Al RUSTAQ: The Women’s Education and Guidance Centre in Al Batinah South Governorate, under the Department of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, has recorded a series of qualitative achievements during the first half of 2025.

These accomplishments underscore the centre’s vital role in empowering women and promoting religious, cultural and social awareness through a comprehensive range of programmes and initiatives targeting various segments of society.

In the field of Quranic education, the centre supervised 113 Quran memorisation schools, with 4,281 male and female students enrolled. The “Noor” project for qualifying female Quran memorisers continued its progress, recording 310 participants, 33 of whom completed memorising the entire Quran. Additionally, the centre conducted 353 supervisory visits to Quranic schools and achieved 7 diverse educational milestones. — ONA

NEW BATCH JOINS ROYAL OMAN POLICE



MUSCAT: A new batch of citizens holding General Education Diplomas (GED) and post-GED diplomas joined the Royal Oman Police (ROP), on Sunday.

This is part of ROP’s ongoing employment efforts in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and is aimed at providing police formations with qualified personnel to keep pace with the requirements of security and police work in light of the expansion taking place at ROP.



TENDER

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) FOR TECHNO-ECONOMIC CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY IPPS

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP) is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the PWP license.

Tender Description	PWP seeks proposals to appoint a qualified and experienced Consultant as a techno-economic advisor for the development of renewable energy projects. The Consultant will be required to study the viability of including hybrid generation (solar, storage and wind power) in identified sites. The scope includes the procurement of multiple renewable energy projects.
Tender Number	OPWP/2025/29
Tender Purchase Period	From 31 July 2025 to 11 August 2025
Tender Fee	200 OMR / Free of charges for (SME) with a valid Riyada card
Submission date	31 August 2025 at 12:00 PM Oman Time Zone
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through the PWP website (https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx). Payment is done electronically through the PWP website. For queries, please send an email to: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om or prj.wind29@omanpwp.nama.om
Tender Workshop	Interested parties are invited to a “Navigate through RFP requirements workshop” on Thursday, 14 August 2025 at 11 AM Oman Time Zone, via MS Teams link.
Bank Guarantee	A Tender Bond or a bank certified cheque of not less than 1% of the tender value is required. It must be valid for a period of 120 days from the submission deadline. The tender bond or certified cheque shall be enclosed as part of the bid.

Duo conquers 1,000 km with noble messages

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

ALI bin Hamed al Balushi and Ali bin Salem al Balushi walked day and night, trekked across mountains, hitchhiked and dared the desert sands during a journey that lasted eight nights and seven days.

They interacted with people from different walks of life, mingled with strangers and often slept under the stars during their 1,000-kilometre journey.

They ventured out on a different kind of expedition to attract the world’s attention to several points, the first of which is that “Oman is the safest country” to live in.

Their journey was unique because they never took their cars on the roads but sought hitchhiking to reach from one point to the next, and walked and trekked at times during their journey to Salalah, which they accomplished in seven days.

“Besides sending out the message that our country, Oman, is beautiful and the safest country in the world, we wanted to urge our youth that nothing is impossible. Work your way out to achieve your goals in life rather than sitting idle,” said Ali bin Hamed al Balushi.

Their journey began on Saturday, July 26. They travelled through roads, halted after several kilometres and stayed overnight with an Omani family. The next day, they hitchhiked to the next destination and so on until they reached Dhofar.



Their journey was unique because they never took their cars on the roads but sought hitchhiking.

“Most importantly, we wanted to raise awareness against the menace of drugs and psychological substances and spark some thought process against the real danger that the world is facing today,” added Ali bin Salem al Balushi.

Their mission was supported mainly by Hamed al Alami, a businessman who

supports such noble causes.

“We visited homes in different wilayats, experienced Omani hospitality, and want the world to know that Omanis are highly hospitable. A visit to the country is worth it. One can not go back to their country without experiencing the true hospitality of Oman,” they said.

NBO Global Equity Fund

Investment Manager Report
For the period ending
30th June 2025

In the period ending on June 2025, the global markets continued with their strong rebound, recovering from the weakness seen in the first quarter and in the early parts of April 2025. Major indices have reached new highs while market volatility eased significantly.

Global financial markets continue to be influenced by monetary policy outlook, with central banks adjusting their stance, such as the European Central Bank, continuing their shift towards easing, as seen with its 25 basis points (bps) rate cut in June and the US Federal Reserve, the Bank of Japan, and the Bank of England maintaining their rates during their respective June meetings. The outlook for the second half of 2025 remains highly sensitive to the US Fed’s monetary policy trajectory, particularly the timing and magnitude of potential rate cuts, as well as any trade tariffs related impact going forward.

The MSCIs Global and Developed indices increased by 9.10% and 8.59% respectively while the Emerging Market index increased by 13.70% during the period. Among Developed Markets (DM), the S&P 500 Index (USA) increased by 5.50%, while Nasdaq Composite (USA) increased by 7.93%. The Euro Stoxx 50 Index (Eurozone), UK and Japan increased by 8.32%, 7.19% and 3.00% respectively. Among Emerging Markets (EM), the Korean, Indian and Chinese markets increased by 28.04%, 7.92%, and 2.76% respectively, (USD returns considered for all indices).

US Dollar continued to decline with another correction of 2.47% in June 2025. For YTD 2025, USD is now down by 10.70% with the Dollar Index (DX) correcting to a low of 96.88 on 30th June 2025 from its peak level of 109.96 in early January 2025. This correction is largely led by the fiscal and trade policies of the new US Government which has weakened near-term sentiment on US Dollar. However, considering the wide variation in US interest rates and rates in other developed markets, it is likely that such a correction may see some reversal/normalization going forward. In the bond markets, the US 10-year yields ended at 4.22% in June 2025, as compared to 4.40% in the previous month. The Global Aggregate Bond Index ended the month up by 1.90%.

Our fund’s performance lagged the broader general global index. This was largely led by sector/security specific underperformance in our Financial and Consumer Staples stock, which underperformed during the strong rally of the period. The lag was also due to the continued correction in the US Dollar which impacted overall performance generally throughout the month. On the other hand, our growth related stocks led by Technology, Communications, and Consumer Discretionary Sectors did well during the period as compared to the general market.

Furthermore, while the market has had a strong pull-back towards all-time highs, we continue to remain cautious given the overall macro volatility and our ongoing strategy focuses on maintaining portfolio quality by refining our research and investment strategy to preserve value and grow the portfolio over the long-term, in line with the respective global indices.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2025			
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION			
	30 June 2025	31 December 2024	
	RO	RO	
ASSETS			
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	3,738,766	3,607,115	
Cash and cash equivalents	52,492	39,573	
Dividend receivable	2,528	1,569	
Total assets	3,793,786	3,648,257	
LIABILITIES			
Accruals and other payables	13,232	12,431	
Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders	3,780,554	3,635,826	
Net asset value per unit	1.060	1.018	
STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME			
	30 June 2025	31 December 2024	
	RO	RO	
INCOME			
Net realised gain on investments at fair value through profit or loss	1,932	139,777	
Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss	209,845	(29,640)	
Dividend income	20,692	15,172	
Foreign exchange gain	175	-	
Other income	137	2,088	
	232,781	127,397	
Expenses			
Brokerage commission	14,681	23,142	
Management fees	18,830	13,307	
Fund Management Body fees	21,002	4,200	
Investment advisor fees	7,767	5,068	
Administration and custodian service fees	5,557	5,019	
Foreign exchange loss	-	1,031	
General and administration	18,239	10,238	
	86,076	62,005	
Net profit and total comprehensive income for the period	146,705	65,392	
Net profit per unit	0.041	0.018	

Note: The complete account in Arabic or English, as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholders within 7 days of written request addressed to the Administrator, Standard Chartered Bank.

KHAREEF DHOFAR



Trips to Khareef Dhofar Season provide an experience along with a blend of history and recreation.



BLENDING
NATURE,
HISTORY AND
TOURISM

DHOFAR’S MUSEUMS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES ARE
VITAL CULTURAL TRIBUTARIES, ADDING SUBSTANCE AND
SOUL TO THE GOVERNORATE’S TOURISM EXPERIENCE

THE museums and archaeological sites in Dhofar serve as a fundamental pillar of cultural tourism during Khareef Dhofar Season. They attract visitors from within and outside Oman and reflect the richness of the governorate’s cultural and archaeological assets.

Several officials from the heritage and tourism sectors, along with investors in archaeological sites, told ONA that the Khareef Dhofar Season is a golden opportunity to promote cultural tourism in the governorate, given the large number of visitors interested in Omani history and cultural identity.

Ali bin Salim al Kathiri, Director of the Land of Frankincense Sites at the Directorate-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, stated that the archaeological cities of Samahram and Al Baleed represent a unique model of ancient port cities that flourished on the southeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. These cities undertook a vital role in the maritime trade network, especially the frankincense trade.

He added that historical sources and excavation results at these two sites have revealed a succession of multiple civilisations, reflecting the rich civilisational heritage of southern Oman. Both sites have been on the Unesco World Heritage List since 2000.

Al Kathiri noted that the number of visitors to the Land of Frankincense sites and the Museum of the Frankincense Land during the last khareef season reached 54,569. He anticipates an increase in this number during the current season due to promotional efforts by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

He explained that the visitor experience is evaluated through regular field surveys, research studies conducted by specialised scientific institutions, and the national ‘Tajawob’ platform, which receives public feedback and suggestions. This contributes to improving services and enhancing community interaction with these sites.

He added that efforts include using interactive and educational displays, providing specialised guides, and organising

“
The archaeological cities of Samahram and Al Baleed represent exemplary models of ancient port cities and have been listed on the Unesco World Heritage List since 2000, with excavations and historical records revealing layers of civilisations that testify to the region’s rich cultural past.

ALI BIN SALIM
AL KATHIRI
Director, Land of Frankincense Sites
Directorate-General, Heritage & Tourism, Dhofar



educational workshops and activities for visitors and students. The local community is also involved in museum initiatives, which enhance awareness of cultural heritage and national identity.

Mohammed bin Ahmed Sawakheroon, supervisor and investor in the Burj Al Askar and Taqah Castle sites, explained that these projects form two integrated heritage and tourist destinations in Taqah. They were developed in cooperation with several government entities to enhance the visitor experience and enable young Omanis to engage in sustainable projects.

He pointed out that the Burj Al Askar site received support from the Dhofar Governor’s Office and was included in official visit programmes. Dhofar Municipality also assisted by paving the road to the top of the tower and providing essential services. The SMEs Development Authority contributed by choosing the site for a handicraft village during the khareef 2023 events and organising several activities during winter.

Harith bin Mohammed al Ghassani, a board member of the Dhofar Museum, stated that the museum serves as a window into the history of the Omani people since the first settlements.

Located in the old quarter of Salalah, it is distinguished by its heritage design and its contents, which include over 1,000 artefacts collected by the museum’s founder since the 1950s.

Salim bin Ahmed al Amri, owner of the ‘Tawasul Al Ajyal Museum’ in Taqah, said that the museum is the first private museum licensed by the MoHT in Dhofar Governorate. It aims to transfer authentic Omani heritage from previous generations to the next, affirming that preserving cultural memory is a shared responsibility between individuals and institutions.

He explained that the museum includes four halls: the reception and library hall, the ‘Umm Salim’ hall, which embodies the traditional urban environment, the crafts and industries hall that documents silver, pottery, palm-frond, leather and perfume industries.

Faiza bint Suwailim al Kalbaniyah explained that her frequent visits to Dhofar during the khareef season, often for work-related conferences and media activities, are always accompanied by her deliberate effort to take time to visit archaeological and historical sites.

Nasser bin Saif al Maamari said that during his visit to Taqah, he was keen to visit Burj Al Askar and Taqah Castle. He expressed his admiration for the meticulous architectural design of the two sites and the archaeological contents that embody the local heritage, expressing his pride in the achievements that reflect the focus on historical heritage.

Abdulhamid bin Mohammed al Khalidi, a visitor from Kuwait, described his visit to the Museum of the Frankincense Land as an enriching experience. He noted the noticeable tourist activity at cultural and archaeological sites during the khareef season, especially from Gulf and Arab visitors, due to the diverse content that reflects Oman’s ancient history. — ONA



REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATION

LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FIRST WASTE TO ENERGY PROJECT
AT BARKA, SULTANATE OF OMAN

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP) is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the PWP license.

Tender Description	Oman is moving towards strategic waste management to reduce, treat, and manage waste volume. The Authority for Public Services Regulation (“Authority”) has nominated PWP to lead the development of the first waste-to-energy project. This project is the first waste to energy project in Sultanate of Oman with a capacity of 95-100MW and a waste treatment of around 3000 ton per day in the Wilayat of Barka. PWP is coordinating with Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (“be’ah”). This announcement launches the qualification process for interested developers through the issuance of the Request for Qualification (“RFQ”) document.
Tender Number	OPWP/2025/30
Tender Purchase Period	From 3 August2025 to 16 August 2025
Tender Fee	350 OMR / Free of charges for (SME) with a valid Riyada card
Submission date	The Statement of Qualification (“SOQ”) must be submitted by September 21, 2025, at 12:00 PM Gulf Standard Time (GST).
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through the PWP website (https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx). Payment is done electronically through the PWP website. For queries, please send an email to: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om

SHORT TAKES



The two-week initiative is titled 'My Summer: Communication and Development'

255 STUDENTS FROM DHOFAR TO ATTEND SUMMER PROGRAMME

SALALAH: The 2025 Summer School Programme for students has officially commenced across four summer centres in Dhofar Governorate. Organised by the Directorate-General of Education in the governorate, the two-week initiative is titled 'My Summer: Communication and Development', and brings together 255 male and female students from various schools in the governorate.

Hamed bin Bakhit al Mashikhi, Acting Director-General of the Directorate-General of Education in Dhofar and Chairman of the Local Committee supervising the programme, highlighted that the initiative aligns with the Ministry of Education's efforts to utilise summer vacations in developing students' skills in a safe, engaging environment. The programme also aims to instil national and societal values while preparing a generation equipped to adapt to technological advancements and uphold Omani identity.

The programme includes a wide range of workshops and activities across social, volunteer, artistic, literary, sports, media and cultural domains, in addition to value-based themes.

During the first week, students will focus on building personal and social skills through physical activities and sessions aimed at creative thinking, problem-solving and teamwork. The second week emphasises national identity through competitions and cultural programmes that celebrate Omani values and traditions.

Activities are being held at Al Saiidiya Boys School in Salalah, Manbaa Al Hikma School, Al Saada School and Durrat Dhofar Girls School. Scientific visits and recreational trips are also part of the educational plan. — ONA



Khareef tourism pushes hotel occupancy to new highs

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 3

Hotels and hospitality providers across Dhofar Governorate are reporting record-high occupancy rates during the ongoing Khareef Dhofar Season 2025, driven by favourable weather, enhanced infrastructure and rising regional interest.

