

OMAN
Observer
DAILY

SPOTLIGHT

NEW STEM CELL BANK OFFERS



TO FAMILIES

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IN BRIEF

OMAN CONDEMNS
ATTACKS ON SAUDI

The Sultanate of Oman has strongly condemned and denounced the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) attacks targeting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, according to a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Monday. Oman affirmed its full solidarity with Saudi Arabia in all measures it takes to protect its sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, while stressing the need to halt such attacks and refrain from any actions that threaten regional security and stability. Earlier, the Saudi Defence Ministry said the country’s air defences intercepted and destroyed drones launched from Iraq that attempted to target oil facilities in the kingdom’s Eastern Province and Riyadh. The ministry said the drones were launched by armed groups in Iraq.

EXPO HIGHLIGHTS
URBAN PROJECTS

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning launched the second edition of Khareef Real Estate Season 2026, reaffirming its commitment to expanding homeownership opportunities and promoting real estate investment while showcasing Oman’s flagship urban developments. Timed to coincide with the Khareef Dhofar Season, the exhibition serves as a comprehensive platform for citizens, residents and visitors to explore Oman’s leading residential and investment destinations, while gaining first-hand insights into Oman’s urban development initiatives and housing opportunities. **DETAILS ON P2**

FRANCE, SPAIN RACE
TO CURB WILDFIRES



Firefighters sought on Monday to take advantage of more favourable weather conditions to subdue massive wildfires threatening the French city and tourist region of Bordeaux and a number of sites in neighbouring Spain. They were racing against the clock as another heatwave is expected to hit both countries later this week in what has been a blisteringly hot and dry summer across Western Europe. Authorities have evacuated about 220,000 people, including holidaymakers and local residents, in France, while further south in Spain around 100,000 have been told to leave their homes or seek shelter. Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu said France was going through an ‘unprecedented fire season’, with the area burned already having surpassed the previous record year of 2022. **DETAILS ON P7**

O H R C V O W S T O P R O T E C T C H I L D R E N F R O M E X P L O I T A T I O N

Focus on right to decent living and social protection



THE WORK of the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) witnessed remarkable development over the past year in the effectiveness of its monitoring and complaint-receiving system. This included expanding its reach to various segments of society and diversifying and developing the available reporting mechanisms. Additionally, the commission intensified its field visits and continuous follow-ups with the relevant authorities, reflecting its ongoing efforts to enhance the necessary protection for individuals and activate its various roles in accordance with its legal mandates. In a statement, the commission confirmed receiving and monitoring 1,479 human rights-related cases during 2025. The commission addressed these cases by verifying the facts and tracing the legal and administrative

pathways for each case. This was done to ensure the achievement of solutions that eliminate their root causes and contribute to resolving them in accordance with national laws and international covenants. The commission worked on studying the incoming cases to analyse their dimensions and identify their direct foundations. This resulted in providing legal advice and consultations to the individuals involved, directing them to the available official mechanisms to pursue their cases before the competent authorities. Further, the commission also continued its role in monitoring, receiving, and following up on complaints and reports in coordination with the relevant authorities. This involved making practical efforts to facilitate access to justice and litigation guarantees, as well as monitoring the rights of inmates and detainees, and healthcare

provisions within detention facilities. Furthermore, it monitored issues related to the right to a decent living, social protection, labour, education, health, housing, and a healthy environment. The commission paid particular attention to protecting children from harmful practices, especially concerning the exploitation of children on social media platforms. It pushed towards enhancing awareness and developing reporting and prevention channels in a manner that safeguards the best interests of the child and protects their privacy and safety. During 2025, the commission followed up on the issuance of several Royal Decrees granting and restoring Omani citizenship to 329 applicants. The commission also monitored the issuance of Royal Orders for the release of a group of

inmates from the Central Prison. The total number of inmates who were granted the Royal Pardon during 2025 reached approximately 2,115, comprising both citizens and foreigners convicted in various cases. The commission emphasised that these steps reflect a practical commitment to human rights principles, the preservation of the right to citizenship, and the enhancement of belonging, as well as family and societal stability. Furthermore, the implementation of the Royal Pardon serves as a practical embodiment of the concept of “restorative justice,” which opens the doors for rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Regarding labour rights, the statement mentioned that the Oman Human Rights Commission conducted field visits to labour gatherings and accommodations. **TURN TO P5**

Oman calls for maritime security and free trade flow

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a series of telephone conversations with several regional counterparts to discuss the latest developments and ongoing efforts to ease tensions. The calls included Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of

Qatar, Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Shaikh Jarrah Jaber Al Ahmed al Sabah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, Dr Badr Abdelatty, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Egyptian Expatriates of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and Dr Abbas

Araghchi, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The telephone discussions focused on reaching practical, fair and sustainable understandings on navigation and supply chain flows through political and diplomatic solutions, in the interest of regional countries and all parties benefiting from maritime traffic through the

Straits of Hormuz. The Foreign Minister and his regional counterparts underscored the imperative of safe navigation and the restoration of trade flows and supply chains linked to the regional and global economy. They also agreed to continue coordination and consultation to support regional security and stability. — ONA

Study documents a decline in the number of languages

WASHINGTON: Globally, people currently use roughly 7,500 languages, with English, Mandarin Chinese, Hindi, Spanish, Arabic and French the most common, counting native and non-native speakers. That is a lot of languages. But it is a far cry from the peak number historically. Researchers used mathematical modelling and insights from anthropology, linguistics and demography to estimate the number of languages used globally dating back about 12,000 years to around

the end of the last Ice Age, covering a chapter in time called the Holocene epoch. They identified a period spanning the first millennium BC and first millennium AD when humankind may have spoken tens of thousands of different languages. The researchers also charted a major decline since this linguistic “golden age,” due to language replacement driven by factors such as the expansion of large empires in antiquity and European colonialism in the past several centuries.



“Languages are meaningful to their communities. They carry knowledge, associations and memories,” said Claire Bowern, a professor of linguistics and anthropology at Yale University in Connecticut, and a leader of the study published in the journal Science. “For scientists, languages carry huge amounts of information about the past, from where people lived to what they ate, and what they talked about. They also give us a window

into the human mind,” Bowern said. Many language families arose and evolved, with written language eventually emerging, first in Mesopotamia - Sumerian written in cuneiform script - during the fourth millennium BC, and separately in places like Egypt, China and Mesoamerica. The researchers estimated that the number topped out in a range from 30,000 to potentially more than 75,000 different languages used worldwide at any one time. — Reuters

OMAN

SHORT TAKES

SUMMER RAINS TO EXTEND TO OMAN SEA COAST

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT, JULY 27

The summer rains are expected to continue on Tuesday over the Hajar Mountains, with the expectation of rains extending towards the coast of the Oman Sea.

According to the Oman Met Office, the rains could cover any of the areas from Muscat to Ras Al Hadd. Al Rustaq and Samayil received impressive rains yesterday (Monday), cooling down temperatures.

The downdraft wind could also cause dust to rise. Drivers heading towards Thamrait in Dhofar Governorate are requested to be cautious.

The National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre issued an alert stating, “Please exercise caution due to reduced horizontal visibility as a result of active winds stirring up dust and sand, with the possibility of thunderstorms accompanied by active downdrafts.”

Meanwhile, Dhofar will continue to experience low clouds and could experience a strong impact of the monsoon in the coming three to four days, pointed out the weather forecaster at the Oman Met Office. According to the weather forecast, partly cloudy to cloudy skies are expected along Dhofar's coasts and mountains with intermittent drizzle. A chance of cloud development with isolated rain is expected over parts of Al Hajar Mountains towards the afternoon. Chance of dust rising over deserts and open areas.

There is also a chance of late-night to early-morning low clouds over the coastal areas of Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta governorates and parts of the Oman Sea coasts.

Exhibition spotlights flagship urban projects

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

SALALAH, JULY 27

THE Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning launched the second edition of Khareef Real Estate Season 2026, reaffirming its commitment to expanding homeownership opportunities and promoting real estate investment while showcasing Oman's flagship urban developments.

The event, being held at Al Haffa Waterfront in Dhofar Governorate from July 25 to August 5, was inaugurated under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, in the presence of senior government officials, representatives of financial institutions, real estate developers and industry stakeholders.

Timed to coincide with the Khareef Dhofar Season, the exhibition serves as a comprehensive platform for citizens, residents and visitors to explore Oman's leading residential and investment destinations, while gaining first-hand insights into Oman's urban development initiatives and housing opportunities.

Sayyid Marwan said the event reflects the nation's ongoing efforts to showcase Oman's expanding portfolio of integrated urban developments and investment opportunities, while reinforcing the real estate sector's role in supporting economic diversification and enhancing quality of life.



The exhibition features several of the ministry's flagship development projects.

He noted that hosting the exhibition during the Khareef season in Dhofar provides an ideal opportunity to introduce visitors to national projects that embody the campaign theme, “Live Oman. Like Nothing Else.” Through integrated communities and future-focused developments, these projects position Oman as an attractive destination to live, invest and build for the future.

Held under the same theme, this year's edition highlights Oman's distinctive lifestyle, investor-friendly environment and sustainable urban vision. Visitors can engage directly with specialists to learn about residential projects, financing options, homeownership pathways and investment opportunities, enabling informed decision-

making.

The exhibition features several of the ministry's flagship developments, including Sultan Haitham City, Salalah Future City, Al Jabal Al Aali, Surooh Integrated Communities and Najd Agricultural City.

Interactive presentations provide visitors with an overview of each project's master plan, residential offerings and long-term investment prospects, alongside financing solutions offered by participating financial institutions. The event also brings together leading real estate developers, banks and sector partners, creating a one-stop marketplace where visitors can compare projects, explore financing options and receive expert guidance under one roof.

Forum examines path from assistance to employment



The event forms part of Labour Forum 2026, which runs from July 26 to August 13.

OASIM AL MAASHANI

SALALAH, JULY 27

Officials and labour specialists meeting in Salalah on Monday examined how Oman could use social protection to help people move from direct assistance towards sustainable participation in formal employment.

The discussions opened the two-day Work Horizons Forum, held under the theme “Towards a Safe and Sustainable Labour Market” at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

The event forms part of Labour Forum 2026, which runs from July 26 to August 13.

The first session examined international standards for comprehensive social protection and the ability of protection systems to respond to economic shocks and crises.

A presentation by Oman's Social Protection Fund outlined the country's

transition towards a system intended to be more inclusive, financially sustainable and increasingly focused on economic empowerment. The second session addressed the transition from social assistance to economic empowerment and sustainable integration into the formal labour market.

