

O M A N
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D A I L Y

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AL ZUBAIR READY FOR THIRD ROUND OF MISANO RACE

INBRIEF

ENGINEERS AND ACCOUNTANTS MUST OBTAIN APPROVAL

MUSCAT: To ensure professional standards and maintain high levels of competence, engineers and accountants must obtain professional accreditation and classification to secure or renew work permits, the Ministry of Labour has said. This is applicable to new and current employees starting on August 1.

According to the ministry, the renewal or issuance of work permits under the designation of “engineer” will be strictly conditional upon the submission of a professional accreditation certificate obtained from the Oman Society of Engineers (OSE). The certificate must be officially approved by the Sector Skills Unit (SSU) for engineering professions and submitted via the designated electronic system.

Professional Classification Certificate will also be mandatory for all individuals employed in accounting, finance and auditing roles in Oman from September 1.

According to the ministry, this new requirement will apply to both new and current employees in the sector.

‘STRONG ARGUMENT’ FOR VIDEO IN COCKPIT: IATA

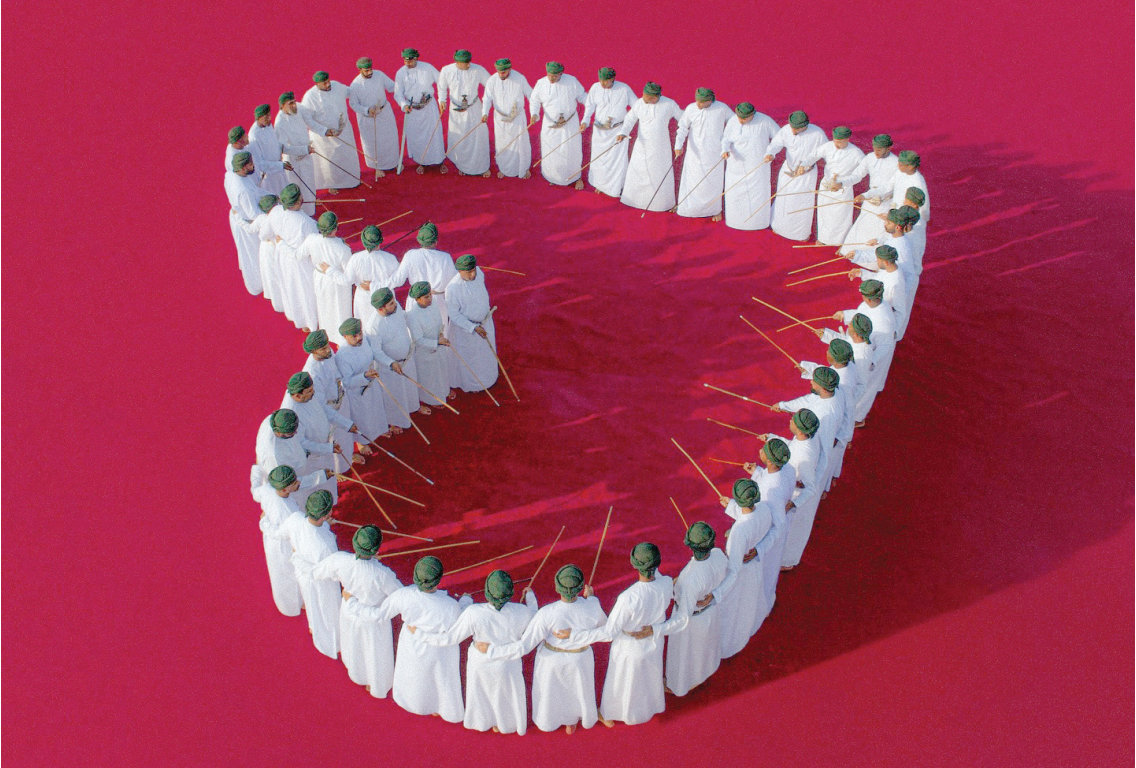


SINGAPORE: There is a “strong argument” for putting video cameras in airline cockpits to assist in accident investigations, the head of global aviation industry group IATA said on Wednesday.

The comments by Willie Walsh, Director-General of the International Air Transport Association, followed the release of a preliminary report on last month’s Air India crash, which found that the plane’s engine fuel switches had been turned off. The report, issued on Saturday by India’s Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), did not offer any conclusions or apportion blame for the June 12 disaster, but indicated that one pilot asked the other why he cut off fuel, and the second pilot responded that he had not.

The crash killed all but one of the 242 people on board as well as 19 people on the ground.

Walsh, a former commercial airline pilot, said he understood the reluctance of pilots to put video cameras in the cockpit. — AFP



FRENCH HONOUR FOR OMANI LENSMAN

Art photographer Abdulaziz al Hosni’s ‘Qalb Mahmod’ has featured in the prestigious La Nuit de l’Année (Night of the Year) at Les Rencontres d’Arles, one of the world’s foremost photography festivals, which is held in Arles, France.

General Education Diploma results today

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 16

The Ministry of Education will announce on Thursday the results of the General Education Diploma (GED) examinations and their equivalent qualifications for the academic year 2024/2025.

The results will be available starting from 4:00 pm on Thursday, July 17, 2025, via SMS through telecom providers by sending a text message containing the seat number to 90200.

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, endorsed the general indicators for these results.

A total of 54,856 students applied for the General Diploma, with a success rate of 82.83 per cent. For private schools, 1,579 students applied for the GED, achieving a success rate of 91.58 per cent. Additionally, 121 students applied for the GED and Islamic Sciences, with a 100-per cent success rate.

For the General Education Diploma (Special Education), 61 students applied, with a success rate of 86.89 per cent. The number of applicants for the Vocational and Technical General Education Diploma reached 138, achieving a 100-per cent success rate.

20 Gazans killed in crush

AT least 20 people were killed in a chaotic crush at an aid centre in southern Gaza on Wednesday, with the site’s operator blaming “agitators” within the crowd and the territory’s civil defence agency attributing the panic to Israeli gunfire.

It was the US- and Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation’s (GHF) first acknowledgement of deaths at one of its aid centres after weeks of chaotic scenes and near-daily reports of Palestinians being killed nearby while waiting to collect rations.

The latest deaths came as Hamas accused Israel of wanting to retain long-term military control of Gaza — a key sticking point in ongoing negotiations aiming to seal a deal for a 60-day ceasefire, the release of hostages and the unfettered flow of much-needed aid.

A Palestinian source close to the negotiations said there had been “no progress so far” in the indirect talks, which are now in their second week in Doha.

In Khan Yunis, the GHF said it understood that 19 of those killed on Wednesday “were trampled and one was stabbed amid a chaotic and dangerous surge”.

Israeli forces opened fire and used (tear) gas, causing panic and a stampede after aid centre guards closed the main gates in front of the hungry crowd

MAHMUD BASSAL
Spokesman, Gaza civil defence agency



People mourn Palestinians who were killed iin Khan Yunis on Wednesday. — Reuters

Gaza’s civil defence agency confirmed at least 20 people were killed in the incident, but blamed it on fire from Israeli troops.

Agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal said that thousands had gathered at the scene when “Israeli forces opened fire and used (tear) gas, causing panic and a stampede

after aid centre guards closed the main gates in front of the hungry crowd”. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Footage showed lifeless bodies being taken to Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis, with some placed on the floor and others on already-bloodied beds. — AFP

Students make toiletries, plastic alternatives out of ‘menace’ mesquite

IBRI: The student-led company “Greenova” from the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Ibri has achieved a breakthrough by extracting alternatives to plastic and advanced health products from the mesquite tree (Prosopis juliflora).

This pioneering step merges green economy principles with biotechnology, embodying Omani innovation and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Badr bin Said al Azizi, CEO of Greenova, stated: “With over two years of experience in innovation and entrepreneurship, the company



Products use mesquite tree waste — which previously required millions of riyals in annual public tenders for disposal

has established a national and global reputation by developing a mesquite-based alternative to plastic. This material is stronger, cheaper, shatterproof and more heat-resistant.” He noted that the material’s high efficiency has been validated by a credible report from the Plant Therapy Research Laboratory in China, supervised by leading scientists, reinforcing the innovation’s credibility and the product’s robustness.

He said: “By extracting compounds from mesquite leaves, the company has produced 100

per cent natural hair wash, body wash and soap derived from a local tree. These product meets global standards, competes in international markets and offers a safe, healthy alternative to existing options.” The CEO emphasised that Greenova has achieved remarkable milestones in a short time. Sales of its plastic alternative raw material have captured 40 per cent of the Omani market in a single transaction, with a net daily profit of 35 per cent, reflecting the project’s economic viability and environmental sustainability. — ONA

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Projects span multiple sectors, including internal road paving and development of recreational facilities. — ONA

RO 2.4M MUNICIPAL PROJECTS IN ADAM IMPLEMENTED

ADAM: The Wilayat of Adam in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is witnessing the implementation of a series of service and municipal projects aimed at enhancing public service efficiency, with a total cost exceeding RO 2.43 million.

These projects span multiple sectors, including internal road paving, market construction and the development of recreational facilities, as part of a balanced plan to distribute development across the governorate’s wlayats.

Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, highlighted that the ongoing projects cover essential sectors that directly impact citizens’ daily lives. Among the most prominent is the vegetable and fruit market project, which has reached 75% completion, along with the design and implementation of an internal road network spanning approximately 35 kilometres.

The consultancy services project for the design of currently implemented roads has been fully completed, while work continues on the Al Handali industrial layout, with progress reaching around 40%.

The Wilayat of Adam has also received several developmental initiatives costing over RO 1.2 million, including the construction of market shades, an animal feed market equipped with essential services, maintenance of damaged road sections, and street lighting leading to public facilities such as Adam Public Park. Additionally, expansion works and lighting installations have been carried out on the road leading to Adam Air Base, along with the supply and installation of 257 streetlight poles along the Adam-Sinaw Road (Phase 1), covering 13.5 kilometres.

Adam Public Park stands out as a key project in advancing the wilayat’s community infrastructure. Spanning over 250,000 square metres, the park is undergoing comprehensive development to transform it into an integrated tourist and recreational facility catering to all segments of society. — ONA

SUMMER RAINS RETURN TO MUSCAT BRINGING RELIEF

MUSCAT: After weeks of intense summer heat, parts of the capital city of Muscat finally received long-awaited rainfall on Wednesday, bringing brief from soaring temperatures.

Light to moderate rains fell across several neighbourhoods, while the Wilayat of Al Seeb reported minor damages caused by strong downdraft winds accompanying the thunderstorm.

The showers followed a system of thunderclouds observed earlier off the Sea of Oman, which moved south-southeast and continued to affect the governorates of Muscat and Al Batinah South.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority, thunderstorm cells also developed off the Arabian Sea, influencing conditions in Al Wusta Governorate and Masirah Island.

The impact of these cells is expected to persist into the evening. Meanwhile, cloud activity remains concentrated over several governorates including Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta, with scattered rainfall likely to continue forming across these areas.

Further south, Dhofar Governorate remains partly to fully cloudy, especially along the coastal strip and nearby mountains, with chances of drizzle, low clouds and fog persisting through the late night and early morning hours. Authorities have issued warnings for reduced visibility due to fog and dust, downdraft winds, and the possible flow of wadis in low-lying and mountainous regions.

OMANI AIRSPACE SEES 18% INCREASE IN AIRCRAFT MOVEMENT: CAA

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Aircraft movements across Omani airspace increased by 18 per cent to 50,101 in June 2025 compared to the same period in 2024, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), which also reported number of passengers travelling through Muscat International Airport increased by 5 per cent to 636,090 in June 2025, compared to the same period a year ago.

It may be noted that the Middle East airspace was disrupted in the



middle of June 2025 when Israeli attacks on Iran led to major airspace closures and flight cancellations across the region. Airlines rushed to reroute planes, and several airports temporarily halted flights.

The disruptions had an impact on the thousands of air travellers.

The Sultanate of Oman was ranked fifth in the compliance index for effective implementation of air safety control in the Sultanate of Oman after scoring 95.95 per cent in 2024, compared to 60.47 per cent and 133rd rank in 2020.

The Sultanate of Oman was ranked fourth globally in the aviation incidents and accident investigation index and second in the Middle East and North Africa, while it is ranked first regionally in the areas of airworthiness and air navigation safety.

The International Civil Aviation

Organization’s (ICAO) Global Air Safety Oversight Audit Programme aims to assess the extent to which ICAO member states comply with the air safety standards and recommendations, done through regular inspections and analysis of safety data to improve global air safety. In the field of air navigation safety, the compliance rate increased from 50 per cent to 97.27 per cent as a result of improvements in control and follow-up procedures to ensure air navigation safety and its adherence to international standards.

Over 2,600 traffic mishap hospitalisations recorded

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 16

MORE than 2,668 road accident victims were treated at Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah during the first half of 2025, according to senior medical staff. The high figure underscores the mounting pressure on emergency services in Dhofar and highlights the ongoing risks facing road users in the Sultanate of Oman.

The number was disclosed by Basim bin Jumaan al Maas, Senior Nurse in the hospital’s Emergency Department, during a road safety awareness seminar held at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

The seminar was organised by the Directorate-General of Culture, Sports and Youth in Dhofar Governorate in collaboration with the Traffic Safety Institute, as part of a broader initiative to raise community awareness and reduce traffic-related injuries and fatalities.

The event brought together officials, medical professionals and social specialists to discuss practical strategies for improving road safety, especially among young people. It also aimed to reinforce cooperation between public institutions, security agencies and civil society organisations in addressing health and safety issues.

In his opening speech, Ali bin Mohammed Baqi, Director of the Department of Sports and Youth Activities, emphasised the importance of joint efforts between government and community institutions in delivering targeted awareness programmes. He stated that the directorate is committed to launching educational initiatives that reflect the concerns of young people and encourage responsible road behaviour.



The seminar brought together officials, medical professionals and social specialists to discuss practical strategies for improving road safety, especially among young people.

Among the speakers was Major Shihab bin Ahmed al Shanfari, an officer at the Traffic Safety Institute in Dhofar, who presented a detailed overview of the institute’s work in educating drivers and promoting safe road practices. He highlighted that between 2023 and 2024, Oman recorded a nine-per cent decline in traffic accidents and injuries, alongside a two-per cent reduction in road fatalities. He attributed these improvements to the concerted efforts of the Royal Oman Police and national safety bodies.

Abdullah bin Ramadan Beit Majzoub, a social care expert at the Directorate-General of Social Development in Dhofar, focused on the safety of persons with disabilities in road environments. He stressed the importance of inclusive mobility planning and called for greater efforts to meet the specific needs of individuals with disabilities in both urban infrastructure and transport systems.

Basim, in his address, shed light on the role of the Emergency Department

in managing traffic accident cases. He explained that the hospital had received 2,668 cases related to road accidents in the first six months of the year alone. He described the heavy toll these incidents take on medical teams and resources, and urged for a renewed commitment to prevention and public awareness.

The seminar concluded with a visual presentation showcasing road safety messages, followed by a musical performance with an educational theme. Organisers also held a recognition ceremony to honour the participating speakers and institutions for their contributions to promoting public health and traffic awareness.

With Dhofar preparing for an influx of visitors during the khareef season, officials are calling for greater vigilance on the roads and a unified national effort to strengthen road safety culture across the Sultanate of Oman.

Vibrant Al Ashkharah welcomes visitors

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, the third edition of the Ajwa’a al Ashkharah (Al Ashkharah Summer Extravaganza) festival was officially inaugurated on Wednesday, in the seaside town of Al Ashkharah, located in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

The festival, which continues until August 9, offers a wide array of daily activities including cultural performances, musical evenings, poetry recitals, family events, interactive competitions and heritage showcases — positioning Al Ashkharah as a unique summer destination on the national tourism map.

The opening highlighted several community-based initiatives and interactive programmes aimed at engaging diverse age groups while showcasing the cultural and



The festival, which continues until August 9, offers a wide array of daily activities including cultural performances, musical evenings, poetry recitals and family events.

economic potential. Guests were treated to a documentary-style presentation introducing the vision and objectives of the festival, followed by a musical performance by a local scout band.

Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of Al Sharqiyah South, stated that the festival has evolved into a practical model for sustainable local

development, underlining the importance of seasonal tourism in stimulating the local economy and fostering community engagement.

“The real value of this festival lies not only in its programme lineup but in its ability to create meaningful partnerships between the public sector, private businesses and the local community,” he said.

“It’s about activating a local ecosystem where everyone has a role — whether through small enterprises, cultural contributions, or social innovation. This edition has been particularly expansive and well- coordinated, building on the success of previous years,” he added.

He emphasised that tourism must be rooted in community involvement and local potential: “We are committed to developing a comprehensive and sustainable model for domestic tourism — one that is grounded in creativity, interaction and continuous

improvement. Our aim is to align these efforts with Oman Vision 2040, ensuring that festivals like this serve as platforms for dialogue, innovation and long-term development.”

Mohammed bin Humaid al Ghabshi, Wali of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, noted that the third edition of the festival demonstrates the community’s growing capacity to design and execute high-impact events.

“This year’s festival has expanded its reach to include not only traditional and recreational offerings but also modern tools for economic empowerment. Youth and women are actively engaged through SMEs displays, family-run businesses and creative platforms.” The Wali added that this year’s programme was carefully curated to include activities for children, families and entrepreneurs alike, turning the festival into a space that blends entertainment with education and enterprise.

SHORT TAKES



Omanis at ‘Chinese Language Bridge’ programme

OMANIS AT ‘CHINESE LANGUAGE BRIDGE’ PROGRAMME

MUSCAT: A delegation of students from Omani higher education institutions is participating in the ‘Chinese Language Bridge’ programme, hosted by the People’s Republic of China. This initiative is part of ongoing efforts to strengthen cultural and educational ties between the Sultanate of Oman and China and to implement memoranda of understanding in the fields of higher education and student exchange. The delegation comprises 15 male and female students from various Omani universities and colleges.

The programme is designed to enhance students’ linguistic and cultural competencies while deepening their understanding of Chinese society through a variety of workshops, educational activities and field visits. The participation offers a valuable opportunity for students to engage directly with Chinese culture and contribute to building bridges of mutual understanding and cooperation between the youth of Oman and China.

