

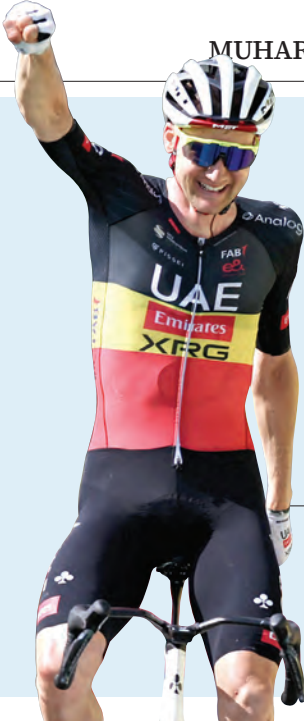
O M A N
عمان
D A I L Y

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INBRIEF

HM THANKED BY
QATAR EMIR AND
DJIBOUTI PRESIDENT

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, in response to His Majesty’s cable of greetings on the occasion of the anniversary of his ascension to the throne.

His Majesty the Sultan also received a cable of thanks from President Ismail Omar Guelleh of the Republic of Djibouti in response to His Majesty’s cable of greetings on the occasion of his country’s National Day.

In the two cables, the two leaders expressed their appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan, wishing him good health, well-being and success. They also wished the bilateral relations and cooperation between their respective countries and the Sultanate of Oman further development and growth.

GREEN SEA TURTLE
RETURNS TO OMAN
AFTER 15 YEARS



Return of green sea turtle in the Wilayat of Sur

RAS AL HADD: A team from the Environment Authority has successfully observed the return of a green sea turtle to Seih Al Marae in the Wilayat of Sur, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate. This marks its return over 15 years after its initial tagging.

The turtle was originally tagged on September 7, 2010, in the Seih Al Marae area during sea turtle nesting monitoring operations at the Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve.

This return underscores the strong attachment of these creatures to their original nesting sites and highlights the crucial role of tagging programmes in tracking their migration and studying their return patterns. Such efforts significantly bolster conservation endeavours and the preservation of their biological diversity.

It is worth noting that the Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve is one of the most prominent global sites for sea turtle nesting, hosting thousands of turtles annually. — ONA

YOUTHS POWER KHAREEF DHOFA



Wadi Darbat witnesses a surge in youth activity during khareef season, marked by a series of Omani projects and initiatives that reflect the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship among young people. **REPORT ON P4**

Over 1.5 million Omanis
get social protection

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

MORE than 1.53 million individuals across various categories have benefited from Social Protection

Fund in the country, reflecting the government’s continued commitment to inclusive welfare under Oman Vision 2040.

The SPF indicated that the largest share of beneficiaries were children, with numbers reaching 1,243,781. Senior citizens accounted for 173,324 beneficiaries, while 47,579 people with disabilities also received assistance under the fund’s social protection umbrella.

The report further highlights that 16,777 individuals received the job security allowance – a safety net designed to protect Omani workers from sudden income loss.

56,808 beneficiaries received ‘family income support’, with 36,632 specifically receiving family income support and 20,176 applications processed under the social security payment scheme. Additionally, 16,041 widows and orphans were covered by dedicated support programmes.

In terms of social insurance, the Fund reported 141,000 active pensions disbursed as of June 2025.

The report also highlighted a positive trend in contributions, with over 594,000 Omanis signing up for the insurance.

1,243,781
Children

173,324
Senior citizens

47,579
People with disabilities

16,777
Job security allowance

594,000
Insurance subscribers

36,632
Family income support



The Social Protection Fund has paved the way for implementing the provisions of the Social Protection Law since the beginning of 2024. Steps in this direction include setting up branches of social insurance and social protection schemes that establish pillars for the protection of individuals and family members against multiple risks in life within the framework of a future vision for comprehensive social protection.

Direct cash benefits are disbursed to those eligible across different segments of society.

The schemes are fully funded by the state’s public treasury, which saw the introduction of schemes to persons with disabilities, children, the elderly, orphans and widows. The Social Protection Fund has been linked with 12 government institutions during 2024.

The system represents a very advanced step in extending protection to Omani citizens. It reflects the deep attention accorded to the social aspects by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, in accordance with what is included in the Basic Law of the State and Oman Vision 2040.

Israeli fire kills 67 aid seekers in Gaza as hunger worsens

CAIRO: At least 67 Palestinians were killed by Israeli fire as they waited for UN aid trucks in northern Gaza on Sunday, the Gaza health ministry said, as Israel issued new evacuation orders for areas packed with displaced people.

The ministry said dozens of people were also wounded in the incident in northern Gaza. It was one of the highest reported death tolls among repeated recent cases in which aid seekers have been killed, including 36 on Saturday. Another six people were killed near another aid site in the south, it said.

Israel’s military said its troops had fired warning shots towards a crowd of thousands of people in northern Gaza on Sunday to remove what it said was “an immediate threat”.

It said initial findings suggested reported casualty figures were inflated, and it “certainly does not intentionally target humanitarian aid trucks”.

It did not immediately comment on the incident in the south.

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) said that shortly after entering Gaza, a WFP convoy of 25 trucks carrying food aid encountered



Palestinians gather to receive food from a charity kitchen, amid a hunger crisis, in Nuseirat on Sunday. — Reuters

“massive crowds of hungry civilians” who then came under gunfire.

“WFP reiterates that any violence involving civilians seeking humanitarian aid is completely unacceptable,” it said in a statement.

In total, health authorities said 88 people had been killed by Israeli gunfire and air strikes across the enclave on Sunday.

After Israel’s military dropped leaflets urging people to evacuate from neighbourhoods in central Gaza’s Deir al Balah, residents said Israeli planes struck three houses in the area. — Reuters

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SHORT TAKES



The vaccination operations focused on diseases that pose a major threat to livestock.

550,600 VACCINATION DOSES FOR LIVESTOCK IN AL DHAHIRAH

THUWAINI AL YAHYAI
DHANK, JULY 20

The Directorate-General of Agricultural and Water Resources in Al Dhahirah Governorate provided 550,622 vaccination doses for livestock in the governorate during the vaccination season, which extended from September 1, 2024, to the end of June 2025.

The move comes within the framework of the implementation of the National Livestock Vaccination Project, overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Eng Mohammed bin Ali al Shandoudi, Director of the Animal Wealth Department at the Directorate-General of Agricultural and Water Resources in Al Dhahirah Governorate, said: “The national project aims to protect livestock from epidemic and infectious diseases, reduce economic losses incurred by breeders, and improve the quality of animal production. Animal health is the foundation of the rural economy, which makes this project a fundamental pillar for achieving the sustainability of this vital sector in the Sultanate of Oman.”

The Directorate-General of Agricultural and Water Resources in Al Dhahirah Governorate carried out 25 field camps during the vaccination period covering villages with high livestock density in the governorate’s three wilayats of Ibri, Dhank and Yanqul. Specialised veterinary teams provided the vaccinations as well as awareness-raising guidance to livestock breeders on best practices in livestock health care.

The vaccination operations focused on diseases that pose a major threat to livestock, such as foot-and-mouth disease, sheep and goat pox, small ruminant plague and clostridiosis.

SHABAB OMAN II RECEIVES LORD PROVOST OF ABERDEEN



The Lord Provost of Aberdeen learned about the noble message the ship carries on its voyages. — ONA

EDINBURGH: The Royal Navy of Oman vessel (RNOV) “Shabab Oman II,” while docked at the port of Aberdeen, Scotland, on Sunday, received Councillor Dr David Cameron, the Lord Provost of Aberdeen. This took place as part of the vessel’s participation in the Aberdeen maritime festival.

During his visit, the Lord Provost toured the ship and viewed a photo exhibition showcasing the cultural depth and diversity of the Sultanate of Oman, highlighting its unique tourism potential and attractive investment environment.

He also learned about Oman’s significant achievements and the noble message the ship carries on its voyages around the world. — ONA

Students urged to review choices ahead of admission

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

AS the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) prepares to launch the Programme Reordering Phase on July 22 students are being strongly encouraged to revise and prioritise their programme choices to improve their chances in the upcoming First Allocation Phase.

In an exclusive interview with Observer, Nada bint Mohammed Al Kiyoumiyah, Director of Undergraduate Admissions at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, emphasised the importance of this final stage before allocation results are released.

“This is a decisive phase where students can re-evaluate the order of their selected programmes,” Al Kiyoumi explained. “The system allocates study opportunities based on the final order submitted and on merit-based selection criteria.”

She noted that many students made avoidable mistakes during the Trial Allocation, such as limiting their programme list or focusing too narrowly on popular majors.

“Some high-performing students submitted only a few programme options, despite the system allowing an unlimited number,” she said. “Others - particularly female applicants - tended to prioritise high-demand fields like education, leading to increased competition.”

Health-related programmes also continue to be among the most sought-after due to their perceived job market value. However, Al Kiyoumi warned that even students with high scores could miss out if they limit their options.

To guide applicants, HEAC has launched



NADA BINT MOHAMMED AL KIYOUMIYAH

a comprehensive awareness campaign through social media, radio, TV and direct communication, helping students understand how to optimise their choices.

Regarding fluctuating admission cut-offs, Al Kiyoumi explained that these vary each year based on General Education Diploma results and applicant preferences. The competitive score is calculated using a formula that weighs 60 per cent of relevant subject marks and 40 per cent of the general average.

“Naturally, when competing students have higher scores, the admission thresholds rise,” she said.

On transparency, she reaffirmed the system’s integrity since its inception in 2006, highlighting that all applicants are assessed through the same formula, and that programme cut-off scores are publicly

available for comparison.

For students wishing to contest their results, a well-defined appeals process is in place. Al Kiyoumi confirmed that a neutral committee, independent of the ministry, reviews all appeals to ensure fairness.

This year, for the first time, appeals can be submitted via the government’s unified services portal (gov.om), as part of a broader national effort to streamline digital services.

Looking ahead, she shared plans to incorporate artificial intelligence and data analytics into the admissions platform, aiming to enhance user experience for students, guardians and system administrators alike.

“We are committed to continuously improving the system’s fairness, accessibility and responsiveness,” she said.

Al Kiyoumi concluded by urging students to make thoughtful, realistic choices and to learn from the trial results: “This is your chance to secure a place that aligns with your strengths and aspirations. Take it seriously, review your options carefully and diversify your selections.”

Indian visa, passport services from new premises

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

Indian visa, passport and other services are now offered by SGIVS Global from its new premises in Al Qurum. Official opening of the same was held on Saturday under the auspices of GV Srinivas, ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman.

Located on Al Raid Business Center Building in Al Qurum, SGIVS Global Services, which is the authorised entity by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India, will deliver all services including attestation, consular, tourism promotion, OCI and value-added services besides visa and passport services.

Speaking to the Observer, on the sidelines of the commencement of services, Tavishi Behal Pandey, Deputy Chief of Mission / Political Officer at the embassy of India said the services offered by the agency would be delivered faster because of a centralised service programme to offer seamless outsourcing solutions for all requirements.

“We are increasing the number of centres across the country making it a total of 11 centres and we have made the visa services available across all centres. It will greatly facilitate the people seeking the diplomatic services. Earlier, only

Besides the main centre in Al Qurum, there will be 10 new centres spread across the country aiming at catering to more Omanis as well as Indians in Oman. These centres are set up in Khasab, Suhar, Al Buraimi, Barka, Ibri, Nizwa, Ibra, Sur, Al Duqum and Salalah.



SGIVS Global Services will deliver all services including attestation.

the Muscat centre provided all the services and people from far flung areas used to visit it. From now on, they can avail visa services from any of those 11 centres, thus saving time and enhancing convenience. This will help more Omanis from the interior, especially those who are seeking medical visas although we have an e-medical visa facility. Either themselves or their relatives can visit any of the centre and get their visa done,” she said.

Besides the main centre in Al Qurum, there will be 10 new centres spread across the country aiming at catering to more Omanis as well as

Indians in Oman. These centres are set up in Khasab, Suhar, Al Buraimi, Barka, Ibri, Nizwa, Ibra, Sur, Al Duqum and Salalah.

Ajith Krishnan, the centre manager advised all applicants to book online for the services and to visit the centre on the said date and time and get prompt services.

“As part of offering smooth service to those who seek Indian visa, passport and consular services, we request them to book appointments online via the SGIVS Appointment Booking Page and to be present on the said date and time,” he added.

SHORT TAKES



The aflaj restoration project is worth over RO 2 million

90% OF AFLAJ RESTORATION COMPLETED

IBRA: The Directorate-General of Agriculture and Water Resources in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate is conducting comprehensive restoration of 179 aflaj (man-made water supply channels) to the tune of more than RO 2 million. The project seeks to maintain the sustainability of water resources in the governorate’s wilayats.

Eng Hamad bin Rashid al Sawai, from the General-Directorate of Agriculture and Water Resources in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, said that the project was prompted by the damage suffered by the aflaj following low-pressure systems that prevailed in the area and a tropical depression that hit the governorate last year.

A total of 162 aflaj (about 90 per cent of the total target number) were restored to normal working conditions, as follows: 21 in the Wilayat of Ibra, 19 in the Wilayat of Al Qabil, 17 in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, 78 in the Wilayat of Dima W’attayeen, 10 in the Wilayat of Bidiyah, 4 in the Wilayat of Sinaw and 30 in the Wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid. — ONA

WORKSHOP DEFINES AL DHAHIRAH’S STRATEGIC VISION



The workshop leverages Al Dhahirah’s advantages to develop future implementation plans.

AL DHAHIRAH: A workshop titled ‘Defining the Strategic Purpose of Al Dhahirah Governorate’ was held on Sunday at Al Muhallab bin Abi Sufra Hall in Al Dhahirah Governorate. The event saw broad participation from government and private entities, as well as members of the local community.

The workshop focused on defining the strategic vision and mission for the governorate, with an emphasis on leveraging Al Dhahirah’s comparative advantages to develop future implementation plans. This workshop, attended by numerous officials, marks the first phase of the project to develop Al Dhahirah Governorate’s strategy. — ONA

NET MAKING: HERITAGE ICON WEAVING IDENTITY OF MARITIME HISTORY

AL ASHKHARAH: Al Ashkharah Festival attracts Omani artisans practising various traditional crafts, showcasing and promoting them to preserve the legacy of their ancestors. These handcrafted trades represent both a means of adapting to the environment and a source of livelihood.

Among the most prominent Omani traditional crafts is sea net making, locally known as “Ghazl Al leekh”. This craft has been practised by Omani fishermen for generations



Crafting these nets requires specific expertise — the maker must be an experienced fisherman. — ONA

and remains prevalent across Oman’s coastal regions.

Al leekh is a fundamental tool for traditional fishermen, consisting of multi-mesh nets made from nylon or cotton threads reinforced with a bordering rope. The size of the mesh openings and the thickness of the thread vary depending on the fishing method and the type of fish targeted. Each net measures between 175 to 200 yards in length and takes about 15 days to complete. — ONA

MoHUP’s urban vision wins Global Smart City Award

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

In a major international achievement, the Greater Muscat Structure Plan has won the WAFX Award 2025 in the Smart Cities category and has been shortlisted as a finalist in the Comprehensive Urban Planning category at the upcoming World Architecture Festival (WAF) in Miami, scheduled for November 12–14, 2025.

Developed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the plan reflects Oman’s bold efforts to shape a sustainable, inclusive and technologically advanced future for its capital — aligning closely with the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The WAFX Awards, introduced on the 10th anniversary of WAF, celebrate future-facing projects that offer practical solutions to global challenges including climate change, digital transformation, urban equity, and smart development. The Greater Muscat Structure Plan’s win underscores Oman’s rising prominence on the world stage in strategic urbanism.

The plan now competes with innovative entries from nations like China, the US, the UK, Brazil, Canada, Türkiye, and Saudi Arabia, a testament to the maturity of Oman’s urban planning and its ability to blend cultural authenticity with global innovation.

“This award marks a key milestone in our journey to create a future-ready Muscat that respects its heritage while embracing modern urban values,” said Eng Yaquoub bin Amer al Harthy, Project Director.

“It’s not just a regulatory plan - it’s a strategic blueprint that tackles core challenges like mobility, sustainability, livability, economic growth and community safety. The recognition is the result of extensive collaboration across public, private



The plan is a testament to Oman’s ability to blend cultural authenticity with global innovation.

The Greater Muscat Structure Plan’s win underscores Oman’s rising prominence on the world stage in strategic urbanism

and civil sectors.”

Monika Beck, Urban Planning Adviser to the Minister, highlighted the strategic and technological depth of the project “This isn’t just about innovative design - it’s about crafting solutions for global issues like climate change and urban health. By embedding the plan into a Geographic Information System (GIS) framework, we ensured deep coordination across transport, sustainability, economic diversification and public services. This multidisciplinary approach is what made the plan stand out.”