The Ministry of Economy discussed smart targeting and the integration of social and economic databases to improve the delivery of support.

The UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia examined the transition from social assistance to social insurance, while the Ministry of Social Development addressed the role of social policy in supporting family stability. The Arab Labour Organization considered how new forms of work are affecting Arab labour standards and conventional employment arrangements.

turn to the governance and financing of social protection systems, including the challenge of expanding coverage while maintaining long-term financial sustainability.

The programme will cover insurance funding, protection against workplace injuries and occupational diseases, maternity insurance and flexible working policies.

A final session will examine the use of evidence and data in social protection policy, including proposals for a unified GCC statistical framework and a Gulf social protection observatory.

Participants will also discuss methods for measuring coverage under Sustainable Development Goal indicator 1.3.1 and the use of artificial intelligence and predictive analysis to anticipate labour-market and social changes.

The chairs of the four sessions are due to present the forum's main outcomes and recommendations at midday on Tuesday.

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SHORT TAKES



RAO Commander Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi led the graduation ceremony.

RAO GRADUATES NEW BATCH OF RECRUITS

MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) on Monday celebrated the passing out of a new batch of recruits who took a course at the Training Battalion of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) in Muscat Governorate.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO).

The ceremony began with a military salute to the chief guest, who later inspected the front row of the parade. Then, the recruits performed a military march in slow motion to the tune of the RAO band. Then, the columns made a forward march in parade formation.

The chief guest handed over certificates to the graduates who topped the ranks of the recruits. At the conclusion of the ceremony, the graduates chanted the anthem of the Royal Army of Oman, performed the oath of allegiance and proclaimed thrice ‘Long live His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander — May the Almighty Allah protect himi!’. — ONA

DHOFAR LAUNCHES STUDENT SUMMER PROGRAMME



SALALAH: A summer programme for school students titled ‘My Summer: Learning and Innovation’ was launched on Sunday at the Directorate-General of Education in Dhofar Governorate, aimed at developing students’ skills and encouraging creativity during the summer break. Organised by the Directorate-General of Education in cooperation with Tithys Oil Montaser Limited, the programme is being held across five centres and targets 300 students. It will continue until August 6. — ONA

SECOND EDITION OF ‘OMANI ELOQUENCE DICTIONARY’ RELEASED

MUSCAT: The second edition of the ‘Omani Eloquence Dictionary’, authored by Eng Abul Qasim bin Mahmood al Kharousi, was published recently in a two-part book.

The second edition was published in a new format that facilitates reading and access to meanings and expressions. The first edition, published in 2004, was completely sold out due to its interesting content.

The dictionary is consistent with efforts to promote linguistic identity. It affirms the authenticity of colloquial Omani words, tracing them back to their origins in ancient Arabic dictionaries, including ‘Al Ain,’ ‘Lissan Al Arab,’ ‘Al Qamoos Al Muheet,’ and ‘Taj Al Aroos’. It sought to establish the relationship between common Omani words and dictionary items.

‘Omani Eloquence Dictionary’

begins with a translation of the author’s biography and a review of his methodology in compiling the dictionary, in addition to two articles titled ‘Oman and Quranic Verses’ and ‘Oman in the Arabic linguistic references’.

The sections of the dictionary are organised in alphabetical order, along with relevant linguistic roots. The author dedicates the final chapter to incorrect words.

— ONA

MoTCIT expands accessible transport, digital services

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

THE MINISTRY of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has reaffirmed its commitment to advancing accessibility and inclusive services for persons with disabilities through its participation in the national Purple Saturday campaign, organised by the Ministry of Social Development.

The ministry showcased a wide range of initiatives and programmes across the transport, communications and information technology sectors aimed at improving accessibility, enhancing independent access to essential services and fostering a more inclusive society in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

MoTCIT said its participation reflects its ongoing efforts to develop services that respond to the needs of persons with disabilities while strengthening collaboration with government entities, private-sector partners and transport operators to adopt advanced technologies and international best practices that support their active participation in society.

As the authority responsible for the Sultanate of Oman’s transport sector, the ministry continues to coordinate efforts to build a more accessible and inclusive transport system. Working closely with operators and stakeholders, MoTCIT is supporting initiatives designed to improve mobility and ensure



MoTCIT launches visual resource library and a unified communication platform.

The national ‘Purple Saturday’ campaign is being organised by the Ministry of Social Development

that persons with disabilities can travel safely, conveniently and independently.

As part of the Purple Saturday campaign, the ministry, in cooperation with transport operators, introduced a package of initiatives, including free public transport services within cities and between governorates, as well as discounted ferry services.

These measures are intended to encourage greater use of public transport while supporting the mobility needs of persons with disabilities.

Ride-hailing companies and taxi operators also joined the campaign by offering complimentary trips, discounted fares and promotional codes, highlighting strong collaboration between the public and private sectors in advancing

community-focused initiatives.

In the public transport sector, Oman National Transport Company (Mwasalat) continues to enhance its services and facilities to better serve passengers with disabilities. Buses have been equipped with wheelchair-accessible features, designated seating areas, audio announcement systems and electronic information displays. The company also provides specialised training for drivers and frontline staff to improve services for passengers with different types of disabilities while implementing community initiatives that promote inclusive mobility.

The ministry also highlighted the growing role of digital technologies in expanding transport accessibility. Among the key initiatives is the AI-powered voice-booking feature available through the TaxiF application, enabling visually impaired users to book transport services more easily and independently.

In the maritime transport sector, MoTCIT continues to work with operators to improve accessibility across ferry terminals and vessels. Ongoing enhancements include accessible boarding bridges, wheelchair facilities, secure wheelchair anchoring points, designated seating areas and passenger assistance services during boarding and disembarkation. Crew members also receive specialised training to respond effectively to the needs of passengers with disabilities under various operating conditions.

Radio station marks 20 years of spreading the message of Quran

MUSCAT: The Holy Quran Radio Station from the Sultanate of Oman celebrates the 20th anniversary of the launch of its broadcast today.

The station is dedicated to the Holy Quran and its sciences, broadcasting Quranic recitations in various narrations recited by readers of diverse ages and both genders, alongside a selection of purposeful and specialised programmes on the Holy Quran and its sciences.

The Holy Quran Radio Station began its initial broadcasting for seven hours daily in 2006, expanding to round-the-clock 24-hour broadcasting starting on January 1, 2014, across 28 transmission stations

covering various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to satellite broadcasting and the ‘Ayn’ platform, enabling listeners to follow its broadcasts inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The radio station operates from a well-defined vision based on consolidating concepts of moderation, balance, and tolerance in Islam — values that distinguish Omani society — drawing on the principles of Islam, calling for understanding and rapprochement among Islamic schools of thought, and promoting harmony, brotherhood, and compassion among people. Ahmed bin Muhana al Kindi, Director of the Holy



Quran Radio Department at the Directorate-General of Radio in the Ministry of Information, stated that the passage of 20 years since the launch of the Holy Quran Radio Station from Oman represents an important milestone in its media journey. Since the launch of its broadcast, the station has been

keen to serve as a platform for spreading the Quran, consolidating the tolerant values of Islam based on moderation, balance, and tolerance, and offering solid Quranic and scientific content that meets the needs of various segments of society.

He added that over this journey, the radio station experienced continuous development in broadcasting hours and content quality, moving to 24-hour broadcasting and offering Quranic recitations in various narrations, along with specialised programmes in the sciences of the Holy Quran, its exegesis, rules of recitation, and Islamic values, utilising various modern platforms and broadcasting

means to reach listeners inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

Regarding Quranic recitations, he pointed out that the radio library includes recited Quran recordings by reciters from across the Islamic world. It also features complete recordings in various Quranic narrations uniquely broadcast by the station, alongside offering specialised programmes explaining them. The radio station has also recorded complete recited Quran recordings by Omani reciters, as well as other recitations by them, in addition to acquiring Quranic recordings by Omani reciters in the narration of Hafs from ‘Asim and the narration of Qalun. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

NEW STEM CELL BANK OFFERS

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Free cord blood storage for 500 newborns over five years

RO 1.5m initiative targets families under Social Protection System

Experts highlight its medical, ethical and social significance for Oman



Stem cells derived from the placenta are among the important sources in modern medical and cosmetic research, with applications being explored in several areas.

DR FAKHRIYA AL SHIBLI
Dermatologist

TO FAMILIES

IDRIS AL BALUSHI

A NEW initiative by The Longevity Cell Bank marks a significant step in Oman's healthcare advancement, offering free umbilical cord blood storage for 100 newborns annually over five years to support families registered under Oman's Social Protection System, with priority given to cases involving specific healthcare needs.

Valued at nearly RO 1.5 million, the initiative aims to make advanced cellular preservation more accessible while strengthening Oman's future in regenerative medicine. The initiative is part of The Longevity Cell Bank's efforts to introduce cellular preservation and

cord blood-banking services in Oman.

The clinical-grade facility collects, processes, tests and cryopreserves umbilical cord blood, stem cells and biological samples, supporting future developments in regenerative and cellular medicine.

Established under the supervision of entrepreneur Yasser al Barami and developed alongside the Biothrive Group with support from the Ministry of Health, the centre represents a step towards expanding Oman's healthcare capabilities in a rapidly evolving field of medicine.

For Dr Fakhriya al Shibli, a prominent board-certified dermatologist, dermatosurgeon, and the founder and CEO of Dr

Fakhriya Clinics in Oman, the establishment of a stem cell bank represents an important milestone in Omani healthcare innovation.

She said stem cell banking could help place Oman among countries advancing in modern medical fields, while creating new opportunities for safer and more natural approaches to treating chronic conditions and supporting tissue regeneration.

"The establishment of a stem cell bank in Oman contributes to reducing reliance on certain chemical treatments and places us among nations advancing in this evolving medical field," she said.

Dr Al Shibli explained that stem cells derived from the placenta are among the

important sources in modern medical and cosmetic research, with applications being explored in areas including autoimmune diseases, tissue repair and improving organ functions affected by chronic illnesses.

Beyond the medical perspective, the initiative has also highlighted the importance of public awareness around this emerging field.

Omani media professional and researcher in Omani history Naser al Busaidy said the launch introduced him to a specialised area that he had not previously explored in depth.

Through his investigation into the subject, he discovered the significance of cord blood banking, which involves collecting,

processing, testing and storing blood from the umbilical cord and placenta after childbirth.

Cord blood is rich in blood-forming stem cells that can develop into different types of cells and have been used in treating conditions including hereditary blood disorders such as sickle cell disease and thalassaemia, certain cancers such as leukaemia, and immune system disorders.