Industry sources confirmed that hotel bookings in Salalah and surrounding wilayats have surpassed 90 per cent since mid-July. Family resorts, boutique guesthouses and furnished apartments are operating at full capacity on weekends and public holidays.

A surge in domestic travel, improved air connectivity and targeted marketing campaigns across the Gulf have all contributed to the uptick in tourism.

The khareef season, which

typically spans from late June to early September, continues to draw a steady stream of visitors from across Oman and neighbouring GCC countries.

"Compared to last year, we are seeing a marked increase



SAID AL MAASHANI

in both length of stay and per-guest spending," said an executive from a leading four-star hotel in Salalah. "Families are arriving earlier and staying longer, with high demand for suites and sea-view rooms."

Demand has also spilled over into alternative accommodations such as serviced apartments, home rentals and eco-lodges, especially near Ittin, Al Mughsail and the Dhofar

highlands. Mobile platforms offering short-term stays have reported record bookings and listings. Said al Maashani, who runs a family-operated mountain lodge, said, "Visitors are looking for comfort and proximity to nature. We're fully booked until the end of August."

The hospitality boom has had a ripple effect on related sectors including car rentals, dining, tour guiding and outdoor leisure businesses.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism attributes the strong season to early planning, robust promotion and infrastructure enhancements. Salalah Airport has added domestic and regional flights, while road improvements have eased access to tourist hotspots. Officials also highlighted the alignment of khareef 2025 with Oman Vision 2040.

SEFCO, OMANI GROWERS SIGN SESAME FARMING PACT

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 3

SEFCO, a food industry firm based in the Salalah Free Zone, signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Omani Agricultural Association (Dhofar Branch) to promote sesame cultivation in the Najd area of Dhofar Governorate.

The initiative is part of a wider collaboration involving the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, and the Salalah Free Zone. It aims to link local agricultural output with the food processing industry, aligning with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.



The project involves around 35 farmers and spans 600 acres of farmland

As per the agreement, SEFCO will procure the full sesame yield from farmers during the first harvest season, with plans to scale up in future phases. The project presently involves around 35 farmers and spans 600 acres of farmland, with a projected yield of 300 tonnes in its first season. It is expected

to reduce reliance on imported sesame, thereby supporting local industries such as tahini and halwa production.

Sesame is highly compatible with the desert environment of Najd and is prized for its versatility across food, cosmetics and traditional medicine, as well as its rich

nutritional value.

Dr Ali Tabouk, CEO of Salalah Free Zone, remarked, "Our objective is to stimulate economic growth by enabling meaningful collaborations between investors in the zone and the local community. This initiative underscores our focus on building industries rooted in local resources and fostering sustainable development across Dhofar and Oman."

The agreement stands as a model of effective public-private partnership, illustrating how government entities, free zones and the private sector can unite to support SMEs, enhance food self-sufficiency and drive long-term national growth.

'Our Pioneers in Dhofar' campaign kicks off

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
SALALAH, AUG 3

FOR the third consecutive year, the 'Our Pioneers in Dhofar' campaign has returned, reinforcing Riyada's commitment to empowering small and medium enterprises (SMEs) across Oman.

Launched as part of the Khareef Dhofar festivities, the campaign aims to strengthen the role of entrepreneurs and elevate their economic contributions during the peak tourism season in Dhofar.

Organised by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, the initiative serves as an integrated platform that combines empowerment, education and marketing. Running throughout July and August and continuing into early September, the campaign spans various key locations in Dhofar Governorate.

This year's edition features a wide range of activities, including introductory meetings, specialised workshops and training programmes. Notable events include pre-qualification sessions for institutions in the security and safety sectors, an orientation on the 'Mahal' programme, an Oman Exports workshop and collaborative sessions with Omantel.



The campaign aims to strengthen the role of entrepreneurs and elevate their economic contributions

The campaign spans various key locations in Dhofar running throughout July and August and continuing into early September

Open marketing spaces for entrepreneurs are also a central feature - such as the SMEs corner in the Al Hafa Beach Market and the Oman Oil Bazaar.

The Future Pioneers Camp further enhances the campaign by equipping aspiring youth with leadership skills and business readiness.

By participating in the khareef season, SMEs gain a strategic platform to promote their products, engage directly with consumers and expand their local market presence. The broader aim is to position SMEs as key players in national economic growth and innovation.

Highlighting its support, the Authority has waived registration fees and commissions for SMEs using dedicated marketing outlets. These include the newly launched Omani Crafts House, offering a direct sales platform to help boost visibility and revenue for local businesses and artisans.

With continued collaboration between public and private sectors, the 'Our Pioneers in Dhofar' campaign reflects an integrated vision - using the vibrancy of khareef as a springboard for entrepreneurial success and sustainable economic development in the governorate.

جامعة الشرقية

A' SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

ASU's Tender Committee is pleased to invite specialized companies to participate in the following tender:

Tender details:

Tender No.	Description	Document Collection Deadline	Deadline for Tender Clarifications	Bids Submission Deadline	Document Fees
(ASU/60/24/25)	Tender for Providing & Supplying Equipment for A'Sharqiyah University Veterinary Hospital	10/08/2025	12/08/2025 At 12:00 PM	21/08/2025	OMR 100

Specialized companies interested in participating in this tender should obtain the tender documents during official working days from Sunday to Thursday, between 9:00 AM and 2:00 PM.

Tender collection process: The interested companies shall follow the following steps:

1 - The payment should be made directly to ASU under the following bank account:

Account Name	AL SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY
Account Number	0423010693610011
SWIFT CODE	BMUSOMRX

2 - After payment, send the receipt to azza.rashid@asu.edu.om, along with the reference number, title of the tender and CR of the company.

3 - Participating companies will receive the tender document via email.

4 - Companies that hold Riyadh certificate are exempted from tender document fees. Companies should send Riyadh certificate to azza.rashid@asu.edu.om, along with the reference number, title of the tender and CR of the company

ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids. http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf

ASU is not bound to accept the lowest bid.

For further details, please don't hesitate to contact us at: azza.rashid@asu.edu.om or 25401115 / 25401116.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Russian, Chinese officers mark the start of the joint drills, in Vladivostok. — Reuters

RUSSIAN, CHINESE NAVIES CARRY OUT JOINT DRILLS

MOSCOW: The Russian and Chinese navies are carrying out artillery and anti-submarine drills in the Sea of Japan as part of scheduled joint exercises, the Russian Pacific Fleet was quoted as saying on Sunday. The drills are taking place two days after US President Donald Trump said he had ordered two nuclear submarines to be positioned in “the appropriate regions” in response to remarks by former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev. However, they were scheduled well before Trump’s action. Interfax news agency quoted the Pacific Fleet as saying Russian and Chinese vessels were moving in a joint detachment including a large Russian anti-submarine ship and two Chinese destroyers. It said diesel-electric submarines from the two countries were also involved, as well as a Chinese submarine rescue ship.

The manoeuvres are part of exercises titled “Maritime Interaction-2025” which are scheduled to end on Tuesday. Interfax said Russian and Chinese sailors would conduct artillery firing, practise anti-submarine and air defence missions, and improve joint search and rescue operations at sea. — Reuters

CLASHES IN SYRIA KILL FOUR AS ISRAEL CONDUCTS RAIDS



People ride a motorcycle past a burned-out military vehicle, in Sweida. — Reuters

DAMASCUS: Renewed sectarian clashes in southern Syria’s Sweida province killed at least four people on Sunday, a war monitor said, in the first deadly incident since a ceasefire last month. The Observatory said three Syrian security forces personnel were killed “as clashes erupted with local factions around Tal Hadid in the western Sweida countryside”. The Observatory also reported the death of a “local fighter”.

Fighting also erupted around the city of Thaalaa, the Observatory said, “following bombardment of the area with shells and heavy weapons launched from areas under the control of government forces, while the sound of explosions and gunfire was heard in various parts of Sweida”.

Israel’s military said on Sunday ground troops had operated in southern Syria, seizing weapons and questioning individuals suspected of arms trafficking, in the latest cross-border raid. A military statement said that troops had completed overnight “a mission involving on-site questioning of several suspects involved in weapons trafficking in the Hader area in southern Syria”, near the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights. — AFP

BANGLADESH PROTEST VICTIM GIVES EVIDENCE AT EX-PM TRIAL

DHAKA: The first witness in the trial of Bangladesh’s fugitive ex-prime minister Sheikh Hasina gave evidence on Sunday, a man shot in the face during protests that toppled her last year. Hasina, 77, who has defied court orders to return from India to attend her trial on charges amounting to crimes against humanity, is accused of ordering a deadly crackdown in a failed bid to crush the student-led uprising. Up to 1,400 people were killed between July and August 2024, according to

the United Nations.

The first witness, among the 11 cases that the prosecution is expected to present to the court, was Khokon Chandra Barman, whose story reflects the violence of the protests. The 23-year-old wears a mask to conceal his face, which was ripped apart by gunshot during the culmination of the protests on August 5, 2024, the same day that Hasina fled Dhaka by helicopter. “I want justice for the ordeal I’ve been going through, and for my fellow

protesters who sacrificed their lives,” he told the court.

Barman lost his left eye, while his right eye was damaged, as well as his lips, nose and teeth. A video showing Barman’s blood-covered face was played in court, with the opening statements aired on the state-run broadcaster.

Prosecutors have filed five charges against Hasina — including failure to prevent mass murder — which amount to crimes against humanity under Bangladeshi law. — AFP

Pro-Palestinians march over Sydney Harbour Bridge

TENS of thousands of demonstrators braved pouring rain to march across Sydney’s iconic Harbour Bridge on Sunday calling for peace and aid deliveries in the war-torn Gaza Strip, where a humanitarian crisis has been worsening. Nearly two years into a war that Palestinian authorities say has killed more than 60,000 people in Gaza, governments and humanitarian organisations say a shortage of food is leading to widespread starvation. Some of those attending the march, called by its organisers the ‘March for Humanity’, carried pots and pans as symbols of the hunger. “Enough is enough,” said Doug, a man in his 60s with a shock of white hair. “When people from all over the world gather together and speak up, then evil can be overcome.”



Protesters walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge during the Palestine Action Group’s March for Humanity. — Reuters

Marchers ranged from the elderly to families with young children. Among them was Wikileaks founder Julian Assange. Many carried umbrellas. Some waved Palestinian flags and chanted, “We are all Palestinians.” New South Wales police said up to 90,000 people had attended, far more than expected. The protest organiser, Palestine Action Group Sydney, said in a Facebook post that as many as 300,000 people may have marched.

Police Commissioner Peter McKenna said more than a thousand police were deployed, and the size of the crowd had led to fears of a crush. “No one was hurt,” he told a press conference. “But gee whiz, I wouldn’t like to try and do this every Sunday at that short notice.” Police were also present in Melbourne, where a similar protest march took place.

Diplomatic pressure ramped up on Israel in recent weeks. France and Canada have said they will recognise a Palestinian state, and Britain says it will follow suit unless Israel addresses the humanitarian crisis and reaches a ceasefire. Australia’s centre-left Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has said he supports a two-state solution and Israel’s denial of aid and killing of civilians “cannot be defended or ignored”, but has not recognised Palestine.

Meanwhile, Egypt’s state-affiliated Al Qahera News TV said on Sunday that two fuel trucks carrying 107 tonnes of diesel were set to enter Gaza, months after Israel severely restricted aid access to the enclave before easing it somewhat as starvation began to spread. Gaza’s health ministry has said fuel shortages have severely impaired hospital services, forcing doctors to focus on treating only critically ill or injured patients. There was no immediate confirmation whether the fuel trucks had indeed entered Gaza.

Fuel shipments have been rare since March, when Israel restricted the flow of aid and goods into the enclave in what it said was pressure on Hamas militants to free the remaining hostages they took in their October 2023 attack on Israel. — Reuters



THAI PROTEST IN FACE OF WAR

BANGKOK: Anti-government protesters held Thai national flags during a rally to condemn war with Cambodia and demand the resignation of Thailand’s suspended prime minister, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, at Victory Monument in Bangkok.

Thailand and Cambodia may have reached a ceasefire to halt their bloody border clashes, but cyber warriors are still battling online, daubing official websites with obscenities, deluging opponents with spam and taking pages down. Thai officials recorded more than 500 million instances of online attacks in recent days, government spokesperson Jirayu Huangsab said.

UN rights chief Volker Turk called for both sides to protect civilians from further harm after both sides accused each other of breaching a deal that has largely halted the open combat along the frontier. — AFP

INTENSE WEATHER PATTERNS

Vietnam flooding death toll rises to 10



The death toll from floods in Vietnam’s mountainous north has risen to 10. Heavy rain led to flooding in recent days in the provinces of Son La, Phu Tho, Tuyen Quang and Dien Bien, isolating several communities. The agriculture ministry confirmed 10 people were killed and seven others injured in Dien Bien province’s Tia Dinh and Xa Dung communes. Authorities deployed helicopters to access isolated communities and deliver basic necessities. — AFP

LARGE SCALE ATTACKS

‘Bandits’ kidnap over 50 people in Nigeria



Gunmen kidnapped more than 50 people in northwest Nigeria in a mass abduction, according to a conflict monitoring report. “Armed bandits” targeted the village of Sabon Garin Damri in Zamfara state. This was the first “mass capture” incident in the Bakura local government area this year. “The recent trend of mass captures in Zamfara has been concerning,” noting “a shift in bandit strategy toward more large-scale attacks in northern Zamfara.” — AFP

NATIONAL SECURITY

Senegal strengthens border gendarmerie



Senegal said that it is positioning new gendarmerie units in the east of the country as it faces growing security threats along its border with Mali. Senegal’s National Gendarmerie said that it had opened new units in Tambacounda, Kedougou and Saraya in ceremonies this week conducted by the minister of the armed forces, General Birame Diop. The units are meant to address cross-border crime, trafficking of all kinds, and security challenges. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Eruption of the Krashenninnikov volcano.

DORMANT VOLCANO ERUPTS FOR FIRST TIME IN 450 YEARS

MOSCOW: A volcano erupted for the first time in 450 years in Russia’s eastern Kamchatka region, the nation’s emergency authority said on Sunday, days after one of the strongest earthquakes on record hit the region. Pictures released by Russian state media show a towering plume of ash spewing from the Krashenninnikov volcano, which last erupted in 1550, according to the Smithsonian Institution’s Global Volcanism Program.

The plume is estimated to have reached an altitude of 6,000 metres, Kamchatka’s Ministry of Emergency Situations said in a post on Telegram. “The plume is spreading eastward from the volcano towards the Pacific Ocean. There are no populated areas along its path and no ashfall has been recorded in inhabited localities”, the ministry said.