The plan is guided by five strategic pillars mainly: Green Muscat: Enhancing urban livability by preserving natural assets like wadis and water systems. Connected Muscat: Reducing car dependency through a smart, integrated transport network. Productive

Muscat: Fostering innovation and knowledge-based industries, Vibrant Muscat: Promoting livable neighbourhoods and strong social cohesion and Safe and resilient Muscat: Designing for climate resilience and public safety.

This international recognition positions Oman at the forefront of smart urban development in the region. It signals a transformative shift in urban planning - anchored in local identity, but responsive to global change.

As Oman prepares to present its vision at WAF in Miami, the Greater Muscat Structure Plan is set to inspire a global audience with its people-centred, sustainable and forward-thinking approach - proving that smart cities are not just about digital innovation, but about building inclusive, resilient and culturally rooted futures.

RO 1.1m Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Park to open in Al Dakhiliyah

AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: The Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate continues to solidify its status as a premier tourist destination through the implementation of high-quality tourism and recreational projects.

Foremost among these is the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Park under construction in Seeh Qatnah, alongside the recently inaugurated Celebration Square, which hosted the opening events of the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival 2025.

Shaikh Sultan bin Mansour al Ghafili, Wali of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, stated that the wilayat is witnessing tangible developmental progress, reflecting an integrated vision to enhance infrastructure and improve quality of life. He emphasised that these projects align with the goals of Oman Vision



The park features integrated recreational and service facilities, including a children’s play area, sports pathways and investment zones.

2040, transforming the wilayat’s natural and cultural advantages into sustainable development opportunities with direct social and economic impact.

In a statement to ONA, he noted that the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Park project is progressing rapidly, with

completion exceeding 85 per cent. The park is set to officially open to visitors in August 2025 at a cost exceeding RO 1.1 million.

Spanning 20,000 square metres, the park features integrated recreational and service facilities, including a 1,000-square-metre children’s play area, sports pathways and investment zones housing a café, a shop, and an electric games section, in addition to prayer rooms and restrooms for men and women.

The park also includes a multipurpose open-air theatre and 5,000 square metres of green spaces planted with 150 trees and 400 shrubs, alongside natural vegetation to enhance the site’s aesthetics, making it a year-round recreational destination.

He affirmed that these projects bolster the wilayat’s tourism

appeal, provide community platforms for national events, support small and medium enterprises, and stimulate local growth by generating jobs and boosting commercial activity.

He added that Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, in coordination with the Al Dakhiliyah Governor’s Office, ensures these initiatives serve as pillars for comprehensive, sustainable development that fosters innovation and strengthens Omani identity.

Future plans include additional initiatives to attract qualitative investments in eco-tourism, smart agriculture and community services, emphasising collaboration between government entities, the private sector and local communities to ensure holistic and sustainable impact, he added. — ONA

KHAREEF DHOFAR

SHORTTAKES



APP ENHANCES KHAREEF DHOFAR EXPERIENCE FOR VISITORS

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

The Dhofar Seasons app is transforming the way tourists experience Khareef Dhofar, offering a suite of electronic services that simplify travel, plan recreational activities and provide vital information - all in one place. This comprehensive digital guide ensures that visitors enjoy a seamless, memorable experience during the monsoon season.

Launched by Dhofar Municipality in coordination with relevant authorities, the app consolidates services to support the governorate's tourism efforts. It offers details on key tourist attractions, a full calendar of events, ticketing and booking services and real-time updates throughout the season.

Available for download on smartphones, the app requires basic user registration and is frequently updated to align with Dhofar's three major tourist seasons. It allows users to explore Dhofar's majestic mountains, pristine beaches and lush green plains while also helping them locate accommodations, restaurants and entertainment suited to their interests.

Since its launch, the app has attracted over 145,000 users, receiving praise for its intuitive design and rich content. It has become one of the governorate's most notable digital innovations, reflecting Dhofar's broader commitment to smart tourism and digital transformation.

Through digital applications like Dhofar Seasons, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism continues to advance its strategy to modernise the tourism sector. These innovations are part of a broader vision to enhance visitor experiences, meet evolving traveller expectations and elevate the quality of services during Oman's most vibrant tourist season.

Wadi Darbat: A growing hub for youth projects

WADI DARBAT in Dhofar Governorate witnesses a surge in youth activity during khareef (monsoon) season, marked by a series of Omani projects and initiatives that reflect the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship among young people. This takes place in an environment rich in natural beauty, attracting visitors from within and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

These projects span a variety of sectors, including recreational activities, water boats, restaurants, mobile kiosks, handicrafts and handmade products, alongside environmental and awareness initiatives aimed at preserving the wadi's cleanliness and aesthetic appeal. Their success lies in meeting local market demands and enhancing the tourism experience.

These initiatives receive direct support from relevant government entities as part of efforts to empower Omani youth to invest in the tourism potential of the khareef season — particularly in high-traffic areas like Wadi Dabrat, which has become a prime destination for pioneering projects that bolster sustainable local development.

The natural features of Wadi Darbat during khareef have also enhanced entrepreneurial opportunities by providing an enabling environment to showcase products, develop business skills, attract tourists and expand local economic activity.

In this context, several young entrepreneurs spoke about their experiences in Wadi Darbat and the ideas and initiatives they have introduced to boost tourism and economic activity during the Khareef Dhofar Season.

Mohammed bin Mohsen al Maamari, owner of Darbat Park Boats, stated that the project was launched in 2008 after a modest start the previous year, when the wadi suffered from low visitor numbers and inadequate services. He explained that the project began



The project was launched in 2008 after a modest start the previous year, when the wadi suffered from low visitor numbers and inadequate services. He explained that the project began with just three boats and a team of four employees but has since expanded to include over 85 boats, with a workforce of 33 Omani employees and 15 expatriates.

**MOHAMMED
BIN MOHSEN
AL MAAMARI**
*Owner of Darbat
Park Boats*

with just three boats and a team of four employees but has since expanded to include over 85 boats, with a workforce of 33 Omani employees and 15 expatriates.

Al Maamari noted that improvements included upgrading infrastructure and hospitality facilities, such as establishing a modern-style cafe. He emphasised that high demand prompted expansion efforts to reduce wait times, contributing to the revitalisation of tourism in the wadi.

On his turn, Salim bin Mohammed al Maashani, owner of Darbat Rural Retreat, explained that his project embodies Omani rural identity in a prime location at the wadi's entrance. The project offers an authentic rural lodging experience using natural materials like wood and clay, alongside local products such as ghee, honey and pottery.

He pointed out that increasing demand has prompted plans for future expansion, stressing that such heritage projects help promote community-based tourism and support the income of local producers and artisans.

Meanwhile, Said bin Mahad al Maashani, owner of Darbat Huts, shared that his project started four years ago with three huts and has since expanded to nine huts in two different designs. The project provides hospitality services in a breathtaking natural setting, with options for advance bookings and hosting visitors from Oman and GCC countries.

Al Maashani added that the project employs several Omani youth but faces challenges such as the limited tourism season, overcrowding and insufficient parking. He expressed hope for permanent solutions to ensure the sustainability of such projects year-round.

In the adventure tourism sector, Eng Abdulhakim bin Amer al Maashani, co-founder of Dhofar Tourism and Investment Company, discussed the zipline project, launched in Wadi Darbat in 2022 with a 120-metre line. He noted the rapid development, including dual lines for round trips and two experience sites, creating around 60 temporary job opportunities for Omani youth. — ONA



TENDER

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) FOR TOPOGRAPHY AND 4K VIDEOGRAPHY
SURVEYS UNDER AD-HOC SERVICES

Tender Description	PWP seeks proposals from eligible and qualified bidders on an ad-hoc basis consultancy service contract(s) for topography and 4k videography surveys. The contract(s) will be for a term of three (3) years. The consultant for topography and 4k videography surveys shall be able to conduct the following investigations: establishing reference benchmarks, topography, and 4k videography surveys of the potential projects as specified in the RFP.
Tender Number	OPWP/2025/021
Tender Purchase Period	From 15 July 2025 to 25 July 2025
Tender Fee	50 OMR / Free of charges for (SME) with a valid Riyadh card
Submission date	24 August 2025 at 12:00 PM Oman Time Zone
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through PWP website (https://omanpwp.om/tenders). The payment is done electronically through PWP website. In case of any queries, please send an email to: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om
Bank Guarantee	A Tender Bond (in the form set out in the tender documents) or a bank certified cheque of OMR 170, to be valid for a period of 120 days from the submission deadline date referred to above. The tender bond or certified cheque shall be enclosed as part of the bid.



Firm fined for damaging vegetation

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 20

The Environment Authority (EA) has issued a formal violation notice against a tourism company for causing damage to fragile vegetation cover in Wadi Darbat.

The violation was documented as part of the ongoing 'Environmental Protectors' initiative, a nationwide effort to preserve natural sites during the khareef season. The company in question was found to have led a convoy of four-wheel-drive vehicles and a heavy truck across green meadows in Wadi Darbat, leaving behind visible tyre tracks and damaging the plant cover.

“This action is a direct violation of Article 21 of the Environmental Protection Law,” said an official from the Environment Authority. “Driving on sensitive terrain, especially during khareef, undermines years of conservation efforts and threatens the natural balance of the area.”

Wadi Darbat, located east of Salalah, is a major attraction for both domestic and international tourists during the monsoon months. Known for its flowing waterfalls, grazing camels and green plateaus, it also serves as a critical habitat for local flora and fauna. Authorities say its beauty also makes it vulnerable.



The EA reminded that protecting Dhofar's landscapes is a shared national duty.

“This latest action shows the Authority’s deep commitment to environmental preservation,” said a local observer. “I commend the Environment Authority for its vigilant efforts in protecting our natural heritage across the governorate, especially during the busy khareef season. With the large number of visitors, it’s not an easy task, but the Authority - along with other government entities - is doing an exceptional job. I hope all visitors, companies, residents and

SHORT TAKES



The event aims to equip youngsters with an understanding of rapid changes in the job market

AI, FUTURE SKILLS
EVENT EMPOWERS
YOUTH IN BATINAH S

AL RUSTAQ: The Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth in Al Batinah South Governorate organised the ‘Youth Readiness’ event on Sunday at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

This event, part of the celebration marking the World Youth Skills Day, comes within the ‘Future Skills for Youth’ programme, which aims to equip young people with an understanding of rapid changes in the job market and provide them with essential future skills.

The event targeted male and female youth, specifically those aged 18 to 35 from Al Batinah South Governorate, including school and university students, recent graduates and individuals interested in self-development. Fifty young men and women participated, a step towards achieving the programme’s key objectives.

The event focused on enhancing awareness of future skills and anticipating job market changes up to 2035.

It included intensive sessions on an introduction to artificial intelligence and the fundamentals of personal financial literacy. It also aimed to stimulate analytical thinking and encourage the participants to plan for their professional futures.

— ONA

OMAN-INDIA TIES
DEEPEN THROUGH
ART AND YOGA



Tamoghna Foundation conducted a special yoga session for sanitation workers on International Yoga Day

MUSCAT: Under the leadership of Dr Kavitha Ramakrishna, the Tamoghna Foundation, headquartered in Bengaluru, has emerged as a transformative force not just in India but also across borders - most notably in Oman. With a deep commitment to wellness, cultural revival and civic engagement, Dr Kavitha has forged meaningful connections between the two nations through her unique blend of Tanjore art, yoga mentorship and cross-cultural initiatives.

In Oman, she has earned recognition as a cultural ambassador, particularly for her efforts in introducing and teaching yoga and mindfulness to local women, and for showcasing traditional Indian Tanjore painting enriched with Omani cultural motifs - including inspirations drawn from national monuments and traditional jewellery. These works have not only captivated art lovers, but also created a new dialogue between ancient Indian artistry and Omani heritage.

Back in India, her foundation recently collaborated with the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) to conduct a special yoga session for sanitation workers on International Yoga Day, reinforcing her mission to uplift underserved communities. The event, part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, highlighted the importance of mental and physical well-being for frontline civic workers.

OMAN
ADVANCES
BIOTECH
STRATEGY
WITH
CONSULTANCY
PACT

MUSCAT: The Oversight Committee for Biotechnology in the Sultanate of Oman on Sunday held its third meeting, chaired by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

During the meeting, the committee reviewed the latest developments regarding the implementation of decisions from its second meeting. This included the crucial task of completing the requirements for preparing the National Biotechnology Strategy



A cooperation programme was launched and signed to fund the assignment of a consultant for the National Biotechnology Strategy project

in accordance with the approved work plan, as well as finalising the procedures for appointing the specialised consultant responsible for developing the strategy.

The tender for the consultancy services was recently issued through the electronic system of the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority.

Dr Kawther al Balushi, Project Manager for the National Biotechnology Strategy, delivered a visual presentation to the committee members. — ONA

SQU explores AI, Emotional
Intelligence in education

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 20

SULTAN Qaboos University (SQU) officially launched the third edition of its annual Summer School, held under the theme ‘The Integration of Emotional and Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education.’ The programme is taking place at the Rotana Hotel in Salalah and continues until July 26, as part of the university’s broader efforts to advance academic development and promote educational tourism during the Khareef Dhofar Season.

This year’s edition brings together approximately 50 academic participants from six higher education institutions across Oman. The six-day programme features expert-led lectures, thematic sessions, interactive discussions and field visits to key tourist and heritage sites in Dhofar Governorate.

In its opening address, the organising committee welcomed the participants and highlighted the significant expansion of the Summer School since its inception. While the first edition included just three institutions, the current edition has doubled that number - reflecting the growing relevance of the school’s academic themes and its role as a collaborative national platform.

The committee noted that the choice of this year’s theme responds to the rising integration of artificial intelligence technologies in education and the pressing need to preserve the emotional and human dimensions of teaching and learning. True innovation, it added, lies not only in technological advancement but in leveraging such tools to serve human development



The programme features expert-led lectures, thematic sessions, interactive discussions and field visits

and social well-being.

The opening day featured a high-level panel discussion titled ‘Thriving Societies Through the Integration of Emotional and Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education.’ The session brought together leading academic voices from Oman and abroad.

Among the panellists was Dr Awadh bin Amer al Rawas, a senior academic and innovation adviser who serves as Non-Resident Dean at the University of Newfern in Georgia, and holds a PhD in Artificial Intelligence from the University of Sussex in the UK. Dr Al Rawas is widely recognised for his contributions to digital transformation and education reform.

Also speaking was Dr Rajiv Jhangiani, Vice-Provost for Teaching and Learning at Brock University in Canada. A global expert in open education, he sits on the boards of several international organisations that advocate for social justice in education and the ethical use of technology. Dr Jhangiani is affiliated with the Inclusive Education Lab and the British Columbia Working Group on Technology Ethics.

Dr Mahmood al Maawali, a

psychologist and certified trainer in career development and academic counselling, also joined the panel. He holds a doctorate in psychological counselling and has led professional development programmes across both the public and private sectors in Oman and Qatar.

The session concluded with a series of forward-looking recommendations aimed at shaping academic strategies in Oman’s higher education sector. These included the adoption of holistic teaching philosophies that integrate emotional intelligence with technical expertise, the development of institutional frameworks to guide ethical AI usage, and the expansion of faculty training in both soft skills and emerging technologies.

The panellists also underscored the importance of designing smart learning environments that support diverse learning styles and encourage meaningful teacher-student interaction.

Finally, the panel called for a redefinition of academic leadership - one that embraces emotional awareness and champions the responsible, human-centred application of artificial intelligence in education.

As part of the week-long programme, the participants will engage in specialised workshops and thematic seminars. A guided field visit on the third day will showcase Salalah’s natural beauty and cultural heritage, reinforcing the link between academic exploration and cultural immersion.

The Summer School reflects Sultan Qaboos University’s ongoing commitment to raising educational standards, fostering innovation in pedagogy, and positioning Dhofar as an emerging hub for academic and scientific exchange.

Muscat to host grand tribute to Raja Ravi Varma

KABEER YOUSUF
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Muscat is set to witness a spectacular audio-visual production titled ‘Kadha Parayum Chithrangal’ - The Pictures That Speak (A Unique Story of Colours and Canvases) — a creative homage to world-renowned Indian painter Raja Ravi Varma. The programme will be staged on three specially arranged platforms on August 22 and 23.

The Malayalam version will premiere on August 22, followed by the Hindi rendition, ‘Bolthi Tasveerem’, with multilingual subtitles, on August 23. Rehearsals are in full swing for this unique theatrical celebration.