The development of stem cell therapies also involves ethical considerations.

Dr Shaikh Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharousi, Assistant Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, has affirmed that treatment using stem cells is permissible in Islam when the source of the cells is lawful.

He explained that

stem cells obtained from permissible sources, including consenting adult donors, are acceptable, while those derived from embryos intentionally aborted for the purpose of obtaining stem cells are not permissible.

Dr Shaikh Al Kharousi also stressed the importance of verifying the ethical and legal standards of treatment centres to ensure that biological materials are obtained through lawful means. By combining scientific innovation, social responsibility and ethical guidance, The Longevity Cell Bank's initiative marks a significant milestone in Oman's healthcare journey, preserving biological resources today for potential medical breakthroughs in the future.

SHORT TAKES



The event featured interactive working sessions and specialised workshops.

ARABIAN ORYX RESERVE’S VISUAL IDENTITY EXPLORED

HAIMA: The development of the visual identity for the Arabian Oryx Reserve in the Wilayat of Haima, Al Wusta Governorate, was discussed as part of ongoing efforts to enhance the reserve’s corporate identity and highlight its environmental, tourism, and cultural value.

The event featured interactive working sessions and specialised workshops during which participants discussed the main pillars of the visual identity and reviewed the values and messages represented by the reserve.

They also explored visual elements inspired by the desert environment as well as the natural and cultural characteristics of Al Wusta Governorate, culminating in drafting an identity that expresses the reserve’s unique character and keeps pace with tourism development and marketing trends.

The initiative aims to build an integrated visual identity for the Arabian Oryx Reserve, drawing inspiration from the natural and environmental assets that distinguish the reserve, as well as the symbolism of the Arabian Oryx as one of the most prominent wildlife icons in Oman. This reflects the reserve’s standing and mission in preserving biodiversity and contributes to enhancing its presence locally and internationally.

Mohammed bin Nasser al Saadi, Director of the Arabian Oryx Department at the Environment Authority, emphasised that building the visual identity for the Arabian Oryx Reserve represents a qualitative step towards highlighting the reserve’s status as one of the most important nature reserves in Oman and enhancing its presence in eco-tourism and wildlife conservation. He pointed out that the project embodies the integration of efforts among various relevant entities. — ONA

Oman, Algeria strengthen ties in ICT, digital economy

OMAN AND Algeria have taken a significant step towards strengthening bilateral cooperation in communications, information technology (ICT) and digital transformation, as an Omani delegation began a three-day official visit to Algeria aimed at expanding economic and technological partnerships.

The delegation, led by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, comprises officials from the ministry, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), and representatives of several Omani technology companies.

The visit focuses on exploring partnership opportunities, exchanging expertise and supporting digital transformation initiatives in both countries while promoting the regional expansion of Omani technology firms.

The delegation opened its programme with a meeting with Mariam Ben Mouloud, Algeria’s Minister of Digital Affairs, during which both sides discussed ways to enhance collaboration in digital transformation and ICT.

They also reviewed their respective national experiences in developing digital services and explored avenues for institutional cooperation.

Algerian officials presented key projects overseen by the High Commission for Digitalisation,



Oman, Algeria plan to explore partnership opportunities and support digital transformation initiatives.

The visit reflects the strong bilateral relations between Oman and Algeria and their shared commitment to leveraging advanced technologies to build competitive, knowledge-based digital economies driven by innovation

including the National Digital Transformation Strategy, digital infrastructure initiatives and the Algerian National Centre for Digital Services, highlighting the country’s progress in building an integrated digital ecosystem.

The Omani delegation, in turn, showcased the National Digital Economy Programme, the Government Digital Transformation Programme and national artificial intelligence initiatives. Representatives of leading Omani technology companies also highlighted innovative solutions in artificial intelligence, digital government services, cybersecurity, cloud computing and software development, underscoring the growing capabilities of the

Sultanate’s digital sector.

The visit reflects the strong bilateral relations between Oman and Algeria and their shared commitment to leveraging advanced technologies to build competitive, knowledge-based digital economies driven by innovation.

It also aligns with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology’s efforts to expand the international footprint of Omani technology companies, boost digital exports and accelerate the growth of the ICT sector in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, which seeks to foster innovation, strengthen public-private partnerships and position national companies in global markets. — ONA

1,479 human rights cases reported

FROM P1



These visits aimed to assess labour housing conditions based on safety standards, the availability of first aid, adequate space, fire-fighting requirements, health facilities, and

cleanliness levels.

This was in fulfilment of its mandates to monitor labour rights and ensure the provision of a decent residential environment for them. During the visits, the commission also listened to the workers’ remarks and inspected the facilities and services provided.

The statement reported that the commission visited the inspection unit of the Security and Safety Services Establishment, where it reviewed the unit’s mandates, work mechanisms, procedures followed, and the services it provides. It affirmed the level of quality and efficiency in the establishment’s performance, reflecting its commitment to professional standards. The commission indicated that it received a number of complaints and reports that were resolved in coordination with the relevant authorities.

Additionally, it facilitated the provision of designated areas enabling inmates to meet their families, as part of its efforts aimed at strengthening family ties and improving the psychological well-being of the inmates. These initiatives included organising recreational and cultural events, and allowing private family meetings in a suitable environment that contributes to enhancing family cohesion.

The commission mentioned receiving and monitoring several complaints via social media platforms regarding the attainment of the social protection benefit.

For those classified as eligible categories, they were enabled to receive the benefit in accordance with the provisions of the Social Protection Law, in coordination with the Social Protection Fund.

The commission reported receiving a complaint regarding the provision of a safe

educational environment, due to the impact of maintenance and restoration works in some schools. The commission followed up on the matter within its jurisdiction with the Ministry of Education.

Consequently, the ministry issued a circular to the educational directorates emphasising the importance of managing these works in a manner that ensures the safety of school attendees and avoids disrupting the educational process. The circular also stressed the necessity of monitoring the companies executing the maintenance works in the schools undergoing maintenance, according to the approved technical requirements and standards, while adhering to the applicable preventive measures to achieve the highest levels of safety in the school environment.

The Oman Human Rights Commission affirmed that the opening of the Muscat Recovery Centre for providing addiction treatment and rehabilitation services comes as a qualitative addition within the integrated health services system.

It aims to provide rehabilitation and recovery services for patients with addiction, psychological and neurological injuries, and other conditions requiring long-term rehabilitative care. The commission noted that the centre is the first specialised government facility for addiction rehabilitation and recovery, representing an integrated umbrella for therapeutic services for addicts, starting from the detoxification stage, through the rehabilitation stage, and reaching the recovery and psychological support stage.

The commission stated that the establishment of the Sohar Recovery Centre, in partnership with the private sector, contributes to providing specialised medical, psychological, and social services for the recovery of addiction patients and their reintegration into society in a way that enhances the quality of life.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Health has worked on issuing specific legislation concerned with employing Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies and artificial intelligence, and has begun applying them to delicate surgeries in the field of ophthalmology. — ONA

المديرية العامة لمستشفى خولة

Directorate General of Khoula Hospital

AUCTION ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites you to the following Auction:

Auction No.	Description	Last date for Collection of Auction Document	Bid Submission Date	Eligibility	Tender Box	Auction Fee (Non-Refundable)
04/2026	Investment Opportunity for the Construction of Solar Photovoltaic Car Parks at the Directorate General of Khoula Hospital	Thursday 13/Aug/2026 Before 01:00 PM	Thursday 17/Sep/2026 Before 09:00 AM	Specialized Companies	Directorate General of Khoula Hospital (Building no 4)	250.000

► Companies & institutions willing to participate can purchase Auction Documents from the Financial Affairs Department (Purchase & Tender Section) between 8.30 am and 12.30 pm on working days starting from 30/Jul/2026 till 13/Aug/2026, on payment of Auction fee mentioned above.

► Auction should be submitted in plain, sealed envelope, Enclosing A Chq issued by a Local bank for not less than (1%) of the value of the bid, addressed to the Directorate General of Khoula Hospital and it will be refunded if the bid is not awarded. Auction(s) Submitted without Chq will not be considered

► Auction should be submitted in plain, sealed envelope with wax, on which the number and name of the auction should be written on the outside on the envelope, avoid writing the bidder name.

► Requested to Deposit their Auction Documents at the Directorate General of Khoula Hospital (Building no 4), Before 09:00 AM on Wednesday, 17/Sep/2026, and bids submitted after this date shall not be considered, whatever the reasons for the delay.

► Copy of Commercial Registration Certificate & Chamber Certificate is to be attached along with the bid submitted.

► The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offer.

WAR

IRAN VOWS CONTROL OF HORMUZ WATERWAY

US President Donald Trump said in “very deep talks with Iran” and warned that he is ready for “strong military action” if diplomacy fails

Saudi Arabia on Monday called on the Iraqi government to prevent attacks from being launched from its territory

Iran said it was not currently involved in negotiations with the United States, despite a halt in recent fighting

Iran’s navy stopped six vessels attempting to transit the Strait of Hormuz through routes not approved by authorities

IRAN SAID on Monday it was still in control of the Strait of Hormuz and not seeking to resume peace talks with the United States, after President Donald Trump halted a two-week bombing campaign that his top brass told him had run its course. Following 13 successive nights of intensifying bombing that provoked Tehran to fire on US bases in response, Trump halted the campaign over the weekend.

Iran said it would suspend its own attacks for as long as the US pause endures. The end of the US bombing campaign sent oil prices tumbling in the hope that disrupted global supplies could resume flowing. Brent crude, which had briefly ticked above \$100 a barrel last week for the first time since May, plunged more than 8% by mid-morning on Monday to just under \$89.

But in signs on Monday that Tehran may already be testing the effective new ceasefire, Jordan reported shooting down two drones and Iraqi security sources said drones had struck a base of Iranian Kurdish opposition fighters in northern Iraq. There were no reports of casualties in either incident. Trump’s decision to suspend the campaign reflected advice from his military that the bombing, aimed at breaking Iran’s grip on the strait, had reached the limits of what it could achieve, according to a US official and several US media reports. The US official said that military commanders had advised the president they were running out of targets. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dan Caine, had expressed concern over the depletion of air defence munitions, the official said.