The volcano has been assigned an “orange” aviation hazard code, the ministry added, meaning flights in the area may be disrupted. It came after Klyuchevskoy, another volcano in the region — the highest active in Europe and Asia — erupted on Wednesday. Eruptions of Klyuchevskoy are quite common, with at least 18 occurring since 2000, according to the Global Volcanism Program. — AFP

MORE TRAPPED WORKERS IN CHILE



Chilean copper miner Codelco on Sunday said two more workers trapped at its El Teniente mine were found dead, bringing the toll of fatalities from a collapse last week to four. One person died at the time of the incident on Thursday evening, while five others were trapped. Codelco reported the death of one of the trapped workers, leaving now two still unaccounted for. Codelco also said rescue teams have now cleared 24 metres of blocked passages at El Teniente, as they seek to reach the area where the remaining workers are expected to be. — Reuters

EL SALVADOR’S BUKELE DEFENDS ENDING TERM LIMIT

SAN SALVADOR: El Salvador’s president on Sunday defended a constitutional reform granting him the right to seek indefinite re-election, slamming critics who say it represents growing authoritarianism in the Central American nation. “Ninety per cent of developed countries allow the indefinite reelection of their head of government and no one bats an eye. But when a small, poor country like El Salvador tries to do the same, suddenly it’s the end

of democracy”, Bukele wrote in English on X. El Salvador’s Congress, dominated by Bukele’s New Ideas party, passed the reform on Thursday. It also extends presidential terms from five to six years. Bukele, 44, who has been president since 2019 and was re-elected in 2024 with 85 per cent of the vote, now holds near-total control over the country’s institutions — in what the opposition calls a “dictatorship.”

He enjoys enormous domestic support for his tough campaign against criminal gangs, but has been sharply criticised by international and local rights groups over his approach. Bukele has notably supported US President Donald Trump’s deportation campaign, taking in hundreds of expelled Venezuelan migrants under contentious legal grounds and housing them at the country’s notorious CECOT penitentiary. — AFP

Ukrainian drones spark fire at Russian Sochi oil depot

AN overnight Ukrainian drone attack sparked a fire at an oil depot in Sochi, the Russian resort that hosted the 2014 Winter Olympic Games, around 400 kilometres from the Ukrainian border, authorities said. Ukraine has regularly hit Russian oil and gas infrastructure in response to attacks on its own territory since Russia began its offensive in February 2022. “Sochi suffered a drone attack by the Kyiv regime last night”, the governor of Russia’s Krasnodar region, Veniamin Kondratiev, said on Telegram. He said drone wreckage hit an “oil tank, which caused a fire”.

Sochi’s mayor, Andrei Proshunin, said there were no victims and “The situation is totally under control”, adding that firefighters were continuing to extinguish the blaze. Images, broadcast by Russian media showed flames and a thick plumes of black smoke rising from the site. Air traffic was briefly suspended at Sochi airport but resumed shortly afterward, Russia’s air transport regulator Rosaviatsia said. Ukraine authorities had not commented on the fire. Air strikes on Sochi are relatively rare compared to some other Russian cities. However, Ukrainian drone attacks killed two people there late last month, according to local authorities.

Kyiv has said it will intensify its air strikes against Russia in response to an increase in Russian attacks on its territory in recent weeks, which have killed dozens of civilians. The Russian defence ministry said meanwhile that three Ukrainian drones had been intercepted in the Leningrad region, which includes the Baltic seaport of Saint Petersburg.

Overnight strikes by Russia inside Ukraine’s south and north also left several people injured, authorities said. One missile wounded seven people in a residential district of Mykolaiv, a city near the Black Sea in southern Ukraine, Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said. Three other people were injured in the northeastern Kharkiv region, she added, while local authorities also reported injuries in the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions in the south. “The Russians continue to wage war not against Ukrainian forces, but against Ukrainian civilians”, Svyrydenko said.

Last week, US President Donald Trump gave his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin



A firefighter works at the site of a Russian drone strike, in the town of Druzhkivka. — Reuters

a ten-day ultimatum, until next Friday, to end the conflict in Ukraine. The air strikes and fighting have not abated, however and the Kremlin has rejected the idea of a lasting ceasefire in Ukraine, which it sees as a gift to Kyiv’s troops.

Ukraine said on Saturday it hit military targets and a gas pipeline in drone attacks in Russia, where local authorities said three people were killed and two others wounded. Ukraine’s SBU security service said the strikes, carried out by long-distance drones, hit a military airfield in the southwestern town of Primorsko-Akhtarsk. They caused a fire in an areas where drones were stored, the SBU said. It said the strikes also hit a company, Elektropribor, in Russia’s southern Penza region, which it said “works for the Russian military-industrial complex”, making military digital networks, aviation devices, armoured vehicles and ships.

The governor for the Penza region, Oleg Melnichenko, said on Telegram that one woman had been killed and two other people were wounded in that attack. Russia’s defence ministry said its air-defence systems had destroyed 112 Ukrainian drones over

Russian territory — 34 over the Rostov region — in a nearly nine-hour period, from Friday night to Saturday morning.

An elderly man was killed inside a house that caught fire due to falling drone debris in the Samara region, governor Vyacheslav Fedorishchev posted on Telegram. In the Rostov region, a guard at an industrial facility was killed after a drone attack and a fire in one of the site’s buildings, acting Rostov governor Yuri Sliusar said. “The military repelled a massive air attack during the night”, destroying drones over seven districts, Sliusar posted on Telegram.

An analysis published on Friday showed that Russia’s forces in July launched an unprecedented number of drones, 6,297 of them.

The figure included decoy drones sent into Ukraine’s skies in efforts to saturate the country’s air-defence systems. In Ukraine’s central-eastern Dnipropetrovsk region, Russian drone attacks on Friday night wounded three people, governor Sergiy Lysak wrote on Telegram. Several buildings, homes and cars were damaged, he said. — AFP

Pope’s ‘Jubilee of Youth’ ends with mass for 1 million pilgrims

ROME: Pope Leo XIV presided over a final mass in Rome for over one million young people on Sunday, the culmination of a pilgrimage that has drawn Catholics from across the world. “Aspire to great things, to holiness, wherever you are. Do not settle for less”, Pope Leo told the crowd. The week-long “Jubilee of Youth” — a highlight of the Jubilee holy year — was an enormous undertaking for the Vatican, with a half a million young pilgrims in Rome for most of the week.

On Saturday night, before a twilight vigil led by the pope, organisers said there were 800,000 people in the vast, open-air space on Rome’s eastern outskirts, and on Sunday the Vatican said that number had grown to one million.

Most of them spent the night in tents, in sleeping bags or on mats in anticipation of Sunday’s mass.

The Vatican has sought to highlight pilgrims who travelled to Rome from war-torn regions and Leo said in his Angelus prayer: “We are closer than ever to young people who suffer the most serious evils which are caused by other human beings”. “We are with the young people of Gaza. We are with the young people of Ukraine, with those of every land bloodied by war”, said the 69-year-old pontiff. “My young brothers and sisters, you are the sign that a different world is possible, a world of fraternity and friendship where conflicts are not resolved with weapons but with dialogue”. The colourful event was accompanied



Pope Leo XIV waves as he leaves after leading a mass in the Tor Vergata district of Rome. — AFP

by music from a choir and about 450 bishops and 700 priests, all in green robes. A towering cross dominated the massive golden arch covering the stage where the pope led mass.

The young pilgrims — from 146 different countries, according to the Vatican — have filled Rome’s streets since Monday, chanting, singing and waving flags of their countries. The festive atmosphere reached a peak on Saturday ahead of the vigil presided over by Leo, with Italian broadcaster Rai dubbing it a Catholic “Woodstock”. Hundreds of thousands camped out at the dusty venue, strumming guitars or singing, as music blasted from the stage where a series of religious bands entertained the crowds.

Leo was greeted with deafening

screams and applause after his arrival by helicopter and as he toured the grounds in his popemobile, with many people running to catch a better glimpse of the new pope. Roads leading to the Tor Vegata venue, about a 40 minute drive from the centre of Rome, were packed, making Leo’s choice of helicopter transportation on both Saturday and Sunday more efficient.

At over 500,000 square metres, the grounds were the size of around 70 football fields. The youth pilgrimage came about three months after the start of Leo’s papacy and 25 years after John Paul II organised the last such youth gathering in Rome. It was announced by Pope Francis during World Youth Day in Lisbon in 2023. — AFP

OPINION

Oman’s urban design blends heritage with modern vision



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

The writer is an Associate Professor, at Sultan Qaboos University

RECENTLY, the outdoor spaces of Sultan Haitham City won the Best Landscape Architectural Design award at the Arabian Property Awards. Not only is this a recognition of the vision projected into this venture, but it is also a reminder of the way in which structures like buildings, and even open spaces, reflect national aspirations and identity.

Gardens may just be gardens to many – a place to enjoy time with families and friends. In fact, we often do not think about the process of conceptualising outdoor spaces, their meaning and purpose.

According to researchers of urban spaces, physical and cultural spaces perform important roles in identifying, creating and consolidating national identities. Examples from Europe include the way in which gardens are depicted as tamed versions of the wild or as representing community aspirations in the 20th century.

In a similar way, landscaping in Oman can be seen in new, innovative ways that reflect the changing perspectives and priorities

of the nation. Already recognised for its traditional heritage tag, as reflected in its low-rise urban landscape, Oman is also seeing subtle shifts in external modelling that take into account harmony with the community.

A mixed-use physical structure is the need of the hour, as it solves the challenges of long commutes and access to everyday comforts. This is particularly true in a hot climate like that of Oman, where the need would be to provide easily accessible comforts and luxury.

In many ways, this reflects the direction that design and landscaping in Muscat – and other cities across Oman – are taking. By prioritising heritage buildings, material and design, urban spaces are being defined as modern but also culturally confident and proud. That is the essential message of Oman Vision 2040 as well.

That this is best reflected in the physical structures, but also in the surrounding gardens and parks, shows an increasing recognition of the importance of the outdoors in facilitating a love for nature and a harmony with the outdoors which leads to a holistic lifestyle.

By prioritising heritage buildings, material and design, urban spaces are being defined as modern but also culturally confident and proud

Landscaping is an integral way in which modern amenities and historical awareness can be acknowledged and shared. The presence of traditional shrubs and trees native to a place helps in preservation but also teaches visitors about local vegetation.

Establishing a sense of continuity with the past but with an eye to the future through buildings allows for inhabitants and visitors to participate in a shared national vision. It helps to create awareness, instil pride, and promote the nation.

When we think of asserting identity through physical spaces, we often think of historical buildings like forts and castles. It is even more interesting to see how landscaping can lead to similar assertions of national consciousness and pride. Tied with other innovative concepts like the newly built botanical gardens in Muscat, such green awareness will contribute to a common purpose which is sustainable and respectful.

While there are a number of obvious ways of showcasing heritage and tradition, landscapes add another visual element to historical storytelling while enhancing pride in the nation.

RETHINKING THE RI² INDEX

As universities worldwide navigate the competitive terrain of global rankings and research output, new performance indicators are surfacing that purport to measure academic integrity. Among these is the Research Integrity Risk Index (RI²), which draws particular attention and concern.

Created by Prof Lokman Meho of the American University of Beirut, the RI² assigns institutions a numerical “integrity risk” score based solely on two indicators: the number of retracted articles per 1,000 publications, and the share of papers published in journals later delisted from Scopus or Web of Science. Institutions are then divided into tiers from red flag (highest risk) down to white/low risk.

While the index claims to shine a light on environments vulnerable to compromised research integrity – especially where volume is prioritised over quality – it has come under fire.

Scholars argue that the RI² offers an overly reductionist lens that fails to distinguish between honest revision, minor mistakes, and deliberate misconduct. Retracted papers may stem from benign causes like improper image permissions or authors voluntarily withdrawing – not necessarily fraud or error.

Furthermore, relying on this index poses structural unfairness to universities in developing contexts. Larger and more productive institutions will naturally have more retractions, and retroactive delistings of journals penalise authors who published in good faith under legit indexing status at the time. These institutions often face disparities in resources, language access, and oversight – factors the RI² does not adjust for.

Research integrity cannot be captured in crude numbers. It thrives on trust, transparent correction mechanisms, peer engagement, and context-sensitive oversight. Indicators solely based on bibliometric outputs neglect the reality of academic environments. Even commentary by external evaluators emphasise that the index does not differentiate severity or intent behind retractions, making identical cases out of trivial procedural errors and outright scientific misconduct.

Rather than descending metrics from above, what is needed are tools that emerge from within – hybrid approaches combining peer review, institutional self-assessment, metadata audits, and qualitative analysis. These would recognise context, capacity and complexity.



DR AYA AKKAWI
The writer is an Associate Professor at Sultan Qaboos University

Global shift towards recognising Palestine

THE diplomatic landscape of the Israel-Palestine conflict is undergoing a major shift, following announcements by Canada, the United Kingdom and France to formally recognise a Palestinian state by September 2025. As longtime advocates of a two-state solution, this move by three G7 nations signals growing frustration with Israel’s conduct and a revived international push for justice. While not a final resolution, it offers hope for a process long stalled by Israel’s continued occupation and military aggression.

The Palestinian demand for statehood is rooted in a history of dispossession. The 1947 UN partition plan, which proposed separate Arab and Jewish states, was accepted by Jewish leaders but rejected by Arab nations, triggering the 1948 war. What followed was the Nakba – a catastrophe during which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forcibly displaced from their homes. Israel exceeded its allotted territory, and scholars such as Ilan Pappé have described this as an act of ethnic cleansing. In 1988, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) declared independence, gaining recognition from much of the Global South. Western powers, however, withheld recognition, arguing that statehood must result from negotiations. This allowed Israel to entrench its occupation while avoiding meaningful accountability.

A recent High-Level International Conference on the Two-State Solution, co-chaired by France and Saudi Arabia at the UN, reflected rising international discontent. The conference reaffirmed ‘unwavering support’ for Palestinian statehood. Yet Israel refused to engage meaningfully, and the US, under



BADR AL DHAFARI

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President Trump’s renewed administration, dismissed the effort as ‘unproductive and ill-timed.’

Secretary of State Marco Rubio’s response highlighted America’s ongoing role in shielding Israel. The conference had been delayed due to Israel’s intensifying confrontation with Iran, illustrating its destabilising role in the region.

The new positions of the UK and Canada signal a departure from this status quo. UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has tied recognition to halting military operations in Gaza and freezing settlement expansion in the West Bank. Canada’s Prime Minister Mark Carney, while supportive, has called for reforms within the Palestinian Authority. These conditions indicate a genuine effort toward a viable, sovereign Palestinian state. They reflect international frustration over Israel’s repeated obstruction of peace and the severe humanitarian toll in Palestine. Failed peace efforts – sabotaged by settlement expansion and Israel’s refusal to negotiate in good faith – make clear the need for a new path.

The United States, by contrast, remains aligned with Israel. Rubio has criticised his allies’ moves as “clumsy” and imposed sanctions on the Palestinian Authority while continuing to send billions in military aid to Israel. This double standard enables Israel to avoid its obligations under international law and perpetuate occupation with impunity.

Public sentiment underscores the urgency of change. A June 2025 Pew Research Center survey found that only 21 per cent of Israelis believe peaceful coexistence with a Palestinian state is possible – reflecting

deep disillusionment. Still, other polls suggest most Israelis would support mutual recognition under a comprehensive peace deal.