The programme brings to life the story and works of Raja Ravi Varma, who was born in the Kilimanoor Palace near Thiruvananthapuram in the 19th century. Famed for blending Western techniques with Indian themes, Ravi Varma revolutionised Indian art with his lifelike oil paintings of mythological and royal figures.



The show incorporates 71 carefully curated scenes

In this innovative format, characters from his iconic paintings take the stage, drawing viewers into the emotional and cultural depth of his artworks. The production offers a rich narrative journey through the painter’s tumultuous life, using light, sound and dramatic visuals to convey the timeless beauty and struggles behind his masterpieces.

The programme is produced by Bhavalaya, conceptualised by Dr J Retnakumar, and presented by Global

Events. Directed by acclaimed stage artiste, director and choreographer Sunil Kumar Krishnan Nair, the show incorporates 71 carefully curated scenes. These include well-known works like Galaxy of Musicians, Hamsa Damayanti and Shakuntala, with musical interludes composed by Ronnie Raphael and background scores by Rama Varma Thampuran, a descendant of the Kilimanoor royal lineage.

As part of the tribute, a painting competition inspired by Ravi Varma’s works will be held in early August for both citizens and residents of Oman.

Over 120 performers and 100 backstage crew members from Muscat will bring this epic to life, joined by Indian film star Moksha.

Speaking to the Observer, director Sunil Kumar Krishnan Nair shared, “Through this audio-visual journey, we aim to introduce Raja Ravi Varma’s genius to a new generation, ensuring that his legacy lives on not just as paintings, but as living, breathing stories.”

WORLD

CAPSIZE

TRAGEDY



Rescuers walk on the wharf after searching for victims of a capsized tourist boat in Ha Long Bay. — AFP

RELATIVES AWAIT
NEWS FROM VIETNAM
WRECK RESCUE

HA LONG BAY: Relatives anxiously sat beside ambulances on the wharf of one of Vietnam's most popular tourist sites on Sunday, waiting for news of loved ones who were on a tourist boat that capsized killing dozens. Fruits and flowers were laid on the coast for the at least 35 killed in the wreckage on Saturday in what some called Ha Long Bay's worst disaster. As rescuers worked into Sunday morning to salvage the sunken boat, a handful of people were still missing.

The tourist vessel called "Wonder Sea" had been carrying 49 people, including several children, around the Unesco World Heritage Site, according to provincial police. Hoang Quang rushed from Hanoi to Quang Ninh province at 2:00 am on Sunday for news of his cousin and her family who were on the boat when it capsized.

The couple — a housewife and fruit seller married to a bus driver — had "tried their best" to afford the trip around the world-famous bay. "They found the body of (the husband), not my cousin yet," Hoang said. He was "so shocked" when he heard news of the incident and immediately went to the wharf with other worried family members. "Suddenly the victims were my relatives -- anyone would be scared. We didn't know what to do, except to keep waiting," he said. "We think that as we are all here, she knew and she would show up. We are all so anxious... We just wish and pray for her to come back here to us."

At Ha Long city's main funeral home, journalists saw bodies wrapped in red cloth being carried in on stretchers, as friends and relatives cried in front of more than a dozen coffins. A 68-year-old man, who asked not to be named, rushed to the scene at 3:00 am, only to discover that his relatives had died in the capsizing.

The wreckage had been towed into the wharf by Sunday and 10 people were being treated at a nearby hospital. Security guard Nguyen Tuan Anh spent the night on the wharf where ambulances were waiting to carry the bodies away -- a scene he described as "painful". "I don't think I have experienced this scene before. This maybe the worst accident ever in Ha Long Bay," he said. "The whirlwind came so sudden and so big. The wind blew off the framework of a big stage for a grand music show nearby," he said.

Ha Long Bay is one of Vietnam's most popular tourist destinations, with millions of people visiting its blue-green waters and rainforest-topped limestone islands each year. Several hundred rescuers including professional divers, soldiers and firefighters joined the search for survivors through the night and heavy rain, state media said. — AFP

IRAN
REPLACES
AIR DEFENCE
SYSTEMS
DAMAGED
DURING WAR

TEHRAN: Iran has replaced the air defence systems damaged during its 12-day war with Israel last month, a senior army general said on Sunday according to state media. "The Zionist enemy sought to destroy Iran's defence capabilities, and some of our defence systems were damaged in that war," army operations chief Mahmoud Mousavi was quoted as saying by the official IRNA news agency. "The damaged defence systems have now been replaced," he added.

Iran's air defence network includes systems like the domestically built Bavar-373 and Khordad-15, designed to counter missiles and aircraft. Iran also installed Russia's S-300 air defence systems in 2016.

The war with Israel killed more than 1,000 people in Iran, while Iranian fire killed at least 28 people in Israel, according to authorities in each country. Israel's attacks targeted military infrastructure and nuclear facilities across Iran. On June 22, Israel's ally the

United States also carried out unprecedented strikes on Iranian nuclear sites at Fordo, Isfahan and Natanz. The full extent of the damage to Iran's nuclear programme remains unclear.

US President Donald Trump has insisted the sites were "completely destroyed", but US media reports have cast doubt on the severity of the damage.

On Friday, NBC News reported that only one of the three sites was mostly destroyed. — AFP

Calm returns to Syria
after violence killed 1,000

CALM returned to southern Syria's Sweida province on Sunday, a monitor and correspondents reported, after a week of sectarian violence between Druze fighters and rival groups that killed more than 1,000 people. A ceasefire announced on Saturday appeared to be holding after earlier agreements failed to end fighting between longtime rivals the Druze and the Bedouin that spiralled to draw in the government, the Israeli military and armed tribes from other parts of Syria.

Correspondents on the outskirts of Sweida city reported hearing no clashes on Sunday morning, with government forces deployed in some locations in the province to enforce the truce and at least one humanitarian convoy headed for the Druze-majority city. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that since around midnight, "Sweida has been experiencing a cautious calm", adding government security forces had blocked roads leading to the province in order to prevent tribal fighters from going there.

The Britain-based Observatory gave an updated toll on Sunday of more than 1,000 killed since the violence erupted a week ago, including 336 Druze fighters and 298 civilians from the minority group, as well as 342 government security personnel and 21 Bedouin. Witnesses, Druze factions and the Observatory have accused government forces of siding with the Bedouin and committing abuses including summary executions when they entered Sweida days ago.



Members of Internal Security Forces hold guns at an Internal Security Forces' checkpoint, in Sweida. — Reuters

A ceasefire announced on Saturday appeared to be holding after earlier agreements failed to end fighting between longtime rivals the Druze and the Bedouin that spiralled to draw in the government, the Israeli military and armed tribes from other parts of Syria

Hanadi Obeid, a 39-year-old doctor, said that "the city hasn't seen calm like this in a week".

The interior ministry said overnight that Sweida city was "evacuated of all tribal fighters, and clashes within the city's neighbourhoods were halted".

The Observatory had said Druze fighters retook control of the city on Saturday evening. Interim President Ahmed al Sharaa had on Saturday announced a fresh ceasefire in Sweida and renewed a pledge to protect Syria's ethnic minorities in the face of the latest sectarian violence since Syrians overthrew longtime ruler Bashar al Assad in December.

A spokesman for Syria's tribal and clan council said late on Saturday that fighters had left the city "in response to the call of the presidency and the terms of the

agreement". Another medic inside Sweida said that "the situation is totally calm... We aren't hearing clashes." "No medical or relief assistance has entered until now," the medic added, requesting anonymity due to the security situation.

State news agency SANA published images showing medical aid being prepared near the health ministry in Damascus and quoted Health Minister Musab al Ali as saying assistance would be delivered to Sweida's main hospital, where bodies have piled up. Inside the city, where around 150,000 people live, residents have been holed up in their homes without electricity and water, and food supplies have also been scarce. The United Nations said more than 128,000 people in Sweida province have been displaced. — AFP



SOUTH KOREA RAIN DEATH TOLL HITS 17

SEOUL: Heavy rain in South Korea has killed at least 17 people in recent days, government records showed on Sunday, while 11 remain unaccounted for in the intense downpours. South Korea typically experiences monsoon rains in July and is usually well-prepared. But this week, the country's southern regions were hit with some of the heaviest hourly rainfall on record, according to official data.

There was also a dangerous deluge in the north early on Sunday, with close to 170 millimetres of rain hitting Gapyeong county in Gyeonggi province, east of the capital Seoul, leaving at least two dead and five missing. — AFP

FRAUGHT RELATIONS

Eritrea warns Ethiopia against waging war



Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki has warned Ethiopia against launching a new war between the bitter foes, with tensions high in the Horn of Africa region. "If he thinks he can overwhelm (Eritrean forces) with human wave attack, (he is mistaken)," Afwerki said. "Before dragging the people of Ethiopia into unwanted wars or using them for another political agenda, the country's internal problems must be first addressed and solved," he said. — AFP

SECURITY OPERATION

Egypt foils 'terrorist' plot, kills suspects



Egypt said on Sunday two suspected militants were shot dead and a civilian killed in a shootout with security forces during a raid in Cairo that authorities said thwarted a "terrorist" plot. Police raided a "militant hideout" in Cairo's densely populated neighbourhood of Bulaq al Dakrou, the ministry said. During the raid, two suspects "began firing randomly at the forces and the surrounding area", resulting in their deaths and that of a passerby. — AFP

POWERFUL EARTHQUAKES

Tsunami alert lifted off Russian coast



A tsunami alert was lifted after a series of powerful earthquakes off the coast of Russia's far east on Sunday did not result in deadly waves. The US Geological Survey (USGS) issued a tsunami alert, forecasting "hazardous waves" after a 7.4-magnitude quake, which was the strongest of a series of earthquakes in the northern Pacific Ocean. The USGS said it expected waves of between 30 centimetres and one metre on Russian coasts. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, flanked by European officials, speaks to media, in Geneva. — Reuters

EU POWERS PLAN FRESH NUCLEAR TALKS WITH IRAN

BERLIN: Britain, France and Germany are planning to hold fresh talks with Iran on its nuclear programme in the coming days, a German diplomatic source said on Sunday. The European powers, known as the E3, “are in contact with Iran to schedule further talks for the coming week”, the source said, following warnings from the trio that international sanctions against Iran could be reactivated if Tehran does not resume negotiations. Tehran had agreed to hold talks with the three European countries, citing an unnamed source. Consultations are ongoing regarding a date and location for the talks, the report said. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held a call on Friday with his British, French and German counterparts and European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas. “Iran must never be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon. That is why Germany, France and the United Kingdom are continuing to work intensively in the E3 format to find a sustainable and verifiable diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear programme,” the German source said.

— AFP

GREECE ISSUES HEATWAVE WARNING



Greece’s weather service EMY on Sunday issued a warning for a new heatwave set to affect the Mediterranean country for the entire week. The heatwave will begin on Monday, will peak at an expected 43 degrees Celsius on Tuesday and will begin falling on Saturday, EMY said. “High temperatures are expected for almost the entire week starting on Monday,” the agency said. “The heatwave will likely end on Saturday,” it added.

— AFP

AUSTRALIA’S TASMANIA ON TRACK FOR MINORITY GOVT AFTER POLL

SYDNEY: Australia’s island state of Tasmania appeared on Sunday to be heading for a minority government as vote counting continued after an election that did not produce a clear winner. The conservative Liberal government was on track to win more seats than the main Labor opposition in the new parliament but would probably fall short of a majority after Saturday’s election, the Australian Broadcasting Corp. projected. The Liberals’ strong performance under Jeremy Rockliff,

premier since 2022, follows a heavy defeat suffered at May’s national election, which returned Anthony Albanese-led Labor for a second term with an increased majority. The vote showed Tasmanians have “no confidence in the Labor party to form government and they have voted to reendorse our Liberal government,” Rockliff said in televised remarks from the state capital of Hobart. The result for Labor, on track to win nine seats of a possible 35, was shaping as

the party’s worst-ever result in Tasmania, the Guardian Australia newspaper said. State Labor leader Dean Winter said the result was disappointing for the party, but he did not concede defeat. The election was triggered by a no-confidence vote against Rockliff initiated by Labor on concerns about public debt and plans to privatise assets. It came less than two years after the state’s most recent poll, in which a majority eluded the Liberals. — Reuters

Japan PM laments upper house election results

JAPAN’S shaky ruling coalition is likely to lose control of the upper house, exit polls showed after Sunday’s election, potentially heralding political turmoil as a tariff deadline with the United States looms. While the ballot does not directly determine whether Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba’s minority government falls, it heaps pressure on the embattled leader who also lost control of the more powerful lower house in October. Ishiba’s Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and coalition partner Komeito need 50 seats to secure the 248-seat upper chamber in an election where half the seats were up for grabs. They are forecast to hold 32 to 51 seats, the exit poll by public broadcaster NHK showed. Other broadcasters forecast the ruling coalition would return 41-43 seats. If the coalition drops below 46 seats, it would mark its worst result since it was formed in 1999.

That comes on top of its worst showing in 15 years in October’s lower house election, a vote which has left Ishiba’s administration vulnerable to no-confidence motions and calls from within his own party for leadership change. Speaking two hours after polls closed to public broadcaster NHK, Ishiba said he “solemnly” accepted the “harsh result”. Asked whether he intended to stay on as prime minister and party leader, he said “that’s right”. “We are engaged in extremely critical tariff negotiations with the United States...we must never ruin these negotiations. It is only natural to devote our complete dedication and energy to realizing our national interests,” he later told TV Tokyo.

Japan, the world’s fourth largest economy, faces a deadline of August 1 to strike a trade deal with the United States or face punishing tariffs in its largest export market. The main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party is projected to win 18 to 30 seats, from 22 held previously, NHK’s exit poll showed. The far-right Sanseito party, birthed on YouTube a few years ago, has been the surprise package with its ‘Japanese First’ campaign and warnings about a “silent invasion” of



Shigeru Ishiba, Japan’s PM and president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), walks in front of a board with showing elected candidates at the LDP headquarters, in Tokyo. — Reuters

foreigners. It is forecast to win 10-15 seats in the chamber, up from one held previously, yet it holds only three seats in the lower house. Opposition parties advocating for tax cuts and welfare spending have struck a chord with voters, the exit polls showed, as rising consumer prices - particularly a jump in the cost of rice - have sowed frustration at the government’s response. “The LDP was largely playing defence in this election, being on the wrong side of a key voter issue,” said David Boling, a director at consulting firm Eurasia Group. “Polls show that most households want a cut to the consumption tax to address inflation, something that the LDP opposes. Opposition parties seized on it and hammered that message home.” The LDP has been urging for fiscal restraint, with one eye on a very jittery government bond market, as investors worry about Japan’s ability to refinance the world’s largest debt pile. Sanseito, which first emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic spreading conspiracy theories about vaccinations and a cabal

of global elites, has dragged once-fringe political rhetoric into the mainstream and gained wider support among frustrated voters. It remains to be seen whether the party can follow the path of other far-right parties with which it has drawn comparisons, such as Germany’s AFD and Reform UK. “I am attending graduate school but there are no Japanese around me. All of them are foreigners,” said Yu Nagai, a 25-year-old student who voted for Sanseito earlier on Sunday. “When I look at the way compensation and money are spent on foreigners, I think that Japanese people are a bit disrespected,” Nagai said after casting his ballot at a polling station in Tokyo’s Shinjuku ward. Japan, the world’s oldest society, saw foreign-born residents hit a record of about 3.8 million last year. That is still just 3 per cent of the total population, a much smaller fraction than in the United States and Europe, but comes amid a tourism boom that has made foreigners far more visible across the country. — Reuters

Ukraine proposes fresh peace talks with Russia next week

KYIV: Kyiv has proposed to Moscow a new round of peace talks next week, Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky said, hours after Russian strikes across Ukraine claimed more lives. Two rounds of talks in Istanbul between Moscow and Kyiv have failed to result in any progress towards a ceasefire, instead yielding large-scale prisoner exchanges and deals to return the bodies of killed soldiers. “Security Council Secretary Umerov... reported that he had proposed the next meeting with the Russian side for next week,” Zelensky said in his evening address. “The momentum of the negotiations must be stepped up,” he added. Zelensky reiterated his readiness to have a face-to-face sitdown with Putin. “A meeting at the leadership level is needed to truly ensure peace - lasting peace,” he said. At talks last month, Russia outlined a list of hardline demands,

including calls for Ukraine to cede more territory and to reject all forms of Western military support. Kyiv dismissed them as unacceptable and at the time questioned the point of further negotiations if Moscow was not willing to make concessions. The Kremlin said earlier this month it was ready to continue talks with Ukraine after US President Donald Trump gave Russia 50 days to strike a peace deal or face sanctions. Trump also pledged to supply Kyiv with new military aid, sponsored by Nato allies, as its cities suffer ever-increasing Russian aerial attacks. Russia has escalated long-range aerial attacks on Ukrainian cities as well as frontline assaults and shelling over recent months, defying Trump’s warning. Most lately on Saturday, it had fired missile and drone strikes that killed three people across



A woman removes a broken glass in a damaged apartment building. — Reuters

Ukraine. Two people died after a Russian missile hit Ukraine’s central Dnipropetrovsk region, an important industrial hub, into

which Russia’s forces have recently advanced. An earlier Russian salvo of 20 drones on the Ukrainian port

city of Odesa killed at least one person overnight. Russia had to suspend trains for about four hours overnight, causing extensive delays in the southern Rostov region, when it came under a Ukrainian drone attack that wounded one railway worker. Moscow and Kyiv are menacing each other with swarms of cheap drones to overwhelm each other’s air defence, as the warring sides said on Saturday they had intercepted hundreds of drones, now launched in large amounts almost daily. As part of the Istanbul agreements, Kyiv received 1,000 soldiers’ bodies on Thursday, while Russia said it had received 19 from Ukraine. The European Union on Friday agreed an 18th package of sanctions on Moscow that targets Russian banks and lowers a price cap on oil exports, in a bid to curb its ability to fund the war. — AFP

OPINION

Why grades no longer define the future



SANDHYA
RAO MEHTA

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THE school-leaving grade 12 results were announced last week in Oman, and as always, there were tears of joy and disappointment. Many students may have felt they got rewarded for their hard work while others may have felt short changed.