START-UPS INDEX SESSION CONCLUDES

SALALAH: An awareness session for the promotional campaign “Incentive Programme and Promising Start-ups Index” concluded on Wednesday in the Wilayat of Salalah. The session was organised by the Muscat Stock Exchange and the National Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Financial Sector Development “Etidamah”, in collaboration with the Dhofar Governorate branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The session introduced the objectives of the Incentive Programme and the Promising Start-ups Index, along with its three incentive tracks: the Main Market, the Promising Start-ups Index and the Third Market. Additionally, the session highlighted key incentives allocated to closed and family-owned companies, outlining the relevant regulatory and technical requirements. — ONA

Quality of telecom connections contributes to digital transformation: TRA

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Internal building connections are one of the key factors contributing to ensuring the availability of high-quality and consistent telecommunications services within buildings. Poor internal wiring quality represents a major challenge and tops the list of complaints received by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) from subscribers across Oman’s governorates. In light of the TRA’s concern for the quality of internal building connections, the Authority, in a media awareness campaign launched to raise community awareness of the importance of proper internal wiring for telecommunications services in residential and commercial buildings, highlighted the need to adopt the technical guidelines issued by the Authority. These guidelines include requirements and standards for internal wiring according to the type of building, whether single-storey residential, multi-storey, commercial, or integrated residential complex. The TRA emphasised that adherence to these technical standards ensures the availability of



The TRA emphasised that adherence to technical standards ensures the availability of an internal communications network infrastructure.

an internal communications network infrastructure that contributes to the digital transformation of society and supports the readiness of modern buildings to keep pace with the development of communications services and smart home technologies. It mentioned that failure to adhere to the approved technical standards may result in continued poor internal service coverage, which will negatively impact the user experience. In the building category, single-storey residential buildings, it is recommended to extend Category 6 (CAT-6) copper cables or higher from the main distribution box to

all communications sockets, with a dedicated infrastructure in place that allows each wireless access point (Wi-Fi) to be connected to a separate cable to enhance performance and coverage. It is also preferable to allocate an RJ45 cable to each television, security camera, ground-floor windows, and external door to transform the building into a fully integrated smart home. In multi-storey residential buildings, the ground floor should be equipped with a main distribution box, connected by ascending channels to the floor distribution boxes on each floor. In the case of big buildings, the TRA recommends establishing a communications room instead of boxes, in addition to providing a dedicated distribution box for each residential unit, connected via cable channels. Furthermore, commercial buildings are required to provide a dedicated communications room within the commercial building, replacing the main distribution box, given the nature and volume of demand for communications services in these facilities. In residential complexes, a central communications room must be installed in the centre of the complex, connected to the outer wall via dedicated ducts.

MEETING LOOKS AT ENHANCING OMAN’S PERFORMANCE IN GLOBAL INNOVATION INDEX

MUSCAT: The National Team in charge of enhancing the performance of the Sultanate of Oman in the Global Innovation Index held its twenty-first meeting under the chairmanship of Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation, Head of the National Team for the Global Innovation Index. The meeting reviewed the outcomes and recommendations of a working session on the International Policy Indicators Simulation System for policymakers



The meeting reviewed the outcomes and recommendations of a working session on the International Policy Indicators Simulation System. — ONA

in the Arab region. Organised by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the

session discussed the mechanisms of simulation and methodologies on analysing the indicators proposed during the session. The protocols included means to measure gaps and formulate scenarios on enhancing Oman’s performance in the Global Innovation Index. The meeting also reviewed the progress made in preparing a medium-term plan and procedural steps to support the team tasked with policies and initiatives and the data management team. The Global Innovation Index team stems from the National Competitiveness Committee. — ONA

Airport pact to increase passenger experience

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, JULY 16

THE agreement signed between Oman Airports and Changi Airport of the Republic of Singapore aims to increase revenues by expanding both aeronautical and non-aeronautical activities within and outside the terminal premises of Muscat International Airport. Eng Ahmed bin Said al Amri, CEO of Oman Airports, stated to the Observer, “We are focusing on the commercial aspect of the business by attracting new airlines and positioning Muscat International Airport as a hub for other airlines. This will increase our revenues through the existing facilities.” Changi Airport, which serves over 68 million passengers annually and generates revenues of over \$2 billion, is globally recognised as one of the best airports in the world. It has received numerous international awards, including being named the World’s Best Airport for twelve consecutive years (2012–2020) and is ranked second worldwide for the quality of its retail services, according to Al Amri. He continued, “The agreement will involve developing strategies to enhance the passenger experience at the airport and increase its utilisation. It will also involve training Omanis to benefit from Changi’s experience and apply it to our airport.” Eugene Gan, CEO of Changi Airport, said, “We will utilise our industry experience,



The agreement will involve developing strategies to enhance the passenger experience at the airport and increase its utilisation.

network and connections to boost passenger traffic and revenues at Muscat International Airport, which has relatively new infrastructure.” Regarding potential projects, Gan mentioned, “It may be premature to provide specific details, but we are considering projects such as theme parks as part of our strategy. There are other possibilities both within the terminal

building and outside, including cargo-related businesses.” Oman Airports also recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Malaysian company WCT International. It will focus on expanding hospitality, entertainment, interactive experiences, and other mixed-use services to increase land investment value and enhance returns from direct and joint ventures.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

ANNOUNCEMENT OF ELECTRONIC AUCTION

The Ministry of Information announces the holding of an electronic auction to sell unusable cars, furniture, materials and technical equipment through the Oman Auction platform (www.mazad.om), according to the following statement:

Statement	Inspection Location	Inspection Date and Time	Electronic Bidding Start Date
Unsuitable Furniture, Materials, and Technical Equipment	Ministry of Information Warehouses 1. Madinat Al Ilam 2. Wilayat Saham 3. Ruwi 4. Wilayat Nizwa	Sunday 20/07/2025 Monday 21/07/2025 From 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM	Wednesday 23/07/2025 To Thursday 24/07/2025
Vehicles	1. Madinat Al Ilam 2. Salalah		

- Entry for inspection will be regulated according to regulations to avoid overcrowding and ensure everyone’s safety.
- To view the terms and conditions and register, visit the website: (www.mazad.om)
- For further inquiries, please contact us via email: (info@mazad.om)

An advertisement banner for AWASR. On the left, the AWASR logo is displayed in white on a teal background, with the tagline "Experience Better" below it. The central part of the banner has a purple background and features the text "Their future starts today!" in white, followed by "Change to AWASR, Fastest Internet In Oman". Below this, two bullet points are listed: "Get Ashel Educational Platform for free!" and "Unlimited data for all plans". On the right, there is an illustration of a young boy sitting at a desk, focused on his laptop. Surrounding him are various educational icons: a triangle with internal angles labeled A, B, and C; a lightbulb; a dashed line with a star; and a mathematical formula $x = \frac{\sqrt{b^2 - c^2}}{c} + c - \frac{b^2}{2}$. To the right of the illustration is a QR code and the text "SUBSCRIBE NOW! WhatsApp 80001000 Website: awasr.om".

ITTIN BURSTS INTO LIFE AS KHAREEF DHOFAR GETS UNDERWAY

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 16

ITTIN Square takes visitors on a journey through worlds of entertainment and culture, combining shopping, international performances and unique family experiences.

Among the notable attractions this year is festival's largest-ever theatre structure — an impressive pavilion inspired by the surrounding mountains, complete with interactive screens, laser games and cascading water features. The skies over Itin Square come alive each night with eco-friendly fireworks and dazzling drone shows, adding a modern twist to traditional celebrations.

A diverse array of international performances adds further vibrancy to the festival. These include the futuristic Galaxy Shows, which merge space-themed fashion with immersive lighting; the high-energy Crow Show, featuring acrobatic stunts seen on America's Got Talent; the whimsical Emoji Festival, which brings 20 animated characters to life; the visually enchanting Fantasy Show with shadow displays; and live music acts such as the Latin Band from Mexico, the globally touring Argola Band, and a variety of folkloric performances sponsored

by Unesco.

Roaming musicians and dancers enliven the grounds through events like the Music Carnival, European Carnival with Russian and Oriental musical blends, the lively Carnival of 100 featuring a 100-performer parade, the all-female Peter Dance Carnival, and the playful Balloon Carnival with performers dressed in balloon-inspired costumes — all culminating in the mesmerising Luminous Balloon Show, which reimagines the concept of hot-air balloon entertainment.

Children are treated to endless fun at the Inflatable City, while Culture Street offers a more reflective experience with interactive displays celebrating the talents of writers, illustrators and poets. Adding a strong local flavour is the Retail Area, where women-led enterprises showcase a blend of traditional and contemporary products – ranging from perfumes and incense to modern interpretations of Omani fashion – reflecting both the entrepreneurial spirit of local artisans and a broader push to support homegrown talent.

As the cool mist of the khareef season settles over Salalah, Ittin Square is once again emerging as the beating heart of Dhofar's festivities — alive with music, lights, laughter and colour. From July 15 until the end of August, the iconic square is hosting an energetic mix of



entertainment that brings together
tradition, innovation and family fun.

Featuring dance and music from across the globe, the International Folklore Show offers a nightly celebration of culture that draws crowds from across Oman and beyond.

Right next to the folklore stage, an explosion of colour and motion awaits families at the Inflatable Entertainment City, open daily for children of all ages to bounce, climb and play to their hearts' content.

Evenings at Ittin Square are truly something special this year. From the very first night, the skies will be painted with the brilliance

of a nightly Fireworks Show — continuing all the way through August 30. Meanwhile, the Drone Art Shows, running until August 13, add a modern twist to the skies, with fleets of lit-up drones performing synchronised routines above the crowds.

Music lovers will find plenty to enjoy too. The upbeat rhythms of the Latin Band Shows (until August 3) and the immersive soundscapes of the Galaxy Shows (until August 23) are creating vibrant atmospheres each evening. And for something a little more light-hearted, the Emoji Carnival has already become a fan favourite, especially among

younger visitors. Those with a taste for the spectacular can catch the Crew Show, an acrobatic sports performance packed with stunts and daring choreography, also running until August 3. And as night falls, the Lights World Carnival dazzles with luminous installations and walk-through experiences — turning the square into a glowing wonderland.

As the calendar moves forward, more attractions will take the stage. The European Carnival will bring a classic fairground experience starting on July 18, followed closely by the Illuminated Balloon Carnival on July 20, both running into early August. The excitement continues with Carnival 100, a nostalgic mix of games and shows, and the return of the Illuminated Balloon Shows, which will light up the evening skies until August 29.

August also brings the Argola Shows, featuring circus-style performances, the high-energy Peter Dance Carnival, and the magical Shadow Fantasy Show. This year's Ittin Square programme reflects a growing ambition to elevate Salalah's position as a regional tourism magnet during the khareef season. Beyond the entertainment, these events represent a significant economic and social boost — supporting local vendors, encouraging domestic travel and offering a family-friendly platform to showcase Omani hospitality.

Muscat Private Hospital and Qpay unveil strategic partnership to launch Oman's first healthcare BNPL Solution



Hassan Al Lawati
CEO
Muscat Private Hospital

In a groundbreaking initiative designed to enhance healthcare accessibility and promote financial inclusion, Muscat Private Hospital (MPH) has officially partnered with Qpay to introduce Oman's first Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) solution for the medical sector. The partnership was formalised during a signing ceremony at Muscat Private Hospital, attended by Hassan Al Lawati, Chief Executive Officer of MPH, and Khalid Al-Mahrooqi, Chief Executive Officer and Co-Founder of Qpay, along with senior executives from both organizations.

This partnership introduces a groundbreaking payment option in Oman's healthcare landscape, enabling patients at MPH to receive

treatments and pay their bills in four interest-free installments through Qpay's secure platform. This initiative aims to alleviate financial burdens for patients and facilitate timely access to essential medical services

Hassan Al Lawati emphasised the hospital's holistic approach to patient care and its commitment to innovative healthcare solutions: "At MPH, we believe in thinking differently and acting compassionately. We are not just a healthcare provider; we are deeply invested in facilitating all the support our patients need to ensure they receive the best treatment without any difficulties. This partnership is a testament to our ongoing commitment to supporting the people

of Oman with accessible and innovative healthcare solutions.”

He elaborated on the importance of making healthcare accessible and less stressful for families. “Many families face financial challenges when it comes to medical expenses. Through our collaboration with Qpay, we seek to ease the financial burden associated with healthcare costs, allowing individuals to focus on their health and well-being. This initiative aligns perfectly with our mission to provide not just superior medical treatments but to create an environment where financial concerns do not inhibit access to essential healthcare services.”

Khalid Al Mahrooqi remarked that they were

excited to collaborate with Muscat Private Hospital as we embark on our journey into the healthcare sector. "This partnership marks a significant milestone for Qpay, and we look forward to enhancing access to flexible payment solutions within the medical field."

The event also included key attendees such as Dr Raymond, Medical Director of MPH; Rajendar, Finance Director; Madhu Ramaiah, Operations Manager; Vijay, Marketing Manager; and Ali Al Lawati, Co-Founder of Qpay. Their participation underscored the strategic importance of this collaboration and the shared commitment to innovation, inclusion, and patient-centered care.

This partnership solidifies Muscat Private Hospital's status as a forward-thinking institution dedicated to healthcare excellence, while Qpay continues to spearhead Oman's fintech revolution, empowering consumers with smarter financial tools. Together, both organisations are paving the way for a future where quality healthcare is not only accessible but also financially manageable for everyone.

أفضل العروض CRAZY DEALS

Ultimate Benefits
with Lowest Prices.

العروض من تاريخ ١٩ يوليو ٢٠٢٤ إلى ١٩ يوليو ٢٠٢٤
متوفر في سوبر ماركت ناستو
أولاد الشرف - منطقة جبل مبارك - خليج
البحرين (الحيث التوسعية بنو العاصم) ببناء مستم
تحتفظ ناستو بحقوق الطبع

OMR 0.150
بصل الهند بالكيلو
Onion India Per Kg

OMR 0.490
برتقال نافل جنوب
أفريقيا بالكيلو
Orange Navel South
Africa Per Kg

OMR 0.390
موز الإكوادور بالكيلو
Banana Ecuador Per Kg

OMR 0.850
جبنة مثلثات ألمانار
قطع ١٢٠ × ٤ سم
Almaral Triangle
Cheese 8P 4x120gm

OMR 7.890
دجاج برفان بول
١٠ × ٩٠٠ جم
Pena Branca Whole Chicken
10x900Gm

OMR 2.990
لوز خام بالكيلو
Almond Raw Per Kg

OMR 3.590
كاجو سادة بالكيلو
Cashew Nut Plain W320 Per kg

OMR 2.990
سكر الأمين الأبيض ٦ × ٢ كجم
Al Ameen White Sugar 6x2kg

OMR 2.650
جبنة الؤءة المملوءة
٢ كجم
Al Wafa Instant Filled
Milk Powder 2kg

OMR 18.000
أرز مدينته المدينة طويل حبة ٣٥ كجم
Al Madinah Extra Long Basmati Rice 35kg

OMR 2.000
شامبو هيد أند
٣٥٠ × ٢ مل
H&S Shampoo Asst
2X350MI

OMR 1.500
مسحوق غسيل مدينته ٥ كجم
Delite Detergent Powder 5kg

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SHORTTAKES



The programme aims to enhance students' abilities in handling advanced problems through intensive drills. — ONA

NUCLEAR SCIENCE OLYMPIAD TRAINING CAMP KICKS OFF

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education on Wednesday launched the central training camp for the national team participating in the International Nuclear Science Olympiad in Bangi, Malaysia. The competition, in its second edition, will take place from July 31 July to August 5, and will feature four students from the educational directorates of Muscat, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Batinah South.

Organised by the Department of Innovation and Scientific Olympiad, the camp includes theoretical training on solving nuclear science Olympiad problems, practical training on experiments in nuclear physics, solving high-level exercises and problems, and honing skills in tackling complex challenges. The programme aims to enhance students' abilities in handling advanced problems through intensive drills that simulate the Olympiad's format, equipping them with the tools needed for outstanding performance in the competition. The International Nuclear Science Olympiad, organised by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), is a global contest designed to raise awareness about the peaceful applications of nuclear science and technology. — ONA

SAY NO TO DRUGS

Programme integrates awareness drive into sports

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

THE Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth organised an awareness initiative under the slogan 'Say No to Drugs', targeting students participating in the summer sports programmes in Muscat Governorate. The initiative aimed to raise awareness among teenagers about the dangers of drug use and its negative impact on mental, physical and social health.

As part of the ministry's ongoing efforts to promote community awareness, the initiative focused on educating youth, their families and educational institutions about the factors that lead some teenagers to experiment with drugs such as peer pressure, curiosity and a lack of familial or religious guidance. The event also emphasised the importance of family communication and parental monitoring, particularly during adolescence, a critical stage marked by rapid intellectual and behavioural changes.

The initiative included a specialised awareness lecture delivered by Yahya al Riyami, a mental health specialist from the Executive Office of the National Committee for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances. He stated that the main objective of the lecture was to equip youth and school students with preventive skills to help them



The initiative included a specialised awareness lecture delivered by Yahya al Riyami, a mental health specialist. - Photo by Hussein al Muqbali

avoid falling into addiction.

Al Riyami explained that the lecture covered several key topics, starting with an introduction to the role of the National Committee. The lecture also provided a detailed explanation of the different types of drugs and their devastating effects on the nervous system, as well as discussing the main causes of drug use.

The lecture also addressed essential life skills students need to protect themselves from drugs, such as planning, time management, effective communication, emotional expression, problem-solving, assertive refusal and self-confidence building.

Speaking about the importance of raising awareness during adolescence, Al

Riyami said, at this age, students undergo intellectual and behavioural changes and are sometimes driven by a desire to experiment, which may lead to poor decisions.

Therefore, it is essential they possess enough awareness to understand the potential consequences of any negative experience, especially drug use.

Regarding the committee's plans, Al Riyami revealed ongoing educational programmes in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, implemented in Cycle 2 schools to promote behavioural skills. He also mentioned a nationwide community competition, now in its fourth edition with the participation of 28 wilayats, compared to just 10 in the first edition.