Among Palestinians, hope endures. A May 2025 PCPSR poll showed that 68 per cent believe an independent state will eventually be realised. Yet many also recognise that symbolic recognition without actual freedom from occupation is insufficient. What they seek is justice and liberation, not empty declarations.

In the countries recognising Palestine, public opinion is largely supportive. A 29 July 2025 YouGov poll found that 45 per cent of Britons back UK recognition, compared to just 14 per cent opposed.

Though recent polling is limited in Canada and France, their governments’ decisions reflect wider humanitarian concern and political will. Human rights organisations have long championed Palestinian statehood as essential to international law. Reports from Human Rights Watch (A Threshold Crossed, 2021) and Amnesty International (Israel’s Apartheid Against Palestinians, 2022) conclude that Israeli policies meet the legal definition of apartheid and constitute crimes against humanity.

This new diplomatic momentum is not a final solution, but it is a pivotal moment. For Palestinians, it renews hope and validates their struggle for dignity. For Israel, it delivers a clear message: the world is no longer willing to ignore its violations. If global pressure continues – and justice becomes the guiding principle – this could mark the beginning of a long-overdue reckoning. History teaches us the cost of silence. The question is whether the world is finally ready to act.

When the sky turns grey



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and communications professional

LIFE doesn't always arrive with flowers in hand. Instead, sometimes, it knocks on your door with a storm in its eyes and mud on its shoes. It doesn't ask permission and doesn't wait for you to be ready. It simply enters loudly, awkwardly, and often painfully. Thus, while we may long for the light, we must also learn to sit through the thunder.

Not every experience in life is pleasing. We are taught to chase happiness as if it were a golden trophy at the end of a clean, straight path. Billboards, movies and social media all whisper the same song: Be happy. Be successful. Be okay all the time. However, there is a secret they don't advertise: the road is rarely smooth.

More often, it twists and crushes. Some days it floods while other days it disappears entirely. You find yourself walking barefoot over broken glass, wondering if you took a wrong turn. But you did not, it is just a speed hump that you jumped over!

In fact, there will be days when laughter doesn't come easily and when the sky outside mirrors the one inside you. There will be relationships that fracture, dreams that pause, and chapters that end far too soon. These moments won't post well on Instagram as they won't earn applause. However, they

are the learnings that you wanted. They teach you that failure shows you what you are made of when the applause dies down. Pain cuts us out, making space for something new.

Pain has a strange chemistry; it transforms us in the shadows. It strips away the excess and returns us to what matters. Think of the farmer pruning, burning and tearing up the soil. It looks like destruction. But it is preparation for new growth and stronger roots. So it is likewise with us. The losses, the struggles, the unwanted changes; they break the surface, but enrich the core of us.

Though pain is not noble, it often prompts reflection and redirection. Hard times can clarify our values, deepen our relationships, and shift our priorities. What is meaningful is not always what is easy. Sometimes, the most unpleasant experiences lead us to the most meaningful paths. As well, growth comes from challenges.

Often, the most profound personal growth happens in our most difficult moments. We discover our resilience when we are forced to face challenges. We gain perspective after loss. These are not pleasant lessons, but they are deeply valuable.

Think of the times in your life that truly shaped who you are. Chances were the

Though pain is not noble, it often prompts reflection and redirection. Hard times can clarify our values, deepen our relationships and shift our priorities

moments that tested you, stretched you, and required you to dig deep. You don't have to enjoy the unpleasant moments and experiences, but you can respect them.

You can trust that even the darkest night contributes to the dawn. We often try to skip over pain, but to live fully is to cry when it is time to cry, to mourn, to question and then to rise.

You are not born to feel good all the time. You are here to feel everything, to be split open and stitched back together a hundred times, until your soul becomes a collaged cover of all the things you have survived.

Not every experience in life is pleasing, but every experience is part of the story: the bitter days and the sweet ones. The seasons of waiting and the nights you did not think you would get through are all threads in the same fabric.

One day, you will look back not with regret, but with respect for the moments that cracked you open and let the light in. We grow not only through joy but also through struggle. By letting go of the myth that life must always feel good, we open ourselves to the truth that it is rich, layered, and ultimately, more meaningful. When we embrace the full complexity of life, we learn to live it more fully.

PEACE OFFERING? DONALD TRUMP’S NOBEL OBSESSION

AURÉLIA END

A craving for international prestige, a decade-long Obama rivalry and perhaps a dash of provocation: a mercurial melange of factors is at play in Donald Trump’s obsession with the Nobel Peace Prize.

“It’s well past time that President Trump was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize,” White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters on July 31, prompting reactions of disbelief and sarcasm from the Republican leader’s opponents.

Since his January 20 return to power, the US president “has brokered, on average, one peace deal or ceasefire per month,” Leavitt said, citing as examples his mediations between India and Pakistan; Cambodia and Thailand; Egypt and Ethiopia; Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); Serbia and Kosovo; and others.

His leading spokeswoman also mentioned Iran, where Trump ordered US strikes against the Islamic republic’s nuclear facilities, as evidence of decisions Leavitt claims have contributed to world peace.

She made no mention of the conflict in Ukraine, which Trump pledged multiple times to end on “day one” of his term, or the war in Gaza, which rumbles on and for which the US supplies Israel with weapons.

For some foreign leaders, mentioning the prestigious award has become a sign of diplomatic goodwill towards an American president who envisions himself as a peacemaker.

Pakistan nominated Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, as did Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

During an early July meeting at the White House, a journalist asked the presidents of Liberia, Senegal, Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, and Gabon whether Trump deserved the award.

Basking in the flattering responses from the African leaders, a smiling Trump said: “We could do this all day long.”

Tens of thousands of people can offer a nomination to the Nobel committee, including lawmakers, ministers, certain university professors, former laureates and members of the committee themselves.

Nominations are due by January 31, with the announcement coming in October — this year on the 10th of the month.

Law professor Anat Alon-Beck, who is an Israeli-American, submitted Trump’s name to the committee’s five members, who were appointed by the Norwegian Parliament.

The assistant professor at Case Western Reserve University School of Law said she did so because of the “extraordinary leadership” and “strategic brilliance” he has shown, in her opinion, in advancing peace and securing the release of captives held in the Gaza Strip.

For some, the prospect of handing the prize to someone who has upended the international order is untenable.

“Nominating Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize is like entering a hyena in a dog show,” US history and politics researcher Emma Shortis wrote on news site The Conversation. — AFP

A new trade agenda for climate-resilient growth

MITIGATING the worst effects of climate change requires reconciling ambition and justice. But achieving both a just energy transition and ambitious global climate action depends on trade rules that foster equitable development. To facilitate the shift to low-carbon economies, developing countries must have reliable access to green technologies, investments, and international markets.

Regrettably, many of today’s trade policies constrain developing countries’ green ambitions. In particular, the securitisation of international trade – driven by the geopolitical interests of major powers and emerging blocs – threatens to disrupt global supply chains, limit access to emerging technologies, and reinforce existing power imbalances. If left unchecked, this trend risks undermining multilateral cooperation and regional integration efforts across the Global South.

The European Union’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is a prime example. While the CBAM is intended to position the EU as a global leader on climate action, many developing countries – particularly in Africa – view it as a protectionist measure and question its alignment with the principles of the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

These concerns are well-founded. Research suggests that African countries could lose up to \$25 billion annually as a direct result of the CBAM, and that the proposed amendments may not always stand to benefit African exporters. Moreover, despite the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the EU continues to pursue fragmented bilateral deals that undermine Africa’s integration agenda and weaken the coherence of regional trade strategies.

Another example is the International Maritime Organisation’s controversial plan to introduce a carbon emissions tax on shipping. Set to take effect in 2028, the tax falls far short of the more ambitious carbon levy developing economies had advocated, which could have supported low-carbon



The world needs fresh thinking and more equitable relationships between the Global North and South.



SALIEM FAKIR

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transitions, climate adaptation, and capacity-building in the world’s most climate-vulnerable countries.

Investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms also present significant challenges to effective climate action. These provisions, embedded in international investment treaties, often limit African governments’ ability to legislate in the public interest or implement trade and investment policies that support green industrialisation and sustainable development.

In recent years, international development practitioners have increasingly focused on the link between trade and climate policy. This signals a shift from a purely normative view of climate change to a more pragmatic approach that recognises climate policy as a driver of economic growth and investment. At the same time, global trade is undergoing a profound transformation as major trading powers prioritise geopolitical and economic self-interest over longstanding commitments to non-discrimination and multilateral cooperation, thereby weakening the World Trade Organisation.

Against this backdrop, developed and developing economies alike are deploying fiscal stimulus packages, subsidies, and protectionist trade measures to align their climate goals with domestic green industrial strategies, aiming to reshape the global economic order in their favour. The race to gain a competitive edge in green industries is partly driven by the dominant position China has established over the past decade through a combination of fiscal expansion, strategic subsidies, and control over critical minerals

and key supply chains. Adding to these tensions is US President Donald Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement, as he did during his first term. This move has further eroded global trust and undermined multilateral climate cooperation, casting doubt on the reliability of developed countries’ commitments to the broader sustainable-development agenda.

Yet periods of geopolitical realignment can also create new opportunities. Even amid rising tensions and economic fragmentation, there are opportunities for African countries to advance fairer, climate-aligned trade rules. One of the most promising is increased regional integration.

Despite deep divisions within the G20, South Africa’s presidency of the group this year could help advance trade policies that are better suited to managing climate risks and accelerating clean-energy transitions in the Global South. The upcoming Leaders’ Summit in Johannesburg provides a platform to champion a more inclusive agenda that integrates risk management, economic diversification, and industrial development into a long-term vision of environmental justice.

Some low-income economies are particularly vulnerable to measures like the CBAM, which, in its current form, departs from the “common but differentiated responsibilities” principle that underpins the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Without careful design and implementation, it could exacerbate inequalities within Africa and jeopardise the continent’s energy transition.

To prevent such an outcome, the CBAM must be implemented through a transparent, multilateral framework that acknowledges differences in countries’ historical responsibility and capacity to respond. Redirecting CBAM revenues toward supporting green transitions in low-income economies, for example, would be a step in the right direction.

It is equally important to help countries that rely heavily on fossil fuels diversify their economies.

@Project Syndicate, 2025

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



From signing ceremony

OMAN SAIL, QNB TO PARTNER FOR OPTIMIST ASIAN & OCEANIAN CHAMPIONSHIP

MUSCAT: Oman Sail announced that it is partnering with QNB Oman to deliver the upcoming Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship 2025, to be held at the Oman Sail Sailing School in Mussanah from 25 October to 1 November 2025.

The agreement was signed by Dr Khamis bin Salim Al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, and Khalid bin Mohammed Al Barwani, CEO of QNB Oman, at a ceremony held recently at the Oman Sail headquarters.

Through this agreement, QNB Oman joins Oman Sail as a Gold Partner to achieve excellence in the sport of sailing by enhancing Oman’s presence at the global stage and enabling Omani sailors to compete at the highest levels. These efforts are part of establishing Oman as one of the leading countries in this sport.

Dr Khamis Al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, “We are pleased to partner with QNB Oman to support the upcoming IODA Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship. Like Oman Sail, our partners are committed to supporting and empowering the Omani Youth as part of the goals of Oman Vision 2040, and the event will be an important development opportunity for the next generation of Omani sailors as we prepare to welcome athletes, coaches, families and media from across Asia and Oceania to the Oman Sail Sailing School in Mussanah.”

Khalid bin Mohammed Al Barwani, commented, “QNB Oman is proud to partner with Oman Sail in supporting the IODA Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship 2025. As the region’s premier event for young sailors, this championship offers a unique platform for emerging talent to thrive and grow”.

Through this partnership, QNB Oman reaffirms its commitment to empowering the next generation and providing them with the opportunities they need to reach their full potential on a global stage.

The 2025 IODA Optimist Asian & Oceanian Championship, organised in collaboration with the Oman Marine Sports Committee and International Optimist Dinghy Association (IODA), will see over 100 sailors from more than 15 countries take part in a week of high-level competition. This will be the second time Mussanah has hosted the event following the successful staging of the event in 2019 with 141 participants from 21 nations taking part.



Mussanah Sailing School

Al Alawi stars at 2025 aquatics in Singapore

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 3

OMANI international referee Abdulmonem bin Khamis al Alawi marked another significant milestone in his illustrious officiating career by successfully completing his duties at the 2025 World Aquatics Championships which concluded recently in Singapore. A prominent figure in the world of open water swimming, Al Alawi once again managed to demonstrate his elite expertise and professionalism on the global stage.

As a member of the International Technical Committee for Open Water Swimming, Al Alawi officiated in several major events throughout the prestigious championship, which featured the world’s top aquatic athletes, including Leon Marchand (France), Cameron McEvoy (Australia), Lani Pallister (Australia), Florian Wellbrock (Germany), Ichika Kajimoto (Japan), Noe Ponti (Switzerland), Hubert Kos (Hungary) and Nicolo Martinenghi (Italy).

Oman’s Al Alawi delivered an outstanding performance throughout the tournament and this solidified his reputation as one of the most respected officials in aquatic sports. His responsibilities reflected the confidence placed in him by the organisers and the World Aquatics.

Speaking to *Observer* from Singapore, Abdulmonem said:” It is always an honour to represent your country in a high profile event like the World Championship. Attending the 2025 World Aquatics Championships in Singapore was a great milestone in my umpiring career. I am grateful to World Aquatics for their continued trust and confidence in my capabilities. A special thanks goes to the Oman Aquatics Association



Omani international referee Abdulmonem bin Khamis al Alawi

OAA as well for their unwavering support throughout the years.”

“ I had key roles in officiating and managing various open water swimming events at the 2025 World Aquatics Championships. I have been assigned as Referee for the newly introduced 4x1500m Mixed Relay, which featured 23 teams and received widespread praise for its execution. Also, I led the judging panel for the Men’s 10km race and served as the delegation head for the Women’s 10km event, beside being the timekeeper for both the Men’s and Women’s 5km races. Furthermore, I supervised safety protocols for the 3km races in both categories,” he

ended.

Hailing from Sur, Oman, Al Alawi began his journey in swimming in 1986 and in 1995, became the first Omani referee to obtain an international licence in the sport. Over the decades, he has served as a pioneer for Omani representation in aquatic sports on the international level.

Al Alawi officiated his third consecutive Olympic Games as he was appointed as the chief referee for the Men’s and Women’s 10km Marathon Swimming events at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, following previous appearances in Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020.

Ammar bin Yasser Team at World Schools Chess in US

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 3

The Ammar bin Yasser School team, representing the Sultanate of Oman, is participating in the World Schools Chess Championship, hosted by the USA from August 3 to 8. The tournament features an elite lineup of school teams from across the continents, with hundreds of talented students competing in chess.