The US ambassador to the United Nations, Mike Waltz, said on Sunday Trump had paused the campaign to allow room for negotiations. Trump, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and other US officials have described Iran as “begging for a deal”. But the spokesperson for Iran’s Foreign Ministry, Esmail Baghaei, said in a televised press conference on Monday that Iran had not asked to resume peace talks with the United States. Messages were still being



Vessels in the Strait of Hormuz near the beach of Bandar Abbas, Iran. — Reuters

Trump’s decision to suspend the campaign reflected advice from his military that the bombing, aimed at breaking Iran’s grip on the strait, had reached the limits of what it could achieve. US official said that military commanders had advised the president they were running out of targets.

passed between the sides through mediators and Iran had not forsaken diplomacy, but “reports about Iran requesting negotiations with the U.S. are fabricated,” Baghaei said. “This is not in our DNA.” Tehran also indicated it was still in control of the world’s most important waterway for energy markets.

Several Iranian state media outlets cited an “informed source” as saying that Iran had turned around six “offending ships” on Monday morning that had attempted to cross the strait without its permission. One of the vessels, the source said, had had “an accident”. “As previously announced, the traffic route in the Strait of Hormuz is the route specified by Iran, and other routes are contaminated and have no way out,” the Iranian state media reports quoted the source as saying.

Trump launched his renewed bombing campaign to punish Iran after Tehran fired on ships using a route through the strait that has been promoted by the United States. Iran says ships may pass only through a channel that runs closer to its own coast, which it controls

and where it intends to impose transit fees.

The two weeks of renewed US bombing killed scores of people in Iran and destroyed bridges and tunnels across the south as well as military targets. Four US service members were killed by Iran’s return fire against US bases in neighbouring Arab states. Iran also struck civilian infrastructure in Gulf countries in what it said was retaliation for US strikes on civilian targets.

The halt to the renewed US bombing campaign leaves no clear indication of what leverage Washington can exert to achieve Trump’s aim to break Iran’s grip on the strait. Washington and Tehran reached an agreement in June on a framework for talks meant to take place by the end of August to resolve major issues such as Iran’s nuclear programme.

But the sides have disputed the meaning of the memorandum’s language about the Strait of Hormuz, with Washington insisting it requires Tehran to allow free travel while Iran says it grants it the authority to supervise transit.

Palestinians hammered by settler violence

WEST BANK: Palestinian villagers in the occupied West Bank said on Monday the area was coming close to breaking point after increasing incursions by Israeli settlers and violent stand-offs, such as one that left six people shot dead last week. The Israeli military made dozens of arrests and blocked roadways through the West Bank after Friday’s incident in the village of Tal, southwest of Nablus, where four Palestinians and two Israelis were killed. Early on Monday, most entrances to Tal, neighbouring villages and Nablus were either partially or fully shuttered, creating long lines of residents seeking to pass the checkpoints.

Shootings occurred after villagers from Tal confronted a large group of armed settlers they said tried to enter houses in the village. The Israeli military said there was a “violent confrontation” between dozens of Palestinians and Israeli civilians in which shots were fired on both sides.

Ahmed Ramadan, 71, the father of one of the Palestinians killed on Friday, said settlers have continually harassed their home on the edge of Tal overlooking the rolling hills of



A young Palestinian boy is seen at a mosque allegedly burned by Israeli settlers in the village of Qusra, south of Nablus. — AFP

the West Bank. He said the settler killed on Friday, Benayahu Mellet - an army reservist who was serving as security coordinator for the nearby settlement of Havat Gilad - had previously come to his home and yelled at him to leave and go to Syria or Jordan.

Ramadan said he had no intention of

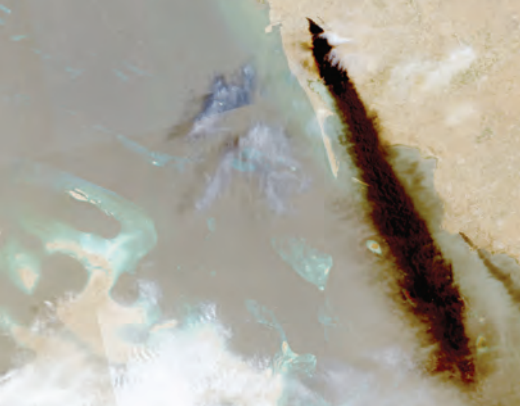
leaving, “Even if we die, we’ll die here on our land. We’re not prepared to leave this country.” Sitting at home with his surviving sons, he said if settlers return in force the village was ready. “If they come, we’ll meet them head-on, even if they kill us,” he said.

Israeli authorities initially portrayed Friday’s incident as an attack by Palestinians on hikers walking near the village, located in Area A of the West Bank, a zone under Palestinian control that Israelis are generally prohibited from entering. Video widely circulated on social media showed settlers carrying rifles and pushing residents as they approached the village. Reuters was not able to independently verify the video. Palestinians from Tal said settlers attacked them first before one of the villagers wrestled a gun from one of the settlers.

The incident followed a pattern seen repeatedly around the West Bank, with large groups of settlers appearing near Palestinian communities, threatening and harassing their inhabitants, often as security forces stand by. Such shows of force have become more frequent over recent months. — Reuters

SENSITIVE TARGETS

Yemen’s Ansar Allah targets Saudi oil transport



Yemen’s Ansar Allah said on Monday they targeted a number of sensitive crude oil supply and transport sites linking eastern Saudi Arabia to the critical Red Sea oil export hub of Yanbu. The group’s military spokesperson Yahya Saree said the operation was in response to what he described as Saudi drone incursions into Yemeni airspace. Saudi Arabia has re-routed its crude output to Yanbu via its east-west pipeline to get around Iranian attacks on shipping in the Strait of Hormuz. — Reuters

GLOBAL IMPACT

Singapore tightens monetary policy over war



Singapore tightened monetary policy on Monday for the second time in three months, as the fallout from the US war against Iran keeps global energy markets volatile and inflation risks elevated. The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) said it would increase the rate of appreciation of the local dollar’s trade-weighted value. The move comes as oil prices remain elevated owing to tensions in the Middle East. Because the city-state imports most of its needs, higher global prices for food and energy directly drive up local living costs. — AFP

VESSEL ATTACK

Iran warns of ‘unforeseen’ result after Ukraine attack



Iran’s foreign ministry warned on Monday of “unforeseen” consequences following Ukraine’s attack on an Iranian vessel in the Caspian Sea over the weekend. “This action by Ukraine was an absolutely illegal and unjustified act, contrary to the Charter of the United Nations, as well as a dangerous act of adventurism that will certainly not go unanswered by us,” the ministry’s spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei said in a weekly press briefing. The consequences of Ukraine’s action “will certainly be unforeseen”, he added. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



Residents mourn following an air attack in Kharkiv. — AFP

Ukrainian drone strikes on Russia kill 5, including child

MOSCOW: Ukraine fired hundreds of drones at Russia early on Monday, killing five people including a child, according to Russian officials. The attack also set buildings ablaze, among them an apartment block and warehouses, officials said. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his forces had struck an export terminal in the western Rostov region, as well as oil facilities in the Yaroslavl and Udmurtia regions far from the front line. “Last night, our long-range sanctions were effective in the Rostov region. An export terminal approximately 250 kilometres from the front line was hit,” Zelensky said. “Deep strikes also targeted oil facilities in the Yaroslavl region and the Udmurt Republic, which is 1,300 kilometres from Ukraine’s state border,” he added. The five reported killed were all in Russia’s Rostov region bordering Ukraine. Among the dead were a married couple and a child, while the attack damaged multiple buildings including a homeless shelter, regional governor Yuri Slyusar said. In the Belgorod region bordering Ukraine, Ukrainian drones wounded 12 people including two children and set fire to an apartment building, regional authorities said. — AFP

South Africa’s Ramaphosa calls for action on migration

MIDRAND: South African President Cyril Ramaphosa called on Monday for African countries to work together to manage migration, as his government faces mounting pressure over attacks on foreign nationals. Ramaphosa’s appeal to the Pan-African Parliament follows weeks of anti-migrant protests in South Africa, where xenophobic activists and fringe groups have blamed undocumented migrants from elsewhere in Africa for crime, unemployment and strain on public services. He warned that unmanaged cross-border movement could undermine security and social order, and said no country could address the challenge alone. “As African countries, we have to acknowledge and address the conditions that drive migration in the first place,” Ramaphosa told a session of the parliament, which is the legislative body of the African Union. “We need to work together to address issues like conflict, instability, governance failures, poverty and social discord.” Demonstrations that began last year over undocumented migrants’ access to public health facilities intensified this year as xenophobic groups demanded that they leave the country by June 30. More than 160,000 foreign nationals have departed South Africa over the past two months. At least four migrants have been killed in the violence, though some foreign governments say the death toll is higher. The attacks were “sad and abhorrent”, Ramaphosa said, adding that “we in South Africa deeply regret and mourn” the lives lost. “We’ve taken a firm stand against hatred for people from other countries, xenophobia or Afrophobia,” Ramaphosa said. — AFP

PHILIPPINES’ MARCOS SAYS ‘PERHAPS TIME TO REVISIT NUCLEAR ENERGY’

MANILA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, who declared a national energy emergency this year, said on Monday that nuclear power might hold answers for a country paying the highest electricity prices in the region. Marcos made the suggestion in a wide-ranging State of the Nation speech that placed spiralling energy costs and inflation, driven by the war in the Middle East, centre-stage. “Perhaps it is time for us to revisit nuclear energy production,” Marcos

told the joint session of Congress. “We will ensure it is safe. We will ensure the good benefits of nuclear energy will be explained properly to the public.” Marcos offered no specifics about his atomic energy plans, the Philippines announced a deal with the United States in May 2024 to train Filipinos how to build and operate nuclear power plants. Carlo Arcilla, former director of the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute, said reintroducing nuclear energy into the conversation was a

“no-brainer”. “While it’s true that we have hydro and geothermal, these are not enough. We’ve experienced a lot of brownouts, especially in the Visayas,” he said, referencing a region of the central Philippines. Energy Secretary Sharon Garin said in March that the import-dependent archipelago planned to boost the output of its coal-fired power plants to keep electricity costs down as the war wreaked havoc with gas shipments. — AFP

Spain, France race to stop blazes ahead of heatwave

SPAIN FACES two crucial days to bring raging wildfires under control before weather conditions worsen, authorities said, as Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez called on his citizens to “exercise extreme caution” ahead of a new heatwave. Wildfires that broke out in forests around the Spanish capital at the height of the summer holidays have forced some 60,000 people to flee their homes, often with just minutes’ notice, leaving pets and medicine behind. The fires devoured forests left tinder-dry by successive heatwaves and lack of rain since May. Overnight, lower temperatures, weaker winds and higher air humidity helped make progress against the blazes west of the capital, the Madrid regional government said. The flames have “slowed their advance”, it said, while urging residents to remain “extremely cautious”. “The situation has improved slightly, but the fire is still active,” it said. But with humidity levels set to drop and temperatures soar across Spain, hitting 40°C in the centre and south according to meteorological agency AEMET, firefighters have only a small window of opportunity. Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska told reporters that Monday and Tuesday “are