The comforting thought is that today, these summative academic results don't mean much. In fact, an average result is not indicative of any future plans a student may have.

Education is being re-defined today in ways which one could not imagine at the turn of this century. Having standardised school-leaving final exams may be important, but they are not reflective of individual interests, capabilities, or even general intelligence.

Research has well established the fact that individuals have unique skills and interests, not all of which are reflected in written exam conditions. To a large extent, exams mainly test memorisation skills and the capacity to perform a task within a specific time limit.

Such settings don't take into account late bloomers. It is quite challenging to be all sorted by 16 or 17 years. All that one can

accomplish at this age is regurgitate others' opinions and narratives.

There are also new challenges which need unusual approaches. In fact, a major impact of the immersion of Artificial Intelligence in every sector of our world is the falling back on traditional trade and industries.

A recent survey by the Economic Times showed that youngsters were turning back to trade careers which are more hands-on and more resistant to challenges that technology will keep introducing. Such a 'countercultural' move is not just a passing trend, but a dynamic shift which reflects the market.

The case of a college in the United States offering specialisations in welding is relevant.

The new programme established by the college would create niche opportunities in specific avenues, including welding in submarines. Such programmes are seen to be 'AI-proofing' while also giving more choices to school leaving students to take up a variety of professional options.

In fact, the very skills that the market requires now – critical thinking,

Youngsters were
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introducing

collaboration, communication and adaptability, are not necessarily provided by a secondary or even tertiary degree. Personal networking and showcasing portfolios work well than passively applying to all possible jobs. These are affective skills which develop over time, practice and implementation, not rote learning.

In many ways, this is an exciting time for those seeking new avenues. Whether being a start-up in an emerging industry, a content creator or engaging in other creative sectors, the possibilities are immense.

Of course, none of this is possible without determination, hard work and passion. Being, and staying invested in off-course careers, requires far more resilience than traditional jobs, but it can be more rewarding.

The take-away from the results just announced is not that it is a judgement on performance but that it is only a step in a journey of self-discovery.

It is only a first, but important step in discovering exactly what one's interests are, and how to move forward. Remembering that this one grade is not life-changing, is perhaps the most important lesson.

Western aid cuts cede ground to China in Southeast Asia: Sutdy

Sydney: China is set to expand its influence over Southeast Asia's development as the Trump administration and other Western donors slash aid, a study by an Australian think tank said on Sunday.

The region is in an "uncertain moment", facing cuts in official development finance from the West as well as "especially punitive" US trade tariffs, the Sydney-based Lowy Institute said.

Total official development finance to Southeast Asia – including grants, low-rate loans and other loans – grew "modestly" to \$29 billion in 2023, the annual report said. But US President Donald Trump has since halted about \$60 billion in development assistance – most of the US's overseas aid programme. Seven European countries – including France and Germany – and the European Union have announced \$17.2 billion in aid cuts to be implemented between 2025 and 2029, it said. And the UK has said it is reducing annual aid by \$7.6 billion, redirecting government money towards defence. Based on recent announcements, overall official development finance to Southeast Asia will fall by more than \$2 billion by 2026, the study projected. "Poorer countries and social sector priorities such as health, education, and civil society support that rely on bilateral aid funding are likely to lose out the most."

Higher-income countries already capture most of the region's official development finance, said the institute's Southeast Asia Aid Map report.

Poorer countries such as East Timor, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar are being left behind, creating a deepening divide that could undermine long-term stability, equity and resilience, it warned.

Despite substantial economic development across most of Southeast Asia, around 86 million people still live on less than \$3.65 a day, it said.

As trade ties with the US have weakened, Southeast Asian countries' development options could shrink, it said, leaving them with less leverage to negotiate favourable terms with Beijing. Beijing's development finance to the region rose by \$1.6 billion to \$4.9 billion in 2023 – mostly through big infrastructure projects such as rail links in Indonesia and Malaysia, the report said.

At the same time, China's infrastructure commitments to Southeast Asia surged fourfold to almost \$10 billion, largely due to the revival of the Kyaukphyu Deep Sea Port project in Myanmar.

By contrast, Western infrastructure projects had failed to materialise, the study said. "Similarly, Western promises to support the region's clean energy transition have yet to translate into more projects on the ground – of global concern given coal-dependent Southeast Asia is a major source of rapidly growing carbon emissions." — AFP

The Mossad inside Iran: Where were nine bullets?

THE recent Israeli-American strikes on Iran have reignited debates about a troubling reality: the Mossad's successful infiltration of Iranian territory and its ability to carry out precise and damaging operations deep inside the country. High-profile assassinations, targeted bombings, and the compromise of nuclear facilities raise serious questions about how Israeli intelligence has manoeuvred so freely, and why Iranian security agencies failed to detect and stop such breaches.

Che Guevara once said, "If you want to liberate a nation, load your gun with ten bullets – nine for the traitors within, and one for the external enemy. If not for the traitors, the enemy would never dare attack." Guevara's statement encapsulates the Iranian dilemma. Tehran seems to have waited too long to aim those metaphorical nine bullets inward. Despite numerous arrests and even executions of alleged collaborators, the real players – those in influential positions – appear untouched.

In a striking moment in 2021, former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad revealed in a televised interview that Iran's top counterintelligence official was himself an Israeli spy. He highlighted how Mossad agents managed to steal truckloads of sensitive documents, questioning how such an operation passed through checkpoints unnoticed.

The operation in question took place in January 2018, as confirmed by former Mossad chief Yossi Cohen in an interview with Israeli Channel 12. The stolen files related to Iran's nuclear and space programmes were later revealed by Israel as a major intelligence triumph. But rather than shake the Iranian establishment into a deep internal reckoning, these revelations were met with limited action. Assassinations of scientists



ZAHIR
AL MAHROUQI

The writer is
author of 'The
Road to Jerusalem'

The Iranian
breach – despite
the country's
strong military
and intelligence
capabilities – sends
a sobering message
to the Gulf. It's not
just the strength of
your military that
ensures security,
but your vigilance
against traitors
within.

continued. Explosions struck military sites. Israeli agents reportedly reached the very heart of Iran's Revolutionary Guard command.

Following the most recent Israeli air strikes, Iranian authorities announced the arrest of 18 alleged Mossad operatives in Mashhad, accused of manufacturing suicide and reconnaissance drones. Reports suggest the plan had been to eliminate senior Iranian figures on the ground while Israel launched air strikes from above. Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf later admitted that "a large part of the enemy's operations are carried out through infiltrators from within."

While Tehran has now launched a campaign against espionage—with more than 700 arrests reported in 12 days – the sheer scale of infiltration points to a longstanding and well-entrenched network. The critical question now is: why do citizens become willing tools of foreign intelligence services?

Iranian media argue that Mossad exploits economic hardship and social marginalisation, particularly among minorities. The use of encrypted apps and cryptocurrency helps facilitate the secure transfer of intelligence.

Recruits, reportedly trained in countries like Georgia and Nepal, are equipped with tools and knowledge to operate covertly. And while poverty may explain the motivations of some, the more unsettling reality is the presence of wealthy and influential collaborators – those whose betrayals are not born of desperation but opportunism.

Israel's deep interest in Iran is hardly a secret. According to Ronen Bergman's book 'Rise and Kill First: The Secret History of Israel's Targeted Assassinations', Mossad's former chief Meir Dagan prioritised the Iranian nuclear threat when he assumed leadership in 2002.

Dagan restructured the agency around two goals: preventing Iran's acquisition of nuclear capabilities and countering armed movements like Hezbollah and Hamas. His 2003 strategy included a combination of sabotage, assassinations, cyber warfare, support for opposition groups, and economic pressure.

The story is all there in Bergman's book – published in 2018, well before the recent strikes. This brings us to a troubling question: with so much information already public, why wasn't Iran prepared?

The conversation has now widened to include concerns across the region. Gulf nations are questioning their own security vulnerabilities, especially in light of reports that some Asian companies working in the Gulf have connections with Mossad. These revelations, surfacing after the Israeli strikes, raise alarm over potential breaches across multiple sectors, particularly as many Gulf states rely heavily on foreign contractors.

The Iranian breach – despite the country's strong military and intelligence capabilities—sends a sobering message to the Gulf. It's not just the strength of your military that ensures security, but your vigilance against traitors within. Gulf citizens have voiced growing concerns online about "fifth column" elements operating under the guise of expatriate labour or business partnerships. The fear is not just espionage, but betrayal from those benefiting from the country's wealth while working for its enemies.

Ultimately, no foreign adversary can inflict such damage without help from within. It's not just the enemy at your door – it's the one already inside your house.

Translated by **Badr al Dhafri**.
The original version of this article was published in Arabic in the print edition of the Oman Daily newspaper on July 14.

Have one breath at a time



ABDULAZIZ AL JAHDHAMI

The writer is author, translator and a communications professional

LIFE rarely knocks. It storms sometimes with thunder, other times with sunshine. One moment, you are sipping your morning coffee in peace; the next, you are blind-sided by a challenge or disappointment. That is the beautiful and confusing rhythm of being alive. Unexpected challenges can emerge at any moment.

As it is often said, no soul walks this earth untouched by hardship. Whether it is a silent disappointment, a loud failure, or the quiet pain of uncertainty, life always finds a way to stretch us. Sometimes, it whispers, sometimes it shouts, but always, it pushes us to grow. Still, it is not the question life throws at us that defines us, it is our answer that matters most! Each sunrise brings with it a mystery box of surprises. Will it contain joy, confusion, peace or pressure? Perhaps all of it. No two days are ever the same. But the secret is not in the contents of the box, it is in how we choose to open it. Our reactions shape our reality. Two people can face the same storm: one panics, the other dances. Why? Because while we can't always control what arrives at our doorstep, we can choose how we greet it.

Therefore, the real question is not if we

will face difficulty, but how we will handle it. Some of us are easily overwhelmed by stress or self-doubt. Others seem to rise above the noise, responding with grace, patience, or a deep breath before the storm consumes the calm. What sets them apart? Not luck or immunity from hardship; something far more powerful called patience.

That may sound simple, but true patience is a silent strength. It is not just the act of waiting; it is how we wait. It is breathing through the panic, staying kind in the face of cruelty. It is the choice to pause when every muscle wants to react. Think of patience like a muscle: every time we use it when we resist breaking or keep going despite setbacks, it grows stronger. And over time, that muscle doesn't just carry us, but it lifts us.

Patience is the quiet decision to hold back a harsh reaction and think clearly when emotions want to take over. As Aristotle once said, "Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet." And that fruit is wisdom, resilience and peace, the kind that doesn't crush under pressure. As another saying goes, "A minute of patience can lead to ten years of peace." What if, instead of reacting instantly to every frustration, we gave ourselves a minute to pause? A moment to reframe the situation,

And when life sends winds that shake your foundation, don't panic. Pause, breathe and listen. Within the noise, there is a lesson and within the struggle, there is a seed. Let patience be the soil, and positivity the sun.

to choose a kinder response, or to remember that even the worst days eventually pass. Yes, challenges may never stop arriving, but neither does our capacity to grow stronger, kinder and wiser through each one. Maybe that is what life is really offering us; not problems, but opportunities to become more of who we are meant to be.

So, the next time life throws you a struggle, remember that storms pass and emotions settle. The best thing you can do is sit quietly, wait patiently and trust that the sun will return because it always does.

And when life sends winds that shake your foundation, don't panic. Pause, breathe and listen. Within the noise, there is a lesson and within the struggle, there is a seed. Let patience be the soil, and positivity the sun. Remember, you are bigger than your hardest day, stronger than your deepest fear, and brighter than any shadow that crosses your path.

Above all, never forget the curious way life operates, it doesn't ask for permission, and it doesn't follow a schedule. Its challenges come unannounced, as if to keep us on our toes or perhaps to teach us something new each day. Sometimes, life may whisper in storms, but you were born to dance in the rain.

DEEP-SEA MINING MAY CAUSE PERMANENT DAMAGE

AMELIE BOTTOLLIER-DEPOIS

Scientists present at the latest effort to hash out international rules for deep-sea mining say it's unclear if it's possible to restore damaged sea floor ecosystems — or how long it would take.

One of the last wild zones on the planet, the sea floor is a coveted frontier for companies and countries eager to access minerals that are in high demand for emerging technologies such as electric cars.

Particularly coveted are potato-sized nodules containing cobalt, nickel, copper and manganese, that are found in abundance on the seabed in the central Pacific Ocean.

Companies eager to vacuum up these polymetallic nodules say they can do it with minimal risk to the deep-sea environment.

But ocean defenders have battled against what they see as the advent of an industry that will threaten isolated ecosystems that are not yet well understood.

That threat was underscored by European scientists who presented findings this week on the sidelines of a meeting in Kingston, Jamaica of the International Seabed Authority, which is trying to finalise future rules for seabed mining.

"If we remove nodules from the seabed, we do not know what we lose, only that it's lost forever," was one of the conclusions of Deep Rest, a sea floor conservation research project.

The Deep Rest study cautioned against using seabed restoration "as a management action for impacted habitats." "So far, all the restoration operations we have attempted within our Deep Rest project have been short-term. And what we observed, is that in the given time, that is to say a few years, the ecosystems do not recover," said Jozee Sarrazin, a researcher at the French Institute for Ocean Science, or Ifremer.

"If restoration is possible, it will take a very long time, and at the moment we don't have the data to be able to say if that will be 100 years or 1,000 years," the Deep Rest coordinator said.

Despite the pressure, the cold, the total darkness, and the lack of nutrition sources at the bottom of the ocean, it is teeming with life.

The number of species who live on the deep seabed is not yet known but estimated to be in the millions.

Broad swathes of the Pacific Ocean where polymetallic nodules are found shelter fauna such as sponges, soft corals or sea anemones.

The fauna "only exists in these areas because they need the hard substrate of the nodule to attach," said Matthias Haeckel of the German research centre GEOMAR, which presented results of the MiningImpact project in Kingston this week.

Vacuuming up these nodules and spreading sediment over the impacted areas reduces population densities, biodiversity and the functioning of ecosystems, MiningImpact's study found.

"To make the story short, in the end, we're talking about recovery times of thousands of years," Haeckel said. The nodules themselves form over millions of years. — AFP

MAGA's new target: Trump

PEOPLE

often become what they scorn. Donald Trump has become the deep state.

He is the keeper of the secrets. He is the one stealing away people's liberties. He is the one weaponising government and protecting the ruling class.

With Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Department of Government Efficiency, Trump deputised wolf packs to root around in Americans' personal information. He got Republicans to give Stephen Miller his own army. Trump manipulates government to hurt his perceived enemies. He obscures rather than reveals, pushing aside reporters who ask penetrating questions in favour of Pravda-like partisans who take his side.

Trump's supporters thought he would shed light on shady elites protecting their own money and power. Now MAGA is reckoning with the fact that Trump is the shady elite, shielding information about Jeffrey Epstein.

"So the guy who spent his lifetime saying the deep state hides things from you and represses you is now saying, 'We've got nothing to hide, trust me,'" said Trump biographer Tim O'Brien. "And the people who follow him don't. They think he's just as bad as the people he criticised before he became president."