The team prepared for this participation through an intensive training programme under the supervision of the national chess team coach, Captain Basheer al Qadeemi. The programme included advanced training on tactics and strategies in both offensive and defensive positions, as well as practice on various opening systems and smooth transitions into middle and endgame stages. The camp also focused on mental and psychological aspects, with sessions dedicated to analysing international games and playing trial matches to simulate the championship atmosphere. These efforts aimed to raise the players’ readiness and instil confidence to handle the pressures of competition.

Oman is represented in this championship by five players: Khalid al Kalbani,



Ammar bin Yasser School team representing Oman

Khalid al Tashkeeli, Al Hassan al Shamli, Abdulaziz al Hinai and Dawood al Shamli, led by national coach Hamdan al Hinai, who accompanies the team to provide technical and on-site support during the competition, offering guidance to the players throughout the rounds.

“Over the past period, we have worked to elevate the players’ levels in all technical and mental aspects. We focused on tactical and analytical elements that give them the ability to handle various situations on the board,” national coach Hamdan al Hinai said.

“The players have shown

great commitment and enthusiasm to represent Oman in the best way. Our goal in this participation is not only to compete for results, but also to gain valuable international experience by facing outstanding players from different countries. This championship is an important milestone to assess the players’ levels and determine the next steps towards bigger tournaments,” he added.

Player Khalid al Kalbani said, “Participating in the World Championship is a big dream for us. We trained hard and made great efforts over the past period, and we feel proud to represent Oman. We

will do our best to achieve good results, but the most important thing is to gain new experience that will help us in the upcoming tournaments. We know the competition is strong, but we are confident that the intensive training we went through will put us in a better position for the challenge.”

This participation reflects the commitment of the Oman Chess Committee and the Oman School Sports Federation to support and develop student talents by providing opportunities to compete at high levels. The championship is considered a golden opportunity for players to develop their skills and refine their experience in a highly competitive international environment.

Oman’s delegation looks forward to achieving positive results, relying on the players’ commitment and high spirit during training, as well as the technical staff’s dedication to monitoring and analysing each round thoroughly. Participating in a world championship of this magnitude also provides the team with organisational and cultural experience through exposure to different playing styles and the exchange of expertise with teams from international schools.

SHORTTAKES



McLaughlin-Levrone after win

MCLAUGHLIN-LEVRONE WINS 400M TO SEAL WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP BERTH

EUGENE: Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone booked her place at the World Championships on Saturday after storming to victory in the 400m at the US trials.

McLaughlin-Levrone, the golden girl of US athletics and the greatest women’s 400m hurdler in history, powered home in 48.90secs at Eugene’s Hayward Field.

The 25-year-old two-time Olympic 400m hurdles champion and world record holder raised eyebrows this year by electing to take on a new challenge in the shape of the 400m flat.

McLaughlin-Levrone told reporters on Saturday she wanted to test herself in the 400m this season after a six-year unbeaten streak in the 400m hurdles.

The decision came relatively recently, just ahead of the Prefontaine Classic Diamond League meeting in early July, she said.

“Going into Pre, we had an idea we wanted to focus on the 400,” McLaughlin-Levrone said.

“And I think we were like - listen, this is a challenge, it’s not as comfortable for us, but I want to challenge myself.

“I felt like this is the year I wanted to step out of the box and really push myself in a different way. So obviously it’s uncomfortable, but I wanted to commit to it and I’m committed to it.

“And just excited to see where I can push myself,” she said.

McLaughlin-Levrone confirmed there was no chance of her attempting to gain a spot in the 400m hurdles in Tokyo via this month’s Diamond League finals.

“No, we’ll focus just on the 400,” she said.

“I think that’s a daunting task in and of itself. It’s a very competitive field, so I respect those competitors for sure and I want to make sure I can give my all to those races.”

McLaughlin-Levrone’s dominance of the 400m hurdles encompassed several record-breaking milestones.

She was the first woman to break the 52-second barrier in 2021, and then became the first woman to duck under 51 seconds a year later. Last year she obliterated her own world record in storming to victory at the Paris Olympics.

McLaughlin-Levrone, though, said she was not setting any specific record targets as she tries her hand at the 400m flat. “Everyone talks about the American record, of course. That’s going to come when it’s supposed to come,” she said.

“(But) I think this year and this event have taught me patience. I’ve learned a lot about myself. I’ve learned a lot about the 400. But ultimately, every day it’s stepping on the track, being the best I can be, figuring out a race that is very foreign to — AFP



Brazil’s Marta and Angelina lift the Copa America trophy after a roller-coaster final in Quito. — Reuters

Brazil edge Colombia in Copa final thriller

BRAZIL successfully defended their Women’s Copa America crown by defeating Colombia 5-4 in a shootout on Saturday to claim their ninth continental title after a roller-coaster final in Quito ended 4-4.

The decider at the Estadio Rodrigo Paz Delgado saw Colombia take the lead three times, only for Brazil to respond on each occasion.

Brazil great Marta forced extra time with a late equaliser and the veteran struck again in the 105th minute to seemingly seal victory.

But a resilient Colombia found yet another equaliser to send the encounter to penalties, where Brazil’s experience ultimately prevailed.

“I think women’s soccer has been growing a lot. I think the trend is for it to be more competitive. Everyone here deserved a match like this. Congratulations to Colombia too,” Brazil’s Amanda Gutierrez said.

“This means a lot. I think it’s Brazil’s job.

It’s that mentality of never giving up. That’s a source of pride for Brazil. I think it means a lot to Brazilians.”

Both teams created early chances but the breakthrough came in the 25th minute when Colombia’s Linda Caicedo capped off a tidy passing move with a composed low finish from close range.

Brazil got the equaliser in the dying moments of the first half when Angelina stepped up to calmly convert a penalty after VAR confirmed a foul by Jorelyn Carabali on Gio Garbelini.

Colombia regained the lead in the 69th minute via a Brazil own goal, defender Tarciane attempting a routine back pass to goalkeeper Lorena but unaware that she had already charged off her line to collect the ball.

Gutierrez equalised for Brazil again 10 minutes from time with her sixth goal in the tournament, a fierce strike off Garbelini’s pass, but striker Mayra Ramirez restored Colombia’s lead by netting after a quick

counter-attack eight minutes later.

‘Las Cafeteras’ were within touching distance of their first continental title until Marta, introduced as a late substitute, delivered a moment of magic with a stunning equaliser six minutes into stoppage time, forcing the game into extra time.

Marta struck again in the 105th minute when she tapped in a fine cross from Angelina but Colombia turned things around again as Leicy Santos’ brilliant free kick sailed into the top corner in the 115th minute.

The penalty shootout mirrored the drama of the match, with Colombia taking the early advantage after Angelina’s miss.

However, when Manuela Pavi failed to convert and goalkeeper Lorena saved Leicy Santos’ effort Brazil held the advantage.

Marta had the chance to seal victory but Katherine Tapia’s save sent the shootout to sudden death, where Carabali’s miss finally handed Brazil their ninth continental title. — Reuters

Norris fends off fierce challenge from Piastri to clinch thrilling GP victory

BUDAPEST: Lando Norris held off McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri to win the Hungarian Grand Prix on a one-stop strategy and slash the Australian’s Formula One lead to nine points going into the August break.

Norris completed 39 of the 70 laps on a single set of hard tyres while Piastri stopped twice and closed a 12-second gap to just 0.6 at the finish, with a nail-biting chase to the chequered flag and a near-collision.

George Russell took a distant third, 20 seconds down the road, to complete the Hungarian podium for Mercedes and take his fifth podium of the season.

“I’m dead. I’m dead. It was tough,”

gasped Norris, who started in third place -- with Piastri second -- and then went down to fifth after being squeezed at the start.

“We weren’t really planning on the one-stop but after the first lap it was kind of our only option to get back into things.

“I didn’t think it would get us the win, I thought it would get us maybe into second.”

The win was Norris’s fifth of the season, and third in the last four, to Piastri’s six. It was also McLaren’s seventh one-two in 14 races.

Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc was a frustrated fourth, after starting on pole position but losing out with a two-stop strategy and a five-second



McLaren’s Lando Norris celebrates on the podium. — Reuters

penalty for erratic driving as Russell challenged. Fernando Alonso finished fifth for Aston Martin, ahead of Sauber’s sixth-placed Brazilian rookie Gabriel Bortoleto.

Lance Stroll was seventh for Aston Martin ahead of Racing Bulls’ Liam Lawson, with Red Bull’s reigning champion Max Verstappen and Mercedes rookie Kimi Antonelli completing the top 10 scoring positions.

Seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton, an eight-times winner in Hungary, started in 12th place for Ferrari and finished there.

The Briton was lapped by the leaders six laps from the chequered flag. — Reuters

SPORTS

TOP SEED

ZVEREV

TOP-SEEDED

Alexander Zverev advanced to an ATP Toronto Masters quarterfinal against defending champion Alexei Popyrin as his fourth-round opponent Francisco Cerundolo was forced to retire with an abdominal injury on Saturday.

Germany's Zverev secured a 6-4, 1-0 victory, Argentina's Cerundolo taking a medical timeout after the fifth game and finally calling a halt after less than an hour on court.

Australia's Popyrin won his ninth straight match in Canada, beating ninth seed Holger Rune 4-6, 6-2, 6-3.

The 26th-ranked Aussie profited from nearly 40 unforced errors from his Danish opponent, who has been taking occasional advice from Andre Agassi.

With Popyrin on the horizon, Zverev said he was headed back to the practice court after his abbreviated victory, but he paid tribute to Cerundolo first.

"He's an incredible player, we have a close personal relationship," Zverev said of Cerundolo. "I know about abdominal injuries.

"You can't serve or accelerate on the forehand. He had tears in his eyes when he had to quit. He didn't want to disappoint the crowd.

"But they can last from a few days to a few months. I have respect for him — he beat me three times before tonight."

Zverev, the 2017 champion, will be playing his fifth quarterfinal in seven Canadian appearances.

Earlier, Popyrin saved a break point with his sixth ace against Rune as he served for victory in the final game, finishing the job with a lob winner which left Rune flat-footed.

"This win means a lot," the Aussie said. "I started the week not high on confidence but I knew my game was there.

"I just let go of the pressure and it worked out for me," added Popyrin, who said dropping the first set did not sit well.

"I told myself to keep going and managed to play aggressive on the next break point that I got. From then on I felt much more comfortable."

KHACHANOV TOPPLES RUUD

Karen Khachanov reached his second straight quarterfinal, ambushing eighth seed Casper Ruud 6-4, 7-5 to continue his ATP hot streak.

Khachanov next faces Alex Michelsen, who claimed his first

Zverev (GER) hits a ball during the fourth round.
— Reuters



Masters last-eight place with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over fellow American and good friend Learner Tien.

Khachanov was playing his first tournament since reaching the Wimbledon quarterfinals last month.

The world number 16 reeled off 18 straight points on serve over the first and second sets and produced love games in his final two service games of the match.

Norway's Ruud, playing his second event after skipping Wimbledon because of injury, was never able to gain control, although he rallied from 4-2 down in the second set to level at 4-4 before Khachanov got back on track.

"I had nothing to complain about until this point," Khachanov said. "I tried to control play and my game plan was working, especially with the first serves.

"It became difficult, but I'm super-glad I was able to put everything together at the end and finish the match."

Michelsen took full advantage of 42 unforced errors from Tien to close out their match in 81 minutes.

"It feels really good," the 20-year-old winner said. "It's uncharted territory from now on. I'm super-happy to be in the quarters."

Michelsen said that despite the raft of errors from Tien, he had to take care with his own forehand to claim the victory.

"I hit my forehand super-well today and I knew that if I didn't I would be in trouble," he said. — AFP

DEFENDING CHAMP
POPYRIN BOOK
ATP TORONTO
QUARTERFINAL



Popyrin (AUS) hits a ball to Holger during the fourth round.
— Reuters

ADVERTORIALS

STRATEGICMOMENTUM



This outcome reflects the strength of ahlibank’s positioning and amplifies its readiness to capitalise on emerging opportunities.

ahlibank’s rights issue oversubscribed amidst strong shareholder demand

MUSCAT: In a clear demonstration of market confidence and strategic momentum, ahlibank has successfully concluded its rights issue, which was oversubscribed.

The offering comprised of around 357 million shares at a price of 142 baisas per share (including 2 baisas issue expense per share), attracting robust participation from shareholders and strong interest across the investment community.

This outcome reflects the strength of ahlibank’s positioning and amplifies its readiness to capitalise on emerging opportunities with greater agility and scale.

This landmark completion of ahlibank’s rights issue marks a critical milestone, reinforcing the bank’s capital position and affirming strong shareholder confidence in its long-term growth agenda.

This outcome reflects a clear endorsement of ahlibank’s disciplined strategy to accelerate transformation, enhance operational agility and strengthen its position in an increasingly competitive banking landscape.

More than a financial transaction, this initiative deepens alignment between shareholders and the bank’s strategic vision – ensuring ahlibank remains well-positioned to deliver sustainable value, drive performance-led growth and navigate future opportunities with resilience and precision.

The rights issue forms part of a broader capital optimisation initiative designed to enhance the bank’s financial flexibility and underpin its next stage of evolution. The funds raised will be directed towards executing core strategic initiatives while also enabling greater lending capacity to fuel business activity.

These efforts will contribute to bolstering capital adequacy ratios, strengthening market resilience and supporting the bank’s objective of delivering superior value across its stakeholder ecosystem. This successful issuance not only reinforces confidence in ahlibank’s governance and institutional strength but also highlights the bank’s progressive strategy.

As the operating environment continues to evolve, ahlibank remains steadfast in its commitment to sustainable growth, disciplined execution and market leadership.

With an enhanced capital structure and a future-oriented approach, the bank is well-equipped to accelerate its performance trajectory and seize value-accretive opportunities across the Sultanate of Oman.

Amouage presents Opus XVI – Timber collection

AMOUAGE’S Library Collection occupies a unique role as the platform from which the esteemed Omani perfume house unveils some of its most audacious creations, showcasing uncompromising innovation and arresting aesthetics.

Key to the Collection is the idea of knowledge, with each of the perfumes in the range being in some way related to the concept, whether it be the question of the form that knowledge assumes in a virtual world (as seen in Opus V – Woods Symphony), its ability to empower those who have been deprived of it (Opus XIV – Royal Tobacco) or the manner in which it can be allied to surrealism in order to challenge our expectations of what we see around us (Opus XV – King Blue).

As it contains some of the most adventurous compositions in Amouage’s universe, the Library Collection is always curated with great care.

“Sometimes, we go through periods when we don’t add anything new to the Library Collection”, explains Chief Creative Officer, Renaud Salmon “simply because we don’t feel we have found the right scent. But then a moment arrives



As it contains some of the most adventurous compositions in Amouage’s universe, the Library Collection is always curated with great care.

when an idea aligns so perfectly with everything the Collection stands for, it becomes absolutely obvious that it has to be introduced to the range”.

For the latest entry in this rarefied assortment, inspiration came from a source that was somewhat unexpected, even though it has been present on the planet for centuries.