Hussam al Rashdi, a student, noted that the lecture addressed several important aspects, particularly the emphasis on not remaining silent in case of suspected drug dealers inside the school. He stressed the need for immediate reporting to the school administration to ensure proper handling of such situations and prevent the spread of drugs among students.

Ahlam al Khamisi, Sports Activity Specialist for the 2025 Summer Sports Programme in Muscat Governorate, affirmed that the programme is rich with diverse activities that go beyond training, focusing also on instilling community values and raising awareness, in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
331/2025	Providing a light meal for those enrolled in each of the following centres Down Syndrome Centre - Early Intervention Centre - Vocational Rehabilitation Centre in Al Khoud	Companies specialized in the field of Supplying Supply of food, beverages and accessories registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority with excellent or first or second or third or fourth degree.	Thursday 31-07-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 14-08-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
332/2025	Providing and installing a meeting system in the meeting room of the Office of His Excellency the Undersecretary	Companies specialized in the field of Design, installation and maintenance of information programs and systems registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 31-07-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 14-08-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
333/2025	Providing male and female assistant workers for the Department of Specialized Rehabilitation Centers	Companies specialized in the field of Hygiene, washing and pest control registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 31-07-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 14-08-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
334/2025	Supply of equipment and tools for the hydrotherapy unit of Al Wafa Center for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at Al Amarat	Companies specialized in the field of Design Supply of office and educational tools, materials and supplies or supply of sports equipmet registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 31-07-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 14-08-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
335/2025	Supply of equipment and tools for the hydrotherapy unit of Al Wafa Center for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at Ibri	Companies specialized in the field of Design Supply of office and educational tools, materials and supplies or supply of sports equipmet registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 31-07-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 14-08-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
336/2025	Supply of equipment and tools for the hydrotherapy unit of Al Wafa Center for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at Taqa	Companies specialized in the field of Design Supply of office and educational tools, materials and supplies or supply of sports equipmet registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 31-07-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 14-08-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
337/2025	Supply of equipment and tools for the hydrotherapy unit of Al Wafa Center for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at Burimi	Companies specialized in the field of Design Supply of office and educational tools, materials and supplies or supply of sports equipmet registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 31-07-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 14-08-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
338/2025	Supply of equipment and tools for the hydrotherapy unit of Al Wafa Center for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities at Bahla	Companies specialized in the field of Design Supply of office and educational tools, materials and supplies or supply of sports equipmet registered with Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Thursday 31-07-2025 02:00 PM	Thursday 14-08-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) .
On **Thursday 17/7/2025**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (**24402200**).

“ The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry”

www.mosd.gov.om

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



PM Keir Starmer leaves 10 Downing Street in London on Wednesday, to take part in the weekly session of Prime Minister’s Questions. — AFP

‘Serious questions’ over UK secret Afghan relocations: PM

London: Ministers in the UK’s last Conservative government have “serious questions to answer” over a secret resettlement plan for thousands of Afghans after a data breach endangered their lives, Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Wednesday.

Parliamentary Speaker Lindsay Hoyle said the affair raised significant constitutional issues” after it emerged that the previous government had obtained a court order banning media coverage and preventing any scrutiny by parliament.

Thousands of Afghans who worked with the UK and their families have been brought to Britain under the programme following the leak.

But the 2022 breach and the resettlement plan to protect those involved from potential repercussions only came to light on Tuesday after a court super-gag was lifted.

Defence Minister John Healey told parliament a UK official had accidentally leaked a spreadsheet containing the names and details of almost 19,000 Afghans who had asked to be relocated to Britain.

It happened in February 2022, just six months after Taliban fighters seized Kabul, he said.

In parliament on Wednesday, Starmer said his government supported the principle of fulfilling “our obligations to Afghans who served alongside British forces” in the post 9/11 conflict in the South Asian country.

Healey had “set out the full extent of the failings that we inherited: a major data breach, a superinjunction, a secret route that has already cost hundreds of millions of pounds”, he added.

“Ministers who served under the party opposite have serious questions to answer about how this was ever allowed to happen,” he said.

The nearly two-year-long court ban secured by the previous government prevented any media reporting of the leak.

In addition, parliament was not briefed and there was no public knowledge of the resettlement plan and the costs involved.

Speaker of Parliament Lindsay Hoyle, who is responsible for the proper administration of the House of Commons, also commented on the affair.

“This episode raises significant constitutional issues. I have therefore asked the clerks to consider whether any lessons need to be learned from this case,” he told lawmakers.

Under the Conservatives the secret programme was put in place in April 2024 to help those “judged to be at the highest risk of reprisals by the Taliban”, Healey said told parliament.

Some 900 Afghans and 3,600 family members have now been brought to Britain or are in transit under the programme known as the Afghan Response Route, at a cost of around £400 million (\$535 million).

Applications from 600 more people have also been accepted, bringing the estimated total cost of the scheme to £850 million.

They are among some 36,000 Afghans accepted by Britain under different schemes since the August 2021 fall of Kabul. Former defence minister Ben Wallace said he stood by his decision to seek secrecy from the court in August 2023 and rejected claims of a “cover-up”. — AFP

LICENCE ROW

UK lifts ban on Pakistani airlines



KARACHI: Britain has lifted a five-year ban on Pakistani airlines, allowing them to apply to resume UK flights just as Islamabad steps up efforts to privatise its national carrier, Pakistan International Airlines .

The ban was imposed in 2020, days after Pakistan launched an investigation into the validity of pilot licences issued in the country following a Pakistan International Airlines plane crash that killed 97 people.

MALAYSIA IN A TIGHT SPOT AS PRESSURE BUILDS TO REJECT TRUMP’S PICK

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia is facing mounting calls to reject a self-styled “alpha male” influencer picked by President Donald Trump to be US ambassador, in what could risk damaging ties at a critical time of tariff talks between the two countries.

The White House has proposed 40-year-old author and outspoken political commentator Nick Adams to the Senate as its nominee for ambassador to Malaysia, triggering concerns in the Muslim-majority

nation over Adams’ views on Islam and support for Israel’s military campaign in Gaza, among other sensitive topics.

No date is set for the Senate vote, but Adams is expected to be approved, with the Republican-held Senate green-lighting every Trump nominee since he became president in January. Adams has an outsized persona on social media and is known for his appeal among young males in the “manosphere”, an online space for men’s issues. He

lists interests including a love for hot dogs, steak, muscle cars, and restaurant chain Hooters.

In posts on on X, Adams has railed against alleged efforts to “teach Islam in schools” and described those expressing solidarity with Palestinians as supporters of terrorism. The posts have sparked outrage in Malaysia, which has a majority of mostly Muslim Malays alongside significant ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities of other faiths. — AFP

Israel hits Syria army HQ; over 300 dead in Sweida

ISRAEL said it bombed Syrian army headquarters in Damascus on Wednesday after warning the Islamist-led government to leave the Druze minority alone in its Sweida heartland where a monitor says sectarian clashes have killed more than 300 people.

Syrian government forces entered the majority-Druze city of Sweida on Tuesday with the stated aim of overseeing a ceasefire agreed with Druze community leaders after clashes with local Bedouin tribes left more than 300 people dead including government forces, local fighters and 27 Druze civilians killed in “summary executions... by members of the defence and interior ministries”.

However, witnesses reported that the government forces joined with the Bedouin in attacking Druze fighters and civilians in a bloody rampage through the city.

The fighting marks the most serious outbreak of violence in Syria since government forces battled Druze fighters in Sweida province and near Damascus in April and May leaving more than 100 people dead. The Islamist-led authorities have had strained relations with Syria’s patchwork of religious and ethnic minorities since they toppled longtime leader Bashar al Assad in December. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz called on Damascus to “leave the Druze in Sweida alone”.

“As we have made clear and warned, Israel will not abandon the Druze in Syria and will enforce the demilitarisation policy we have



Men walk among debris after powerful Israeli airstrikes shook Damascus on Wednesday, — Reuters

“As we have made clear and warned, Israel will not abandon the Druze in Syria and will enforce the demilitarisation policy we have decided on,” he said in a statement.

Syrian forces should withdraw, he added, and promised no let-up in Israeli military attacks until that happened, saying Israel would “raise the level of responses against the regime if the message is not understood”.

Shortly afterwards, the Israeli military said it had hit Syria’s military headquarters in Damascus.

“A short while ago, the (Israeli military) struck the entrance of the Syrian regime’s military headquarters in the area of Damascus in Syria,” it said in a statement.

Syrian state television reported that two people were wounded in central Damascus, without giving a more precise location.

Israel said it was sending more troops to the armistice line between the occupied Golan Heights and Syrian-controlled territory.

“In accordance with the situational assessment, the (Israeli military) has decided to reinforce its forces in the area of the Syrian border,” a statement said.

The head of the Druze community in Israel, Sheikh Mowafaq Tariq, called the situation “an existential battle for the Druze community”.

According to the Observatory, witnesses and Druze armed groups, government forces took part in fighting alongside the Bedouin against the Druze. Sporadic gunfire continued to ring out in the city on Wednesday, an AFP correspondent reported.— AFP



RAINS KILL OVER 110 IN PAKISTAN

People on a motorbike wade through a flooded street in a residential area after heavy monsoon rains in Lahore on Wednesday. Monsoon rains in Pakistan have been linked to more than 110 deaths including dozens of children since they arrived in late June. “The deaths were caused by collapsing roofs particularly in rural areas of the Punjab,” said Farooq Ahmad, spokesman for the provincial rescue department. Ahmad said around 90 people were injured. Punjab is Pakistan’s biggest province where millions of people are associated with agriculture and live in villages. The rains are considered blessings during the season but they also cause mud houses to collapse. — AFP

FORMER IS HUB

Iraq PM reopens Mosul airport



MOSUL: Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani inaugurated on Wednesday Mosul’s newly restored airport, years after it was destroyed in the battle to dislodge the IS group. Sudani’s flight landed at the airport, which is expected to become fully operational for all flights in two months. “The airport will serve as an additional link between Mosul and other Iraqi cities and regional destinations,” PM’s media office said

IN FIRST SIX MONTHS

Japan sees record 21.5 m tourists



TOKYO: A record 21.5 million tourists visited Japan in the first six months of the year, a 21-per cent increase year-on-year, official figures showed on Wednesday, despite visitors from Hong Kong dropping by a third last month over rumours of a quake. “The number exceeded 20 million in six months, the fastest pace ever,” the Japan National Tourism Organisation said. The figure in June alone jumped 7.6 per cent to record 3.4 million.

SHORT TAKES



Prosecutor asks Brazil Supreme Court to find Bolsonaro guilty of coup

Brasília: A prosecutor asked Brazil’s Supreme Court on Tuesday to find ex-president Jair Bolsonaro (pictured) guilty of plotting a coup, in closing arguments after a trial that saw US President Donald Trump try to intervene on behalf of his right-wing ally.

Bolsonaro is accused of seeking to overturn the 2022 election won by his left-wing opponent, current President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

The prosecution told the court that former army officer Bolsonaro and seven others were guilty of participating in “armed criminal association” and had sought to “violently overthrow the democratic order.”

After the defense presents its closing arguments, a five-justice panel will decide the fate of the former president. If found guilty, Bolsonaro and his co-defendants could face up to 40 years in prison.

Bolsonaro says he is the victim of political persecution, echoing Trump’s defense when the US president faced criminal charges before his White House return.

“It’s not about imprisoning me; they want to eliminate me,” he told news site Poder360 on Tuesday.

Prosecutors say Bolsonaro tried to overturn his 2022 loss in a plot that only failed because the military did not side with him.

Violent supporters then rioted, rampaging through government buildings in the capital Brasilia in scenes that echoed the assault on the US Capitol by Trump’s supporters after the Republican lost to Democrat Joe Biden in 2020.

The trial has attracted attention from Trump, who returned to power in the 2024 election and continues to claim -- despite this being rejected repeatedly by the courts -- that he won in 2020.

Trump has repeatedly called on social media for Bolsonaro’s trial to be stopped, accusing the authorities in Brazil of mounting a “witch hunt” and a “disgrace.”

On July 9, he took his campaign to extraordinary new levels by announcing plans to tariff Brazilian imports to the United States at 50 per cent.

And on Tuesday, Washington said it was opening an investigation into “unfair trading practices” by Brazil, a move that could provide a legal basis to justify imposing tariffs on South America’s largest economy. — AFP

ITALY SORTS VAST PILES OF POST FOR POPULAR POPE LEO

ROME: Leo XIV has not long been pope, yet the American head of the Catholic Church already receives 100 kg of letters a day, faithfully sorted by the Italian post office.

Missives from around the world, addressed to “His Holiness” in flowing cursive, in stark block capitals or in scrawls, are sorted into a series of yellow crates in a vast hangar near Rome’s Fiumicino airport. Robert Francis Prevost was a relatively unknown churchman when he was elected pontiff on May 8, but vast numbers of the faithful are penning him letters of support and pleas for him to pray on their behalf. “We receive hundreds of letters a day addressed to the pope, with peaks of 100 kg per day, or an average of 500 to 550 kg per week,” Antonello Chidichimo, director of the sorting centre, said. “There are many letters written by children, postcards, and it’s wonderful to see that in the digital age, many people still use a pen to write to the pope,” he noted. Bearing colourful

stamps, the day’s letters arrive from as far afield as Andorra, Brazil, Cameroon, Hong Kong or the US. After being sorted by machine — or by hand if a hand-written address is indecipherable — the mail is collected by a van that delivers it the same day to the Vatican, about 20 km away.

Pilgrims and tourists visiting the Vatican can also write to the pope and drop their letters directly at the Vatican Post Office, where it is collected four times a day. — AFP

Russia fires drones at Ukraine, defying Trump warning

RUSSIA fired hundreds of drones, artillery and a ballistic missile at Ukraine between late on Tuesday and early on Wednesday, Ukraine said, defying calls by Donald Trump to reach a peace deal.

The attacks left one woman dead and wounded more than two dozen people across multiple regions, while a missile attack cut power and water in Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s home city of Kryvyi Rig, according to authorities.

The bombardment came two days after US President Trump threatened to impose severe sanctions against the country unless it reached a peace settlement within 50 days to end its three-year war on Ukraine.



People take shelter inside a metro station during a Russian drone and missile strike in Kyiv. — Reuters

Ukrainian and Russian officials last met for direct peace talks more than a month ago, and no further meetings have been scheduled despite the Kremlin saying it is open for more talks.

Russia fired at least 400 drones at Ukraine between late on Tuesday and early on Wednesday, as well as an Iskander ballistic missile launched from the annexed Crimean peninsula, the Ukrainian air force said.

Overnight drone attacks on the central Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia left eight wounded, while three were wounded in an attack on the northeastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, local authorities said.

Russian attacks on the city of Kryvyi Rig wounded at least 15 people, destroyed an industrial building and disrupted power and water supplies, according to local officials.

A 17-year-old boy was among those injured, the city’s mayor Oleksandr Vilkul said on Telegram. “He was wounded in the abdominal cavity. He was immediately taken to the hospital, in serious condition. Now doctors are fighting for his life,” he wrote.

“This has never happened before. A ballistic missile and 28 Shaheds simultaneously,” he added, referring to Iranian-designed drones.

Russia has stepped up its summer campaign against Ukraine in recent weeks as Washington-mediated ceasefire talks stall.

Its army has pushed ahead on the battlefield, while pounding Ukraine with combined drone, artillery and missile strikes.

Trump said on Monday he had struck a deal with NATO chief to supply more American air defence systems and weapons to Ukraine, citing his frustration with Russia’s refusal to accept a ceasefire. — AFP

‘Pro-Russia hacking group broken up’

THE HAGUE: EU anti-crime bodies Europol and Eurojust said on Wednesday they had coordinated an international operation to dismantle a pro-Russian hacking group accused of launching thousands of online attacks against Ukraine and its allies. The network, known as NoName057(16), was disrupted following raids in 12 countries between July 14 and 17, they said.

The operation involved twelve countries and led to the arrest of two people, one in France and one in Spain, they added.

“The actions led to the disruption of an attack-infrastructure consisting of over one hundred computer systems worldwide, while a major part of the group’s central server infrastructure was taken offline,” Europol said in a statement.

Authorities issued seven international arrest warrants, including six for suspects based in Russia.

Two of those are believed to be the principal organisers of the group’s activities, the statement said.

The hacker group is responsible for multiple attacks on critical infrastructure such as electricity suppliers and public transport systems in Europe, according to the European agencies. — AFP

Iceland volcano erupts for ninth time since 2023

Reykjavik: A volcano erupted on Wednesday in Iceland’s Reykjanes peninsula in the southwest, weather authorities said, the ninth eruption to hit the region since the end of 2023.

Live video feeds showed lava spewing out of a fissure in the ground, with the Icelandic Met Office saying that it began just before 4:00 am (0400 GMT).

Broadcaster RUV reported that the nearby fishing village Grindavik had been evacuated, as had the Blue Lagoon, Iceland’s famed tourist spot.

The previous eruption to hit the area was in April.

When the first volcanic eruption first hit the area in late 2023, most of Grindavik’s 4,000 residents were evacuated.

Since then, almost all of the houses have been sold to the state, and most of the residents have left.

Volcanoes on the Reykjanes peninsula had not erupted for eight

centuries when in March 2021 a period of heightened seismic activity began.

Volcanologists have warned in recent years that volcanic activity in the region had entered a new era.

RUV said the latest eruption was not expected to impact international flights. A volcanic eruption in another part of Iceland in 2010 caused worldwide travel chaos as the ash spewed into the atmosphere sparked airspace closures in Europe.

Iceland is home to 33 active volcanic systems, more than any other European country.

It is located on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, a fault in the ocean floor that separates the Eurasian and North American tectonic plates and causes earthquakes and eruptions.

Often referred to as a land of ice and fire, the North Atlantic island nation with its many glaciers and volcanoes has now experienced a dozen eruptions since geological



Lava emerges through a fissure following a volcano eruption near Grindavik on Wednesday. — Reuters

systems on its Reykjanes peninsula reactivated in 2021.