It's mythic, being devoured by the forces you unleashed. Trump has trafficked in conspiracy theories since the despicable "birther" one about Barack Obama. Now that whirlpool of dark innuendo has sucked him down. He can no longer control the Epstein conspiracy madness inflamed by his top officials.

Trump always reminded me of Lonesome Rhodes, a charismatic, populist entertainer whose "candid" patter with plain folks garners him enormous power in Elia Kazan's 1957 movie, "A Face in the Crowd." At the finale, Andy Griffith's Rhodes — engorged by flattery and riches — has a narcissistic explosion.

Trump's Truth Social posts backing up Pam Bondi's claim that the Epstein files were much ado about nothing showed that same brutal disregard for his devout fans. They had taken him seriously? What fools! He said that those who are focused on the "Jeffrey Epstein hoax" are "selfish people," "PAST supporters" and "weaklings" who



Trump's supporters thought he would shed light on shady elites protecting their own money and power. Now MAGA is reckoning with the fact that Trump is the shady elite, shielding information about Jeffrey Epstein.



MAUREEN BRIGID DOWD

The writer is an American columnist for The New York Times and an author

had been "conned by the Lunatic Left." If his fans couldn't focus on how great he was, better than "perhaps any President in our Country's history," Trump pouted in a post, "I don't want their support anymore!" One "gal," a Texan named Rosie, said she was broken-hearted. She replied on Truth Social that she has four daughters and "can't even begin to comprehend the flipped narrative that 'it was so long ago' 'why are we still talking about this' and 'nobody should care.' These victims were some ones daughters, sisters, nieces, granddaughter. Someone's child. Please reconsider, sir."

Trump bonded with Epstein years ago, although it's not clear if Trump knew the extent of Epstein's predations.

Trump, who rose to power with the help of Fox News, threatened Emma Tucker, editor of Rupert Murdoch's Wall Street Journal, trying to stop its story about a letter and drawing he allegedly contributed to a 50th birthday book

that Ghislaine Maxwell compiled for Epstein.

On Thursday, Trump posted that he had asked Bondi to produce "any and all pertinent Grand Jury testimony, subject to Court approval." But judges usually keep such testimony secret. It was hilarious to see Trump hiding behind the judiciary he has tried to sideline.

Natalie Winters, a reporter for Steve Bannon's "War Room" podcast, told Bannon that the Journal story made her feel "gaslit" by the administration. "I thought the DOJ had nothing related to Epstein," she said. "Well, this story sort of contradicts that. So why don't we release it? It's maddening." Twisting conspiracy theories into a Gordian knot of hate, Trump is claiming some Epstein files were "made up" by Barack Obama, James Comey, "Losers and Criminals of the Biden Administration" and "Crooked Hillary." It's tough to blame the deep state when you are the deep state.

— The New York Times

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



The Junior Hockey League continues on Monday with three matches in the second round

AHLI SIDAB, MASIRAH DOMINATE U-18 LEAGUE OPENERS

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

Ahli Sidab team secured a sweeping 10-0 victory over Al Nahda in the opening match of the Junior U-18 Hockey League , within the first group competitions, held at the Oman Hockey Complex in Al Amerat.

Ahli Sidab started the game strongly, opening the scoring early in the 3rd minute through player Rashid al Alawi. Despite Al Nahda’s efforts to find an equaliser, both teams exchanged chances until Ahli Sidab doubled their lead in the 14th minute with a goal by Haitham al Wahaibi, ending the first quarter 2-0.

In the second quarter, Al Nahda showed improvement and sought to reduce the gap, but Ahli Sidab maintained their lead, keeping the score unchanged at 2-0 by the end of the quarter.

The third quarter saw Ahli Sidab increase their tally, with Saeed al Fazari scoring the third goal in the 33rd minute. He then added the fourth goal in the 41st minute, ending the quarter 4-0 in favor of Ahli Sidab.

In the final quarter, Al Nahda’s performance dropped noticeably, allowing Ahli Sidab to dominate and control the match. Haitham al Wahaibi scored the fifth goal in the 45th minute, followed by Rashid al Alawi’s sixth in the 46th. The goals kept coming as Saeed al Fazari netted the seventh in the 48th minute, then Anas al Siyabi added the eighth in the 49th, and again in the 50th minute with the ninth. Haitham al Wahaibi completed the goal festival with the tenth in the 52nd minute, sealing a well deserved 10-0 win for Ahli Sidab.

Meanwhile, Masirah also registered a dominant win, defeating Saham 11-0 in the opening match of Group Two, held at Sohar Sports Complex.

The first quarter was balanced, with both teams exchanging attacks. In the 12th minute, Abbas al Noufali broke the deadlock by scoring the opening goal for Masirah. Saham attempted to level the score in the remaining minutes, but the quarter ended 1-0 for Masirah.

In the second quarter, Al Noufali returned to score the second goal from a penalty corner in the 17th minute. Just a minute later, his teammate Al Qasim Said scored the third goal. Al Noufali then completed his hat trick with Masirah’s fourth goal, ending the quarter 4-0.

Early in the third quarter, Al Fadhl al Noufali added the fifth, followed by Abbas al Noufali’s fourth personal and the team’s sixth goal. Masirah continued their dominance as Al Qasim Said scored the seventh in the 42nd minute, ending the quarter 7-0.

In the final quarter, Al Qasim Said scored the eighth goal, followed by another from Abbas al Noufali, making it 9 0. With Sohar struggling, Al Qasim Said completed his hat trick with the tenth goal in the 55th minute. In the final minute, Abbas al Noufali scored the eleventh and final goal, completing Masirah’s emphatic 1-0 win.

The Junior Hockey League continues today (Monday) with three matches in the second round. The first game will see Al Salam face Ahli Sidab at the Sohar Sports Complex. The second match features Seeb against Masirah at Seeb Club’s hockey field. The round concludes with a match between Al Ittihad and Salalah at the Sultan Qaboos Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah. All matches will kick off at 5 pm.

Oman thrash Kuwait in West Asia volley tourney

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

THE Oman national men’s volleyball team began its historic participation in the West Asia Men’s Volleyball Championship with a well-deserved and exciting straight-sets victory (3-0) over Kuwait. The match took place at the Isa Bin Rashid Hall in the Bahraini capital, Manama, as part of Group B competition in the championship, which continues until July 27 with the participation of eight teams from the West Asia region.

From the outset, Oman displayed a disciplined and cohesive performance, asserting dominance throughout most of the match while executing head coach Reza Hossein Vakili’s tactical instructions effectively. The Iranian coach’s thorough preparation was evident in the team’s impressive continental debut.

Despite Kuwait’s strong start and early lead in the first set, the Omani players entered the court with visible confidence. As the set neared its decisive moments, Oman regained control, relying on powerful back-row attacks and improved service and reception to clinch the set 25-23. The second set saw complete Omani superiority.

The team excelled in blocking and powerful serves, coupled with varied offensive plays that unsettled the Kuwaiti side, who struggled to match Oman’s high tempo. Oman won the set with a



The Omani team is now preparing for a challenging match on Monday against Saudi Arabia

Oman team is now preparing for a challenging match today, against Saudi Arabia in the third round of group-stage matches

wide margin, 25-15. In the third set, Kuwait attempted a comeback and delivered a more composed performance. However, Oman maintained its rhythm through tactical discipline and composure under pressure. After several lead exchanges, the Omani players sealed the set 25-23, completing a straight-sets win.

Oman scored a total of 75 points in the match, committing only

Al Riyami outlines key factors for Oman in Asian Qualifiers

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

As the national team gear up for the crucial and decisive phase of the AFC Asian Qualifiers — Road to Fifa World Cup 2026, Veteran football coach Abdulaziz al Riyami shared his in-depth analysis and expectations to Oman Observer for the national team success under newly appointed head coach Carlos Queiroz. The decisive phase will see Oman competing in Group A alongside hosts Qatar and the UAE as the matches scheduled for October in Doha city.

Coach al Riyami, experienced in Omani football, affirmed that the appointment of Queiroz could be a game-changer due to the Portuguese coach’s extensive international experience. “Queiroz’s proven track record in high-pressure qualifiers will be instrumental in mentally and tactically preparing our squad,” he said.

The former coach of Oman Military team highlighted on the key factory that can depended by coach Queiroz.

According to al Riyami, the pre-playoff training camp must be well-structured and cohesive to build chemistry and fine-tune the tactical system ahead of the crucial matches which are scheduled in October 8 to 14. “ Queiroz will may introduce a fresh



Oman competes in Group A alongside hosts Qatar and the UAE

technical and tactical identity for Oman, different from the previous style. Oman will likely adopt either a 4-2-3-1 or 4-3-3 formation under the new coach. These systems will offer a blend of defensive strength and attacking fluidity. The first formation, 4-2-3-1, will provide defensive stability through two holding midfielders while allowing creative play behind the striker. The second, 4-3-3, emphasizes midfield control and rapid transitions,



COACH
ABDULAZIZ
AL RIYAMI

especially using the wide players,” he explained

KEY PLAYERS
The Football filed Manager in Bahla club shared his expectations about the players who are likely to be pivotal in the upcoming campaign. “ Queiroz is expected to depend on the experienced players with emerging talents by selecting those who exhibit tactical discipline and a clear understanding of their roles. Goalkeepers including

Faiz al Rushaidi may remain the first choice due to his experience though Ibrahim al Mukhaini is another option depending on fitness.

In defence, Ahmed al Khamisi and Thani al Rushaidi are expected to anchor the central positions while Amjad al Harthy and Ali al Busaidy will play key roles as full-backs contributing to both defense and attack. In the midfield, Harib al Saadi is likely to play a central role in controlling the tempo, supported by attacking midfielders like Yazid al Maashani or Arshad al Alawi. Creative duties may be taken up by Salah al Yahyaee or Jameel al Yahmadi.

In the forward line, Al Riyami pointed to Abdulrahman al Mushaifri, Mohsin al Ghassani, and Issam al Subhi as players who offer pace and versatility, with Omar al Malki or a clinical finisher like al Subhi or al Ghassani possibly leading the attack,” he said.

Discussing the playing style, Former coach of Fanja, Al Bashayer, Ahli Sidab, Nizwa, Qurayat and Bahla explained that Queiroz will likely emphasize a compact and well-organised defensive structure starting from the front line. “Players will be tasked with closing down passing lanes and applying intelligent pressure.

SHORTTAKES



France's Lois Boisson celebrates with her trophy after winning the WTA tennis tournament in Hamburg. — AFP

BOISSON WINS MAIDEN WTA TITLE IN HAMBURG

HAMBURG: French number one Lois Boisson battled to her first WTA title on clay in Hamburg on Sunday with a straight sets win over Hungary's Anna Bondar.

A surprise Roland Garros semifinalist last month, Boisson won 7-5, 6-3 to give France a first success on the WTA circuit since Caroline Garcia at the season-ending Tour Finals in November 2022.

"This is the first time I've given a (tournament winner's) speech, so please bear with me," the 22-year-old said before offering a simple "Danke" ("Thank you") to the German crowd.

Fifth seed Boisson rallied from 5-2 down in the first set and survived a break in the second. Boisson hit headlines last month when as a wild card in her Grand Slam main-draw debut and ranked 361st in the world she reached the French Open last four before being beaten by eventual winner Coco Gauff. Boisson, now ranked 63rd and set to join the top 50 on Monday, lost her first qualifying match on grass at Wimbledon, but back on her favoured surface clay returned to winning ways. Bondar, ranked 77, had got off to a flying start with a double-break for 4-0. The Hungarian served for the set at 5-2, but was unable to close in that game, and Boisson took full advantage. The Frenchwoman wrapped up her first-set comeback with another break, winning the last five games in a row. At the start of the second set, Bondar, who won the final on this same court last year when the tournament was not yet a WTA 250 event, broke serve.

But Boisson erased the break with a dropshot winner to earn a love break and pull back on serve at 3-3.

She dug deep to break for 5-3, staving off a break point in the last game and grabbed her first WTA title. — AFP



Ducati Lenovo Team's Marc Marquez celebrates with a trophy on the podium after winning the MotoGP race. — Reuters

Marc Marquez cruises to Czech MotoGP win

MARC Marquez won the Czech MotoGP on Sunday for his eighth victory in 12 races this season and fifth in a row, extending his commanding lead in the world championship.

The factory Ducati rider beat Marco Bezzecchi on an Aprilia by almost two seconds, while Pedro Acosta on a KTM came in third in his first race podium finish of the season.

Marquez had a fifth straight perfect weekend, winning both the sprint on Saturday and Sunday's race.

The 32-year-old Spaniard now leads the world championship with 381 points, 120 ahead of his younger brother Alex who crashed, and 168 ahead of Ducati teammate Francesco Bagnaia. Bagnaia started from pole on a sunny Sunday at Brno but only retained the lead until the second lap when Bezzecchi eased past him, with Marquez following suit soon afterwards.

Acosta did the same to settle down in third after getting a boost from a third-place finish in Saturday's sprint.

Marquez glided past Bezzecchi in lap eight as the runaway trio kept building up their lead, and as so often this season kept widening the gap comfortably.

The three stayed put until the finish line, although fourth-placed Bagnaia gave Acosta a hard time pressing from behind.

Reigning world champion Jorge Martin collected his first points after finishing seventh in the first race he has completed this year.

Martin sat out the first three races following two pre-season crashes, and when he returned at Qatar in April, he crashed heavily again during the race and missed the next seven.

Alex Marquez retired after crashing in lap two to leave Brno without a point following a disappointing 17th spot in the sprint race.

He took out Joan Mir who also walked away from the gravel safety area, just like Enea Bastianini a lap later.

The MotoGP circus will now take a summer break and resume with the Austrian GP on August 15-17. — AFP

Germany defeat France in shootout to reach Euro semis

BASEL: Ann-Katrin Berger pulled off a stunning final save as Germany beat France 6-5 in a penalty shootout to set up a Euro 2025 semifinal showdown with world champions Spain after a bruising encounter that ended 1-1 after extra time on Saturday. The Germans pulled off a superb comeback from a goal down and a straight red card for defender Kathrin Hendrich after 13 minutes, battling their way back into the game and eventually getting the better of their opponents in a thrilling shootout. Hendrich was sent off after a VAR review established that she had pulled the hair of Griedge Mbock Bathy in the box, and Grace Geyoro's subsequent penalty had the power to get over the line despite Berger getting a strong hand to it. On the ropes and struggling, the Germans suddenly levelled, Sjoeke Nuesken catching the defence napping by darting towards Klara Buehl's near-post corner and flashing a header into the net in the 25th minute.

With the well-organised Germans defending doggedly, France had two goals ruled out for offside and Nuesken had a second-half penalty saved.

Even before the penalty shootout, Berger pulled off a contender for the 'save of the tournament', back-peddalling before diving acrobatically to claw away Janina Minge's misdirected defensive header and



Germany's defender #04 Rebecca Knaak (Top-L) and France's forward #09 Melvine Malard (Top-R) jump to head the ball during the UEFA Women's Euro 2025 quarter finals football match. — AFP



keep the scores level.

With neither side managing to score in extra time the game went to penalties, and Berger got the shootout off to a great start for the Germans by saving from Amel Majri, but they were brought back to level pegging when Sara Daebtritz struck her spot kick off the crossbar and over the goal. Berger, a cancer survivor who sports a tattoo to cover up a scar from her treatment that says "All we have is now", then fired home from the spot herself before making her decisive save. She dived to her left to deny 21-year-old defender Alice Sombath, sending the Germans through to the last four.

They will face Spain on Wednesday, a day after England face Italy in the other semifinal.

"For large parts of the game, you wouldn't notice we were one (player) less. I am incredibly proud," Germany captain Minge said of her side's resilient comeback.

"I have to say, the fans were unbelievable. I don't know if I have ever experienced anything like that. You could see that we are ready for

something big."

"We know we'd done the hardest thing by opening the scoring against a team reduced to 10 (players). Penalties are difficult, we know that, and it's a shame for Alice because she's young and learning. You also have to take your hat off to Germany," dejected France coach Laurent Bonadei said. — AFP



UAE Team Emirates XRG's Tim Wellens celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win stage 15 on Sunday. — Reuters

WELLENS WINS TOUR DE FRANCE STAGE 15, POGACAR KEEPS LEAD

TIM WELLENS of Team UAE won a baking and hilly stage 15 of the Tour de France at Carcassonne on Sunday after a 45 km solo rampage towards the walled citadel.

Overall leader Tadej Pogacar held on to the overall lead with a 4min 13sec advantage on Jonas Vingegaard, who had to fight to catch up when caught behind an early mass fall.

Wellens had been part of an early break which only really got away once the fall sent a shockwave through the race.

It was a large and mixed group that was whittled down to five before the Belgian champion suddenly accelerated and caught the others napping.