The sequoia trees of California’s Giant Sequoia

National Monument are amongst the largest and, more importantly, oldest living organisms on the earth. In some cases rising to a height of over 80 metres, they have watched over their surroundings for thousands of years, surviving countless changes taking place around them.

Unsurprisingly, they have become symbols of timelessness and wisdom, taking on a

totemic potency within the cultures that have developed under their immense shadows. Although they are considerably more humble in stature, the frankincense trees of Oman are equally significant.

On the one hand, they have played a vital role in the trade routes that have run through the country for millennia.

On the other, they have found their way into what could be called the very soul of Oman.

The frankincense resin they exude is one of the land’s most treasured products – a hallmark of its people’s generosity and openness – to the extent that it has become an image of the enduring power and sagacity of nature, not unlike the giant sequoia trees.

Renaud Salmon wanted to create a perfume that would form a tribute to a sense of permanence, profundity and erudition.

What better way to express such notions, he thought, than by exploring the creative possibilities offered by the giant sequoias of California and the frankincense trees of Oman. And what better way to capture the spirit of these ancient organisms than by composing a perfume constructed almost entirely with woods.

LOT-THE VALUE SHOP LAUNCHES FIFTH OUTLET IN AL BIDAYAH

MUSCAT: LOT – The Value Shop has further broadened its scope in Oman with the launch of its fifth outlet at LuLu Hypermarket in Al Bidayah.

The launch of the fifth branch follows the success of the other four branches of LOT in Mall of Muscat, Wadi Al Lawami, Nujum Mall at Al Amerat and Al Buraimi.

The expansion plan aligns with LOT’s commitment to continuously enhance accessibility of retail offerings to customers even in the remote areas of the country.

With the recent launch, the group aims to uphold its dedication to excellence while providing an unparalleled retail experience through quality products and services for the local community.

The value shop aims to serve the day-to-day needs of customers by offering a diverse



The value shop aims to serve the day-to-day needs of customers.

range of products at affordable prices. Shoppers can explore an impressive assortment of household essentials, kitchenware, toilet essentials, travel accessories, stationery and a vast collection of toys.

There is also a separate area dedicated to household products priced at less than 0.350 baisas.

Shoppers can find an exceptional collection of the latest seasonal fashion trend for men, women and kids, footwear,

elegant jewellery and ladies’ bags. LOT offers an enjoyable experience for those on the hunt for great deals and value in everyday essentials, without compromising on the quality.

Speaking at the launch, a senior spokesperson stated, “We are happy to have launched the fifth branch of our value store in Oman. All LOT outlets have well-planned layouts and ample parking spaces, offering shoppers a hassle-free experience.

The strategic location of LOT stores ensures convenience and accessibility, making it a preferred destination for customers”.

LOT value shops offer convenience, value and a unique assortment of merchandise for the whole family, making it the first choice among budget-conscious shoppers seeking quality products.

Dhofar Islamic expands Sharia advisory role with QQBI post-IPO

MUSCAT: In a significant endorsement of its growing stature in the Islamic finance domain, Dhofar Islamic – the Islamic banking window of BankDhofar – has been appointed as Independent Sharia Advisor to OQ Base Industries (QQBI), a leading player in Oman’s petrochemical sector.

Under the terms of this new mandate, Dhofar Islamic will conduct quarterly Sharia screening of QQBI’s business and financial activities, based on the company’s published financial statements.

Commenting on the appointment, Amor bin Said Mohamed al Amri, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Dhofar Islamic, said: “We are honoured to continue supporting OQ Base Industries in its growth journey by ensuring alignment with Islamic finance principles. This

appointment reflects the confidence major corporates have in our Sharia expertise and underscores our commitment to fostering ethical, transparent and Sharia-compliant financial practices across Oman’s industrial and capital markets landscape”.

Following the assessment, Dhofar Islamic will issue a Sharia Compliance Certificate endorsed by its Sharia Supervisory Board (SSB). This certification will be used by QQBI for submission to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) and shared with investors and stakeholders as confirmation of the company’s adherence to Islamic finance principles.

The appointment builds on Dhofar Islamic’s earlier engagement with QQBI during its highly successful Initial Public Offering



Dhofar Islamic provided comprehensive advisory services to ensure the offering met Islamic finance requirements.

(IPO) on the Muscat Stock Exchange in December 2024.

In its role as Sharia Advisor for the IPO, Dhofar Islamic provided comprehensive advisory services

to ensure the offering met Islamic finance requirements, culminating in the issuance of a formal fatwa certifying the IPO’s Sharia compliance.

The IPO raised \$490 million through the sale of 49 per cent of QQBI’s equity, marking a pivotal moment in the company’s transformation from a wholly state-owned enterprise to a publicly listed entity.

Since then, Dhofar Islamic has continued to provide Sharia-compliant banking services to QQBI, including facilitating several deposit placements from the company. This ongoing collaboration highlights Dhofar Islamic’s position as a trusted partner for large corporate clients navigating the intersection of ethical finance and commercial growth.

OQ Base Industries, located in the

Salalah Free Zone, operates an integrated petrochemical complex that produces methanol, ammonia and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), including propane, butane and condensate.

With a total production capacity of approximately 1.8 million tonnes annually, QQBI exports its products to more than 15 countries across three continents, underlining its robust global presence. The company is 51 per cent owned by OQ Group, a wholly government-owned enterprise under the Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

Following its public listing, QQBI reported total revenue of approximately \$510 million for 2024, supported by an adjusted EBITDA margin of 43.1 per cent. Its estimated market valuation currently stands at around \$1 billion.

BUSINESS

ADVANCEINTEREST



Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, met with the Governor of Hong Kong, John Lee Ka-chiu, to explore bilateral cooperation in the economic, trade and investment sectors.

OMAN AND HONG KONG EXPLORE NEW INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

HONG KONG: Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, met with the Governor of Hong Kong, John Lee Ka-chiu, to explore bilateral cooperation in the economic, trade and investment sectors.

The meeting also reviewed ways to strengthen partnerships between the two sides.

The discussions took place during Al Murshidi's current visit to Hong Kong, during which he praised the positive relations between Oman and Hong Kong. He emphasised the value of continued exchanges and expanding cooperation to advance shared interests.

For his part, the Governor of Hong Kong commended Oman's forward-looking strategic agenda, embodied in "Oman Vision 2040" and its alignment with the Belt and Road Initiative.

For his part, the Governor of Hong Kong commended Oman's forward-looking strategic agenda, embodied in "Oman Vision 2040" and its alignment with the Belt and Road Initiative.

He noted that this alignment would help foster deeper economic and trade ties. Lee highlighted Hong Kong's role as a global financial and trading hub, offering an attractive investment climate in sectors such as renewable energy and advanced technologies.

The meeting was also attended by Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

GCC GDP HITS \$456 BILLION, LED BY NON-OIL SECTORS

MUSCAT: The combined GDP at constant prices of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries rose by 3.3 per cent to \$456.3 billion by the end of Q4 2024, up from \$442.3 billion during the same period in 2023.

According to the latest figures released by the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for



In contrast, oil-related activities made up 29.4 per cent.

the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), non-oil sectors contributed 70.6 per cent of total GDP at constant prices in Q4 2024. In contrast, oil-related activities made up 29.4 per cent.

The GCC's GDP at constant prices also recorded a quarterly growth of 1 per cent, rising from \$452.2 billion in Q3 to \$456.3 billion in Q4 of 2024. — ONA

Oman secures orbital slot with launch pledge

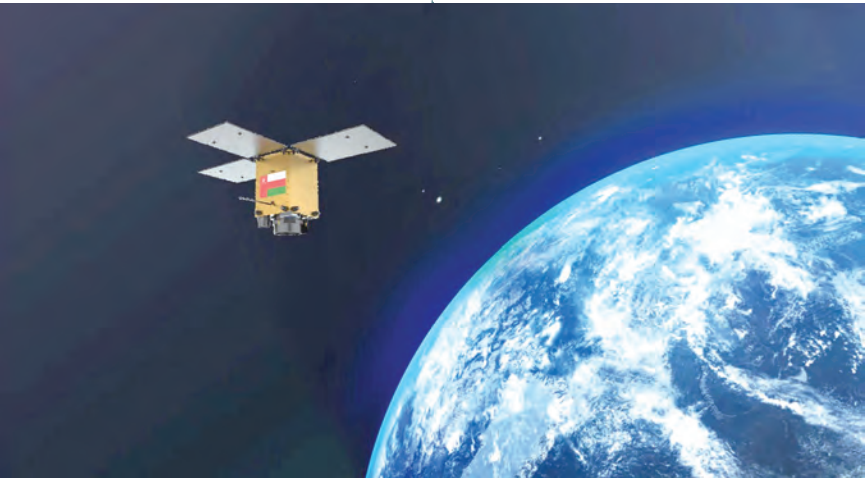
JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 3

THE Sultanate of Oman has successfully retained regulatory control over a prime geostationary orbital slot at 73.5° East after committing to launch a temporary satellite by December 2025 and to sign a contract for a Ka-band high-throughput satellite (HTS) before the end of this year. The full satellite, expected to deliver advanced broadband capacity, is targeted for launch in 2028.

The decision by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to grant Oman this extension represents a major step forward for the Sultanate of Oman, which has faced multiple delays in executing its national satellite communications programme.

The orbital slot is considered highly strategic, offering coverage across large parts of the Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia—regions with growing demand for satellite-based broadband, broadcasting and data services.

Oman's satellite ambitions have been in development since at least 2018, centred on its Omansat-1 telecommunications



In November 2024, the country successfully launched OL-1, its first AI-powered Earth observation satellite, into low-Earth orbit. Picture courtesy: Oman Lens.

satellite project. However, due to a series of setbacks — including procurement delays and missed regulatory milestones — the country risked losing its claim to the 73.5° East orbital position under ITU's "use-it-or-lose-it" policy.

In October 2024, Oman issued a public tender for a temporary satellite to maintain the slot while working towards a long-term solution.

According to a report by Space Intel Report, the ITU's Radio Regulations Board reviewed Oman's case and agreed to the country's road map, granting it a deadline of

December 31, 2025 to launch the interim satellite.

Oman also committed to contracting a full Ka-band HTS satellite by the end of 2025, with a 2028 launch deadline. Despite limited progress in earlier years, the report notes that Oman was able to retain the slot through timely regulatory commitments and credible plans.

The announcement builds on Oman's recent achievements in space. In November 2024, the country successfully launched OL-1, its first AI-powered Earth observation satellite, into low-Earth orbit. Developed by Oman Lens, in partnership with Star

Vision Aerospace and Mars Development & Investment Company, OL-1 provides real-time, high-resolution imaging for land use planning, infrastructure monitoring and environmental assessments.

To reinforce its position, Oman issued Royal Decree 40/2025, granting OmanSat a Category I licence to develop and operate national satellite communication services.

This allows OmanSat to offer fixed satellite broadband to underserved regions and support national digital transformation goals.

Oman is working to meet the immediate goal of launching a temporary satellite by the end of 2025 in order to comply with ITU regulations and hold on to the orbital slot.

In parallel, the country plans to finalise a contract for the more powerful Ka-band high-throughput satellite within the same year, with the actual launch scheduled for 2028.

Together, these milestones are intended to cement Oman's role in the regional space and communications sector and reflect a growing strategic focus on space as a pillar of economic diversification and national infrastructure development under Oman Vision 2040.

Game development bootcamp to enhance future-ready digital talent

FAISAL AL AJMI
MUSCAT, AUG 3

AS PART of its efforts to enhance digital skills development and economic diversification, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), in collaboration with Unity Technologies and Al Nahda Training Institute, has launched a National Game Development Bootcamp for young Omani talent.

The initiative, which falls under Oman's broader plan to invest in new digital sectors, aims to train 50 Omani nationals in the space of six months. The trainees will be given practical training in game programming, animation design, 3D modelling and artificial intelligence, the building blocks of today's gaming sector.



Pioneering initiative aims to upskill 50 Omanis and build a sustainable digital ecosystem through industry-driven training.

Jalila bint Abdullah al Fannah al Arimiyah, Director of Future Skills Development at MoTCIT, announced the launch, emphasising the programme's focus on practical learning. "This bootcamp has a very strong practical application focus", she said. "It offers participants

an opportunity to gain real-world experience in technology incubators and to develop their own game projects, ultimately preparing them to build competitive Omani start-ups in this fast-emerging digital sector".

She pointed out that the project reflects a long-term national commitment to digital transformation. "National digital talent investment is key to a sustainable digital economy. This project is a concrete step towards that vision — opening up new possibilities for young Omanis to play an important role in the global gaming sector".

Speaking at the bootcamp's official launch ceremony, Shaikh Humaid bin Juma al Shamsi, Chairman of Al Nahda Training Institute, emphasised the strategic importance of the bootcamp. "This landmark initiative resonates with

our vision to empower Omani youth by equipping them with cutting-edge digital skills that now form the bedrock of advanced global economies", he said.

He also added that the gaming industry has turned into a knowledge-based industry. "The video game industry is no longer merely entertainment. It's a multi-integrated, knowledge-based industry that includes programming, designing, artificial intelligence and artistic creativity.

The bootcamp was established as a practical platform to allow young Omanis to be part of this active and rapidly emerging global industry".

Representing Unity Technologies in the Middle East, Zia Ul Islam further stated that the programme also leverages Unity's real-time AI tech to the advantage of long-term ecosystem development.

"This programme is not only intended to upskill people, but to contribute to a sustainable digital ecosystem in Oman", he said. "By building talent and small- and medium-sized enterprises, we hope to power job creation in the gaming and broader digital sectors".

Ul Islam was optimistic regarding the programme's future expansion. "This is just the beginning. Our vision is to build something much bigger in the near future, in collaboration with national institutions and ministries across Oman, to further accelerate the development of the local digital economy".

The bootcamp marks a significant milestone in Oman's drive to embrace digital innovation and equip its young people for active participation in high-growth global industries.

CONSUMER GOODS

Tariffs hit Buffett's Berkshire businesses



Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway said on Saturday that its consumer goods businesses took a hit from US President Donald Trump's trade policy, which raised tariffs on imported goods.

The conglomerate's consumer products group, which includes companies such as Fruit of the Loom, Jazwares and Brooks Sports, posted a 5.1% revenue decline in the Q2 from a year earlier to \$189 million. — Reuters

POTENTIAL DISRUPTIONS

Opec+ agrees to another oil output hike



Opec+ has reached a preliminary deal to increase oil production by 548,000 barrels per day from September, sources said as concerns mount over potential supply disruptions linked to Russia.

A decision is expected at a virtual meeting amidst increasing US pressure on India to halt Russian oil purchases — part of Washington's efforts to bring Moscow to the negotiating table for a peace deal with Ukraine. — Reuters

SHARP DETERIORATION

US labour market cracks widen



US employment growth was weaker than expected in July while the nonfarm payrolls count for the prior two months was revised down by a massive 258,000 jobs, suggesting a sharp deterioration in labour market conditions.