A firefighter stands before flames as a forest fire rages, some 30km from Bordeaux, France. — AFP

Overnight, lower temperatures, weaker winds and higher air humidity helped make progress against the blazes. firefighters and water-bombing aircraft battled on Monday to contain a wildfire before a new spike in temperatures

absolutely decisive days” to control the fires, before temperatures start rising again. “The next two days will not bring the most favourable conditions, nor the ones we would have wanted, but they are two days in which we can take the initiative, make progress, and work towards controlling and containing the blaze.” AEMET said that from Tuesday the fire risk would “surge to very high or extreme levels across almost the entire country.” “This situation will persist, or may even worsen, in the following days,” it added. Reacting to the forecast, Sanchez said: “I ask for understanding and call on all citizens in all the country to exercise extreme caution and

take every possible precaution.” “We face difficult hours, complex hours” ahead, he warned. Meanwhile, firefighters and water-bombing aircraft battled on Monday to contain a wildfire in southwest France before a new spike in temperatures, with slightly less active fire fronts than the previous day. The blaze has since Wednesday last week ravaged 42,000 hectares of pine forest — an area larger than Detroit — in the famous wine-growing region of Bordeaux. It has caused some 220,000 holiday makers and residents to flee at the height of the summer holidays, and destroyed around 240 homes. In a village west of the city of Bordeaux, drizzle offered a little welcome respite to firefighters on Monday morning. At a school in Saint-Jean d’Illac, dozens of tired firefighters ate breakfast in the canteen. Around 40 fire fighting trucks waited to be deployed in the courtyard, next to tractors pulling water cisterns. A firefighter said that he had spent the night patrolling around homes to protect them from any incoming fire, but the flames had never arrived. “It really calmed down last night,” he said, asking to remain anonymous because he was not authorised to speak to the press. But “it can start off again at any moment,” he added. — AFP



DRONE STRIKES ROCK SUDAN’S EL-OBEID

EL OBEID: Paramilitary drone strikes shook Sudan’s flashpoint city of El Obeid on Monday, hours after the army regained control of the city’s highway to the capital Khartoum. The army’s former ally, now rival, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), have for months amassed troops around El Obeid, attempting to encircle it ahead of an apparent large-scale assault. Following a days-long advance across North Kordofan state, the Sudanese army on Sunday managed to push the RSF west, off the 400-kilometre highway that connects Khartoum with the embattled Kordofan region’s largest city. At dawn, RSF drone strikes tore through two municipal buildings in El Obeid in apparent retaliation, leaving the local lawyers’ association and a branch of the Agricultural Bank of Sudan in ruins. No casualties were reported. Since the start of the year, drone strikes by both forces have killed over 1,000 people in Kordofan alone, according to the UN. Since April 2023, the war between Sudan’s army and their former allies, the Rapid Support Forces, has torn the country apart and killed over 200,000 people, aid workers estimate. It has also created the world’s largest displacement and hunger crises, with over 33 million people in need of humanitarian aid. — AFP

HORRIFIC VIOLENCE

Mass shooting kills 3, wounds 4 in Seattle



A shooting near the Space Needle landmark in Seattle killed three people and wounded at least four others including a toddler. Seattle Police said one suspect was arrested and they were searching for another following the incident at a food festival in a popular tourist district of the northwestern US city. Assistant Police Chief Tyrone Davis said shots were heard around 6:00 pm and “there were two people who we believe were shooting at each other.” — AFP

HIGH-PROFILE ABDUCTION

Gunmen kidnap judge in N-west Nigeria



Gunmen have kidnapped a judge in northwestern Nigeria’s Kebbi state, police said on Monday, the latest high-profile abduction. Faruku Hassan Bunza, a High Court judge in Kebbi state, was abducted from his home in Bunza town on Sunday morning, days after gunmen kidnapped Nura Umar Bungudu, chairman of Bungudu local government area, a municipality in neighbouring Zamfara state. Police said efforts were under way to try to rescue the judge. — AFP

RECONSIDER MEMBERSHIP

Chad plans to withdraw from the ICC



Chad announced that it planned to withdraw from the International Criminal Court (ICC), saying its effectiveness was “limited and uneven” with a focus on Africa. Chad’s decision follows “an in-depth review of the functioning of the International Criminal Court since it began operating in 2002, as well as its record whose effectiveness remains limited and uneven”. It also condemned what it said was a concentration of the ICC’s activities on African countries. — AFP

OPINION

Redefining ourselves in the age of Artificial Intelligence



AHLAM AL BALUSHI

The writer is Head of AI Team, Ministry of Information

WHILE listening to a podcast by Dr Afnan al Ghamdi, I was drawn to her description of the subtle transformations people experience throughout their lives.

She referred to these moments as soft chaos, periods that may feel uncertain yet quietly reshape how we think, behave, and grow. Soft chaos is not a state of disorder; rather, it is a gentle disruption that pushes us toward growth, adaptation, and transformation.

The phrase remained with me because it perfectly captures the human journey through an increasingly intelligent and interconnected world. When we think about technological revolutions, we often focus on visible changes: new systems, redesigned processes, faster workflows, and greater efficiency.

The digital era transformed how organisations operate and create value. However, AI is introducing a different kind of transformation, one that extends far beyond technology itself. It is not simply changing the way we work; it is changing the way we think and redefine our capabilities.

Every major technological leap brings its own form of soft chaos.

It begins before adoption, when uncertainty shapes our thinking. We ask difficult questions: Will AI replace us? Can we

trust it? What skills will matter in the future?

These questions are not barriers to progress; they are signs of transition. They represent the natural process of reshaping our mental models to adapt to a changing world. Then comes another stage of soft chaos: learning to work differently.

For years, we celebrated the ability to multitask, while with AI success increasingly depends on a different capability: the ability to orchestrate intelligence.

It is no longer about doing everything ourselves, but about understanding which AI model, which tool, and which human capability best serves a particular purpose.

The value lies in skilfully combining different forms of intelligence to create better outcomes. Yet perhaps the most profound form of soft chaos is learning to let go.

We invest time mastering an AI tool, refining our prompts, and integrating it into our daily work.

Just as it becomes part of our routine, a newer model or a more advanced capability emerges, inviting us to begin again.

What once felt like expertise becomes another milestone in an endless journey of learning and adaptation. This makes me pause and wonder:

How much does this continuous cycle of adaptation change us? How flexible can we, as human beings, become? Is there a limit to our capacity to reinvent ourselves? And

AI is introducing a different kind of transformation, one that extends far beyond technology itself. It is not simply changing the way we work; it is changing the way we think and redefine our capabilities

why does this constant cycle of learning, unlearning, and relearning, despite resembling chaos, feel less like disruption and more like growth?

Perhaps the greatest innovation is not AI itself, but the human capacity to continuously reinvent ourselves. We have long associated the word chaos with disorder and uncertainty. Yet not all chaos is destructive. Some chaos arrives quietly. It does not disrupt our lives overnight; instead, it gently reshapes our habits, our assumptions, and even our identity.

It invites us to question what we know, release what no longer serves us, and embrace possibilities we had not previously imagined. That is the joy of soft chaos.

It reminds us that growth is rarely comfortable, but it is often meaningful. It teaches us that expertise is no longer a destination but a mindset of continuous curiosity and adaptation. In a world where intelligent technologies evolve almost daily, our greatest advantage may not be mastering every new tool, but developing the ability to evolve alongside them.

The true promise of AI then, may not be limited to the intelligence we build. It may be the transformation it inspires within us, a deeper understanding of what it means to be human in a world of constant change: a humanity that embraces uncertainty, and discovers joy in the soft chaos of becoming.

THE FUTURE OF EMERGENCY CARE

DR MAHMOUD BIN NASSER AL RAHBI



DR MAHMOUD BIN NASSER AL RAHBI

The writer is a Senior Consultant in Emergency Medicine, Samayil Hospital

Emergency departments (EDs) are the frontline of every healthcare system and represent a critical measure of its ability to provide timely, safe and high-quality care.

Beyond treating critically ill patients, EDs are complex environments where clinical expertise, advanced technology, effective management and rapid decision-making come together.

With healthcare systems facing increasing patient volumes, rising chronic disease burdens, recurring public health emergencies and growing expectations for faster access to quality care, traditional emergency care models are under mounting pressure.

Many emergency departments continue to operate through conventional processes that are no longer sufficient to address these challenges, resulting in longer waiting times, overcrowding, inefficient patient flow, limited resource utilisation and reduced patient satisfaction.

Business Process Re-engineering (BPR) offers a strategic approach to redesign emergency services by reviewing the entire patient journey — from arrival and triage to diagnosis, treatment and discharge or admission.

The transformation involves removing unnecessary processes, improving workflows, redefining roles and making better use of human and technological resources. The goal is not only to reduce waiting times but also to create a safer, more equitable and efficient emergency care where patients receive the right care at the right time.

A key element of this transformation is the move towards data-driven healthcare management. Leading healthcare organisations increasingly rely on real-time information to anticipate demand, manage patient surges, optimise staffing, improve capacity planning and enhance patient flow.

Artificial intelligence and predictive analytics are also opening new opportunities to strengthen emergency preparedness, support clinical decisions and improve operational efficiency.

However, technology alone cannot drive sustainable change. Investment in healthcare professionals remains essential.

Purple Saturday must move beyond awareness to action

THIS past weekend, Oman marked Purple Saturday - July 25 - under the slogan ‘A Day with a Lasting Impact.’ The goal is clear: raise awareness about inclusion, empower people with disabilities, and push for more accessible services. But in my WhatsApp group of 59 Omani women with disabilities, the main reaction to the news was confusion.



DR NAJMA AL ZIDJALY

The writer is an Associate Professor, Sultan Qaboos University



Many did not know what Purple Saturday was, why it mattered, or how it would change their daily lives. That gap - between public celebration and real impact - is the problem we need to solve.

Public days like this can help when they work well. They get attention, line up different groups around the same message, and show that the state recognises disability rights. Visibility and legitimacy matter. They can open doors.

But attention is not the same as help. If a campaign does not lead people to a next step they can take tomorrow, it stays symbolic.