Magma forced through the earth’s crust opened a massive fissure of length between 700 m and 1,000 m (0.4 miles and 0.6 miles), Iceland’s

meteorological office said, with the first signs of the eruption giving scant warning.

“(It does) not threaten any infrastructure at this time,” the office said in a statement. “Based on GPS measurements and deformation signals, it is likely that this was a relatively small eruption.”

Flights at Keflavik airport in the capital of Reykjavik were not affected, its web page showed.

The Reykjanes eruptions have not yet posed a threat to Reykjavik, nor ejected large volumes of ash into the stratosphere, so air traffic has not been disrupted.

Experts have said the eruptions in the area could recur for decades, or even centuries.

The fissure eruptions, as the outbreaks are known, are characterised by lava flows emerging from long cracks, rather than from a central crater.

—AFP and Reuters

OPINION

Skimming the Sun, probe sheds light on weather threats



ISSAM AHMED

The writer is health, science and environment reporter at AFP

ERUPTIONS of plasma piling atop one another, solar wind streaming out in exquisite detail — the closest-ever images of our Sun are a gold mine for scientists.

Captured by the Parker Solar Probe during its closest approach to our star starting on December 24, 2024, the images were recently released by Nasa and are expected to deepen our understanding of space weather and help guard against solar threats to Earth.

“We have been waiting for this moment since the late Fifties,” Nour Rawafi, project scientist for the mission at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, said.

Previous spacecraft have studied the Sun, but from much farther away.

Parker was launched in 2018 and is named after the late physicist Eugene Parker, who in 1958 theorised the existence of the solar wind — a constant stream of electrically charged particles that fan out through the solar system.

The probe recently entered its final orbit where its closest approach takes it to just 3.8 million miles from the Sun’s surface — a milestone first achieved on Christmas Eve 2024 and repeated twice since on an 88-day cycle. To put the proximity in perspective: if the distance between Earth and the Sun measured one foot, Parker would be hovering just half an inch away.

Its heat shield was engineered to withstand up to 2,500 degrees Fahrenheit (1,370 degrees Celsius) — but to the team’s delight, it has only experienced around 2,000F (1090C) so far, revealing the limits of theoretical modelling.

Remarkably, the probe’s instruments, just a yard behind the shield, remain at little more than room temperature.

The spacecraft carries a single imager, the Wide-Field Imager for Solar Probe (WISPR), which captured data as Parker plunged through the Sun’s corona, or outer atmosphere.

Stitched into a seconds-long video, the new images reveal coronal mass ejections (CMEs) — massive bursts of charged particles that drive space weather — in high resolution for the first time.

“We had multiple CMEs piling up on top of each other, which is what makes them so special,” Rawafi said. “It’s really amazing to see that dynamic happening there.” Such eruptions triggered the widespread auroras seen across much of the world last May, as the Sun reached the peak of its 11-year cycle.

Another striking feature is how the solar wind, flowing from the left of the image, traces a structure called the heliospheric current sheet: an invisible boundary where the Sun’s magnetic field flips from north to south.

It extends through the solar system in the shape of a twirling skirt and is critical to study, as it governs how solar eruptions

Space weather can have serious consequences, such as overwhelming power grids, disrupting communications and threatening satellites.

propagate and how strongly they can affect Earth. Space weather can have serious consequences, such as overwhelming power grids, disrupting communications and threatening satellites.

As thousands more satellites enter orbit in the coming years, tracking them and avoiding collisions will become increasingly difficult — especially during solar disturbances, which can cause spacecraft to drift slightly from their intended orbits.

Rawafi is particularly excited about what lies ahead, as the Sun heads towards the minimum of its cycle, expected in five to six years.

Historically, some of the most extreme space weather events have occurred during this declining phase — including the infamous Halloween Solar Storms of 2003, which forced astronauts aboard the International Space Station to shelter in a more shielded area.

“Capturing some of these big, huge eruptions... would be a dream,” he said.

Parker still has far more fuel than engineers initially expected and could continue operating for decades — until its solar panels degrade to the point where they can no longer generate enough power to keep the spacecraft properly oriented.

When its mission does finally end, the probe will slowly disintegrate — becoming, in Rawafi’s words, “part of the solar wind itself.”

In backing Brazil’s Bolsonaro, Trump may be helping Lula

RAMON SAHKMOW

US President Donald Trump’s backing for a far-right Brazilian ally could inadvertently boost leftist President Luis Inacio Lula da Silva’s flagging political fortunes, analysts say.

Brazilians on both sides of the political aisle have been angered by a threatened 50 per cent tariff on exports to the US — a penalty for what Trump calls a “witch hunt” against ex-president Jair Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro is on trial for allegedly plotting a coup against Lula, who narrowly beat him in a bitter 2022 election. Lula’s popularity has tanked amid persistent inflation, anger over an alleged social security scam to defraud retirees and a proposal to raise tax on financial transactions.

But he seems to have been bolstered by Washington’s threats: rallying Brazilians against a common meddlesome enemy. “Trump gave Lula a great gift,” Andre Cesar of the HOLD marketing consultancy said. Rejecting US “interference”, Lula’s administration has launched a patriotic campaign under the slogan: “Brasil (‘Brasil’ in Portuguese) is written with an S for Sovereignty.”

The former trade unionist has been sporting a baseball cap with the words “Brazil belongs to Brazilians”, and made fun of Trump at a recent event by offering to send him a local fruit as a treatment against “bad mood” and “tariff fights”.

“Lula taxes the rich, Bolsonaro taxes Brazilians”, rings another slogan adopted by the administration in Brasilia. On the back foot, few in Brazil’s political right welcomed the tariff move despite having agitated for US measures against Lula and the courts for their “persecution” of Bolsonaro. Among the rare defenders was congressman Eduardo Bolsonaro — the former president’s son — who wrote: “Thank you President Trump. Make Brazil Free Again”, in an all-caps social media post after the US president’s own writing style.

Bolsonaro himself was more guarded in his response, and at pains to stress he was “not happy” about the tariff pain Brazilian producers would suffer. Geraldo Monteiro at the Federal University of Rio said Trump’s threats “may have shifted the game” by “further isolating the far-right” in Brazil. “There was an unexpected convergence of interests between Lula’s government and the business class, in addition to a convergence of the political class to align with Lula.” — AFP

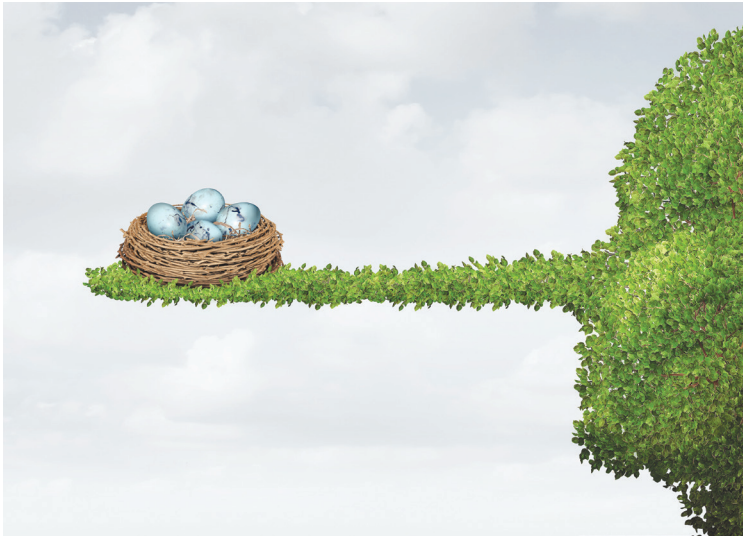
Use clarity to fight fakery

I was catching up on the news when a headline from Brazil caught my eye. COP30’s presidency has initiated a global call to address what they are identifying as climate disinformation. Not soft miscommunication. Not public confusion. Disinformation. The kind that spreads fast, wears the voice of someone familiar and takes root before facts can catch up.

Proposals are now open for groups around the world, especially from the Global South, to build tools that defend truth in the climate fight. It felt overdue.

Just days earlier, a friend had sent me one of those familiar, long WhatsApp messages claiming that Oman’s newly announced wind farms will “vacuum the clouds”, blaming recent shifts in rainfall on clean energy. There was no evidence cited, no meteorological data, just a concerned tone and sweeping conclusions. The message sounded scientific, but it wasn’t. It had already moved through three different WhatsApp groups before anyone asked if it was even true.

This is the thing about climate disinformation. It doesn’t always come in shouting. It slides into chats, dressed like a question or a worry, and before long it shapes how people vote, what policies they resist, and what solutions they no longer believe in. These stories reshape trust, rewire public emotion and wear down resolve. The issue extends beyond merely fake news; it revolves around narrative warfare. Sometimes these narratives deny the science altogether. Sometimes they delay action by saying the transition is too expensive or too fast. Sometimes they distort a single event, like a cold spell in winter, to argue the planet is not warming. Sometimes they distract, pointing at litter or plastic waste and insisting we focus on that instead. And more



Disinformation spreads fast, wears the voice of someone familiar and takes root before facts can catch up.



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

often than not, they greenwash. They make emissions look cleaner than they are. They make fossil fuel companies sound like climate champions.

This is not theory. This is everyday life. This is watching your neighbours grow sceptical of wind farms. This is hearing someone on the radio say climate change is just part of a cycle. This is seeing an ad that calls petrol clean because the font is green and the background has a leaf.

Researchers have mapped how to respond: detect, deconstruct, debunk and then deploy the truth in ways that travel just as fast. But most of us are not researchers. So what do we do?

We pause. We ask where the story came from. We verify the date. We compare it to trusted reports, like those from our Meteorology Officer and international bodies like the IPCC. We ask who benefits if we believe it. And we respond gently, clearly and early, before the story hardens into belief. That is called pre-bunking, and it matters more than we realise.

This work cannot take place on the periphery. The mayors of London and Paris have warned about how disinformation campaigns, some even funded by fossil fuel interests, have undermined clean air zones and delayed much-needed reforms. The same is true here, though the disguise may look more local, more familiar. It is not always loud, but it is always strategic. And the longer it goes unchecked, the harder it becomes to move forward.

Oman has no time for this. Our fisheries are exposed, our coasts are shifting and our cities are already contending with more extreme weather. The farmers of Al Batinah do not need myths about solar farms. They need facts that help them adapt to drier seasons. Every minute we spend chasing rumours is a minute we lose preparing the systems that will carry us through what is coming. Climate disinformation is not just frustrating. It is dangerous. It erodes trust. It slows response. And it isolates people from the truth at the moment they most need to act on it.

If you have encountered this information, whether it landed in your inbox or appeared on your screen, understand that you are not imagining it. Recognise that it carries weight and is not without consequences.

We also know there are effective ways to counteract it. This can be achieved not through argument or confrontation, but through clarity, context and care. The message from Belém serves as a reminder that the fight for climate action extends beyond boardrooms and summit halls; it unfolds in family chats, group messages and during our morning scrolls.

And in that space, each of us has a role. Truth travels slowly. But it still arrives if we make room for it and protect it.

Ideological warfare played out on social media



SONIA AMBROSIO

The writer is journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

SOCIAL media sites have become fantastic entertainment venues for highlighting spectacles. From the comical to the absurd, social platforms offer a circus of real life, featuring the most diverse clowns. Besides amusement, the posts provide lessons related to media and politics.

From feeling frustrated to laughter or despair to grave concerns, social media can be overwhelming. Trying to separate the fake from the real and understand the cultural nuances of public participation is a demanding exercise.

It is interesting to observe how narratives can evolve, shift, or be manipulated in response to different situations. It also reveals the intellectual level of people’s engagement.

Lessons from Brazil are not for the weak, as past events have demonstrated, especially during the second round of the 2022 presidential election and the incidents preceding the inauguration of the new government.

Social media is once again at the heart of an extraordinary development in Brazil. Until days ago, a socially, economically and politically polarised nation witnessed its people from the south to the north arguing with one another over regional differences, political affiliation, the rich versus the poor, the power struggle between the legislative and executive branches, including rival parties already using hate speech and false narratives in anticipation of the 2026

presidential election. Ironically, thanks to Donald Trump, most Brazilians have rallied around national sovereignty.

A letter to President Lula da Silva protesting what he called the “unfair judicial treatment” of Jair Bolsonaro accompanied Donald Trump’s social media post announcing a 50-per cent tariff hike on all Brazilian goods.

In the document, Trump linked the hike in tariffs to Brazil’s treatment of former president Jair Bolsonaro, who is on trial over charges of plotting a coup to prevent Lula from taking office in 2023. Trump stated in the letter that the trial ‘should not be taking place’ and that the ‘witch hunt should end immediately’.

He also said the hike was partly because of Brazil’s attacks on free elections. Similarly, Trump has condemned Brazil’s pursuit of social media regulations, alleging that Brazil has attacked the ‘fundamental Free Speech Rights of Americans’, accusing Brazil’s Supreme Court of unlawfully censoring US media platforms.

Trump’s decision to involve himself and the United States in Brazil’s internal affairs sparked an online discourse centred around ‘national unity’.

Under the hashtag ‘Respect Brazil’, Internet users ignited a surge of messages in support of the BRICS group and advocating for the principles of sovereignty.

Following the last day of the BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro last week, Trump took to social media, threatening 10 per cent tariffs

It is no longer about narrative control; we are facing an excess of versions, creating confusion between truth and falsehood and a subsequent erosion of trust in institutions.

on allied nations and accusing the group of anti-American actions.

With his move, Trump has given a new inference to tariff policy for political reasons and has escalated the online ideological conflict to new levels.

On social media, ideological warfare is raging between those defending Brazil’s national sovereignty and other groups, including democratically elected legislators who support Trump’s endorsement of Bolsonaro, tariff rises, and non-regulation or accountability of social platforms.

From Socrates to social media and freedom of expression, there has been a lengthy history of development and evolution. One of the most important aspects is that social media platforms are private companies with their own content moderation policies. This has raised concerns regarding the balance between safeguarding free speech and curbing harmful content.

The complexities of radicalism, partisanship, international trade relations, and social platforms’ sophisticated engagement algorithms can lead to potential consequences.

It is no longer about narrative control; we are facing an excess of versions, creating confusion between truth and falsehood and a subsequent erosion of trust in institutions.

It’s important to acknowledge that while social media offers positive aspects, it has also become a circus fostering a culture of performativity in which algorithms have a potential role in social processes.

Syria’s aviation comeback struggles amid regional turmoil

FERAS DALATEY

Poor infrastructure, regional conflict and sporadic Israeli air strikes are holding back more airlines from returning to Syria, industry officials said, hampering efforts to rebuild a shattered economy after 14 years of civil war.

This month, at least 11 foreign airlines are scheduled to fly into Syria, up from just three a year ago, as sanctions are scaled back following the overthrow of long-time leader Bashar al Assad in December 2024.

These include the world’s largest international carrier, Dubai’s Emirates, and the first two European Union-based airlines to fly into Syria since 2011: Romania’s Dan Air and Greece’s Air Mediterranean. But airlines such as Royal Jordanian, FlyDubai, Turkish Airlines and Qatar Airways last month were forced to cancel many of their recently launched flights as airspace across the Middle East closed to civil air traffic due to air and missile attacks involving Israel, the US and Iran. At the same time, airlines are worried about the state of Syria’s aviation infrastructure and management of the industry.

Lufthansa and Air France KLM, which used to fly to Syria pre-war, have visited Damascus airport to assess the infrastructure and former offices, officials at Damascus airport and Syria’s aviation regulator said.

Emirates at the end of May resumed flying over Syria for the first time since the civil war, shaving up to an hour off a Dubai to Beirut flight.

However, several countries, including Britain and the United States, still advise their airlines to avoid flying over Syria. Europe’s aviation regulator EASA says “there is a risk of both intentional targeting and misidentification of civil aircraft”. Syria completely reopened its airspace on June 24, its civil air authority said.

Damascus Airport’s two runways were bombed during the civil war, but have been repaired.

Alaa Sallal, director of public relations at Syria’s Civil Aviation Authority, said a number of airlines had been to inspect security and infrastructure at the airport. The head of Syria’s General Authority for Civil Aviation earlier this month said it wanted to build new airports in Damascus, Aleppo and in the country’s central region. But that will take time and money that the war-ravaged country may struggle to find on its own.

The mostly Iranian and Iraqi carriers that served Syria through its long conflict have largely stopped flying there, reflecting a new political landscape after Iran- and Russia-backed Assad’s overthrow. The flag carriers of Qatar and Türkiye, countries that backed Syria’s rebels through the war, were the first big airlines to resume flights in January under President Ahmed al Sharaa’s new leadership. — Reuters

Investing the Omani way: Steady and sustainable

AS investors around the world adapt to a changing landscape marked by uncertainty, rising costs and shifting priorities, the search for stability has become paramount. In this context, Oman’s measured and values-driven approach is drawing increasing interest.

The Sultanate of Oman is positioning itself not only as an attractive investment destination — but as a country offering clarity, consistency and long-term value.

In a region shaped by rapid transformation, Oman stands out for its intentional and grounded approach. Rather than competing for visibility, the country has focused on building trust and resilience — appealing to investors looking beyond short-term gains.

According to official data, foreign direct investment (FDI) into Oman rose by 16.2 per cent year-on-year, reaching RO 26.68 billion by Q3 2024, up from RO 22.96 billion during the same period the year before.

Strategic Institutions and Projects Oman’s investment environment is strengthened by the role of key institutions such as the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Invest Oman, and the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ). These bodies provide structured support, policy clarity and investor facilitation across sectors.

Recent developments include: a \$30-billion green hydrogen programme, with major projects underway in Duqm and Salalah; the launch of 15 new public-private partnership (PPP) projects in 2024; and continued industrial and logistics expansion in Suhar, Khazaen and Salalah. These are not isolated announcements — they are part of a coherent national strategy linking diversification with long-term resilience.

Environmental stewardship in Oman is not driven by trend but by tradition. From water conservation practices to mountain ecosystems, sustainability has long been embedded in Omani life.



Institutions such OIA, Invest Oman, and OPAZ provide structured support, policy clarity and investor facilitation across sectors



IMAD EDDINE OUBIRI

The writer is a specialist in public policy and international investment strategy

In policy terms, the country jumped from 149th to 50th in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) — a major rise backed by reforms in pollution control, ecosystem protection and renewable energy policy. Oman has also committed to Net-Zero carbon emissions by 2050, with guidance from the Oman Sustainability Centre. This alignment between vision and values is increasingly important to ESG-driven investors.