The Labour Department's closely watched employment report on Friday also showed the unemployment rate rose to 4.2% last month as household employment declined. — Reuters

OPINION

The relationship: Climate change and food security



DR MYTHILI KOLLURU

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

ONE of the significant challenges the world is facing today is climate change. The climate crisis is impacting human welfare, agricultural production, public health, labour productivity and food price volatility. The intensified climate crisis is an existential reality that impacts countries and people at both the macro and micro levels. The unprecedented rainfall, droughts, heatwaves and floods are disrupting food supplies and could exacerbate food price volatility, potentially leading to a 3% increase in food prices. This development will impact seasonal price patterns and make staple foods less affordable. Experts have penned projections that if comprehensive adaptation for sustainable agriculture is not implemented soon, the future could be alarming. Climate change is a crucial factor for food price stability. Research has shown that the relationship between inflation and the monthly temperature increase is non-linear. Another study states that climate change poses a risk to food price stability, potentially leading to inflationary pressures, altering food seasonality and amplifying the effects of weather extremes. Ghana and Ivory Coast supply 60% of the world's cocoa and were hit by a heatwave in early 2024, which resulted in a surge of cocoa prices by 280%. The situation persists

into 2025, mainly due to disease, rainfall fluctuations and farmers shifting to palm oil, as it's a more profitable crop. Brazil is the world's largest producer of coffee, satisfying 30% of the global supply and 30% of the Arabica seeds. Brazil experienced a severe drought, resulting in a 55% surge in coffee prices in mid-2024. Additional US tariffs on Cambodian coffee have increased prices by 62% in 2024. Interestingly, experts predict that in the coming 3 years, these commodities could become luxury products. There are also short-term price surges in foods such as potatoes, cabbage, rice and olive oil. The price of cabbage rose by 70% in South Korea in 2023. In Japan, Rice prices rose by 48% in 2024. In India, the cost of potatoes rose by 81% in 2024. The price surges in the countries were attributed to extreme weather conditions, specifically heatwaves. In Europe, olive oil prices rose by 50% in 2024 and in Ethiopia, due to drought, overall food prices increased by 40% in 2023. Drought caused these price fluctuations. In Australia, the price of lettuce rose by 30% in 2022 due to floods. In Brazil, climate change is affecting every item and staple commodity purchased. The Global South, including Africa and South America, bears the heaviest brunt of

Climate change is a crucial factor for food price stability. Research has shown that the relationship between inflation and the monthly temperature increase is non-linear.

the global climate crisis and they experience inflationary pressures all year round. Tropical regions are more vulnerable as crops are already stressed by rising temperatures. Climate change raises food prices and also increases costs across the economy. Research has shown that high temperatures have upward inflationary trends over the past 30 years in both high and low-income economies. Climate change is no longer a threat; it is a reality that we can see in our inflated grocery bills, disrupted agricultural production, reduced crop yields, increased complexity of supply chain bottlenecks and a threat to global food security. These are not just words on a newspaper; this article serves as a potent reminder, a wake-up call to act and a nudge to global stakeholders and decision-makers to collaborate in mitigating the amplifying ramifications of global warming through resilient agriculture, stringent regulations, farmer support, encouraging drought resistant crops, international climate funds, consistent dialogue, enforcing stringent emission cuts and awareness campaigns. Even individuals can adopt green practices, sustainable dietary habits, reduce wastage and support eco-friendly producers. Every single climate-conscious act of 8.2 billion people worldwide will build a stable and affordable future for all.

HONG KONG
PROPERTY DEALS
CRY FOR CHINA
INVESTMENT

KA SING CHAN

Iconic buildings don't often change hands. Yet a trio of prime commercial properties in Hong Kong is now up for grabs. Each carries a strong connection to China's state-backed giants, which could emerge as buyers. The deals will signal whether or not mainland money will step up to halt the city's brutal real estate slump.

Prices have dropped over 30% since hitting a peak in 2021. Slow sales and high vacancy rates are so bad that Hong Kong's government

has suspended the sale of commercial sites, proceeds of which comprise a major source of its income. Finding a new cohort of buyers is, therefore, of the utmost official importance.

Valued at about \$153 million, the eight retail properties McDonald's put up for sale this week will be a small but indicative transaction. The American company has established itself as one of the world's biggest commercial

landlords by leasing properties to franchisees. Its well-located premises in the city, including in Tsim Sha Tsui, Causeway Bay and Mong Kok, ought to be a strong draw for Citic, one of China's largest conglomerates, which runs the local concession.

Elsewhere, the prolonged bear market is also putting pressure on developers to sell their prized assets. Lai Sun Development may offload its 50% of CCB Tower, Bloomberg reported this week citing unnamed sources. China Construction Bank owns the rest. So far, though, the banking mammoth has not expressed interest in acquiring full ownership in its head office, the report added.

The giant airport mall developed by New World Development under a tender worth roughly \$2.6 billion, is a much bigger deal. It's located next to the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau bridge. With Beijing keen to enhance the economic integration of Hong Kong with other Chinese cities, the mall ought to have appeal to the state firms New World outbid for the project in 2018.

Citic and its peers all have the money and official incentives to drive purchases. One obvious problem, though, is that Hong Kong remains one of the world's priciest cities. This looks increasingly at odds with its struggling economy and weak retail sales. If Chinese buyers do emerge for these assets, they may drive a hard bargain and set the tone for where prices go. — Reuters

Stock market IPOs up in the US, down in Europe

WORLDWIDE, there were 539 stock market flotations in the first six months of the year, but despite Ireland's economy being generally strong within the European Union — particularly in terms of GDP per capita which is second only to Luxembourg — none of them in Ireland, even though new incentives were introduced in Budget 2025.

The global IPOs raised \$61.4 billion, a 17 per cent increase in value year-on-year, according to a new report by EY. It says that while there were no new listings in Ireland, investor sentiment remains positive.

“While Ireland has not seen IPO activity so far this year, the fundamentals remain strong. Investor sentiment is holding firm and the pipeline of potential listings is healthy”, said Fergal McAleavey, a corporate finance partner at EY Ireland.

“Continued market stability will be key to unlocking that potential. America is leading the way in the number of flotations, with 109 so far this year, its best first-half performance since the peak in 2021.

EY's Global IPO Trends report notes that cross-border listings are at a record high in the US, with almost two-thirds coming in from foreign countries. Companies from China and Singapore are “leading the charge”.

“The US market's appeal stems from its deep capital pools, broader investor base and strong liquidity”, the report says. “International issuers particularly value access to investors with an appetite for profitable, growth-oriented companies”. Europe, by contrast, experienced a notable slowdown in IPOs, with most of the big markets pausing following the turmoil set off by US president Donald Trump's announcement of reciprocal tariffs in April.

The continent recorded just 50 IPOs, a 15 per cent drop year-on-year. Sweden was the only exception, with the Asker Health



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Europe, by contrast, experienced a notable slowdown in IPOs, with most of the big markets pausing following the turmoil set off by US president Donald Trump's announcement of reciprocal tariffs in April. The continent recorded just 50 IPOs, a 15 per cent drop year-on-year. Sweden was the only exception, with the Asker Health Group's IPO valuing at about 2.3 billion euros.



A trader works at the Frankfurt stock exchange in Frankfurt. — Reuters

Group's IPO valuing at about 2.3 billion euros. China accounted for one in three of the global IPOs by value, surpassing the US in that category. India was the second most popular, with 108.

The Irish Government introduced two measures in Budget 2025 to encourage investment, including a corporation tax deduction for expenditure incurred in listing shares of a company on any stock in the European Economic Area.

McAleavey said this would be a “nice benefit” for anyone who had decided to list, but not enough on its own to persuade them to do so. He said the attraction of the US, over Europe (which includes Ireland) was in its high level of liquidity, helped by a strong retail market, which resulted in companies being valued fairly.

He pointed out that Irish companies can now raise hundreds of millions from private equity funds, which has made that route more attractive.

A spokesman for Euronext, which runs the Irish stock exchange,

said the introduction of a tax relief for IPO expenses was a welcome development, especially for smaller companies that would be the target for its new “Access” market.

“Given market conditions, although we have a pipeline of potential IPO candidates, IPO activity is muted globally but we expect to see some activity when market conditions improve”, he said.

Euronext has put forward a number of proposals for this year's budget, including a stamp duty exemption on the trading of shares in companies with a market valuation of less than one billion euros and to increase the life-time limit for the Capital Gains Tax (CGT) entrepreneur relief by a further one million euros to two million euros.

It is also proposing the creation of an incentivised savings and investment account scheme for Ireland and an Irish Equity Market Growth Fund to provide equity finance to companies listed or intending to list, on Irish markets.

BUSINESS

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, AUG 3

THE housing sector contributed the largest share to overall inflation in the GCC, according to a recent report from the GCC Statistics Centre. The sector witnessed the highest inflation rate among all consumer categories in the region with a 5.7% increase in 2024, marking a 90.1% contribution to the overall inflation in the region.

In 2024, Saudi Arabia recorded the highest housing inflation at 8.8%, followed by the UAE at 3.3%. Kuwait saw a 1.2% increase, Oman 0.3% and Bahrain 0.2%. Qatar, meanwhile, recorded a deflation rate of -3.3%.

Other sectors experienced increases as well. Inflation in the restaurant and hospitality sector rose by 1.8%, while the culture and entertainment sector registered a similar increase of 1.8%.

Education increased by 1.7%, food and beverages by 1.5%, and goods and services by 1.1%. Several categories recorded deflation, including health

HOUSING SECTOR PRIMARY DRIVER OF
GCC INFLATION IN 2024

According to the report, the inflation rate in the GCC stood at 1.7% in 2020, then rose to 2.4% in 2021, reaching its peak in 2022 at 3.1%. The rate then declined to 2.2% in 2023, before returning to the same level of 1.7% in 2024.



The housing sector witnessed the highest inflation rate among all consumer categories in the region with a 5.7% increase in 2024, marking a 90.1% contribution to the overall inflation in the region.

(-0.2%), clothing and footwear (-0.7%), communications (-1.0%), tobacco (-1.1%), furniture (-1.6%) and transport (-2.0%).

In 2024, countries of the GCC recorded an average inflation rate of 1.7%. Kuwait registered the highest rate at 2.9%, followed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE at 1.7% each, Qatar at 1.3%, Bahrain at 0.9% and Oman at 0.6%.

According to the report, the inflation rate in the GCC stood at 1.7% in 2020, then rose to 2.4% in 2021, reaching its peak in 2022 at 3.1%.

The rate then declined to 2.2% in 2023, before returning to the same level of 1.7% in 2024.

The report notes that the return to the pre-2021 rates reflects “the success of the economic policies adopted by GCC countries in containing inflationary pressures.”

In addition, it points to a “state of relative stability in the region compared to the fluctuations seen in global markets, along with a decline in global inflation and the stabilisation of food and energy prices during 2024.”

CLASSIFIEDS

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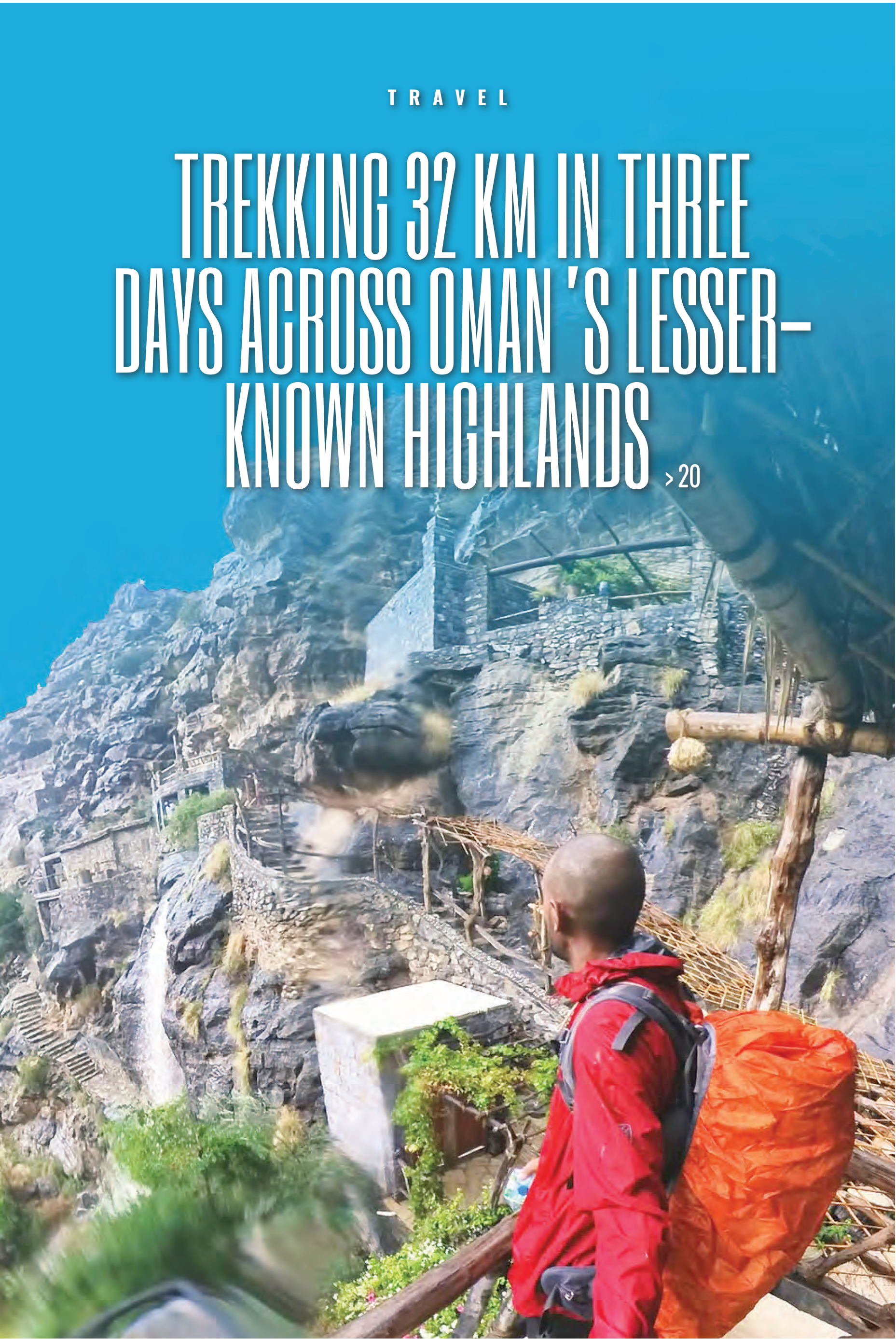
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T R A V E L

TREKING 32 KM IN THREE DAYS ACROSS OMAN'S LESSER-KNOWN HIGHLANDS > 20

ENTERTAINMENT

‘Wednesday’ returns with Jenna Ortega and a Lady Gaga cameo



JENNA ORTEGA returns to screens next week for a second series of “Wednesday”, Netflix’s spin-off of The Addams Family that launched her career and revived Gothic fashion.