This was a fifth win for Team UAE with Pogacar previously having won four stages on a thoroughly dominant Tour for the team.

Wellens was so far ahead at the finish line he had time to high five dozens of Belgian fans on the run in on the eve of Belgium's national holiday.

"This makes me happier than winning a stage myself," said Pogacar. "He helps me keep this thing every day," he said pointing to the jersey.

Having previously won stages on the Giro d'Italia and the Vuelta a Espana this triumph completes the set of stage wins on the three big tours for Wellens.

The remaining 167 of 184 riders embarked towards Carcassonne on yet another nervy stage.

After a mass fall early on with Florian Lipowitz and Vingegaard involved, the Pogacar group raced on, leaving two-time winner Vingegaard and a pack of 30 riders to exhaust themselves catching up.

There was embarrassment for Frenchman Julian Alaphilippe, who celebrated at the line thinking he had won when in fact he was third.

Sprinting for third place long after Wellens and Victor Campenaerts took the top two spots, Alaphilippe pipped Wout van Aert at the line.

Poor Alaphilippe hung his head when his horrified compatriots told him.

He had been part of the early fall, losing his race radio, and had no idea the stage had already been won, he explained.

I DON'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT IT

Pogacar entered the Pyrenees on Thursday trailing in second behind surprise yellow jersey Ben Healy but emerged with two more stage wins and a four-minute advantage at the top of the overall standings in his bid for a fourth Tour de France title.

The defending champion said he had been ill. "Half the peloton is coughing. I've got this red nose. It's because of all the ice packs and air conditioning I think, but I'm better now," said Pogacar.

Monday is a the final rest day before the 2025 edition soars into the Alps on Tuesday's stage 16 with the 15.8 km ascent of Mont Ventoux at 7.9 per cent gradient to its 1901m high summit.

"Mont Ventoux is for after the day off, so I don't want to talk about it now," Pogacar said after the podium ceremony at Carcassonne.

"All I know is that Jonas will be attacking, I just don't want to think about it." — AFP

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ASYAD EXPRESS'S REVERSE LOGISTICS PLATFORM TO DRIVE E-COMMERCE

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 20

ASYAD EXPRESS, part of Asyad Group, has launched a strategic, technology driven 'Reverse Logistics Platform' that redefines how businesses in Oman and the GCC manage product returns, exchanges and refunds. The service is designed to give e-commerce businesses a competitive edge by turning complexity into simplicity, helping them streamline returns while reinforcing trust at every touchpoint.

Addressing the increasing demand from retailers and digital-first brands for agile, transparent and consumer-centric return processes, Asyad Express's new offering delivers a seamless 'end to end' reverse logistics experience. With comprehensive GCC-wide coverage, this service encompasses convenient doorstep pickup, quality checks and efficient reintegration of returned goods into inventory, all supported by complete visibility and tracking throughout the entire lifecycle.

Engineered for effortless integration into current e-commerce and retail workflows, Asyad Express's reverse logistics solution supports businesses of all sizes, from SMEs to large enterprises.

This enables businesses to adopt more flexible return policies, significantly shorten turnaround times and ultimately boost customer satisfaction.

This launch underscores Asyad Express's commitment to e-commerce logistics excellence in the region, offering a comprehensive range of services tailored to meet the diverse customer needs.

With a strong focus on express delivery, e-commerce solutions and warehousing, Asyad Express utilises an extensive global network to efficiently process, package and ship thousands of deliveries across 220 destinations and territories.

Oman 'largely compliant' on OECD tax transparency

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 20

THE Sultanate of Oman has received a strong endorsement from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes, earning an overall rating of Largely Compliant in its 2025 Second Round Peer Review.

The result highlights Oman's firm commitment to international tax transparency standards and reflects the substantial reforms the country has implemented in recent years.

This is Oman's first full peer review since joining the Global Forum in 2018. The assessment, covering the period from January 2021 to December 2023, evaluated both Oman's legal and regulatory framework and its practical implementation of the international standard for Exchange of Information on Request (EOIR).

The review confirms Oman's strong performance in the majority of assessed areas. Out of 11 core elements, Oman was rated Compliant in nine, including key areas such as banking information availability, access to information, confidentiality and functioning exchange mechanisms. These results underline the robustness of Oman's legal framework and the effectiveness of its administrative practices.

The report notes that Oman has developed a comprehensive banking supervisory system, with banks required to maintain



This is Oman's first full peer review since joining the Global Forum in 2018. Image for illustration only.

client records for ten years and clear rules on identifying beneficial ownership.

The Tax Authority also has wide-ranging powers to access relevant data and has strengthened cooperation with other government entities through memoranda of understanding.

Operationally, Oman has made significant strides. The Authority has established a dedicated EOIR unit and developed manuals and guidance to support tax officials. All EOIR requests received in 2022 and 2023 were answered within the 90-day international benchmark — an improvement from 2021, which was affected by post-pandemic adjustments and internal restructuring.

Two elements — availability of ownership and identity information (A.1) and accounting information (A.2) — were assessed as Largely Compliant, reflecting transitional areas where Oman is already implementing

reforms.

Legal provisions related to beneficial ownership have recently been enhanced through the introduction of the Beneficial Ownership Regulation in 2023, which requires most companies to maintain ownership registers and provide this information upon request.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion is actively building a central beneficial ownership register, a key move towards ensuring easier access to accurate and timely information.

While some areas for improvement remain — such as formalising obligations for regular updates and enhancing supervision — Oman's efforts are already well underway and are expected to strengthen compliance further.

The report also highlights the Authority's initiatives to improve the availability of accounting records, especially for entities with limited

activity. While work is ongoing to address tax return filing rates and inactive company oversight, these are recognised as part of a broader, forward-looking reform agenda.

Oman's participation in the Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters, along with eight bilateral tax agreements, further reinforces its commitment to international cooperation.

The country's legal provisions on confidentiality and professional secrecy are also aligned with the global standard.

Looking ahead, Oman will provide its first self-assessment report under the Global Forum's enhanced monitoring programme in 2026, followed by biennial updates.

This mechanism is designed to support continuous improvement and ensure member countries stay aligned with evolving international standards.

Oman's LPG production hits record 1.353 million tonnes in 2024

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 20

PRODUCTION of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) — a vital fuel source for both households and industries — surged by nearly 37 per cent to reach 1.353 million metric tonnes in 2024, up from around 990,000 metric tonnes a year earlier, marking a new record for the Sultanate of Oman.

LPG — a byproduct of natural gas processing and crude oil refining — is primarily used in homes for cooking and heating. It is also increasingly employed in commercial and industrial sectors, including catering, laundry services, metal cutting, drying and machinery operation. Thanks



Production from Duqm Refinery lifted Oman's LPG output to a new high.

to its low emissions and ease of transport and storage, LPG is also used as an automotive fuel in many export markets.

A key contributor to the sharp increase in production was the Duqm Refinery (OQ8), which accounted for 287,000 metric tonnes, or 21 per cent of the total.

This represented the first full year of operations for the Omani-Kuwaiti-backed refinery, which began operating at full capacity early last year.

The largest contributor, however, was the Sohar Refinery (owned by OQ Refineries and Petroleum Industries Company — OQ RPI), with an output of 611,000 metric tonnes, representing a 45-per cent share. Next was the

Salalah LPG plant, also operated by OQ RPI, with 315,000 metric tonnes (23.3 per cent), while the company's Mina Al Fahal refinery contributed 63,000 metric tonnes, equivalent to a 5-per cent share.

Production from Daleel Petroleum's Wadi Aswad field totalled 51,000 metric tonnes, accounting for 3.8 per cent of the total.

Smaller volumes were also recorded from Petroleum Development Oman's (PDO) Saih Rawl facilities, which produced around 20,000 metric tonnes (1.5 per cent), and from the Bukha and West Bukha fields operated by Musandam Oil & Gas Company, which yielded approximately 5,000 metric tonnes (0.4 per cent).

ADVERTORIALS

AMBITIOUS YOUTH



The ‘Tomohi’ programme has contributed to enhancing the capabilities of 55 ambitious Omani youth.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL CELEBRATES THIRD COHORT OF ‘TOMOHI’ GRADUATES

MUSCAT: In a testament to its commitment to human capital development and its strategic role in driving national progress, Sohar International proudly hosted the graduation ceremony for the third cohort of its distinguished ‘Tomohi’ programme.

Held at the Mandarin Oriental, Muscat, the event took place under the esteemed auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in the presence of Said bin Mohamed al Aufi, Chairman of Sohar International and Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International.

The ceremony was also attended by members of the Board of Directors, senior executives from the bank’s executive management, esteemed VIP guests and the families of the graduates — further underscoring the significance of the occasion and the collective pride in celebrating this important milestone.

Since its launch in 2018, the ‘Tomohi’ programme has contributed to enhancing the capabilities of 55 ambitious Omani youth by developing their skills and strengthening their readiness for the job market. The successful employment of all 15 graduates from the third cohort within various departments across the bank further reflects Sohar International’s commitment to transforming empowerment into tangible opportunities, reinforcing its dedication to nurturing national talent and integrating them into the financial sector.

Commenting on the occasion, Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, stated: “Tomohi represents more than a developmental initiative — it is a strategic investment in Oman’s future. As we transition into a knowledge-based economy, nurturing agile, forward-thinking talent becomes imperative to drive innovation, competitiveness and national growth.

At Sohar International, we view human capital development as a cornerstone of sustainable progress. Through Tomohi, we are not only equipping youth with practical experience and leadership capabilities but also cultivating a generation empowered to shape the future of our nation. This programme reflects our unwavering commitment to supporting Oman Vision 2040 and building a resilient economy powered by local talent”.

The ceremony opened with a keynote speech by Abdulwahid bin Mohamed al Murshidi, reaffirming the bank’s longstanding commitment to empowering local talent and contributing to the nation’s Oman Vision 2040 objectives. Attended by more than 100 guests, including senior executives, programme graduates and their families, the event served as a celebration of both individual achievement and collective progress.

TALABAT LAUNCHES 2025 EDITION OF ITS ‘SUMMER TOGETHER’ CAMPAIGN

MUSCAT: talabat is launching the 2025 edition of its ‘Summer Together’ campaign with a strong focus on rider wellbeing in Oman.

This year’s campaign blends practical support with uplifting experiences, aiming to show appreciation to riders across the country.

“At talabat, rider wellbeing is a core principle”, said Stéphane Berton, Managing Director at talabat Oman. “Summer Together offers on-the-ground support by

introducing localised initiatives that make a real difference in riders’ daily lives. These efforts are part of our broader mission to build a better ecosystem where every rider feels valued, empowered and protected”.

This year, over 8,000 riders in Muscat will benefit from free bottled water at 23 partner outlets, along with 10% discounts on select restaurant menus. Meanwhile, riders in both Muscat and Suhar can enjoy complimentary ice cream

from talabat mart branches, a refreshing pick-me-up during long summer shifts.

To ensure consistent hydration access, select local shops in Muscat have been equipped with water dispensers, providing chilled water throughout July. On a national scale, talabat is distributing 200 TCare Kits by Talabaty, assembled with care by talabat employees, the kits are a meaningful expression of the team’s gratitude and solidarity with riders.

New World Autos launches Sinotruk brand in Oman

IN a landmark event that combined strength, innovation and promise, New World Autos LLC, the exclusive distributor of Sinotruk in Oman, officially unveiled the globally renowned heavy-duty truck brand at a grand event held at Hotel InterContinental, Muscat. Present at the event were distinguished guests from both the public and private sectors.

The Chief Guest at the event was Wang Yunan, General Manager, Sinotruk International Middle East & Asia Sales Region.

He was accompanied by Liu Yehui, Chief Representative, Sinotruk International Middle East & Asia Sales Region.

The evening marked more than the introduction of a brand. It marked the beginning of a shared journey built on engineering excellence, long-term partnerships and a vision for contributing meaningfully to Oman’s growing oil and gas, mining, construction, roads infrastructure and logistics landscape.

Recognised as one of the world’s largest and most respected manufacturers of heavy-duty trucks, Sinotruk has a long-standing reputation



First few owners of Sinotruk vehicles along with Abdullah Bin Mohammed Saud Bahwan and Wang Yunan.

for its cutting-edge technology, robust engineering and reliable performance.

With more than 700,000 trucks exported to over 150 countries and being No 1 in China’s heavy-duty truck exports for 20 consecutive years, Sinotruk is a global force now geared to empower Oman’s Oil and gas, logistics and industrial sectors.

At the event, Abdullah bin Mohammed Saud Bahwan, CEO, Saud Bahwan Group, stated that Sinotruk has arrived in Oman not just as a renowned brand, but as a dependable partner for progress. He emphasised the Group’s commitment to delivering outstanding after-

sales support, driver training and an inspiring range of vehicles featuring advanced engineering, all aimed at setting new standards in customer satisfaction and business productivity.

The product line-up introduced at the event included the Sinotruk MAX and the HOWO TX, both engineered to meet the evolving needs of oil & gas, mining, construction, logistics providers and industrial operators across Oman. The Sinotruk MAX, with its commanding presence, next-generation cab, high design electrical architecture and advanced safety and comfort features, offers a premium

driving experience for oil and gas, mining and long-haul journeys.

The HOWO TX, designed with durability and versatility in mind, is a powerhouse of efficiency and reliability, ideal for both oil and gas, construction and cargo operations. The models are backed by powerful engines, high load-bearing capabilities and superior fuel efficiency, offering operators an exceptional combination of performance and value.

To support the brand’s entry into the market, New World Autos LLC has invested in a dedicated showroom in Al Wattayah, a fully equipped service and parts facility in Al Mawaleh and a strategic after-sales network across Suhar, Nizwa, Salalah and Marmul.

Comprehensive training programmes for drivers, technicians and service personnel have also been rolled out to ensure every Sinotruk customer receives exceptional support at every step.

In a symbolic and inspiring moment during the event, the first few Sinotruk customers in Oman were handed the keys to their new vehicles.

BANK MUSCAT WINS MOST INNOVATIVE RETAIL AWARD

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has proudly won the Most Innovative Retail Award at the esteemed Global Brands Awards held recently in Dubai. Salim bin Said al Shanfari, Bank Muscat’s Representative in Dubai received the award on behalf of the bank.

The event celebrated outstanding brands from various industries, bringing together business leaders for a memorable evening.

This recognition underscores the Bank’s relentless pursuit of excellence in providing cutting-edge financial solutions and services tailored to meet the evolving needs of its retail customers. It also reflects the bank’s commitment to innovation and customer-centricity in the competitive banking landscape.

To enhance service delivery, Bank Muscat is actively improving its electronic channels and banking devices, ensuring that



Salim bin Said al Shanfari, Bank Muscat’s Representative in Dubai received the award on behalf of the bank.

customers receive the best possible services at all times. In response to valuable customer feedback, the bank has recently launched a new version of its Mobile App and revamped over 200 e-services, further demonstrating its dedication to innovation and creativity.

The Bank Muscat portfolio features a comprehensive array of retail banking services and products designed to meet the diverse needs of its customers.

Offerings include personal finance, auto financing “Sayyarati”, housing finance “Baituna”, as well as travel and study financing options. Customers can also open children’s accounts, apply for credit or prepaid cards electronically and access services for car insurance, checkbooks and utility bill payments. In addition to these services, customers benefit from seamless fund transfers within Bank Muscat accounts and to other local banks, as well as international transfer services.

BankDhofar’s ‘Bank on Wheels’ rolls into Dhofar for khareef roadshow

MUSCAT: BankDhofar’s innovative ‘Bank on Wheels’ is rolling south towards the lush khareef landscapes of Dhofar (Khareef Dhofar Season), as part of a four-day roadshow designed to bring value-driven banking services directly to communities and travellers alike.

Launched earlier this year, Bank on Wheels is a fully equipped, mobile banking branch that reflects BankDhofar’s commitment to inclusive, customer-centric and

technology-enabled financial services across Oman. By going beyond conventional banking models, this initiative ensures that even the most remote communities have access to essential financial support — on the move and on demand. With khareef showers turning Dhofar into a seasonal magnet for domestic and regional tourists, Bank on Wheels is heading off the main expressway and taking the scenic, people-focused route.



Bank on Wheels is heading off the main expressway and taking the scenic, people-focused route.

Rather than speeding down the highway, the convoy is making scheduled stops in towns, villages and key community centres — staying true to its core mission of enhancing financial inclusion.

The roadshow began on July 13 at the Samad Al Shaan Health Centre in Al Mudhaibi (Al Sharqiyah North Governorate), followed by visits to Sinaw Health Centre and Bar Zaman Company. From there, the convoy headed coastward through

Al Wusta Governorate, making stops at Mahout Construction Company and the local health centre on July 14, before hosting a community engagement event in Al Duqm that evening.