Oman is embracing innovation — but doing so on its own terms. The National Digital Economy Strategy targets a 10-per cent contribution to GDP by 2040, led by growth in fintech, e-government and smart logistics. In parallel, eco-tourism grew by 46 per cent in 2023, reflecting the rising appeal of cultural authenticity, coastal nature and heritage-based travel. In both technology and tourism, Oman is innovating in ways that preserve identity and add long-term value.

What distinguishes Oman is not only what it builds — but how it builds it. Investors frequently note the accessibility of decision-makers, the responsiveness of institutions and the emphasis on listening. This

culture of engagement is not simply hospitable; it is strategic. Oman recognises that lasting investment requires more than incentives — it requires trust.

KEY STRATEGIC TAKEAWAYS

- Oman is delivering consistent FDI growth despite global uncertainty.
- Green hydrogen, PPPs and digital economy projects are key drivers of diversification.
- Sustainability is backed by cultural heritage and bold climate policy.
- Innovation is pursued with local identity and long-term impact in mind.
- The investment climate is shaped by transparency, humility and strategic intent.

A Model for Uncertain Times

While some economies move fast to attract attention, Oman is moving deliberately to build resilience. Its approach may be quieter, but it is also smarter — especially for investors who value depth over spectacle and coherence over volatility.

In a world of distractions, Oman’s steady, strategic and sustainable model stands out — and investors are taking notice.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



The AFC playoff round will feature six teams

OMAN SET FOR WC 2026 PLAYOFF DRAW

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

The Oman national football team will learn their fate in the decisive stage of the Fifa World Cup 2026 qualifiers as the playoff round draw will take place on Thursday at 11:00 am (Oman time). The draw which will be held at the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) headquarters in Malaysia, will mark the beginning of Oman’s last and most crucial push to achieve a historic maiden qualification to the Fifa World Cup.

The forthcoming phase of Oman’s football will be led by the veteran Portuguese tactician Carlos Queiroz, who was officially appointed as head coach on Tuesday by the Oman Football Association (OFA). The OFA confirmed the appointment via an official media statement on its social media platforms, expressing confidence in Queiroz’s ability to take Red Warriors into new heights. Queiroz, whose illustrious coaching career includes spells with the national teams of Iran, Egypt, Colombia, and South Africa, as well as a tenure as assistant manager of Manchester United, will bring a wealth of tactical international experience. His leadership is expected to be a key factor as Oman prepares to navigate one of the toughest phases in Asian football qualification. He will assisted by the Omani experienced coach Hamed al Azzani who is also in charge of Oman U-19 head coach.

The AFC playoff round will feature six teams including: Oman, Indonesia, Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE as all of them finished third and fourth in their respective groups during the third round of qualification. These teams will be split into two groups of three, with only the group winners earning direct tickets to the Fifa World Cup 2026, to be co-hosted by Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Each group will play in a single round-robin format hosted at centralised venues. The Qatar Football Association and the Saudi Arabian Football Federation have been confirmed as the official hosts for the playoff stage. The draw pots will be based on Fifa Men’s World Rankings as of June 13 as Qatar (53) and Saudi Arabia (58) in Pot one while Iraq (59) and United Arab Emirates (66) will be set at pot two. Oman (79) and Indonesia (118) are in pot three. The playoff set to be held during October 8 to 14 in Doha and Riyadh cities.

Oman’s fans hopes are high with the new leadership of Carlos Queiroz and the experience of a battle-hardened squad. All the audience will aim that Oman can make a historic breakthrough and join the global elite at the Fifa World Cup for the first time in the history.

The two teams which will end as runner-up in their group, they will still have a final opportunity to qualify through a Knockout Stage scheduled for November 13 and 18. The winner of that tie will progress to the Fifa intercontinental Play-Off tournament, offering one last chance at securing qualification.



Carlos Queiroz

Oman beat Bahrain after Khorfakkan loss

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

THE Omani national wheelchair basketball team secured an important victory over the Bahraini Al Ittihad team with a score of 68-49, as part of the 9th West Asian Club Championship, hosted in the Jordanian capital, Amman, from July 13 to 19, 2025. The tournament is held under the supervision of the Asian Federation and hosted by the Ajyal Al Ghad Club, with matches taking place at Prince Hamzah Hall in the Hussein Youth City.

The Omani team started the game cautiously in the first quarter, struggling to penetrate the Bahraini defense, which resulted in a limited number of points. On the other hand, the Bahraini team capitalised on fast breaks and ended the first quarter ahead 13-8.

At the start of the second quarter, Oman’s players showed a clear offensive resurgence, led by the outstanding Younis al Toubi, who scored several points from mid-range shots and drives to the basket, alongside precise movements from Hafidh Awlad Ahmed. The Omani team dominated the quarter, scoring 20 points to Bahrain’s 8, overturning the score and ending the first half ahead 28-21. In the third quarter, the team continued its strong performance, displaying solid defensive organisation that limited Bahrain’s offensive threat. Meanwhile, the attacking line remained effective, adding 20 points against the opponent’s 16, extending the lead to 11 points by the end of the quarter (48-37). The fourth quarter saw a peak in Oman’s performance, as the team intensified its defensive pressure and closed off spaces to Bahrain’s key



Oman players showed a clear offensive resurgence, led by the outstanding Younis al Toubi,

players, forcing them into multiple errors. The Omani team took advantage of these moments to score another 20 points, compared to 12 for Bahrain, sealing a comfortable win at 68-49. Standout performers in the match included Younis al Toubi with 34 points, Hafidh Awlad Ahmed with 22 points, and Ali al Ghasini, who added 6 points all contributing significantly to Oman’s dominance. The team had started its campaign with a loss against UAE’s Khorfakkan Club, 43-65, in a match marked by several defensive and offensive errors. The quarter scores were: 13-19, 10-24, 8-16, and 12-5, as the team struggled to keep up with the fast-paced performance of their Emirati

counterparts. The Sultanate of Oman’s delegation includes: Mohammed al Hinai as the head of delegation, Hamoud al Amiri as head coach, Moosa al Siyabi as assistant coach, and ten players: Zaher al Otaibi, Hafidh Awlad Ahmed, Younis al Toubi, Ali al Ghasini, Ahmed al Numani, Maktoom al Muqbali, Khamis al Masoudi, Ashraf al Khasibi, Amjad al Wahaibi, and Salem al Hashami. The national team hopes to deliver strong performances in the upcoming matches and compete for top positions, reflecting the development of the sport in Oman and the growing support for para-sports.

Al Zubair ready for third round of Misano race

MUSCAT: Al Manar Racing by Team WRT’s Al Faisal al Zubair and German team-mate Jens Klingmann return to Sprint Series racing action this weekend when they tackle the third round of the 2025 GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Sprint Series at Misano in Italy.

The pair are tackling the Gold Cup category in their BMW M4 GT3 EVO and currently hold second in both the Drivers’ and Teams’ Championships following a fifth place and a victory in the two one-hour races at Brands Hatch in England and a pair of third-place finishes at Zandvoort in the Netherlands.

Emil Frey Racing leads the way in the Teams’ Championship on 60 points with Al Manar Racing by Team WRT 18.5 points behind in second place and three clear of a tying Saintéloc Racing and Tresor Attempto Racing.

Oman-based Al Zubair said: “I am really looking forward to going to Misano. It will be my first time racing there. My first time driving there was in March during testing and it was a track that I enjoyed. But I want to see what the racing is like there. We are currently second in the championship, so the most important thing is to collect points and make sure that we are completing the races.

“The target, as always, will be to go for the wins. The



The Misano race has attracted a record 44 entries across the various classes.

competition in Gold Cup has been extremely strong this year but I hope that we can

give our rivals a good fight and also push for the overall positions as well.”

This weekend’s race meeting at Misano on the Italian Adriatic coast has attracted a record 44 entries across the various classes. It is the 11th consecutive year that the circuit has hosted the Sprint Series.

Misano is officially known as Misano World Circuit Marco Simoncelli in memory of the local MotoGP rider, who lost his life in a crash in 2011. The 4.226 km circuit is located close to the town of Misano Adriatico in the Rimini province and also hosts the MotoGP World Championship.

Competition for Al Manar Racing by Team WRT in Misano comes from the Saintéloc Racing Audi R8, the Garage 59 McLaren 720S GT3, Emil Frey



Al Faisal al Zubair

Racing’s Ferrari 296 GT3 and Tresor Attempto Racing’s Audi R8 LMS GT3.

Free practice takes place on the Italian circuit from 13.40hrs on Friday (July 18th) and precedes an hour of pre-qualifying from 19.20hrs.

The first of the two qualifying sessions gets underway at noon on Saturday (July 19th) with Q2 following at 12.15hrs. The opening one-hour gets the green light at 20.15hrs.

Sunday’s action sees the second qualifying sessions scheduled for 10.25hrs and 10.40hrs, respectively, with race two getting started at 14.45hrs.

- TEAMS – LATEST GOLD CUP STANDINGS:**
1. Emil Frey Racing 60pts
 2. Al-Manar Racing by Team WRT 41.5pts
 3. Saintéloc Racing 38.5pts
 4. Tresor Attempto Racing 38.5pts
 5. Garage 59 25.5pts
 6. CSA Racing 9pts

- DRIVERS – LATEST GOLD CUP STANDINGS:**
1. Chris Lulham/Thierry Vermeulen 60pts
 2. Al-Faisal Al-Zubair/Jens Klingmann 41.5pts
 3. Gilles Magnus/Paul Evrard 38.5pts
 4. Sebastian Øgaard/Leonardo Moncini 38.5pts
 5. Louis Prette/Adam Smalley 25.5pts
 6. Arthur Rougier/James Kell 9pts

SHORTTAKES



Lucas Vazquez

LUCAS VAZQUEZ TO LEAVE REAL MADRID

LONDON: Lucas Vazquez has announced he is leaving Real Madrid. The 34-year-old right-sided player has spent almost his entire career at Real, having joined the club’s academy at the age of 16. Following a loan spell with Espanyol, Vazquez made his Real debut in September 2015 and has gone on to make 402 appearances for the club over 10 seasons, winning 23 trophies, including five Champions League titles and four La Liga crowns. Vazquez’s final outing came as a substitute during their 4-0 Club World Cup defeat to Paris Saint Germain earlier this month and he revealed on Wednesday he will be leaving the club. “Dear Madristas, it’s been nearly two decades since I arrived at Valdebebas as a 16-year-old full of dreams and excitement to wear this shirt,” he said in a post on Instagram. “Every step along the way has been a gift and over time, Madrid became my home. We’ve lived unforgettable nights together, celebrated 23 titles and created memories that will stay with me forever. “From the bottom of my heart thank you to the president, the board, the staff, my coaches, my team-mates and above all to the fans. You pushed me to always give that little bit more. “Today, after more than 400 matches, it’s time to say goodbye to the club of my life. But I leave with peace of mind knowing I gave it my all.” Real said farewell ceremony will be held for Vazquez on July 17. President Florentino Perez said: “Lucas Vazquez represents in an exemplary way the values of Real Madrid, which has made him one of the most loved players by our fans. “The figure of Lucas Vazquez symbolizes the hard work, perseverance, humility, and winning spirit that are essential for success in this shirt. “He is a player who has the affection and recognition of all Madridistas. Real Madrid is and always will be his home.” — **dpa**

EVERTON SIGN BOURNEMOUTH KEEPER TRAVERS



Mark Travers

LONDON: Everton signed Ireland goalkeeper Mark Travers from Bournemouth in a deal worth a reported £4 million (\$5.3 million) on Tuesday. Travers agreed a four-year contract with the Premier League club, who will open their new stadium at the start of the forthcoming season. The 26-year-old said: “I’m extremely proud and excited to be an Everton player. Coming in, you can feel how big this club is and the history that comes with it. “You really feel that with the fanbase, the new stadium now as well and the direction the club is going in. “It’s a really exciting time to be part of this massive football club and I just can’t wait to get going.” Travers, who made 82 appearances for Bournemouth during his nine years with the club, will compete with England keeper Jordan Pickford for the starting place in David Moyes’ team. — **AFP**

McIlroy, Schauffele to compete in British Open

A raucous reception will greet Rory McIlroy as the British Open returns to Royal Portrush and Northern Ireland on Thursday for the first time since Shane Lowry’s 2019 triumph. McIlroy will be heralded by an expected crowd of 200,000 across the four days after ending his 11-year wait to complete the career Grand Slam at the Masters in April. But a long list of contenders, including world number one Scottie Scheffler and reigning champion Xander Schauffele, stand between the hometown hero and a second Claret Jug. “When I was looking at the calendar for 2025, this was the tournament that was probably circled even more so than the Masters for different reasons,” he told reporters after a practice round on Monday. “It’s lovely to be coming in here already with a major and everything else that’s happened this year. I’m excited with where my game is.” McIlroy will be desperate to at least put on a better show than in 2019 when he opened his tournament with a ruinous quadruple bogey on his way to a first-round 79, missing the cut despite a second-round charge. “The golf on Thursday feels like a bit of a blur. I try to forget that part of it,” said the 36-year-old, who famously shot a 61 at Portrush 20 years ago. “But I remember the run on Friday. I remember I was making a charge and making a run to try to make the cut, and I hit a 6-iron into the 14th, second shot, and I remember the roar from the crowd... “It was really special.” McIlroy will play the first two rounds alongside world number four Justin Thomas and England’s Tommy Fleetwood, teeing off at 3:10 pm local time (14:10 GMT) on Thursday.

SCHAUFFELE SEARCHING FOR BEST Schauffele was undoubtedly one of the two most in-form players in the world alongside Scheffler when he romped to his second major title of 2024 at Troon 12 months ago. The American has not posted a top-five finish this year, though, and has admitted he is struggling for rhythm. A tied-eighth effort at the Scottish Open in North Berwick last weekend provided a glimmer of hope that being back on links courses could help him rediscover his form.



Rory McIlroy

“I think I had a better understanding of what I was doing, which was helpful when I was hitting bad shots,” he said of his efforts in Scotland. The last 11 Opens have produced first-time champions, with the last previous winner to lift the trophy Ernie Els in 2012. Scheffler is one of the players hoping that trend continues. The 29-year-old is the title favourite after bouncing back from an uncharacteristically slow start to the season. The three-time major champion has finished in the top 10 on each of his past 10 starts, winning three

times including the PGA Championship. “I could not care any less about being the favourite or not being the favourite,” said Scheffler. “We all start even par and the tournament starts on Thursday. That’s pretty much all that matters.” Lowry sparked jubilant scenes with his sensational six-shot triumph six years ago when the island of Ireland hosted the competition for the first time in 68 years. The Irishman is still waiting for a second major title despite a series of near misses since. — **AFP**

Marathon runner Fauja Singh dies aged 114

LONDON: British marathon runner Fauja Singh has died in a road accident in Punjab, India, aged 114. The athlete — believed to be the oldest runner to complete a marathon- was hit by a car and suffered fatal injuries while trying to cross a road in his birth village Beas Pind, near Jalandhar in Punjab, on Monday, according to reports in India. His London-based running club and charity, Sikhs In The City, confirmed his death and said their upcoming events in Ilford, east London, will be a celebration of his life and achievements. Singh — who lived in Ilford from 1992 — made his name by beating a number of records for marathon times in multiple age brackets. The centenarian became an inspiration for countless athletes by running marathons past the age of 100. A profile on the Olympics website said Singh was born in Punjab, then under British rule, on April 1, 1911 and was the youngest of four children in a farming family. He was said to have suffered from thin and weak legs, and was unable to walk until he was five years old. He moved to England and



(FILES) Ninety three-year-old Fauja Singh (R), the oldest runner in this year’s Flora London marathon, receives an award in recognition of his outstanding running achievements. — **AFP**

settled in east London with his son after the death of his wife Gian Kaur in Jalandhar. It was not until 2000, aged 89, that he took up running, quickly rising to fame by completing his maiden marathon in London in six hours and 54 minutes. This time knocked 58 minutes off the previous world’s best in the 90-plus age bracket. Singh ran numerous marathons, completing the 2003 Toronto Water front Marathon in five hours and 40 minutes, his personal best. On October 16, 2011, in Toronto, the runner is thought to have become the first centenarian to run a marathon.