The women in my group asked simple, practical questions: How do I renew my disability card? How can I travel with a wheel chair? Where do I go to renew my passport? How do I access medication or transport help? If those answers are not easy to find and act on, then the celebration has not reached the ground.

A big part of the challenge is knowledge of the law. Rights only work when people can understand them in plain language and use them. That means knowing which office handles what, which documents to bring, how long it takes, and who to call if something goes wrong.

Without that, rights sit on paper.

Purple Saturday can be more than a colour on social media. It can be a doorway. To get there, we need checklists, contacts who answer, open counters, and companions who guide the way

Add real-world barriers — money, distance, and building access — and even a simple errand can become impossible.

So, how could Purple Saturday make a real difference? Here are some suggestions. First, turn rights into steps: pair every post with a one-page checklist in Arabic that covers how to apply for or renew the disability card, what documents to bring, which office to visit, typical timelines, fee waivers, and a phone or WhatsApp number that picks up.

Second, turn law into everyday language: short explainers that map rights to common situations—clinic visits, workplace accommodations, transport discounts, passport renewal—with example phrases to use at the counter.

Third, turn events into services: every Purple Saturday booth should offer on-the-spot application help, document scanning, fee-waiver checks, appointment booking, and disability-friendly transport to and from the venue.

If someone leaves with a submitted application number, the day mattered. Fourth, turn posts into peers: train peer navigators — women with disabilities who know the system — to run weekly Q&As, share step-by-step reels, and

accompany first-time applicants.

People trust people who have walked the same path. Fifth, measure what counts: in the two weeks after Purple Saturday, publish how many disability cards were issued or renewed, how many complaints were resolved, and how many physical barriers were fixed.

If the numbers do not move, change the plan. Public reporting keeps everyone honest and focused on results. Finally, design for the realities women face. Many juggle care work, have limited mobility, face stigma, or live far from offices.

“Visit during office hours” excludes them. Offer mobile units at wilayat centres, evening hours, remote submissions, and automatic fee waivers when disability status is verified. Make services go to people, not the other way around.

Purple Saturday can be more than a colour on social media. It can be a doorway. To get there, we need checklists, contacts who answer, open counters, and companions who guide the way.

Next time, success will sound like this in my group: “I understood my rights, I submitted my documents, and here’s my reference number.”

That is how a day becomes a lasting impact.

People change, and so does climate...



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is a senior editor of Observer

THE WORLD is facing climate change, the scientists kept saying. And we have been counting carbon footprints too. But now we are seeing the wildfires in different places in the world as drought sets its anchor in locations where summers have been known to be mild and perfect for holidays.

If the climate faces changes, how about people?

People change too, said a friend.

To that, another friend quipped, “We can see the changes in climate, but we cannot see the change in people’s minds.”

People change; it is only natural to evolve after all. One can see the behavioural and physical changes, but the mind — that is a whole new game.

Reading minds is not an easy skill.

“Mind reading” is actually a fascinating reality across several distinct fields today.

I am impressed with mentalists, but there is so much more happening with tech-based mind reading that has come about in neuroscience and AI.

Apparently, researchers are getting shockingly close to decoding human thoughts using brain scanning and machine learning.

According to reports, scientists have trained AI models to analyse brain scans (fMRI) while a person listens to a story or imagines an image.

With this technology, the AI can reconstruct the general flow of thoughts or

re-create images the person is visualising with impressive accuracy.

And I want to say, leave my mind alone.

What might cause anxiety is the thought of why the scientists would want to see so much into the mind.

The worry is that all that your mind’s reading could also become data.

Then there are Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs) where companies like Neuralink and academic labs use neural implants to allow paralysed patients to spell out sentences or control computer cursors simply by imagining the physical movement. This is, of course, of great benefit.

What many of us must have been already practicing, knowingly or unknowingly, is applied psychology’s behavioural mind reading.

Most “mind readers” in daily life rely on keen observation of non-verbal cues.

When we conduct interviews as journalists, we observe micro-expressions — the tiny, involuntary facial expressions lasting a fraction of a second or so. This reveals the true emotions before a person consciously masks them.

The job interviewers are already sketching out the personality of the candidate through body language and vocal tone, and that also includes posture.

How often have we noticed the eye movement patterns, speech pacing, and pupil dilation? All of these give good indications of

Apparently, researchers are getting shockingly close to decoding human thoughts using brain scanning and machine learning

stress levels, hesitation, or interest. These are important observations in communication.

Sometimes we want to jump to conclusions, and really there is a thin line between judging and analysing a person.

Sometimes people have to build a mental model of how someone else could think based on their current circumstances and background.

This is important for student counsellors but also in public relations, especially in corporations, because organisations today reflect diversity and it is important to know cultures so everyone feels included.

Experts point out that inclusion is not about ‘fitting everyone into a single mould’ — it is about building environments, systems, and mindsets flexible enough that everyone can show up as they are and contribute fully. Acceptance is as important as other qualities and skills.

We tend to see the differences more often and find it tedious to adjust to someone who has a different approach to life and thoughts.

According to experts, true inclusion happens at three distinct levels: personal interactions, structural systems, and cultural mindsets.

To achieve that, we need to learn more about cultures and why people think in a certain way in particular situations.

The circle goes back to the mind.

Better understanding could start with good conversations.

NEW AI TOOLS LET READERS TALK TO BOOKS

THOMAS URBAIN

Imagine a world where you could ask a book a question as you read it.

That’s the pitch from a wave of new AI tools letting readers do exactly that. “You are dealing with a book as if it is a living object - it’s totally different,” says Ahmed Kamel, CEO of Sinai.ai, a platform now in testing.

With these tools, users get access to an e-book or audiobook alongside an AI chatbot. Confused about a character’s motives or the historical setting? Just ask.

Readers can dig into a character’s psychology, historical context, or a philosophical concept - no separate research required.

French startup My Smart Book launched something similar in mid-April. Like Sinai, its chatbot draws only on the actual text of the book - no outside information.

Even book-selling behemoth Amazon is in on it. Its audiobook company, Audible, launched a feature called “Ask a Question” last fall.

Mid-listen, you can tap a button, ask your question, hear the answer, and then pick up the story right where you left off.

“We’re excited about the potential for AI-powered features to enhance the customer experience,” an Audible spokesperson said, adding the tool is “designed to answer questions specifically about the audiobook the listener is currently engaged with.”

The company thinks it could pull in new fans too, making books “more accessible and appetising to a broader range of listeners.”

Amazon’s Kindle has its own version: “Ask this Book,” described as an “expert reading assistant” that answers questions about plot and characters “without disrupting your reading flow.”

ElevenLabs - a rising star in AI voice tech - built “ElevenReader Voice Chat,” which it says “turns any book into a two-way conversation.”

But the question of who gets paid or has permission to develop this new reading superpower is a thorny one.

Sinai.ai says it only offers books that are either in the public domain or ones where the author, their estate, or the publisher signed off first.

Another company, iChatbook, does things differently.

“Our chat book is not a library of books - it’s a library of concepts and ideas and facts,” says founder Brian Yang.

Instead of handing over the actual text, the AI pulls out key ideas and explains them in simpler language - something Yang thinks could be huge for students.

And since it never quotes the book directly, it sidesteps a lot of copyright headaches.

Not every platform is as careful, though. Some, like Myreader, let users upload any book, whether or not it’s under copyright, and then connect it to an AI interface. — AFP

Will heatwaves push tourists to ‘coolcations’?

EUROPEAN holidaymakers worn down by recurrent heatwaves are currently snubbing Mediterranean destinations for northern climes in hopes of cooler temperatures, but it remains to be seen whether it is just a fad or a durable shift in the tourism market.

With temperatures in the European summer regularly climbing up towards 40 degrees Celsius (100F), cool has become cool. This year, visitors “have been telling me that they have escaped the heat in southern parts of Europe,” said Terje Viblom Pedersen, a guide who offers tours in southeastern Sweden.

“They are just amazed” by the daytime high temperatures under 30C and sea breezes, as well as the lack of crowds compared to tourist hotspots in southern Europe.

Two French tourists, Daniel and Florence Gastaldi, joined Pedersen for a tour of Stockholm’s Old Town.

“It’s good to have escaped the heatwave,” said the recently retired couple from the southern French city of Marseille.

“We’re happy to have found cooler temperatures,” they said.

The concept of “coolcations” - vacations in a cooler clime - has been gathering pace in recent years and appears to have exploded in 2026. On the French version of Hotels.com, searches for rooms in the Danish capital of Copenhagen have jumped by 246 per cent since the first heatwave struck France in May. Those for Dublin in Ireland have risen by 151 per cent. The trend is not limited to France.

Jonna Robertson, a trip adviser at New York-based Fora Travel, said she had observed the phenomenon in the United States, which has also seen its share of sweltering weather.

“Oslo has seen booking growth of 154 per cent year-over-year, Helsinki 124 per cent... Those numbers tell me that travellers are actively looking beyond the traditional summer hotspots,” said the expert and founder of Coolcation Adventures. In France, industry experts say they have seen growing



A firefighter clears brush in Saint-Jean-d’Illac, west of Bordeaux, on Monday in the Gironde region, southwestern France. — AFP



MARIE-MORGANE LE MOEL

The writer is a journalist with AFP

popularity of mountain resorts during the summer.

“That’s because at higher altitudes there is a clear drop in temperatures in the evening and during the night, which makes the stays much more liveable,” said Jean-Pascal Chopard, head of the tourism body for the mountainous Jura region.

But will this current enthusiasm actually change the geography of international tourism?

Travellers’ choices depend on a whole range of different factors, not least pricing, experts point out.

And southern Europe, which is traditionally cheaper than the north, remains at the top of the most popular destinations.

“All European countries have recorded an increase in tourist arrivals, and there is no discernible trend linked to the heat,” said Swedish professor Stefan Gossling, a tourism specialist. “Temperature is one aspect people take into account when they go on vacation,” he said.

“But there are many other elements. Italy is not Denmark in terms of culture, environment, prices. All of that means people

don’t easily change destinations when they have a favourite,” he said.

Norway’s tourism promotion agency agreed.

“Our recent visitor surveys show that around one in five foreign tourists considers cooler summer temperatures to be one of the reasons for choosing Norway”, it said. Nevertheless, “climate is only one of many factors that influence travel decisions”, it argued.

Security, nature, accessibility, air connections, and exchange rates also play a role. Furthermore, Mediterranean countries have very extensive tourism infrastructures. Indeed, visitor numbers continue to demonstrate the importance of warm countries.

Greece, for example, had its best year ever in terms of visitor numbers last year, as did Spain.