On July 15, Bank on Wheels provided full-day services at Al Duqm Health Centre, before travelling to Al Jazir, where the team engaged with customers at the health centres in Khal, Lakbi, and Soqarah.

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



The United Kingdom ranked 11th in 2023 among the GCC’s trading partners, slipping two positions from 9th in 2022.

GCC-UK TRADE SLIDES 13.86% IN 2023

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

THE TOTAL trade exchange between countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the United Kingdom declined by 13.86% in 2023, in comparison to 2022, according to recent data from the GCC Statistics Center.

In 2023, the total trade exchange between the two entities amounted to \$31.7 billion, signalling a \$5.1 billion decrease from the amount in 2022 valued at \$36.8 billion.

Exports from the GCC to the UK experienced a sharp decline of 29% in 2023 in comparison to the previous year, totalling \$15.6 billion in comparison to \$21.9 billion.

Mineral fuels, oils and waxes made up 70.5% of exports with a value of \$11 billion. This was followed by miscellaneous items, at 11.6% valued at \$1.8 billion.

Machinery and mechanical appliances made up 6.4% of exports with a value of \$1 billion, followed by precious stones and metals valued at \$0.8 billion (5.1%).

Exports of aircraft and spacecraft and parts accounted for a 3.8% share collectively worth around \$0.6 billion, while electrical machinery and equipment made up 2.6% of exports with a value of \$0.4 billion.

On the other hand, imports from the United Kingdom to the GCC increased by 8.3%, reaching \$16.1 billion in 2023, in comparison to \$14.9 billion in 2022.

Miscellaneous items made up the majority of the imports with a value of \$6.2 billion (38.5%). This was followed by machinery and mechanical appliances imports, valued at \$4.0 billion representing 24.8% of total imports.

Vehicles and vehicle parts represented 19.3% of imports with a value of \$3.1 billion, followed by electrical machinery and equipment which represented 6.8% of imports with a value of \$1.1 billion.

Imports of precious stones and metals represented 5.6% of total imports, with a value of \$0.9 billion, while aircraft, spacecraft and parts made up 5% of imports with a value of \$0.8 billion.

The United Kingdom ranked 11th in 2023 among the GCC’s trading partners, slipping two positions from 9th in 2022.

MSX INDEX CLOSES 0.43% HIGHER

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) 30 Index closed on Sunday at 4,674.40 points, up 20.1 points or 0.43 per cent, compared to the last trading session’s close of 4,654.34 points.

Trading value reached RO 28,509,800, a 59.9 per cent increase compared to the last trading session’s value of RO 17,821,522.

A report issued by the MSX indicated that market capitalisation increased by 0.424 per cent compared to the last trading day, reaching approximately RO 28.76 billion. — ONA

AGGRESSIVE TARGETS

EV brands Zeekr, Neta inflate car sales



Chinese electric vehicle brands Neta and Zeekr inflated sales in recent years to hit aggressive targets, with Neta doing so for more than 60,000 cars.

The companies arranged for cars to be insured before they were sold to buyers, the documents show, enabling them under Chinese industry car registration practices to book sales early so they could hit the monthly and quarterly targets, the dealers and buyers said. — Reuters

PARTNERSHIP SIGNED TO ELEVATE OMAN’S ESPORTS ECOSYSTEM

MUSCAT: Nova E-Sports, Oman’s leading esports and gaming brand, is proud to announce a strategic partnership with Duamentes, a UK-based global authority in player behaviour, cognitive science and UX research.

This collaboration marks a major milestone in Nova’s mission to advance the gaming and esports economy in Oman. Through this partnership, Nova will integrate Duamentes’ cutting-edge analytics



and UX methodologies into its training programmes, tournaments and digital platforms enhancing player development, competitive

performance and fan engagement.

Nova E-Sports was founded to empower local talent and elevate Oman’s presence in the international gaming arena. The organisation is actively building infrastructure for professional esports training, boot camps and large-scale gaming events. With a growing team of dedicated professionals, Nova is leading the way in creating pathways for youth to turn passion into profession.

Procurement and FM: Tools for efficiency

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 20

EFFICIENT procurement and facilities management (FM) are no longer auxiliary functions within institutions — they have become pivotal enablers of operational sustainability, cost optimisation and service excellence.

This message was at the heart of a recent conversation with Rashid al Masrouri, a prominent Omani expert in the field, whose professional insights shed light on the evolving role of institutional infrastructure management in Oman’s public and private sectors.

Al Masrouri, who has led transformative initiatives in facilities and procurement operations, argues that a new mindset is urgently needed: “Facilities management is the invisible hand that keeps institutions functioning. Procurement, meanwhile, is the economic artery that ensures continuity and value”.

According to him, when both functions are aligned and managed strategically, institutions unlock real, measurable performance gains.

He pointed out that despite



“Facilities management is the invisible hand that keeps institutions functioning. Procurement, meanwhile, is the economic artery that ensures continuity and value.”

RASHID AL MASROURI
Omani expert

growing awareness, key challenges persist. Among them: outdated perceptions of the role of support services, fragmented processes between operations and procurement units, a lag in digital integration and a shortage of professionally trained local talent.

“Too often, these departments are seen as administrative overheads”, he noted, “when in fact they are central to long-term institutional sustainability”.

Al Masrouri emphasised that Oman is equipped with the infrastructure and ambition to modernise these domains — but success depends on shifting organisational cultures.

“Digital tools like CAFM (Computer-Aided Facility Management) and ERP systems are only effective when embedded within a forward-looking governance model that empowers decision-makers on the ground”.

On the procurement front, he outlined three essential priorities for modernisation:

- Full automation of workflows to ensure transparency and reduce delays,
- Clear policies for fair competition and value-for-money contracting,
- A national supplier database

that tracks performance and supports strategic sourcing.

He also stressed the need for performance-based contracts and cost-benefit analyses to become standard practices in both public and private entities. “The system should reward results, not just compliance”, he added.

As for Omani talent, Al Masrouri is confident in the capabilities of the next generation but called for more applied training, international certification pathways (such as CIPS and IFMA) and clear professional tracks for career progression.

“This is a sector where hands-on problem-solving is just as important as academic qualifications”.

He concluded with a call to action: “Leaders in both government and private institutions must revisit how they perceive these functions. Investing in procurement and facilities management is not an expense — it is an investment in operational resilience, public value and national development”.

As Oman advances its Oman Vision 2040 priorities, institutional effectiveness and sustainability will remain high on the national agenda. And as experts like Al Masrouri remind us, strategic efficiency often begins with the functions we least see — but most depend on.

Bank of England scrutinises lenders for dollar risk



People walk outside the Bank of England building in London. — Reuters

LONDON: The Bank of England has asked some lenders to test their resilience to potential US dollar shocks, three sources said, the latest sign of how the Trump administration’s policies are eroding trust in the United States as a bedrock of financial stability.

As the leading currency for global trade and capital flows, the US dollar is the lifeblood of global finance.

However, President Donald Trump’s break from long-standing US policy in areas such as free trade and defence has forced policymakers to consider whether the emergency provision of dollars in times of financial stress can still be relied on.

While the US Federal Reserve has said that the central bank wants to continue to make

dollars available in the financial system, Trump’s policy shifts have prompted European allies to reexamine their dependence on Washington.

Following similar demands from European supervisors, the Bank of England, which oversees banks in the City of London financial hub, has

requested that some lenders assess their dollar funding plans and the degree to which they depend on the US currency, including for short-term needs, one of the people with direct knowledge said.

In one instance, a global bank based in Britain was asked in recent weeks to run stress tests internally, including scenarios where the US-dollar swap market could dry up entirely, another of the sources said.

“In a global dollar funding crisis, the Fed might hesitate to offer swaps for fear of strong Trump reaction — its priority is monetary policy independence, after all”, said Richard Portes, professor of economics at London Business School and former Chair of the European Systemic Risk Board’s Advisory Scientific Committee. — Reuters

RENEWED OPTIMISM

Crypto sector’s market value hits \$4 trillion



The crypto sector’s market value hits \$4 trillion on Friday, according to CoinGecko, marking a milestone that reflects its shift from a nascent asset class to a central part of the global investment landscape.

A wave of renewed optimism, regulatory clarity in key markets and rising institutional flows have catapulted the crypto sector to a new valuation peak. — Reuters

MINORITY STAKE

Blackstone drops bid for TikTok US



Private equity giant Blackstone has withdrawn from a consortium seeking to invest in TikTok’s US operations, a source said. Blackstone had planned to take a minority stake in the TikTok US business in a deal orchestrated by President Donald Trump.

The consortium is led by Susquehanna Intl Group and General Atlantic, current investors in TikTok’s Chinese owner ByteDance. — Reuters

OPINION

Corporate reactions: A snapshot of 2025 disappearing jobs



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.

2025 is witnessing sweeping layoffs not only in a single sector but across multiple sectors, including technology, retail, creative, entertainment, advertising, manufacturing, logistics and even government associations. Just yesterday, Microsoft announced a mass layoff of 15,000 workers and has also urged the remaining staff to invest in their own AI skilling. As of now, a total of 52,000 workers have been laid off across major companies like Google, Microsoft and Amazon. Even more alarming is that 64,000 jobs have been lost in the retail sector over the last four months of 2025. In the retail landscape, major chains have restructured, scaled down, or declared bankruptcy. Most of these changes are driven by economic uncertainty and tariffs; even logistics companies like UPS have announced plans to eliminate 20,000 jobs. In the automotive sector, companies like Volvo and General Motors are reducing production jobs to mitigate the impact of trade tariffs. Even governments are streamlining federal employment. The scenario clearly indicates a powerful shift and an uncertain storm sweeping across the global workforce. Neither leaders nor governments seem to have the foresight for the ramifications of the proliferation of AI to such an extent that the very purpose of human existence becomes questionable.

More importantly, we choose to believe that life, security, intelligence and privacy can be entrusted to machines. An alarming development is that approximately 50% of major employers have decided to freeze hiring for the remainder of the year. The top consulting companies, such as McKinsey, Bain and BCG, have also reduced hiring for support and non-core jobs. These companies have also frozen hiring for junior and entry-level positions, such as accountants. Now, AI-axe has fallen onto accountancy roles and automation is often preferred over human potential. Existing employers also face the brunt of accelerated technological advancements, with more stringent performance reviews and increased voluntary exit packages. Consultancy companies have also reduced their hiring of consultants and are delaying the onboarding of recruits by months. A paradigm shift is happening globally, drastically altering work patterns. The key determinants of this fundamental, evolving structural change, are the adoption of AI, automation, economic uncertainty, geopolitical escalations and trade wars. The large-scale layoffs that are making newspaper headlines almost daily will immediately reduce discretionary spending. The demand for products and services will eventually lead to a cascading economic slowdown. Many entrepreneurs and leaders I have recently spoken to have stated that

As of now, a total of 52,000 workers have been laid off across major companies like Google, Microsoft and Amazon. Even more alarming is that 64,000 jobs have been lost in the retail sector over the last four months of 2025.

the market is moving towards a recession, although a recession has not been officially announced by the government. Uncertainty is pausing business investments in innovation and expansion, which will further dampen economic recovery. The growing adoption of AI automation raises serious questions about the career progression of students and their intent to make substantial investments in education. Anxiety will also begin to infiltrate the structural framework of educational institutions, particularly in the higher education sector, as they face the challenge of keeping pace with the rapid pace of technological developments and aligning them with the programme curriculum. The world stands at a crucial crossroads, where hiring freezes, mass layoffs and a lack of alternative work options will not only create economic unrest but also lead to social instability. It will shake the foundations of consumer economics. We are a generation that questions the nuclear capabilities of countries, but we should also understand the implications and ramifications of extensive investments in AI advancement. Suppose world leaders and governments do not focus on creating purposeful employment opportunities for humans. In that case, the world will experience a period of sustained disruptions, which will not only affect businesses but also society as a whole.

UK’S NUCLEAR PUSH MAY HAND INVESTORS A CUSHY DEAL

YAWEN CHEN

BROOKFIELD’S reported plan to take a 25% stake in the Sizewell C nuclear project would mark a big vote of confidence in Britain’s atomic energy revival. But while it suggests that private capital could play a role in funding the country’s energy security, taxpayers are likely to take much of the risk. The Canadian giant is no stranger to infrastructure, but nuclear power comes with high upfront costs, delays and cost overruns. Sizewell C could cost up to 40 billion pounds (\$54 billion) to build, the Financial Times says, up from the latest government estimate of 20 billion pounds. Britain’s track record is far from reassuring. Take Hinkley Point C, which was majority owned by EDF. Construction began in 2017 and was originally expected to be completed in 2025 and cost 18 billion pounds. It is now unlikely to be operational before 2030, with the overall cost revised to up to 35 billion pounds in 2015 prices. EDF had little protection against those delays as the chief backing it got from the government came from energy price commitments, which kick in when the plant is running. Bringing in private investors may therefore require a new approach. That’s why the government passed legislation in 2022 so that the Sizewell C plant will be financed via a model seen in utilities like water companies or energy networks, dubbed the regulated asset base (RAB). That model fixes an allowed return to investors by passing on costs to consumers. Crucially, it allows a project to generate revenue from the moment construction begins, instead of only when it becomes operational. The closest precedent is probably London’s Thames Tideway Tunnel, which funded the construction of a new sewer. There, consumer bills are charged enough to cover a blended return to debt and equity investors, or weighted average cost of capital (WACC), of 2.5% over inflation while the project is under construction. Given the risks in nuclear, industry experts reckon a WACC of 4% above inflation is more likely, equivalent to a nominal rate of 6%. And, as with Thames Tideway, nuclear plants will likely require a commitment from the government for it to compensate investors if cost overruns exceed a certain threshold. That’s means the RAB model could easily end up becoming pretty expensive. The National Audit Office’s modelling suggests that the WACC of a hypothetical nuclear project could rise to 9% if expenses were to come over budget by between 75% and 100%. As Hinkley Point showed, that’s quite plausible. — Reuters

European banks grab market share from rivals

EUROPEAN investment banks have grabbed market share from Wall Street rivals on their home turf as protectionist US policies have renewed focus on the continent. The top European investment banks secured around 55 per cent of the fee pool in their home market in the first six months of 2025. This was their biggest share of revenue in the region for nearly a decade, according to data provider Dealogic. It’s a reversal of fortune for European investment banks, which have been losing ground to their US peers since the 2008 financial crisis. An expected boom in US dealmaking this year has not materialised, as US president Donald Trump’s policies have created uncertainty in the market. Trump also announced back in April that he would impose steep import tariffs on US trading partners’ goods. His ‘Liberation Day’ has already led to more deals being iced. The upheaval in the US has led to renewed optimism in Europe, with corporate embarking on deals and private equity firms looking further afield for investments. “The shift from global investors to corporates to focus on the European market plays to our strengths in our home markets”, said Henrik Johnson, co-head of European investment banking at Deutsche Bank. Renaud-Franck Falce, head of Global Capital markets at BNP Paribas, said the recent shift towards Europe being forced to stand on its own two feet is likely to lead to a surge in dealmaking in the region. “Europe’s push towards greater autonomy is expected to translate into an investment ‘super cycle’ requiring large financing solutions and to accelerate cross-boarder M&A within Europe”, he said. “Broad access to capital markets, moderate leverage in corporate Europe and significant private equity dry powder will support such moves”. Dealmakers had predicted a bumper 2025 fuelled by “Trump



A drone view of London’s Canary Wharf financial district, in London, Britain. — Reuters



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

Europe’s push towards greater autonomy is expected to translate into an investment ‘super cycle’ requiring large financing solutions and to accelerate cross-boarder M&A within Europe. Broad access to capital markets, moderate leverage in corporate Europe and significant private equity dry powder will support such moves.

2.0’, which would usher in a new business friendly era with light-touch M&A regulation. However, US policy has instead led to more protectionism and volatile market reaction has scuppered appetite for deals. Investment banking fees are down globally by 4 per cent at \$34.4 bn so far in 2025, according to Dealogic. JPMorgan’s chief executive Jamie Dimon signalled that dealmaking revenue could be down by mid-teen percentages in the second quarter. European investment banking fees are down by 12 pc this year, despite the increase in optimism around activity. JPMorgan added more than 300 people to its EU hub in 2024, with Paris the main beneficiary as it continues to hire in the French capital. The bank ended 2024 with 4,956 people within JPMorgan SE — the entity created to house its EU operations after Brexit — up to 307, according to its newly released annual report. Like its rivals, JPMorgan has been bolstering its

operations in the EU in recent years following the UK’s formal exit from the bloc in 2020. The Wall Street bank expanded its Paris office by 105 people last year, the figure shows, an increase of 15 per cent compared with a year earlier. BNP Paribas’s Falce said: “We fully anticipate dealmaking activity will increase in Europe, notably in sectors related to security, sustainability and electricity transmission, as well as digital infrastructure”. Ready to fight giants: European banks dominated their home turfs before the 2008 financial crisis. Deutsche Bank and Barclays were among those that embarked on a quest to become global players and take on Wall Street giants in the US. However, a prolonged period of low interest rates and a slower recovery from the crisis saw some European banks fall behind. Their share of the European investment banking fee pool has been slowly eroded since hitting a peak of 65 per cent in 2010, according to Dealogic numbers.