Guinness World Records described it as an “inspirational achievement” but said it was unable to recognise the feat without the necessary proof of his date of birth. Singh did not have a birth certificate, as official birth records were not kept in India in 1911, although the date of birth on his passport was April 1, 1911 and he received a personal letter from Queen Elizabeth II on his 100th birthday. He was a torchbearer for the London 2012 Olympics and retired at the age of 101. Harmander Singh, Fauja Singh’s coach at Sikhs In The City, confirmed his death in a statement posted to the running club. “Dearest runners. It is with great sadness that we can confirm our icon of humanity and powerhouse of positivity Fauja Singh has passed away in India. Aged 114 years old. He succumbed to injuries caused by a vehicle accident while crossing the road close to his home. His running club and charity Sikhs In The City will be devoting all of its events until the Fauja Singh Birthday Challenge on Sunday March 29, 2026 to celebrate his life of

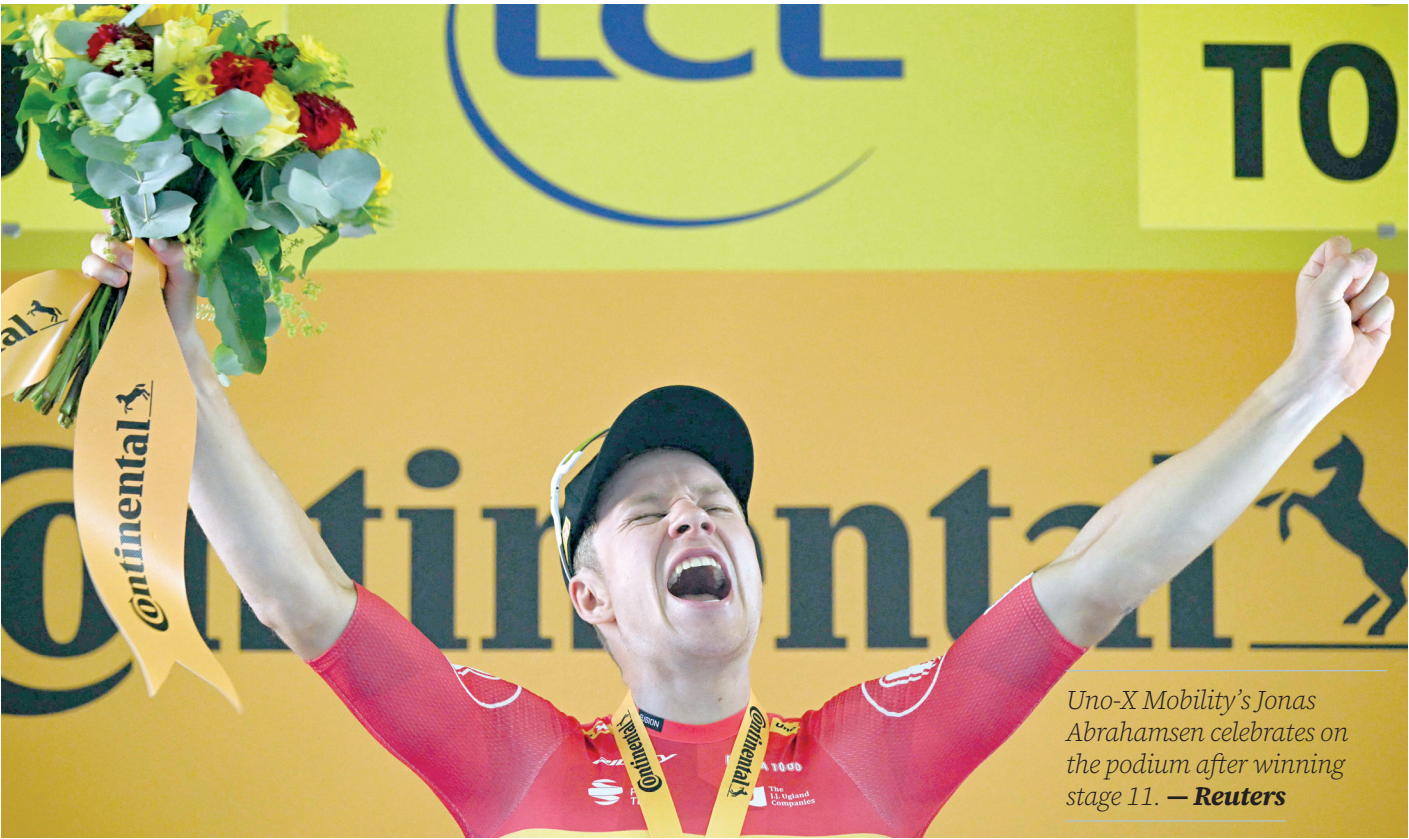
success and achievements. We will be doubling the efforts to raise funds to building the Fauja Singh Clubhouse on the route in Ilford where he used to train. In lieu of flowers please donate to his Clubhouse Appeal so we can carry on his legacy to encourage the world to keep fit and stay positive.” Preet Kaur Gill MP said on X: “Saddened to hear about the passing of Fauja Singh. “I had the honour of meeting him. A truly inspiring man. His discipline, simple living, and deep humility left a lasting mark on me. “A reminder that age is just a number, but attitude is everything. Rest in power, legend.” Jas Athwal MP said on X: “Deeply saddened to hear about the passing of Sardar Fauja Singh Ji. “He was legendary — a man who continued running until he was 101. He was a global Sikh icon, that inspired millions across the world. “His spirit and legacy of resilience will run on forever. My heartfelt condolences to all his family and friends. We will miss him. — **dpa**

SPORTS



(From L) Arkea-B&B Hotels team's French rider Kevin Vauquelin, Team Visma - Lease a bike team's US rider Matteo Jorgenson, UAE Team Emirates - XRG team's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar, Team Visma - Lease a bike team's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard, cycle in the ascent of the Cote de Pech David during the 11th stage. — AFP

ABRAHAMSEN WINS TOUR DE FRANCE STAGE 11



Uno-X Mobility's Jonas Abrahamsen celebrates on the podium after winning stage 11. — Reuters

NORWAY'S Jonas Abrahamsen won stage 11 of the Tour de France at Toulouse on Wednesday while defending champion Tadej Pogacar crashed 4 km from the line.

Pogacar fell after hitting the back wheel of another rider but his rivals Jonas Vingegaard and Remco Evenepoel sportingly waited for the Slovenian to catch up after he got back

on his bike. Ireland's Ben Healy retained the leader's jersey.

The thrilling stage over 156 km from Toulouse and back was unexpectedly won by Abrahamsen as a long range breakaway foiled the ambitions of the sprinters.

Abrahamsen contested a two-way cat-and-mouse war of nerves down the home straight with Swiss Mauro Schmid as the cunning Mathieu van der Poel crept up on them and finished third at 7sec.

Healy retained the overall lead on his first day in the fabled yellow jersey, while Pogacar remains second and Evenepoel third.

Following Tuesday's rest day, Wednesday's run was billed as a likely sprint finish with 70 points at stake in the sprint points standings at Toulouse.

Stage 11 did however feature five small climbs along a 156.8 km route making sure it was constantly fast and nerve-wracking.

Pogacar fell after hitting the back wheel of

another rider but his rivals two-time winner Vingegaard and Evenepoel sportingly waited for the Slovenian.

The UAE rider Pogacar struggled to put his chain on after sliding across several metres of tarmac and had looked as if he would lose 30 to 40 seconds. Healy will lead the peloton into the Pyrenees on Thursday where the first real mountains will test his and everyone's legs on the legendary beyond category Hautacam climb. — AFP



MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
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BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$70.06
BRENT \$68.21
LIGHT \$65.95



Ladies Account



Empowering you more than ever!

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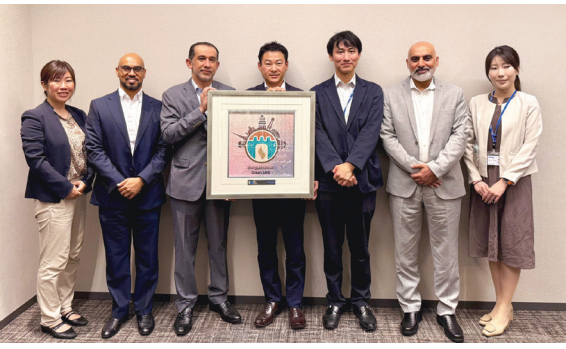
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MAJOR MILESTONE



Japan has remained a primary destination for Omani LNG exports since the company's inception more than 25 years ago.

Oman LNG marks 1,000th export to Japan

MUSCAT: Oman LNG has successfully exported its 1,000th LNG cargo to Japan's Osaka Gas Co Ltd, marking a major milestone in the longstanding energy relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and Japan.

The achievement highlights Oman LNG's role as a dependable supplier of clean energy and its efforts to establish Oman as a key hub in the global LNG sector. Japan has remained a primary destination for Omani LNG exports since the company's inception more than 25 years ago.

Hamed bin Mohammed al Naamany, CEO of Oman LNG, said the shipment represents the company's enduring success and strong ties with partners across the gas value chain. He emphasised that the company's robust relationship with Japan is a cornerstone of its operational achievements and its vision for reliable and sustainable LNG supply.

Al Naamany added that the milestone reflects Oman LNG's contribution to the global energy landscape and its commitment to fostering international partnerships. He also addressed the energy sector's evolving challenges, calling for the adoption of efficient practices to maintain reliability in supply.

The CEO highlighted Oman LNG's ongoing sustainability initiatives and emissions-reduction projects, which align with the nation's objective of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. Since the first export in 2000, Oman LNG has also made significant contributions to national development through its social investment programmes. — ONA

OQAE, Naqaa to develop wind energy projects

OQAE (OQAE) has signed a joint development agreement with Naqaa Sustainable Energy to invest in multiple wind energy projects across the wilayats of Al Duqm, Mahout and Sadah, located in the governorates of Dhofar and Al Wusta.

The projects are expected to generate up to 1,100 megawatts using wind turbines locally manufactured by Mawarid Turbine's upcoming factory in Al Duqm.

The move forms part of OQ Group's broader strategy to build an integrated value chain in clean energy, while promoting national industries by localising expertise and supporting startups in the renewable energy space.

The agreement was signed by Eng Saeed bin Mohammed



The move forms part of OQ Group's broader strategy to build an integrated value chain in clean energy.

al Masoudi, Chairman of OQ Alternative Energy and Mustafa bin Mohammed al Hinai, CEO of Naqaa Sustainable Energy, in the presence of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of

sustainable development in Oman.

He added that the project reinforces OQ's role as a national investment vehicle in the clean energy transition and its continued development of grid-supporting projects tailored to the country's future energy needs.

Meanwhile, Al Hinai noted that the collaboration aligns with national objectives to diversify energy sources by harnessing Oman's natural resources.

He stressed the importance of enhancing the electricity sector's ability to meet rising demand in the coming years.

In April 2025, OQ Group signed a memorandum of understanding with Mawarid Company to establish the Mawarid Turbine factory in Al Duqm, which will manufacture wind turbines for local and regional projects. — ONA

OMAN BOOSTS TIES WITH EURASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman recently welcomed a high-level delegation from the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) to explore avenues for enhancing economic and investment cooperation between the two sides.

The delegation held a series of key meetings with the Ministry of Finance, the Oman Investment Authority, the Oman Investment Bank, and the Muscat Stock Exchange.

Discussions centred on expanding partnerships between Oman and the EDB, particularly in financing infrastructure and development projects. They also touched on supporting joint economic ventures, exchanging technical



Discussions were centred on expanding partnerships between Oman and the EDB.

expertise and financial advice; and strengthening collaboration with Central Asian nations and other member states of the bank.

This visit further reinforces Oman's reputation as a competitive and attractive investment hub, positioning it as a focal point for regional and international cooperation.

The Eurasian Development Bank, established in 2006, currently has seven member countries. It plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainable economic growth across the Eurasian region. The bank primarily finances development projects in key sectors including energy, transportation, mining, agriculture and logistics. In addition, it offers technical and advisory support to help member states achieve broader economic development goals. — ONA

OQEP, TPAO ink exclusive pact to evaluate Oman upstream blocks

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 16

OQ EXPLORATION & Production New Ventures LLC, a subsidiary of OQ Exploration & Production (OQEP), has signed a tripartite Exclusivity Agreement with the Omani Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Türkiye's state-owned energy giant Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO).

The agreement grants the parties exclusive rights to evaluate specific oil and gas blocks in the Sultanate of Oman for a three-month period. Publicly traded OQEP disclosed the agreement in a filing to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on Wednesday, July 16.

According to Turkish media, the agreement was signed during the official visit to Muscat by Türkiye's Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Alparslan Bayraktar, earlier this week. During the visit, Bayraktar held bilateral talks with Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals.



OQEP oversees a portfolio of 15 onshore and offshore assets in Oman.

As part of the visit, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was also signed between the two countries.

The MoU commits both sides to exchange technical expertise, align regulatory frameworks, explore joint energy projects and

examine financing mechanisms aimed at enhancing efficiency and accelerating the transition to cleaner fuels.

Potential areas of collaboration include crude oil exploration, LNG trade, renewable energy development, energy storage

technologies and alternative fuels.

A dedicated workstream will also explore opportunities in green hydrogen production, storage and transport — an emerging focus area under Oman's net-zero 2050 strategy. Separately, OQEP and TPAO signed another agreement to explore broader opportunities for investment and cooperation in other energy-related domains.

TPAO, wholly owned by the Turkish government, is Türkiye's national oil company. While originally integrated across exploration, production, refining, marketing and transportation, it has since the 1980s focused primarily on exploration and production.

In addition to its significant domestic footprint, TPAO is active internationally in countries such as Azerbaijan, Libya, Pakistan, Hungary, Somalia, Iraq and Russia.

From deepwater production in the Black Sea to seismic exploration globally, TPAO plays a key role in Türkiye's push for energy independence and regional

leadership in hydrocarbons.

OQEP — Oman's largest pure-play upstream operator and the upstream arm of majority state-owned OQ Group — has a portfolio of around 15 onshore and offshore assets.

With a daily output averaging around 230,000 barrels of oil equivalent, OQEP accounts for roughly 14% of Oman's total hydrocarbon production.

In addition to its core operations, OQEP also holds a 20 per cent stake in Marsa LNG, a low-carbon marine LNG bunkering project under construction at SOHAR Port and Freezone, led by TotalEnergies.

Earlier this year, OQEP was designated by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals to support the joint marketing of up to 11 new concession blocks to be launched as part of multiple bid rounds in 2025.

The effort is being undertaken in partnership with the Ministry and Toronto-based Scotiabank, a global leader in oil and gas M&A advisory, with deep finance and technical expertise in the energy sector.

ADVERTORIALS

FINANCESOLUTION



This platform offers cash management and trade finance solutions.

SOHAR ISLAMIC
LAUNCHES ONLINE
UNIFIED TRANSACTION
BANKING PLATFORM

MUSCAT: In alignment with Oman Vision 2040 and its commitment to promoting financial inclusion, Sohar Islamic — Sohar International Islamic Window — has announced the launch of its online Unified Transaction Banking Platform for its Wholesale Banking Clients.

This platform offers Cash Management and Trade Finance solutions, serving as a comprehensive solution for corporate and institutional clients’ everyday banking needs.

It provides convenient features such as auto reconciliation, supply chain finance, liquidity management, receivables management, digital trade finance and payment processing.

Incorporating global technology trends, these online unified transaction banking services align with the bank’s ongoing digitalisation strategy.

Fahad Akbar al Zadjali, Head of Sohar Islamic at Sohar International, emphasises the bank’s dedication to innovation and staying ahead of the curve: “The demand for 24/7, easily accessible and on-the-go banking solutions is crucial in today’s ever-changing world.

With the support of the Omani government, which has acted as a significant catalyst for change, we have witnessed enhanced business and industry collaborations, secure channels establishment and more effective governance. At Sohar Islamic, we recognise the importance of leading industry transformation.

Our agility, disruptive technologies and commitment to innovation set us apart. By embracing digitalisation, we provide exceptional customer service to wholesale banking clients while contributing to the broader goal of a paperless world”.

Sajeel Bashiruddin, Chief Technology & Digital Officer at Sohar International, stated, “Our digital strategy is centred around building intelligent systems that are resilient, interoperable and built for scale. In a fast-evolving financial environment, it is essential to design platforms that are not only secure but also adaptable to the complexities of modern business.

Through a modular architecture, design and advanced integration capabilities, we are laying the foundation for a future where banking services become embedded within our clients’ operational ecosystems. This approach supports long-term digital transformation while reinforcing our role as an innovation-led institution shaping the next era of banking in Oman”.

Sohar Islamic’s robust digital capabilities empower clients with reliable cash and liquidity management solutions, as well as efficient trade finance services, through a secure and seamless channel.

EASIER TRAVEL
PLANS WITH
NBO MUZN
ISLAMIC
BANKING’S
TRAVEL
FINANCE

MUSCAT:NBO Muzn Islamic Banking has made travel easier and more convenient this summer with its Sharia-compliant Travel Finance solution, designed for customers planning to travel to any destination worldwide.

Available to both existing and new customers, the Muzn Islamic Banking’s Travel Finance provides comprehensive financing for all travel-related expenses including flights, accommodation, meals, airport transfers, excursions and sightseeing. Customers can select their preferred travel agency, request



a quotation and submit it to their nearest Muzn Islamic Banking branch to initiate the financing

process.

Salima bint Obaid al Marzoqiyah, Assistant General Manager and Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO, said, “As a trusted Islamic banking partner, we recognise the importance of creating financial solutions that align with our customers’ evolving lifestyles.

This offering is part of our effort to make travel easier and more accessible this summer, while reinforcing our commitment to flexible, value-driven options that meet our customers’ needs and expectations”.

Chery Tiggo 7 Pro Max
with summer benefits

SUV enthusiasts can now make the most and own the Chery Tiggo 7 Pro Max with an impressive offer. The benefits include free AAA roadside assistance, free service up to 6 years /60,000 km (Whichever is earlier. Not available on all models), an unparalleled 10 year/1,000,000km engine warranty (not applicable on Arrizo 5), free insurance, Walk-in and Win Raffle with a chance to win a Samsung Galaxy S25 Ultra 5G and Test Drive & Win exciting prizes.

Also available are attractive EMI options across the full range. This exclusive campaign that began on May 18, 2025 will last until July 17, 2025. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Chery showroom for exact details).

The Tiggo 7 Pro Max is setting new benchmarks in the mid-size SUV category with its compelling mix of premium styling, advanced technology and exhilarating



The Tiggo 7 Pro Max is setting new benchmarks in the mid-size SUV category.

performance.

A standout in Chery’s global range, the Tiggo 7 Pro Max has quickly become a favourite for drivers who refuse to compromise on style or substance.

From the outside, the Tiggo 7 Pro Max is impossible to miss. With its bold, aerodynamic silhouette, striking diamond-pattern grille and sleek LED lighting, it makes a confident impression on city streets and highways alike.

Step inside and the attention

a driving experience that is both smooth and responsive. Whether cruising through urban traffic or heading out on a road trip, this SUV delivers the kind of performance that keeps you engaged behind the wheel.

Safety in the Tiggo 7 Pro Max too, is impressive. Equipped with Chery’s Advanced Driver Assistance System (ADAS), the Tiggo 7 Pro Max includes features like adaptive cruise control, lane-keeping assist and automatic emergency braking, all designed to elevate driver confidence and passenger safety.

The addition of a 360-degree camera system makes parking and manoeuvring in tight spots effortless, especially in busy city environments.

Designed to comfortably seat five, the Tiggo 7 Pro Max offers generous legroom, premium upholstery and smart storage solutions, making it ideal for both daily commutes and weekend adventures. Its balance of luxury, safety and performance makes it a versatile and reliable companion for today’s modern lifestyle.