The first instalment of the quirky series in 2022 became Netflix’s second most watched show after “Squid Game”, clocking up 252 million views.

Ortega’s deadpan and witty portrayal of Wednesday as she solves a series of murders while enrolled in the creepy Nevermore Academy hooked millions of fans and became a viral sensation.

The first four episodes of the Tim Burton-directed second series will release — naturally enough — on Wednesday, with the rest of them due on September 3.

The 22-year-old actor and the producers have promised a more macabre turn for the horror-inflected drama. There are bigger roles for Wednesday’s family, notably her mother Morticia Addams (Catherine Zeta-Jones) and father Gomez Addams (Luis Guzman).

American arthouse favourite Steve Buscemi also appears as the new head of Nevermore, Principal Dort.

“There’s a couple of weapons that I had to learn to use that I hadn’t used on people before, so that was a little bit of a learning curve”, Ortega told reporters recently about the biggest challenge of the second series.

They include a Swiss army knife and an axe.

Her character, as in her own life, also has to contend with her newfound fame after her exploits in season one.

One of her most high-profile fans, Lady Gaga, has a cameo in the new series.

Since 2022, Ortega has gone on to play roles in “Scream VI” and in Burton’s “Beetlejuice Beetlejuice”, as well as landing brand ambassador roles for Dior and other labels.

Burton, director of cult hits from “Batman” to “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory”, agreed to direct the second series — he made half of series one — after feeling “strangely like it was written for me”.

“Even though I’m not a teenage girl, I feel like one sometimes and it’s just something that really spoke to me”, he said during an online press event ahead of the launch.

“I loved (Wednesday’s) take on everything from family to school to psychiatry, to everything. That’s why I wanted to do it, because of the strength of that particular character”, he said. — AFP

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



LIFESTYLE

Manggarai men perform during a Caci, a ritual whipping fight, in Surabaya. Caci is a war dance and a folk game. — AFP



MUSIC

US rapper Busta Rhymes poses for a photo during the unveiling of his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Hollywood, California. — AFP



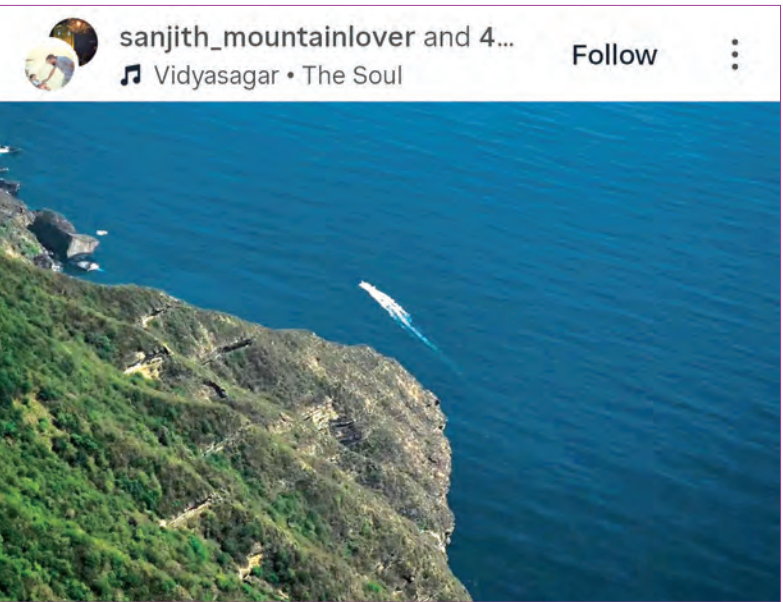
FASHION

Workers at the Rio of Mercedes cowboy boot factory sit at sewing machines in Mercedes, Texas. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Italy fines Armani for ‘misleading ethical’ statements



ITALY’S competition watchdog said on Friday it fined luxury goods giant Giorgio Armani 3.5 million euros (\$4 million) for misleading consumers over dangerous conditions for workers making its bags and accessories.

The watchdog sanctioned the Milan-based fashion group for “misleading ethical and social responsibility statements that were at odds with the actual working conditions found at suppliers and subcontractors”.

“The companies made untruthful ethical and social responsibility statements that were not presented in a clear, specific, accurate and unambiguous manner”, it added in a statement.

It said Armani outsourced a “large part” of its leather bag and accessory production to suppliers who relied on subcontractors.

The watchdog cited cases in which “safety devices had been removed from the machinery to increase production capacity,

thereby posing a serious risk to the safety and health of workers”.

“Hygiene and sanitary conditions were inadequate, while workers were often employed totally or partially ‘off the books’”

The watchdog judged that “respect for workers’ rights and health did not correspond to the ethical and social responsibility statements” issued by the company.

It said the brand was aware of the situation “which seriously harmed the workers who produced Armani-branded leather bags and accessories”.

The watchdog did not say where the workers were based.

Giorgio Armani slammed the ruling, expressing “disappointment and bitterness” in a statement.

It said it would appeal the decision and vowed that it has “always operated with the utmost fairness and transparency towards consumers”. — AFP



Ralph Lauren’s Vintage Man of Mystery

FOR MORE than a quarter century, Doug Bihlmaier has held a mythic position in the world of men’s fashion, especially among those who prize vintage style.

Matt Hranek, the founder of the men’s fashion magazine WM Brown, first heard about Bihlmaier in the mid-1990s. At the time, he noticed that Double RL, a Ralph Lauren spinoff brand, had the best versions of the vintage military clothing and watches he sought for his own collection.

“You’d say, ‘Who finds this stuff?’” Hranek said.

He soon learned of the man whose job sounded like a fantasy: he travelled the world on a Ralph Lauren corporate credit card to find and buy cool old stuff.

One day, while waiting in line outside a vintage show, Hranek met the man himself — a shy, bearded figure in faded denim. From then on, whenever they spotted each other at fairs, Bihlmaier would smile beatifically and give Hranek the peace sign.

“It was like the pope putting up his hands”, said Hranek, 58. “For somebody like myself who really loved vintage, Doug was the benchmark of what to be looking for”. Though Bihlmaier remains largely unknown to the wider world, his profile has been rising in recent years, especially among young vintage collectors and online fashion influencers.

TikTok creators proclaim him a “low-key style savant” and regard him as the spirit, if not the uncredited architect, behind Double RL, whose Americana aesthetic has shaped trends. Cameron Ross Steiner, a 31-year-old podcaster, spent two years emailing Bihlmaier before persuading him to appear on his show, Collectors Gene and talk about his life’s work.

Bihlmaier, 71, lives in a funky cedar-shake house in a wooded part of East Hampton, New York. When he greeted me on a recent afternoon, he was dressed in baggy canvas shorts and a loose white T-shirt. His small dog, Ziggy, circled his bare feet.

With his full beard and ponytail, he may look like an aging hippie or beach bum, but his life has been

fairly conventional. He married his high school sweetheart, Kathy and they raised two daughters in Darien, Connecticut. Now they live in the Hamptons full time.

As their home makes clear, Bihlmaier has collected not only for his employer, but for himself: the closets are stuffed with vintage chambrays, French work clothes, old flannels, distressed military leather jackets.

In the bedroom, dozens of Navajo silver rings and bracelets were arranged on the dresser and the arm of a beat-up leather club chair was piled with early 20th-century Pendleton blankets. Native American rugs of an older vintage covered the floors.

Such items are in high demand in today’s vintage market, in part because Bihlmaier, through his work with Ralph Lauren, helped popularise them. On the patio over lunch, he talked about how he fell into his singular career.

He was born in Osborne, Kansas, a farming town. A great-uncle taught him to ride a horse, milk cows and feed chickens. Once a year, the family would drive four hours to Kansas City to go Christmas shopping. Like many boys in the 1950s and ‘60s, Bihlmaier liked to dress up as a cowboy. Even as a teenager, he noticed that the quality of the denim was slipping and he started buying up old pairs of Levi’s.

“I loved wear and patina”, he said. “I loved my grandfather’s old pickup rather than my father’s new one”. His father, an insurance agent who became the owner of three small banks, was a sharp dresser. While Bihlmaier attended Kansas State University, his father arranged to get him a job at a local men’s store, Woody’s. Some of the clothes in the shop came from a young New York designer, Ralph Lauren.

In the early 1970s, Bihlmaier was sent to the airport to pick up a sales representative from the label. The man stepped off the plane dressed in a brown corduroy suit, red plaid shirt with a yellow club tie and argyle socks.

“I’d been dressing in what I called my Neil Young look — old jeans and flannels”, Bihlmaier said. “I thought, ‘Wow, I want to look like this guy’”. In 1993, Lauren started Double RL, the

brand named for his “RRL” ranch in Colorado. It sold selvage denim, sportswear, accessories and an assortment of vintage pieces, a novel idea in fashion retail at the time. Originally, Double RL was tucked like a secret within the Ralph Lauren store on Madison Avenue.

Bihlmaier was part of the team that gave the brand its identity. He installed new wooden floors that squeaked like old ones.

“It had to squeak on purpose”, he said. To find the stuff to fill the showrooms and stores, he went on shopping excursions to the Brimfield Antique Flea Market in Brimfield, Massachusetts and the Rose Bowl Flea Market in Pasadena, California. The merchandise was plentiful and cheap. “You’d find the coolest 1920s hunting coat for \$20”, Bihlmaier said.

He worked with another Ralph Lauren employee, Bob Melet and the two of them would hit vintage fairs from Santa Fe to Paris like Vikings, only instead of swords and axes they had business cards and discerning eyes.

“If Doug and I walked into an antique venue, we could eviscerate a show as quickly and with quality as anyone”, Melet said.

Dealers gave them nicknames. “They used to call Doug ‘Eagle Eye’ and me ‘Wandering Eye’”, Melet added.

Bihlmaier, who speaks with deference and caution about his employer, said his taste and Lauren’s were “almost perfectly aligned”. He added that his boss taught him that when hunting, “mint” wasn’t the goal. Rather, scuffs, dents and age made a vintage item special. Lauren also trusted him.

“He told me, ‘If you don’t want it, I don’t want it’”, Bihlmaier said.

Part of the legend of Bihlmaier is that he recognised the intrinsic style of certain items before others did, and mixed and layered them in novel ways. Hranek, the fashion editor, credits him with pairing American Western with vintage military, citing the combination of a turquoise silver watchband and a Waltham World War II watch — a look that Double RL merchandised.

“It looked as though he did it without effort”, Hranek said. “That is true talent”. — NYT

FEATURES



Eventually, I reached a flat area — stamped out by trucks — where I spotted two stone cottages nestled in the distance. Curious, I called out “Huud! Huud!” and was greeted by Abdul’talib, a goatherd who had called this rugged spot home for over seven years. He welcomed me warmly, sharing water, coffee and stories about life in these mountains. His stone cottage, blending seamlessly into the rocky landscape, felt like a hidden treasure — a small storybook shelter in the wilderness.

Then came the final, brutal 2.4-kilometre climb, arguably the steepest of my entire journey. My legs felt like jelly, every summit revealing another ridge higher than the last. I pushed myself through exhaustion, recalling past adventures, like cycling 700 km across Morocco and climbing the highest peak in the Arab world in a snowstorm. Those memories fuelled my



TREKKING 32 KM IN THREE DAYS ACROSS OMAN'S LESSER-KNOWN HIGHLANDS

BY HAMDOON AL HASHMI

WOULD I do it again? Absolutely. Would I choose the harder trail again? Without a doubt. My three-day trek through Oman’s lesser-known highlands was an adventure that pushed every limit, revealed stunning hidden corners of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and connected me with a rich tapestry of culture and nature that’s harder to find elsewhere.

From the very first step in the quiet village of Al Rus, the journey was bursting with surprises. The warm hospitality hit me instantly — shared coffee, fresh apricots plucked straight from the tree and heartfelt conversations with elders in their traditional sablas, all while overlooking the sweeping Wadi Al Hijri. It felt like stepping back in time, immersed in a landscape that seemed untouched by modern life.

As the sun dipped below the mountains and night fell at Al Talhat Mosque — perched above Wadi Al Alya — I pitched my tent under a canopy of stars. The air was crisp, the silence broken only by the faint sound of distant waterfalls. Camping there, with only my thoughts and the vast night sky, set the tone for everything that would follow.

Day two was an absolute rollercoaster. I woke before dawn, eager to reach Suwgrah before the Friday prayers. The trail meandered along cliff edges — narrow, treacherous at times, with sheer drops on one side. Clouds gathered ominously, unleashing a sudden summer rain that felt almost divine, blessing the landscape with a freshness that invigorated me even further. Waterfalls tumbled down ancient cliffs and the lush greenery of Suwgrah village revealed itself amidst the grey skies, the sound of rain echoing through centuries-old stone walls.

The climb into Suwgrah was tougher than I expected, with steep zigzags and unfamiliar terrain testing my endurance. When I finally arrived, I sought out locals heading to prayer. Salim al Shuraiqi invited me into his home for coffee, a quick wash and a change of clothes before we headed to the mosque in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar town. As we prayed, the sky rumbled and rain poured down — a blessing that turned the landscape into a shimmering wonderland. We passed waterfalls and streams that made me wish I’d had my camera ready.

Later, I stayed in Suwgrah long enough to enjoy a hearty meal — mountains of rice with fish curry that seemed bottomless. Sitting under the steady rain, I found myself marveling at how the ancient villagers managed to build their homes along these cliffs, seemingly undeterred by storms or floods. Watching the waterfalls cascade through the village again and again, I kept thinking about the resilience embedded in this land.

But it was day three that truly tested me. Without a marked trail, I found myself climbing hills, crossing rocky boulder fields and slipping down into valleys. The terrain was unforgiving and my legs ached with every step. During one moment of respite, I plucked a mango from the tree and that juicy, cooling fruit felt like a piece of heaven amidst the chaos. Sweat dripped down my face, humidity clung to my skin and every breath was a challenge.

resolve.

At around 5 pm, I reached the 3.2 km marker to Al Manakhir. I collapsed for a short while — legs trembling, heart pounding — before pushing on to the final stretch. Descending into Al Manakhir felt like an eternity. When I finally spotted Nasser al Shuraiqi’s car parked where I’d left it, a wave of relief washed over me.

This wasn’t just a 32 km hike. It was a pilgrimage through culture, terrain, solitude and my own limits. From the village sablas and apricot trees to thunderous rainstorms and ancient waterfalls, every moment was a reminder of the raw, untouched beauty of Oman.

Driving away from Al Manakhir, the mountains seemed to whisper stories of generations past — villages carved into cliffs, waterfalls tumbling from ancient rock and a way of life rooted deeply in harmony with nature. The experience had transformed me, revealing how much strength and patience it takes to walk these extraordinary paths.

Back in the comfort of civilisation, I realised that the true reward lies not just in reaching the end, but in every step, every encounter and every breathtaking view along the way. Oman’s lesser-known highlands aren’t just a hidden gem for thrill-seekers — they are a testament to resilience, culture and the untouched wilderness that still whispers its secrets to those willing to listen.