BUSINESS

CHINA 'S EXPORTS OF RARE EARTH MAGNETS TO THE US SURGE

BEIJING: China's exports of rare earth magnets to the United States in June soared to more than seven times their May level, marking a sharp recovery in the flow of critical minerals used in electric vehicles and wind turbines after a Sino-US trade deal.

Outbound shipments to the United States from the world's largest producer of rare earth magnets surged to 353 metric tonnes in June, up 660% from May, data from the General Administration of Customs showed on Sunday.

That came after pacts reached in June to resolve issues around shipments of rare earth minerals and magnets to the United States. Chipmaker Nvidia plans to resume sales of its H20 AI chips to China as part of the agreement.

China, which provides more than 90% of the global supply of

Outbound shipments to the United States from the world's largest producer of rare earth magnets surged to 353 metric tonnes in June, up 660% from May.



Samples of rare earth minerals are on display during a tour of MolyCorp's Mountain Pass Rare Earth facility in Mountain Pass, California. — Reuters

rare earth magnets, decided in early April to add several rare earth items to its export restriction list in retaliation for US tariffs.

The subsequent sharp fall in shipments in April and May, due to the lengthy time required to secure export licences, had upset the global supply chain, forcing some automakers outside China to halt partial production due to a rare earths shortage. In total, China exported 3,188 tonnes of rare earth permanent magnets globally last month, up 157.5% from 1,238 tonnes in May, although the June volume was still 38.1% lower than the corresponding month in 2024.

Shipments of magnets are likely to recover further in July as more exporters obtained licences in June, analysts said. During the first half of 2025, exports of rare earth magnets fell 18.9% on the year to 22,319 tonnes. — Reuters

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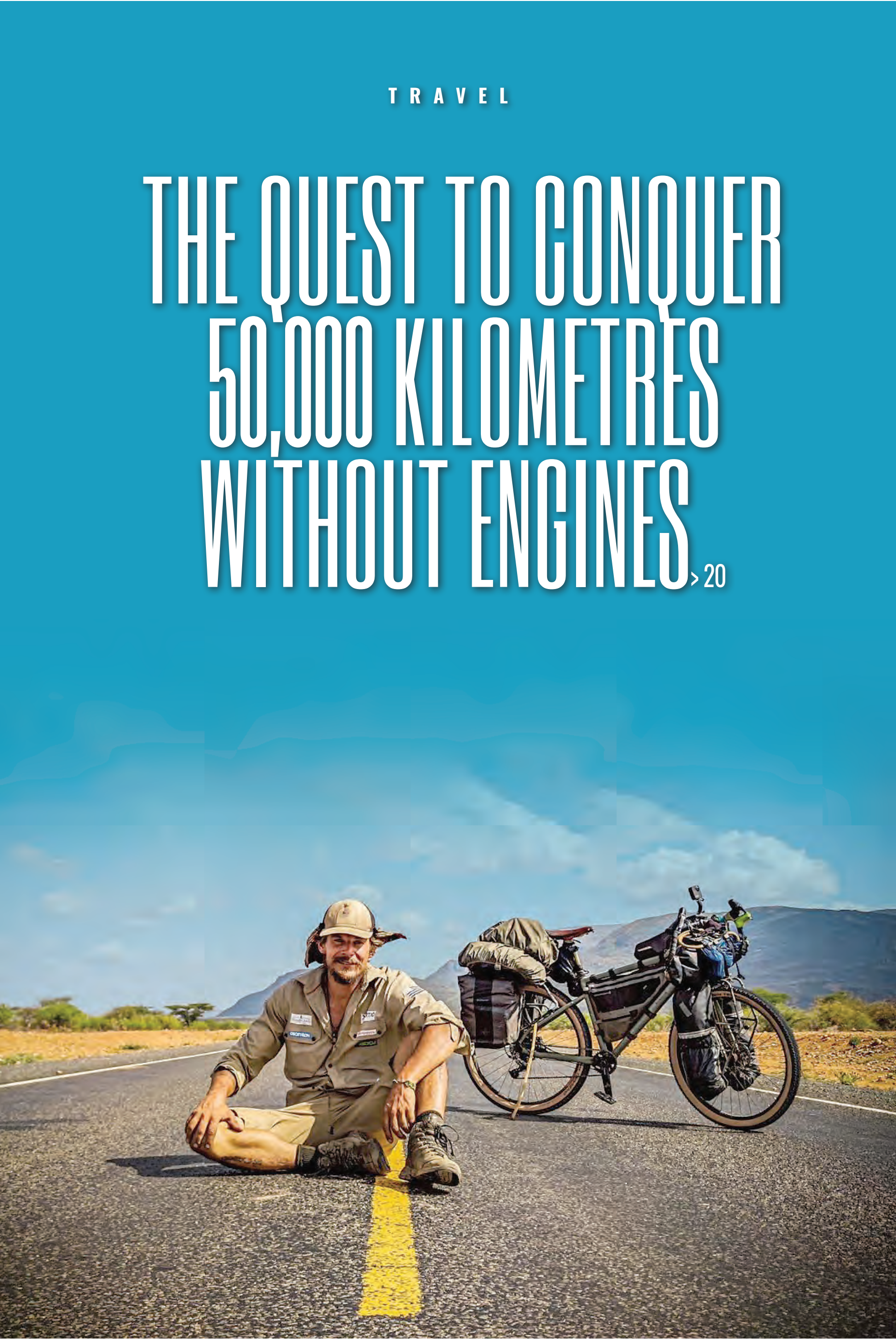
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ART/LIFE



T R A V E L

THE QUEST TO CONQUER 50,000 KILOMETRES WITHOUT ENGINES_{> 20}

ART

France museum-goer eats million-dollar banana taped to wall



A VISITOR to a French museum bit into a fresh banana worth millions of dollars taped to a wall last week, exhibitors said on Friday, in the latest such consumption of the conceptual artwork.

Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan — whose provocative creation entitled “Comedian” was bought for \$6.2 million in New York last year — said he was disappointed the person did not also eat the skin and the tape.

After the hungry visitor struck on Saturday last week, “security staff rapidly and calmly intervened”, the Pompidou-Metz museum in eastern France said.

The work was “reinstalled within minutes”, it added.

“As the fruit is perishable, it is regularly replaced according to instructions from the artist”.

Cattelan noted the banana-eater had “confused the fruit for the work of art”.

“Instead of eating the banana with its skin and duct tape, the visitor just consumed the fruit”, he said.

Cattelan’s edible creation has sparked controversy ever since it made its debut at the 2019 Art Basel show in Miami Beach.

He has explained the banana work as a commentary on the art market, which he has criticised in the past for being speculative and failing to help artists.

The New York Post said the asking price of \$120,000 for “Comedian” in 2019 was evidence that the market was “bananas” and the art world had “gone mad”.

It has been eaten before.

Performance artist David Datuna ate “Comedian” in 2019, saying he felt “hungry” while inspecting it at the Miami show.

Chinese-born crypto founder Justin Sun last year forked out \$6.2 million for the work, then ate it in front of cameras.

As well as his banana work, Cattelan is also known for producing an 18-carat, fully functioning gold toilet called “America” that was offered to Donald Trump during his first term in the White House.

A British court in March found two men guilty of stealing it during an exhibition in 2020 in the United Kingdom, from an 18th-century stately home that was the birthplace of wartime prime minister Winston Churchill.

It was split up into parts and none of the gold was ever recovered. — AFP

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



LIFESTYLE

Decorations made from aurora film are seen displayed at the Sky Gallery, an observation deck at Shibuya Scramble Square, a tourist spot that offers a panoramic view of Tokyo. — AFP



FILM

Bollywood actor Tiger Shroff attends the trailer launch of upcoming Indian web series ‘Hunter season 2’ in Mumbai. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Seok, a member of K-pop boy band 1VERSE who defected from North Korea, gets makeup to film a scene for the group’s new music video in Seoul, South Korea. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



View from the Road

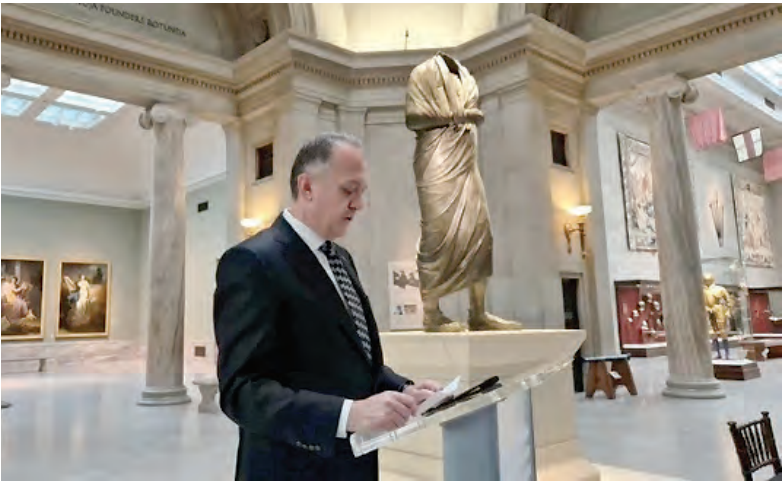


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Ancient statue returns to Türkiye 65 years later



TÜRKIYE HAS repatriated an ancient statue believed to depict Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius from the United States as part of efforts to recover antiquities illegally removed from the country, the government announced on Saturday.

The bronze statue, smuggled from the ancient city of Boubon — now the province of Burdur in southwest Türkiye — in the 1960s, was returned to Türkiye after 65 years, according to Turkish officials.

“It was a long struggle. We were right, we were determined, we were patient and we won”, Culture and Tourism Minister Mehmet Ersoy said.

“We brought the ‘Philosopher Emperor’ Marcus Aurelius back to the land where he belongs”, he added.

This unique artefact, once exhibited in the United States, was repatriated to Türkiye based on scientific analyses,

archival documents and witness statements, added the minister.

“Through the combined power of diplomacy, law and science, the process we conducted with the New York Manhattan District Attorney’s Office and the US Homeland Security Investigations Unit is more than just a repatriation; it is a historical achievement”, Ersoy said.

“Marcus Aurelius’s return to our country is a concrete result of our years-long pursuit of justice”.

The headless statue had been on display at the Cleveland Museum of Art from April to July, before its return to Türkiye. Ersoy said Türkiye was determined to protect all its cultural heritage that has been smuggled out.

“We will soon present the Philosopher Emperor to the people of (Türkiye’s capital) Ankara in a surprise exhibition”, he announced.

— AFP



Aloha, Bavaria! Munich surfers riding wild river wave again



SURFING enthusiasts have cheered the reopening of a beloved whitewater site in downtown Munich, the German city better known for partying at Oktoberfest than splashing in the waves.

The Eisbach (“ice brook”) standing wave in the city’s Englischer Garten park was closed after tragedy struck in April when a 33-year-old woman drowned during a nighttime winter surf.

After a safety review and a petition to keep it open, the site — just a stone’s throw from an art museum and shopping streets — was reopened by authorities in recent weeks.

Putting on a wetsuit and taking a board out of its bag after a day’s work, Moritz, 43, said he’s a regular at the surf spot on an arm of the Isar river.

“It’s amazing. A wave right in the city centre is something very special”, he said. “I missed it during the closure”.

Nearby, surfers performed tricks with virtuosity on the powerful wave, formed by the presence of rocks on the riverbed near a bridge.

“It’s completely different from the

ocean”, said Moritz.

“Even if you know how to surf very well in the sea, you don’t necessarily know how to do it here where the water comes from the front and not from behind”.

Another surfer, Irina, 34, said she tries to come three times a week, “before work, because it gives you energy”.

She finds “the power of the wave is good” and said she feels safe at this unique spot, even if “there are rocks at the bottom and you have to be a little careful when you fall”.

— ‘SURFER’S PARADISE’ —

A German surfer lost her life during a night session in April after being trapped underwater for nearly 30 minutes, her leash caught on an unidentified object.

Friends and emergency services rushed to help her, but she died a week after her accident.

An investigation found no safety breaches on the part of the city or state, which had always warned surfers to attempt the challenge “at their own risk”.

New guidelines have, however, been issued: night surfing is banned

between 10:00 pm and 5:30 am; and the minimum age for braving the wave is 14.

Surfers must also use a system that allows their leash to be detached in case of emergency.

These rules are “largely reasonable”, said Franz Fasel, head of the local surfers’ association IGSM, who said between 3,000 and 5,000 local surfers use the Eisbach site.

“Surfing is simply part of the lifestyle in Munich”, he said. “Not just for the surfers themselves, but also for the city’s image”.

It was not always this way. In the past, the Eisbach wave was entirely natural and surfable only occasionally, for example, when gravel accumulated in the riverbed.

Surfers took matters into their own hands in the 1980s, installing a river crossing and adding objects to improve the wave, not all well received by the authorities.

The site is now promoted by the tourist office as one of Munich’s top attractions.

Bavaria’s state premier Markus Soeder proudly declared during a recent visit that “Munich is a surfer’s paradise” and Bavaria “a bit like the California of Germany”. — AFP

FEATURES



THE QUEST TO CONQUER 50,000 KILOMETRES WITHOUT ENGINES

BY NASRULAH AL AJMI

TO BECOME the first person to complete the longest journey on Earth without crossing any ocean or using a powerful engine is nothing short of extraordinary. But while the quest may be audacious, Yann Busnel's ambition to traverse from the southernmost tip of Africa to the southernmost point of South America — a staggering 50,000 kilometres — entirely on traditional and human-powered means is slowly becoming a reality.

Such a feat is an intense challenge, given the vast and varied landscapes he must conquer: relentless deserts, towering mountains, turbulent seas and sprawling continents. The complexity lies not only in the sheer distance but also in navigating diverse terrains, unpredictable weather and logistical hurdles — all without the aid of engines or modern transport technology.

Yann Busnel's adventurous spirit was fuelled by a life filled with



high-stakes challenges. A former military helicopter maintenance operator, first aid instructor and commando trainer, he spent twelve years honing his resilience in demanding environments. It was during a gruelling military training course that he realised he possessed the strength — both mental and physical — to undertake this ambitious expedition.

“That was when I knew I had the technical skills, the endurance and above all, the motivation to pursue this goal”, he says. “For me, it’s not just a challenge; it’s a mission”.

His earlier travels included cycling 10,000 kilometres across Africa, paddling and sailing across the Red Sea and kayaking over 700 kilometres along coastlines and rivers. Traversing the rugged Arabian mountains and crossing the vast, scorching Rimal Al Sharqiya brought him closer to the realisation of his dream — the realisation that through perseverance, human effort can surpass even the most daunting natural barriers.

A quick look at the Guinness World Records showed that no one has yet completed such an extensive journey solely through non-motorised means without crossing oceans. While individuals have achieved remarkable feats in long-distance travel, completing the longest continuous land and sea route without crossing an ocean remains unclaimed, making Busnel's endeavour both pioneering and unprecedented.

Now in Oman, Busnel is preparing for the next phase

— finding a modest sailboat capable of crossing the Sea of Oman to Pakistan. From there, the journey continues eastward through Asia, scaling the challenges of China, Mongolia and Russia, before embarking across North America — from Alaska through Canada — and finally into South America.

Throughout this odyssey, Busnel relies solely on traditional modes of travel: riding camels across deserts, cycling through rugged terrains, paddling kayaks and sailing small, engine-free boats. Each step reflects a profound respect for nature and a commitment to simplicity.

In an exclusive interview with the Oman Observer, Busnel summed up his relentless passion: “I am more than willing to surrender everything in pursuit of this. Completing 50,000 kilometres without using an engine is not just a goal — it’s a way of life”. His ambition challenges our perceptions of human endurance and opens new horizons for explorers seeking to reconnect with the world’s natural landscapes.

As Busnel's journey unfolds, it captures the imagination of adventurers and environmentalists alike. His feat — still in progress — offers a powerful reminder of what can be achieved through resilience, innovation and unwavering dedication to a dream. In a world increasingly driven by technology, his expedition stands as a testament to the enduring human spirit and the timeless allure of exploration.