TAAGEER FINANCE AND AUTOSPA ANNOUNCE PARTNERSHIP

MUSCAT: In a strategic move aimed at enhancing customer convenience and access to premium automotive care and detailing solutions, Taageer Finance Company SAOG has partnered with AutoSpa, one of Oman’s largest and most luxurious vehicle detailing centre.

The collaboration introduces easy and flexible financing options for AutoSpa customers, making it simpler for vehicle owners to access world-class car detailing and protection services.

With a reputation built over more than a decade, AutoSpa is recognised for its uncompromising quality, meticulous attention to detail and use of globally acclaimed products and techniques. From advanced ceramic coatings and paint protection to full-service interior and exterior detailing, AutoSpa delivers an exceptional experience designed to elevate vehicle aesthetics and longevity.

Through this partnership, Taageer Finance will enable customers to spread the cost of AutoSpa’s premium services through Equated Monthly



The collaboration introduces easy and flexible financing options for AutoSpa customers.

Installments (EMIs), helping them maintain their vehicles without the burden of upfront payments. This financing solution aligns with both

companies’ commitment to delivering quality, value and ease to a growing segment of discerning customers in Oman.

Fahad bin Khamis al Bulushi, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Taageer Finance, averred: “At Taageer Finance, we are always looking to enhance the customer experience by offering innovative and practical financing solutions. Our partnership with AutoSpa allows us to extend our value proposition to a new category of clients who prioritise excellence in automotive care. We believe this collaboration will not only support AutoSpa’s growth but also contribute to setting new benchmarks in the vehicle care industry in Oman”.

AutoSpa’s commitment to excellence, paired with Taageer’s trusted financing expertise, is expected to drive greater customer engagement and satisfaction. The collaboration also reflects a wider industry trend where luxury services are becoming more accessible through well-structured financial solutions.

Experience financial freedom with BankDhofar’s youth account

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, the second largest bank in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of branches, is empowering Oman’s youth with its innovative Youth Account, designed to provide the tools and resources needed for financial success.

Committed to supporting the next generation, the Bank offers a range of tailored benefits to help young adults navigate the world of finance with confidence.

Recognising the unique needs of young people, BankDhofar has created a modern banking experience that combines convenience, accessibility



The bank offers a range of tailored benefits to help young adults navigate the world of finance with confidence.

and valuable rewards. The Youth Account is a part of its ongoing

commitment to promote financial inclusion and literacy through products that help young individuals kickstart their financial journeys.

This account offers a suite of features designed to make banking easy and rewarding. From free mobile transfers to exclusive discounts, the Youth Account helps young adults manage their money effectively and build a strong financial foundation.

Key benefits include up to four free mobile transfers each month, freedom and flexibility to manage funds with no minimum balance fees, and a globally accepted personalised vertical Visa

Debit Card with enhanced security features for online shopping and international transactions.

Account holders can also avail exclusive merchant offers and discounts across various categories, including beauty, lifestyle, shopping, leisure and dining.

The Youth Account provides access to different saving and deposit accounts, allowing young adults to start planning for their future financial goals. BankDhofar’s extensive network of over hundred branches; and 24/7 mobile and internet banking ensure convenient access to services anytime,

anywhere.

Commenting on the Youth Account, Amjad Iqbal bin Hassan al Lawati, Chief Retail Banking Officer at BankDhofar, said “We believe in empowering young people with the financial knowledge and tools they need to thrive.

The Youth Account is a testament to this commitment, offering a range of benefits and resources to help them achieve their financial aspirations. We are proud to support Oman’s next generation as they embark on their journey towards financial independence”.

BUSINESS

COMPETITIVEEDGE



The session addressed major challenges faced by the industry while highlighting opportunities to drive growth.

Construction and engineering sector workshop highlights reform priorities

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion on Wednesday hosted a workshop in Muscat focusing on the regulation, governance and future development of the construction and engineering consulting sector.

The session addressed major challenges faced by the industry while highlighting opportunities to drive growth.

Discussions revolved around adopting a modern employment approach aligned with future aspirations, enhancing Omanisation and improving the efficiency of the national workforce. These efforts aim to strengthen the sector's competitive edge and support sustainable growth.

The workshop also covered the creation of a clear employment framework for the sector and the identification of potential replacement opportunities, with special emphasis on prioritised national activities and professions.

Mechanisms for calculating appropriate Omanisation rates were reviewed, alongside proposed incentives to help companies maintain stability and sustainably increase local employment.

Other topics included challenges associated with direct employment and the exploration of alternatives such as “parallel employment”. This concept involves leveraging modern technologies, including artificial intelligence, to optimise operations, reduce costs and raise workplace health and safety standards.

There was also a proposal to integrate new professions into the self-employment programme, aimed at expanding job opportunities for Omanis and opening new pathways for entrepreneurship in construction and engineering services. — ONA

OIL PRICES RISE, GLOBAL ECONOMY STABILISES IN JUNE

VIENNA: The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) announced on Wednesday a significant increase in oil prices in June, with the average Opec basket rising by \$6.11 to \$69.73 a barrel, in addition to the stability of the global economy in the same month.

Opec reported in its monthly report that Brent crude rose by \$5.79 to \$69.80 and West Texas Intermediate crude rose by \$6.39 to \$67.33.

On the economic front, the report indicated that the global economy continued its stable growth, supported by strong performance in the first half of this year, with growth forecasts remaining stable at 2.9 per cent for 2025 and 3.1 per cent for 2026.

The report indicated that forecasts for the world's largest economies remained stable during 2025 and 2026, led by the United States at 1.7 per cent and 2.1 per

cent, China at 4.6 per cent and 4.5 per cent, and India at 6.5 per cent. In addition, forecasts for Japan, the Euro zone, Brazil and Russia remained stable.

Global oil demand remained unchanged, with an expected growth of 1.3 million barrels per day for 2025 and 2026, an increase of 100,000 barrels per day from OECD countries and 1.2 million barrels per day from non-OECD countries. — ONA

Moringa project launched with RO 5.3m investment

THE Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, has signed a usufruct contract for a major agricultural investment project in the Wilayat of Thamrait, Dhofar Governorate.

The initiative involves the cultivation of Moringa trees over an expansive area of 10.5 million square metres in Hanfit, with a total investment value exceeding RO 5.3 million.

The signing ceremony was held in the presence of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar; Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning; Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; and representatives from Trufod, the company tasked with implementing the project.

This large-scale agricultural venture aims to integrate agriculture with processing industries and global supply chains, representing a new direction in sustainable agribusiness development in Oman. It aligns with national



The initiative involves the cultivation of Moringa trees over an expansive area of 10.5 million square metres.

efforts to enhance food security while fostering environmentally responsible investments.

Expected to yield annual revenues of RO 4 to 5 million through the export of Moringa-based products, the project will target high-demand international markets, including North America, Europe and Asia.

In addition to its commercial potential, the initiative will create

over 500 direct employment opportunities, along with numerous indirect jobs in supply, packaging and logistics. These prospects are set to stimulate local entrepreneurship and contribute to socio-economic development in the Dhofar Governorate.

Environmental sustainability is also at the core of the project, with plans to plant around 15 million Moringa trees. This plantation is

projected to absorb more than 400,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, significantly supporting Oman's climate mitigation strategies and the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

This project serves as a model for future agri-industrial investments in the Sultanate of Oman, combining economic returns with positive social and environmental impact. — ONA

UK inflation rises to highest since January 2024

LONDON: Britain's annual rate of consumer price inflation unexpectedly rose to its highest in over a year at 3.6% in June, official figures showed on Wednesday, slightly dampening expectations for further cuts in Bank of England interest rates.

June's reading from the Office for National Statistics took the annual CPI rate to its highest since January 2024, against expectations from economists in a Reuters poll for it to remain unchanged at May's reading of 3.4%.

British inflation has risen steadily since touching a three-year low of 1.7% last September and in May the BoE forecast it would peak at 3.7% in September — almost twice the central bank's 2% target.

Inflation in Britain is the highest of any major advanced economy and is around one percentage point more than in the United States or the euro zone.



An employee arranges produce inside a supermarket in west London, Britain. — Reuters

Sterling rose slightly against the dollar after the data, five-year gilt yields hit a one-month high and financial markets priced in slightly lower chances of a quarter-point BoE rate cut in August and another later in the year.

Deutsche Bank Chief UK Economist Sanjay Raja said he did not think an August rate cut was really in jeopardy

but saw more of a question mark over the pace of cuts after that.

“There's enough of a slowdown in GDP and the labour market to warrant a ‘gradual and careful’ easing of monetary policy. But the onus now rests on the labour market to shape how far and how fast the MPC can cut this year and next”, he said in a note.

Gross domestic product data last week showed an unexpected fall in output in May, while official data on Thursday is expected to show only a moderate slowdown in wage growth from rates of just over 5%.

Higher costs for motor fuel, air fares and train tickets were the biggest contributor to the rise in the inflation rate between May and June, the ONS said; and it also noted increases in the cost of food and clothing.

Food and drink prices were 4.5% higher than a year earlier, the biggest rise since February 2024.

Finance minister Rachel Reeves said the government was supporting living standards for working-class households through a higher minimum wage, a cap on bus fares and free breakfasts for younger school-age children.

The EU has readied plans for tariff retaliation, but will it use them? Previously, April brought a particularly sharp jump in inflation to 3.5% from 2.6% due to rises in regulated energy and water tariffs, a spike in air fares and upward pressure on the cost of labour-intensive services from a rise in employment taxes and the minimum wage.

Despite this, Governor Andrew Bailey has said interest rates are likely to remain on a gradual downward path, as a weaker labour market puts downward pressure on wage growth and the outlook for economic growth remains lacklustre. — Reuters

BECOMING IRRELEVANT

WTO overhaul targets fairer trade



World Trade Organization members are seeking to break years of paralysis in international trade negotiations, which have been sidelined by the Trump administration and risk becoming irrelevant, internal WTO documents say.

Trump's sweeping tariffs have forced countries to line up to negotiate bilateral trade deals with US, bypassing the multilateral framework. — Reuters

NORMAL TRADE

EU trade chief heads to US for tariff talks



EU trade chief Maros Sefcovic will head to Washington on Wednesday for tariff talks, an EU spokesperson said, adding that he will meet US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and Trade Representative Jamieson Greer.

Trump has threatened a 30% tariff on imports from the EU from August 1, a level Europe says is unacceptable and would end normal trade between two of the world's largest markets. — Reuters

TOUGH NEGOTIATOR

Indonesia clinches US trade deal



Indonesia's president said US counterpart Donald Trump was a “tough negotiator” after the two countries reached a trade deal that led to a reduction of proposed tariff rates to 19% from 32%.

The deal is among only a handful reached so far by the Trump administration ahead of an August 1 deadline for negotiations, but no details were provided by Indonesia. — Reuters

OPINION

The role of municipalities in fostering youth entrepreneurship



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

Municipalities play a significant role in stimulating business and employing local residents. They also play numerous roles in promoting the economic growth of their respective countries, not to mention performing other routine administrative, logistical, economic and social tasks.

Since the responsibilities assigned to municipalities in Oman were transferred to the Ministry of Interior, the municipal sector in each governorate has been working to develop the system to improve operations and provide a better level of services.

What motivates me to write about the work of municipalities in the Sultanate of Oman, particularly Muscat Municipality, are the repeated complaints directed at some officials regarding the exclusion of young people's businesses from some small kiosk projects established to sell kebabs and grilled meat in certain areas of Muscat, particularly in areas frequented by citizens and tourists at various times.

This exclusion creates family and social challenges for them, not to mention the difficulties and financial obligations that result from these decisions.

At the same time, we find that Muscat

Municipality is working to create specific locations for these young people who wish to work independently, in areas that do not harm families and the environment; and are far from people's homes, in order to ensure their comfort and privacy.

However, it appears that the locations chosen by Muscat Municipality are not as frequented by tourists and customers as they are currently in tourist areas and along traffic lanes for motorists coming and going from one governorate to another.

In fact, municipalities should support small youth projects if they do not disrupt traffic and public safety. In doing so, they will contribute to solving the unemployment issue in society and provide more jobs for them.

Municipalities are expected to play a vital role in empowering youth and encouraging them to work in fields needed by Omani society, especially in light of Oman Vision 2040, which focuses on economic diversification and empowering youth in business.

This work is complemented by supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurship for youth.

This can also be achieved by providing business incubators and co-working spaces at nominal prices, in addition to offering training courses in project management and digital marketing.

Municipalities are expected to play a vital role in empowering youth and encouraging them to work in fields needed by Omani society, especially in light of Oman Vision 2040, which focuses on economic diversification and empowering youth in business.

Municipalities around the world are now working to promote these businesses and encourage various groups of young people interested in buying, selling and farming.

They encourage them to establish vertical farms or agricultural projects, provide small plots of land for modern agricultural investment in public parks they establish for pedestrians and train them in hydroponic and smart farming techniques.

Municipalities also play a role in supporting community tourism projects, such as establishing "guest houses" or organising heritage tours. They provide jobs and training for young people in managing small tourism projects, such as running popular restaurants, selling traditional products and working as tour guides.

They also establish programmes to collect and recycle waste such as plastic, paper, electronics, pharmaceutical waste, used tyres and others; and help them transform this waste into useful projects in furniture, decor and energy.

What we need in Omani society is for municipalities to partner with national institutions to organise these activities and workshops, provide more facilities and eliminate bureaucracy. They also need to consider the work of young people by reducing licensing fees and granting them expedited permits for youth projects.

RIO'S NEW CEO FACES A LONG SLOG TO CUT COSTS

ANTONY CURRIE

PLENTY of board directors can only dream of their company sporting a 42% margin on earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation. That's what Rio Tinto is expected to crank out this year on the key profit measure, per estimates collated by LSEG.

Trouble is, the \$100 billion miner usually lags major rival BHP, which looks set to hit 50% this year. That explains why the marching orders Rio Chair Dominic Barton has given to new CEO Simon Trott include improving its financial discipline.

He has a long slog ahead of him.

What's mostly holding Rio back is its iron ore business, which accounts for around 70% of the company's EBITDA and which Trott has run since 2021. BHP's operation in the main mining area of the Pilbara in Western Australia is the most efficient, whereas Rio's is number three.

On paper, the answer would appear to be to cut around \$4 billion, or some 14% of the overall company's annual costs, based on 2025 estimates.

That would bring Rio's margin in line with its larger peer's and arguably persuade shareholders to bump up the enterprise's valuation of five times EBITDA closer to the almost six times multiple BHP sports.

It's not that simple. Rio's mines are spread over a larger area and some are getting depleted. So the company has had to invest to keep the iron ore flowing and is slated to open one new mine a year in the region over the next four years.

That doesn't mean Trott has no room to manoeuvre. He has already shown an ability to wring more out of the iron ore business during his four years in charge.

The division has met its production target every year since he took the helm, after missing it in five of the previous seven years. The Gudai-Darri mine opened in 2022 is now producing 50 million tonnes a year, 16% more than its estimated yield.

Once he takes over from departing CEO Jakob Stausholm in just under six weeks' time, Trott will have more power to improve both the iron ore operations as well as Rio's other units — copper, aluminium and lithium.

For the next few years, though, barring any major strategy changes, he's unlikely to be able to do more than close just some of the gap with BHP.

— Reuters

Voters vent at Labour after disorganised first year

VOTERS have delivered a withering verdict on the Labour government after a week in which the anniversary of their election victory was marred by shambolic U-turns and infighting.

Voters' disapproval of the government appears to have intensified with a growing number of people opposing the government's high-tax-high-spending policies, according to the latest Freshwater Strategy poll.

The poll of eligible voters found that more than half (55 per cent) believe the Chancellor Rachel Reeves should resign while prime minister, Keir Starmer, who has insisted Reeves will remain Chancellor for a "very long time", is also facing the pressure.

Starmer's approval ratings have crashed to minus 38; making him the least popular politician in a monthly survey with fully 61 per cent of Brits now reporting a negative opinion of the PM.

The chancellor also slipped to an approval rating of minus 37.

A majority of Brits (65 per cent) said Labour has done a good job on easing the cost of living with the same percentage unimpressed by efforts to reduce immigration. A similar percentage of voters said the government has done a poor job on welfare reform.

The latest snapshot provides insight into the challenges facing the government just 12 months on from their election win, with more voters now seeing immigration as the most important issue facing the UK.

Small boat crossings are 50 per cent higher this year than at the same point in 2024, while forecasters believe that overall levels of migration will only be cut to 250,000 entrants a year (pre-Brexit levels) by 2030.

Labour ranked worse than the Conservative Party in terms of trust on reducing immigration. Voters also put inflation near the top of their list of most important issues.

Economists in the financial district and at the Bank of England have warned that Rachel Reeves' taxes on employers through higher national insurance contributions (NICs) was feeding through to higher prices in shops.



UK Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, speaks at the House of Commons, in this file photo. — Reuters

The latest snapshot provides insight into the challenges facing the government just 12 months on from their election win, with more voters now seeing immigration as the most important issue facing the UK.



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

The poll shows that only 25 per cent of voters have confidence in the government's effort to spare economic growth, with 72 per cent either not very or not at all confident.

Treasury officials including Rachel Reeves have celebrated a string of interest rate cuts in the last year but global economic turmoil due to tariffs and high taxes risks delaying further reductions in the coming months, policymakers have warned.

Reeves could decide to hike taxes further in this year's autumn Budget given unfunded commitments on welfare spending and the partial restoration of winter fuel payments, altogether costing more than £5 billion.

Meanwhile, Reeves is facing renewed pressure to scrap the ring-fencing regime imposed on British banking giants in a bid to bolster the sector's international competitiveness and bolster economic growth.

The Chancellor has been lobbied by top banking chiefs to ditch the "redundant" 15-year-old legislation which requires major banks to

separate their retail banking operations from their investment banking activities.

But Reeves has now been urged to re-think the regime by the wider financial services industry. KPMG data reveals. Almost two-thirds of financial services leaders have called for a 'ring-fence' which would adapt the current regime. Meanwhile one in five have called for the rules to be completely abolished.

Global and UK head of financial services at KPMG, Karim Haji, said: "Whichever side of the argument you sit on, the industry is calling out for fresh thinking on ring-fencing. It's not 2008 anymore.