In Spain, spending by domestic and foreign tourists has already risen by more than eight per cent in the second quarter of 2026, according to data published recently by Exceltur, an organisation that brings together the main Spanish tourism companies.

SPORTS

OMAN SHOOTING CLUB CUP DRAWS FIERCE COMPETITION



Competitors remain focused as they target leading positions in the Skeeton shooting event.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

THE OMAN Shooting Club Cup 2026 continues to deliver closely contested action at Action Point Oman in Muscat, with shooters battling for leading positions across four categories and the opportunity to qualify for the tournament’s grand prize draw.

The month-long championship, which runs until August 4, features the M4 .223 rifle, shotgun, Glock 9 mm pistol and Skeeton .22 LR categories. The M4 competition was held from July 12 to 18, followed by the shotgun event from July 19 to 25, while the pistol competition is scheduled from July 29 to August 4. The Skeeton category remains part of the programme through the closing date.

Competition has been particularly tight in the M4 .223 rifle standings, with seven shooters recording the maximum score of 100 points.

Said bin Salim al Kalbani leads the provisional standings with seven inner-centre hits, known as “X” scores, ahead of Mubarak al Salti, who also posted 100 points



Competitors remain focused as they target leading positions in the Skeeton shooting event.

and seven Xs.

Said bin Muslim al Sarkhi occupies third place after scoring 100 points with six Xs, followed by Saif bin Mohammed al Hajri with five Xs. Mustafa bin Sulaiman al Shamli is fifth with four Xs, while Mazin bin Saleh al Rajhi and Ahmed bin Salim al Kalbani complete the top seven.

The M4 event is contested on the 100-metre



A competitor takes aim during the M4 .223 rifle competition at the Oman Shooting Club Cup 2026.

range, with each competitor firing 10 shots across two magazines from distances of 60 and 70 metres. Shooters are given one minute for each magazine, placing a premium on accuracy, composure and time management.

In the provisional Skeeton .22 LR standings, Abdullah bin Saeed bin Salim al Darei leads after recording 100 points and five Xs. Ali bin Hamoud al Hadhrami is second

with the same score and number of Xs, while Mubarak bin Saeed al Salti stands third with 100 points and three Xs.

Younis bin Juma al Busaidy occupies fourth place after registering 100 points and two Xs. The competition remains open, meaning the standings could change as more shooters complete their attempts.

The Skeeton competition consists of 10 shots on the 50-metre range, with results recorded on official scorecards under the supervision of accredited range officers and judges. The shotgun category features 12 shots across four lanes, including single-target and double-target stages. Meanwhile, the Glock 9 mm pistol event consists of 10 shots across two magazines on the 25-metre range, with one minute allowed for each magazine. Cash prizes of RO 300, RO 200 and RO 100 await the top three competitors in each category. Qualifide competitors will also enter the grand prize draw, with a Jetour X50 awarded for first place, RO 2,000 for second place and RO 1,000 for third.

The tournament is being staged with Sohar International as the main sponsor, alongside Shell, Adventure World, Omantel, Platinum Shield United LLC and Dhofar Insurance.

Summer programme promotes skating across Oman

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 27

The Oman Skating Sports Committee is continuing its summer training programme across several wilayats under the slogan “Our Summer... Skating”, as part of its efforts to promote skating sports and attract more participants from different age groups.

The programme, which will run until August, is being implemented in the wilayats of Al Seeb, Ibri, Al Rustaq, Al Buraimi and Dhank. It also includes activities at ice-skating venues at Snow Oman and Boulevard Al Seeb, providing participants with opportunities to experience both roller and

ice disciplines.

The initiative aims to introduce community members to various forms of skating, expand the sport’s grassroots base and encourage children and young people to take part in structured training programmes.

The roller sports segment features disciplines such as speed skating and roller hockey, while the ice programme includes ice hockey and freestyle ice skating. The summer period is considered an ideal opportunity to attract young participants and identify promising talents who can be developed through specialised training.

Skating is regarded as one of the emerging sports



Young skaters join the summer training programme.

in the Sultanate of Oman and has witnessed growing interest among young people in recent years. Through the programme, the committee seeks to build an integrated sporting system for all disciplines under its umbrella by

developing players and qualifying coaches, administrators and other technical personnel.

The committee is also preparing to organise several local and international competitions during the next phase,

aimed at strengthening the sport’s presence and providing young athletes with more opportunities to compete and gain experience.

Among the major events on its calendar is the Oman Roller Hockey Championship 2026, scheduled to be held in September with the participation of teams from 10 countries. The international line-up is expected to include teams from England, Belarus, Germany, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, alongside participants from several other countries.

The committee will also organise a local speed skating championship, with further details expected to

be announced soon.

In December, Oman will host the Oman Ice Hockey Championship 2026, which will feature a women’s category for the first time in the tournament’s history. The addition represents an important step towards increasing women’s participation and supporting the development of women’s ice hockey in the Sultanate of Oman.

Further competitions, development programmes and specialised qualification courses for players, coaches and administrators are also included in the committee’s upcoming calendar as it continues working to establish a sustainable pathway for skating sports in Oman.

SHORTTAKES



Participants take part in the opening session of the AFC Fitness Coaching Certificate Course Level 1B.

22 COACHES JOIN AFC FITNESS COURSE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

The Oman Football Association (OFA) has launched the AFC Fitness Coaching Certificate Course Level 1B, with 22 participants taking part in the programme as part of its ongoing efforts to strengthen the capabilities of Omani football coaches and technical staff.

Organised by the OFA Technical Development Department, the course began on Saturday and is being delivered by AFC instructor Dr Tariq al Banna. It aims to enhance participants’ knowledge of modern fitness coaching principles in line with the latest Asian Football Confederation standards.

The programme combines classroom-based theoretical sessions with practical field applications, covering key aspects of physical preparation, training methodologies and performance development. Participants will gain the skills required to design and implement effective fitness programmes tailored to the demands of modern football.

The Level 1B course forms part of the OFA’s wider coach education and technical development strategy, which focuses on raising the standard of football coaching across the Sultanate of Oman by providing nationally recognised and AFC-accredited training opportunities.

Through a series of technical and educational initiatives, the OFA continues to invest in developing qualified national coaching personnel capable of supporting clubs and national teams while contributing to the long-term growth of football in Oman.



Participants attend the AFC Fitness Coaching Certificate Course Level 1B.

TAROUBA, Trinidad and Tobago: Shan Masood anchored a strong reply by Pakistan with the visitors reaching 199 for three in reply to the West Indies first innings total of 311 at the close of the second day of the first Test at the Brian Lara Stadium in Trinidad on Sunday.

Masood’s unbeaten 88 and 63 from opening batsman Imam-ul-Haq ensured the day belonged almost completely to the visitors after the home side slipped from their overnight position of 194 for three, Mohammad Ali taking four wickets as the Pakistani seamers made up for an indifferent effort on the opening day.

Removed as captain in the aftermath of a 2-0 series loss in Bangladesh in May, Masood enjoyed early luck and then

survived a late scare. In between though, the 36-year-old batted attractively, his innings so far occupying 137 deliveries during which he stroked 11 fours.

His 155-run second-wicket partnership with Imam-ul-Haq following the early loss of Azan Awaits to Kemar Roach came at almost a run-a-ball through a scorching afternoon when the West Indies bowlers failed to establish any consistency in line and length, paying a heavy price as the two left-handers made merry in the blistering sunshine.

Shamar Joseph and Jayden Seales redressed the balance somewhat in the final session with the wickets of Imam-ul-Haq and Babar Azam, the veteran right-hander re-appointed as captain for this brief series and falling



Shan Masood of Pakistan during the 2nd day of 1st Test match between West Indies and Pakistan. — AFP

just before bad light took the players off the field for the last time.

“My main focus was to leave the ball well and I was just

waiting for them (the bowlers) to come in my zone to score runs, and luckily enough it turned out to be my day,” said Imam-ul-Haq in reflecting

on his contribution, which included seven fours off 102 deliveries.

As if to reinforce that perspective on the importance of the first session of the day, West Indies’ quest for a first innings total in excess of 400 was immediately undermined at the start of play when Kavem Hodge fell to Khurram Shazad for 84, adding just one to his overnight score and closing off a 91-run fourth-wicket partnership with Shai Hope. Hope was badly missed by Awaits at slip when on 51 but Pakistan picked up three more wickets in the morning session.

Mohammad Ali, the unfortunate bowler when Hope edged to first slip, roared with relief when he removed Justin Greaves, Salman Ali Agha taking one of his four

catches in the innings.

West Indies captain Roston Chase and Roach also fell cheaply and it was Mohammad Ali who claimed the last three victims shortly after lunch as the West Indies lost their last five wickets for 54 runs.

Joseph, who belted three fours and six in 23 off 13 balls, gloved an attempted hook to Agha before Hope was trapped LBW for 92, eight short of a sixth Test century. He had spent more than five hours at the crease in a watchful effort that featured a lone six and six fours.

Mohammad Ali then bowled Seales comprehensively to finish with four for 50 and went a long way to ease the frustration of the opening day. — AFP

57 national sailors gear up as Oman Sail sharpens skills

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 27

OMAN SAIL’S Summer Training Camp in Ras Al Hadd is about to reach the halfway point as more sailors from all fleets go through a week of intense training. Running from July 10 to August 19, 2026. The camp will bring a total of 57 national sailors together alongside visiting international teams to refine technical skills, elevate physical conditioning and prepare for major upcoming championships on the regional sailing calendar.

Taking advantage of Ras Al Hadd’s exceptional wind conditions, the training schedule is structured across six dedicated blocks running throughout July and August. The programme provides tailored, class-specific instruction for Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, ILCA 7, and 29er fleets under the guidance of Oman Sail’s expert coaches.

Led by Hashim al Rashdi, Oman Sail’s Head Coach Performance, alongside Female Team Leader Ibtisam al Salmi, the camp focuses on building tactical sharpness, technical mastery and athletic endurance.

The programme serves as a critical preparation ground for key events, including the upcoming Oman Sailing Championships from August 14-18, followed by Al Musannah Race Week and the 3rd Arab Women Sailing Championship from October 15-21.

Abdulaziz al Shidi, Acting Director of Sailing at Oman Sail, said, “Our Summer Training Camp in Ras Al Hadd represents a vital step in our continuous pursuit of excellence. By providing our sailors with a rigorous, world-class training environment, we are not only sharpening their competitive edge for upcoming national and international regattas but also reinforcing the strong foundation of Omani sailing for years to come.”