Everything has changed, from the state of geopolitics to the way the world does business and the rules need to reflect that".

A majority of leaders, 80 per cent, believe overhauling the system would help drive economic growth by enabling more efficient deployment of capital. Analysts have pegged NatWest and Lloyds as the top beneficiaries of a ring-fencing overhaul.

BUSINESS

LITTLETON, Colorado: Surging clean powersupplieshaveallowedChina’sutilities to reduce their emissions from electricity production to record lows during the opening half of 2025.

Carbon dioxide emissions per kilowatt hour (kWh) of electricity averaged 492 grammes during the opening half of 2025, according to data from energy portal electricitymaps.com.

That was the first ever reading below 500 grammes per kWh, and is down from 514g/kWh during the same period in 2024 and 539g/kWh from January to June 2023.

A nearly 23% rise in clean power generation from January to June 2024 was the main driver behind the reduction in emissions intensity, as higher volumes of cleanenergyallowed power firms to reduce output from coal and gas power plants.

Total power generation from thermal power plants — mainly coal — dropped by 4% from a year ago to just under 7,000 terawatt hours (TWh), data from LSEG shows.

Output from clean energy sources from January to June totalled 2,400 TWh, highlighting that fossil fuel power sources

CHINA CUTS ELECTRICITY EMISSIONS TO RECORD LOWS IN 2025

Total power generation from thermal power plants — mainly coal — dropped by 4% from a year ago to just under 7,000 terawatt hours (TWh), data from LSEG shows.



A general view of solar panels at the Dunhuang Photovoltaic Industrial Park in Gansu province, China. — Reuters

still account for a 75% share of China’s power generation mix.

But the growth of clean energy supplies continues to sharply outpace growth in fossil fuel power generation, suggestingthatChina’spowermixlooks set to keep getting cleaner.

Total Chinese clean power output during the first half of 2025 was 200% more than during the first half of 2019, according to LSEG.

In contrast, total Chinese thermal power outputfromJanuarytoJune2025 was 20% greater than during the same period in 2019.

China’spowersectoremissionsfrom fossil fuel generation have declined in line with the cleaner mix.

Totalemissionsfromfossilfuelsused in electricity production from January to May were 2.24 billion metric tonnes of CO2, according to data from energy think tank Ember.

That total is 60.5 MT less than during the same months of 2024, and is an indication that some progress is being madeagainstBeijing’sgoalsof reducing energy sector pollution. — Reuters

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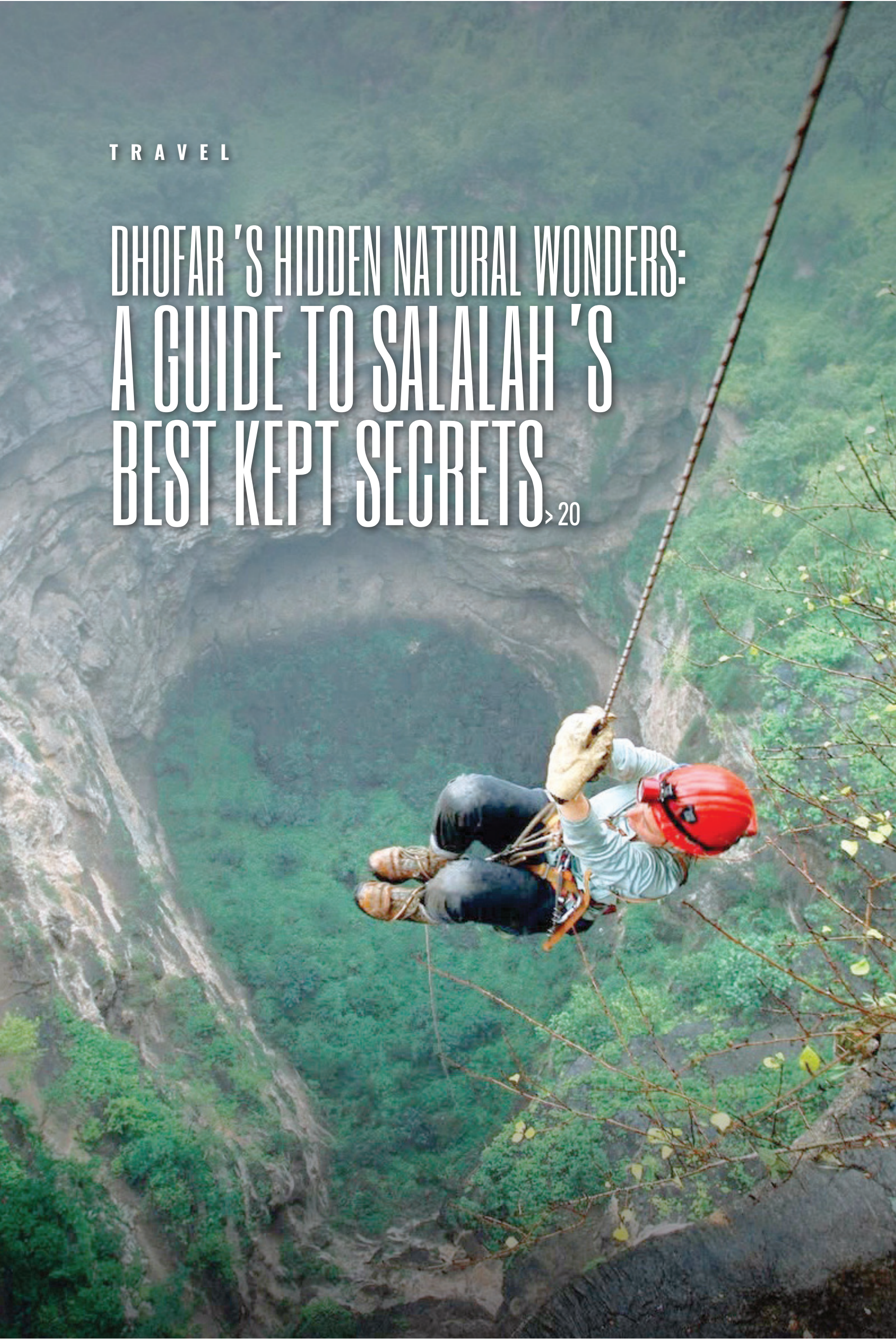
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T R A V E L

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DESTINATIONS

G Bissau's Bijagos archipelago added to Unesco World Heritage list



THE BIJAGOS Archipelago off the coast of west Africa was declared a World Heritage site by the UN's cultural agency on Sunday, in recognition of its exceptional biodiversity and rich local traditions.

The string of islands in Guinea-Bissau and surrounding turquoise waters are home to endangered green and leatherback sea turtles, manatees, dolphins and more than 870,000 migratory birds, a Unesco spokesperson said.

The archipelago's small island of Poilao is an extensive nesting ground for green sea turtles.

The continuous network of coastal and marine ecosystems in the west African archipelago includes mangroves, mudflats and intertidal zones which are fundamental to aquatic life.

"This moment marks the culmination of more than 10 years of collective effort, commitment, dialogue and a shared conviction that this extraordinary and unique place deserves to be recognised, protected and celebrated by all of humanity", environment minister Viriato Luis Cassama said after the announcement.

Unesco chief Audrey Azoulay hailed the region as a "rare coastal and marine ecosystem, where local communities have kept their traditions alive" as she congratulated the country on its first World Heritage site.

Rare plant species and diverse fish and bird populations also call the islands home.

The archipelago is additionally home to several sacred sites as well as artisanal fisheries.

After failing to make the World Heritage list on its first attempt in 2012, an application was resubmitted following extensive scientific research and the involvement of local populations.

The Bijagos Archipelago was already designated a Unesco biosphere reserve in 1996.

The archipelago's placement on the World Heritage list "strengthens its protection and its inclusion in an even larger global network of sites protected by Unesco", the spokesperson said.

The archipelago covers more than 10,000 square kilometres (3,850 square miles), including sandbanks and mudflats.

It is made up of 88 islands and islets, of which only about 20 are permanently inhabited. — AFP

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



FILM

US actor Tyriq Withers attends the World premiere of Columbia's "I Know What You Did Last Summer" at The United Theatre on Broadway in Los Angeles. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Austrian singer Johannes Pietsch aka JJ (R), winner of the 2025 Eurovision Song Contest, poses with Vienna's Mayor Michael Ludwig after having been presented with the "Golden Town Hall Man" award at the City Hall in Vienna. — AFP



HERITAGE

Revellers raise red scarves and candles as they sing the song "Pobre de Mi", marking the end of the San Fermin festival in Pamplona, Spain. — AFP

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Harry Potter series to debut in 2027



FILMING has begun on a Harry Potter TV series that will debut in 2027, bringing the Hollywood hit to the small screen for the first time. Adapted from the wildly popular books, which have also yielded blockbuster films and stage shows, the latest outing for the boy who lived is being filmed at Warner Bros. Studios in Leavesden, Britain, the studio said on Monday. While no exact release date has been confirmed, the show will be available on the HBO Max streaming platform. The franchise sees the eponymous Potter plucked from non-magical obscurity and thrust into a wizarding world in which he and

his close friends Ron and Hermione battle against the forces of darkness. With the mega-selling books’ author JK Rowling among its executive producers, the show is envisaged as “a decade-long series” featuring a new cast from the films. Potter will be played by Dominic McLaughlin, Arabella Stanton will star as Hermione Granger and Alastair Stout will take on the role of Ron Weasley. Established stars will appear alongside them, with John Lithgow playing headmaster Albus Dumbledore, Paapa Essiedu as Severus Snape and Nick Frost as Rubeus Hagrid. — AFP



Passion for hand fans sizzles in burning Spanish heat

AS PASSENGERS

wilted in a packed Madrid metro, one traveller defied the summer heat by snapping open her handheld fan — a quintessential Spanish accessory enjoying undimmed popularity. The burst of coolness drew envious eyes to a must-have item that has retained its relevance thanks to designer creativity and increasingly oppressive summer temperatures, stoked by climate change. “Everyone uses a fan here in Spain — children, the elderly, young people, men”, said Arturo Llerandi, owner of the “Casa de Diego” fan boutique in Madrid. “Why? Because it’s hot... It’s hotter across Europe and you see fans everywhere”. Llerandi’s bustling shop, which has been located in the centre of the Spanish capital for more than two centuries, boasts 10,000 different models of fans. Bone and lace versions are aimed at women and smaller versions cater to men, all diminutive enough to slip into a jacket pocket, with the most luxurious costing up to 6,000 euros (\$7,000). With temperatures close to 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) regularly assailing Madrid in July, the idea of buying a fan as a gift was a no-brainer for customer Carmen Pulido. “It’s something to have forever... Lately, it’s become essential”, said the 62-year-old legal assistant. For pensioner Rosa Nunez, 69, the “good old fan” has remained her best friend after the batteries of her electronic alternative died. “With handheld fans, the battery runs for a lifetime”, she said with a smile. — ‘VERY ELEGANT’ — Olivier Bernoux, a designer who



heads a luxury fan store in Madrid, acknowledged the accessory has “a heavy legacy... perceived as an old object, for the elderly”. But they are “not kitsch, nor for old women”, insisted the man whose celebrity clients include pop idol Madonna and US actor Eva Longoria. “Even in New York you find fans due to climate change because you have to find a way to cool down”, said Bernoux. His global customer base brings different expectations. “Men are more classic”, while Spanish women “are more sensitive to the noise” made when fans are unfurled, he said. “For the ‘Miami’ American woman customer, large fans are a must-have, while the French are particularly attracted to all our linen creations”, Bernoux continued. At Madrid’s Pride festival in July, some dancers snapped their fans to the rhythm of the music before spectators waving rainbow-coloured equivalents, illustrating how the humble object can also be used to convey messages. “The fan has always been fundamental for us and the community. It has always been a gay icon”, said Pedro Pontes, a 31-year-old waiter. Ecuadoran journalist Erika von Berliner, who lives in Madrid, sees her fan as a “very elegant” accessory. “You hold something very beautiful that goes with your clothes and if you know how to use it well, with elegance, so much the better”, the 49-year-old enthused. Bernoux agreed, emphasising what he identified as the object’s “sensuality”. “The very opening and closing of a fan is a marvellous gesture that will attract attention,” he said, advising users to sprinkle perfume on theirs. “On public transport, you take out your fan and it makes a tough moment an easier one”, he concluded. — AFP

FEATURES



DHOFAR 'S HIDDEN NATURAL WONDERS: A GUIDE TO SALALAH 'S BEST KEPT SECRETS

BY YERU EBUEN

ALL ROADS will soon lead to Salalah as the Khareef Dhofar Season approaches, transforming Dhofar Governorate into a lush paradise of greenery, rainfall and cool breezes. This annual monsoon weather pattern, which usually begins around June and lasts until September, attracts visitors from around the globe eager to experience the region's unique natural beauty. Beyond the verdant landscapes and refreshing rain, Dhofar offers a host of captivating destinations along its coastline and inland terrain that make for unforgettable excursions. Here's a guide to some of the most frequently visited and highly recommended spots during the Khareef Dhofar Season, each showcasing the diverse natural wonders that make Dhofar a truly special destination.

FAZAYAH BEACHES

Approximately 70 kilometres west of Salalah lies the stunning chain of Fazayah Beaches, a pristine stretch of coastline famed for its serene beauty and crystal-clear waters. Nestled beneath towering cliffs and emerald hillsides, these beaches can only be accessed via a winding, often rugged road that descends to the coast, revealing sweeping expanses of white sand and secluded coves. During low tide, the beaches reveal their more intimate and tranquil character, perfect for quiet reflection or leisurely picnics. The relaxed environment is further enhanced by the presence of roaming camels, a common sight along the coast that adds to the rustic charm. Fazayah's unspoiled landscape, coupled with its seclusion, makes it a must-visit for nature lovers seeking an authentic experience away from more crowded beaches.



AL MUGHSAIL BEACH & BLOWHOLES

Closer to Salalah, Al Mughsail Beach offers a lively yet equally mesmerising setting. Its wide sandy shores are complemented by well-maintained picnic gazebos, making it a popular spot for family outings. One of its most remarkable features is the Marneef Cave area at the western end of the beach, where flat rocky outcrops form natural platforms overlooking the sea. During the khareef, the blowholes here become spectacular — water spurts up to 30 metres into the air, accompanied by a thunderous roar that echoes across the coast. These natural geysers are at their most impressive in the rainy season, creating an awe-inspiring spectacle that draws many visitors. Outside the monsoon period, the calmer waters reduce the blowholes' activity but the scenic value and accessibility remain high, making it a rewarding stop year-round.

SHAAT HIDDEN BEACH, VIEWPOINT & SINKHOLE

Nestled along a rugged coastline just south of Fazayah, Shaat Hidden Beach offers an adventurous escape into a petite pebble and sand bay, fringed by imposing basalt rocks and a tranquil lagoon. The journey to reach this secluded spot involves navigating a challenging 45-minute to one-hour drive along a steep, unpaved track in a 4x4 vehicle. The route meanders past small farms and offers spectacular sea vistas, turning the drive into part of the experience. Once there, visitors can enjoy a peaceful afternoon away from crowds, with the compelling scenery of cliffs, sea and rock formations providing plenty of photo opportunities. Nearby, the Shaat Viewpoint and Sinkhole add to the allure, with the sinkhole measuring approximately 150 metres wide and 211 metres deep — one of the largest in the world. Exploring inside requires caution but rewards visitors with a sense of scale and natural wonder that is truly awe-inspiring.

WADI UYUN

For those seeking inland adventures, Wadi Uyun, roughly 60 kilometres north of Salalah, stands out as a picturesque oasis for hiking, swimming and camping. Its towering cliffs offer a dramatic backdrop, while the wadi's natural pools — some shaded by lush grasses and others more open and suitable for swimming — invite visitors to dip in and relax. A short 15-minute hike from the car park leads down to the wadi floor, where the cool waters provide a refreshing break from the desert heat or humid khareef weather. The tranquillity and scenic beauty of Wadi Uyun make it an ideal spot for nature enthusiasts looking to immerse themselves in the region's spectacular landscapes.

WADI DARBAT & THE TRAVERTINE CURTAIN

Arguably Dhofar's most renowned natural feature, Wadi Darbat remains a lush haven throughout the year. During the khareef, its verdant banks are alive with greenery, grazing camels and a sprawling river. The wadi hosts a variety of waterfalls and pools that provide ideal picnic spots and scenic viewpoints. One of its highlights is the travertine curtain — a 150-metre-high limestone formation, eroded over centuries into a curious, pitted surface resembling a giant drip of hardened chocolate ice cream. During the monsoon, water rushing over the travertine creates a spectacular waterfall, which can be observed from above or from the base for a more immersive view. A short trail from the parking area leads closer to the curtain, offering spectacular vistas and a closer look at this geological marvel.

TAWI ATAIR SINKHOLE

Near Wadi Darbat is the impressive Tawi Atair Sinkhole, one of the world's largest, measures approximately 150 metres across and plunges over 211 metres into the earth's depths. Most visitors view this geological marvel from a designated platform at its edge, which offers a limited perspective. However, for the truly adventurous, descending the rugged path on the right of the platform unveils the sinkhole's full splendour. A challenging hike leads down through layers of earth and rock, culminating on a rusty, old platform situated 130 metres below the surface. From here, you can marvel at the immense scale of the formation and listen to the symphony of birdsong that fills the silent depths — a serene reminder of nature's quiet power. The walk back up is taxing but rewarding, offering an unforgettable close-up experience of one of nature's most dramatic creations.

As the Khareef Season paints Dhofar with its signature lushness, these varied destinations — from the pristine beaches of Fazayah to the rugged grandeur of the sinkholes and waterfalls inland — collectively define the region's allure. Every road in Dhofar seems to lead to Salalah, but the journey through its diverse landscapes is what truly captures the essence of this season; a time when nature's splendour emerges in full force. Whether relaxing on secluded beaches, marveling at geological wonders, or exploring green valleys filled with life, visitors are encouraged to explore these highlights — each offering a unique glimpse into Dhofar's rich natural tapestry. As the monsoon winds arrive once again, they carry the promise of adventure, serenity and awe — making Dhofar an unmissable destination this khareef season.