Hashim al Rashdi, Head Coach Performance and Team Leader, added, “Ras Al Hadd offers ideal conditions to push our sailors to their limits. Over these six training blocks, our focus is on technical precision, tactical decision-making under pressure and peak physical conditioning. The energy and commitment from both our sailors and coaching staff have been exceptional, and we are confident this preparation will yield strong



This international participation offers Omani sailors valuable fleet-racing practice against top regional talent.



Summer Training Camp in Ras Al Hadd represents a vital step in our continuous pursuit of excellence.

ABDULAZIZ AL SHIDI
Acting Director of Sailing at Oman Sail



Archive image of Ras Al Hadd Training camp.

results on the water.”

The 18-sailor Optimist fleet is headed by Coach Sultan al Zadjali and supported by Development Coaches Hassan al Rahbi, Ibrahim al Fadhli and Ali al Araimi. The ILCA 4 fleet features 11 sailors under Coach Ahmed al Wahaibi, while the ILCA 6 and ILCA 7 fleets feature three sailors each under the direction of Coach Mundher al Kindi. Additionally, Coach Zakariya al Wahabi is leading four sailors in the high- performance 29er class. Demonstrating Oman Sail’s growing status as a regional sailing hub, the Ras Al Hadd camp will also host two visiting national and regional squads. A team from the Abu Dhabi Sailing & Yacht Club will join the camp this week with

two separate contingents: an ILCA team of seven sailors and one coach training from July 25 to August 2, followed by an Optimist team of seven sailors and one coach training from August 5-20 . Next month, from August 9-19, the Sri Lanka National Team will arrive, bringing four Optimist sailors and one coach.

This international participation offers Omani sailors valuable fleet-racing practice against top regional talent ahead of the autumn championship calendar and helps position Oman Sail as a leading training provider within the region as well as showcasing the potential for coastal regions across the nation to host major sporting events and activities.

Masood anchors Pakistan reply after West Indies total 311

SPORTS



Overall winner UAE Team Emirates - XRG's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar celebrates on the on the podium with second-placed Red Bull - BORA - hansgrohe team's Belgian rider Remco Evenepoel and third-placed UAE Team Emirates - XRG's Mexican rider Isaac Del Toro after the 21st stage of the 113th edition of the Tour de France. — AFP

“Thank you to all the fans and to all of France for hosting this great race.

TADEJ POGACAR

POGACAR EQUALS TOUR DE FRANCE RECORD WITH 5TH TITLE

SLOVENIAN POGACAR WINS FIFTH TOUR DE FRANCE, THIRD CONSECUTIVE TITLE

VAN DER POEL WINS FINAL STAGE, BEATING PHILIPSEN IN PHOTO FINISH

TOUR FEATURES NO FRENCH, ITALIAN, OR SPANISH STAGE WINS FOR FIRST TIME

SLOVENIA'S TADEJ POGACAR secured a record-equalling fifth Tour de France title on Sunday after safely navigating the final stage, won by Mathieu van der Poel, to seal a third consecutive crown in cycling's greatest race.

The 27-year-old UAE Team Emirates XRGcyclist, affectionately known as “Pogi”, only needed to avoid a race-ending mishap on the run into Paris to join Jacques Anquetil, Eddy Merckx, Bernard Hinault and Miguel Indurain as a five-time Tour champion.

Belgium's Remco Evenepoel finished second overall, while Mexico's Isaac del Toro rounded out the overall podium in third.

“Thank you to all the fans and to all of France for hosting this great race,” Pogacar said. “Thank you to my competitors for putting on a great show. We fought hard over the last three weeks.”

‘A DREAM’

Van der Poel and Pogacar broke away on the final ascent of Montmartre with around 10 kilometres remaining and took a slender advantage into the run to the Champs-Elysees as the chasing group closed relentlessly.

Pogacar's challenge faded inside the final kilometre, but Van der Poel pressed on to secure victory in a photo finish ahead of Alpecin-Premier Tech teammate Jasper Philipsen, with Mads Pedersen of Lidl-Trek in third.

“When I was sick last year and I had to watch the stage on television, I was already thinking about this



UAE Team Emirates - XRG's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey, Alpecin - Premier Tech team's Dutch rider Mathieu van der Poel and Red Bull - BORA - hansgrohe team's Belgian rider Remco Evenepoel cycle on the Butte de Montmartre during the 21st stage of the 113th edition of the Tour de France cycling race. — AFP

moment,” Van der Poel, 31, said.

“The way it went, it's a dream. It's incredible. It was super hard, and to be up there with the best rider in the world, all my respect for Tadej.

“I thought we were going to get caught back, then I was just thinking about this moment. I put my head down in the last five hundred metres. I just went as hard as I could...

“I'm super happy. I have a few races I still wanted to win in my career and this was one of them.”

SUPREME POGACAR

Pogacar underlined his supremacy throughout the Tour by claiming five stage victories. His path to a third straight yellow jersey became less complicated when two-time Tour winner Jonas Vingegaard, widely regarded as his principal challenger, withdrew after a crash on Stage 15.

The Tour's traditional finale in Paris was shortened after security forces were redeployed to help tackle wildfires near Bordeaux. As a result, Stage 21, which customarily takes the peloton into Paris before several laps of the Champs-Elysees, was reduced to 89 kilometres from the 133 originally scheduled.

This year's race also produced a remarkable first: no rider from France, Italy or Spain won a stage, making it the first Tour de France without a stage victory from any of the three nations that created and host cycling's Grand Tours.

Pogacar's latest triumph caps three weeks of racing since the Grand Depart in Barcelona and further cements his status as the dominant rider of his generation. — Reuters

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
7,185.381

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$82.41
BRENT \$85.63
LIGHT \$83.24



BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



The platform was unveiled during the opening of the real estate exhibition held alongside the Khareef Dhofar Festival 2026.

Oman Housing Bank launches digital waiting list platform

SALALAH: Oman Housing Bank has launched the country's first digital waiting list platform for housing finance, allowing citizens to register electronically for home loan financing as part of the bank's wider digital transformation strategy. The platform was unveiled during the opening of the real estate exhibition held alongside the Khareef Dhofar Festival 2026, under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. The new system enables applicants to join the housing finance waiting list online without visiting bank branches during the initial stages of the application process. The launch also marks the start of processing 1,252 housing finance applications submitted during April and May across the bank's branches, with a combined financing value exceeding RO 63 million.

Applicants can create an online account, submit personal and employment details, select financing preferences and upload supporting documents electronically. The platform will also provide notifications throughout each stage of the application process until customers are invited to complete the financing process. The initiative forms part of the bank's "Book Your Turn" campaign, which aims to simplify access to housing finance while expanding digital government services.

Moosa bin Masoud al Jadidi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Housing Bank (OHB), said the platform represented a major step in the bank's digital transformation programme in line with Oman Vision 2040. He said the new system redesigns the customer journey by allowing citizens to begin the financing process online, reducing branch visits and shortening waiting times.

Al Jadidi added that the platform would improve operational efficiency, accelerate housing finance approvals and support national urban development objectives. He said the bank would continue investing in digital technologies and plans to introduce additional smart services to make housing finance faster and more accessible while strengthening its role as a development-focused financial institution. — ONA

Oman targets Europe's liquid hydrogen market

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 27

OMAN is emerging as a pivotal partner in Europe's ambitions to establish large-scale green hydrogen import corridors, with Dutch-based clean energy developer EcoLog advancing plans to transport renewable hydrogen in liquid form from the Sultanate of Oman to the Netherlands, according to the company's Chief Executive Officer Ellen Ruhotas.

In an interview published by *Nederland Waterstofland*, the Dutch national hydrogen platform, Ruhotas said discussions with Omani stakeholders are currently the most advanced element of EcoLog's proposed international liquid hydrogen supply chain, which aims to connect renewable energy producers in Oman with European industrial consumers through Dutch ports.

"During His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's state visit to the Netherlands, all parties sat down at the table together for the first time. We are now moving towards commercial contracts," Ruhotas said, referring to growing cooperation between Oman, the Netherlands and other potential partners in developing a future hydrogen trade route.

EcoLog's planned value chain envisages green hydrogen production in Oman, liquefaction by OQ Group, transport by specialised vessels and storage at EcoLog's planned import terminal



With abundant solar and wind resources, large areas allocated for renewable hydrogen development and a strategic location between Europe and Asia, Oman is positioning itself as a major future exporter of green hydrogen and its derivatives.

ELLEN RUHOTAS
CEO - EcoLog

in Amsterdam. The company has identified Indian energy company ACME as a potential green hydrogen producer in Oman, with OQ responsible for the liquefaction stage.

The proposed project highlights Oman's growing importance in Europe's emerging hydrogen economy. With abundant solar and wind resources, large areas allocated for renewable hydrogen development and a strategic location between Europe and Asia, Oman is positioning itself as a major future exporter of green hydrogen and its derivatives.

EcoLog's planned Amsterdam terminal would be designed to receive up to 200,000 tonnes of liquid hydrogen annually in its first phase, with potential expansion to 600,000 tonnes per year.

EcoLog plans to establish its import terminal at Afrikahaven Oost in Amsterdam, where it owns land and is preparing infrastructure. The project includes eight storage tanks capable of holding liquid hydrogen for more than a month.

While the Netherlands is developing itself as a European hydrogen import hub through its ports and industrial infrastructure, Oman represents the critical upstream component of the supply chain.

Ruhotas said Oman's advantage lies in its low-cost renewable energy potential and coordinated national approach through its hydrogen development framework. The country's

hydrogen strategy is coordinated by Hydrom, which has been established as the national orchestrator for green hydrogen development. Several large-scale projects are progressing, targeting production of renewable hydrogen and derivatives for export markets.

For Oman, the EcoLog initiative represents an opportunity to move beyond exporting hydrogen derivatives such as green ammonia and participate directly in the emerging global liquid hydrogen trade.

However, significant hurdles remain before final investment decisions can be taken. EcoLog estimates that developing the complete international supply chain would require an investment of around €9.5 billion.

Ruhotas identified financing as the main challenge, noting that banks require long-term purchase agreements before committing funds, while customers remain reluctant to sign 15-year contracts without greater certainty on future hydrogen prices.

"We do not need subsidies, but parties willing to act as guarantors and thereby reduce the financial risks," she said, adding that government-backed risk-sharing mechanisms could help unlock financing. In this regard, she identified Oman, the Netherlands and Germany as countries with complementary interests: Oman as a producer, the Netherlands as trading and import hub and Germany as a major industrial consumer.

TRA SEEKS VIEWS ON TELECOM LICENSING RULES

MUSCAT: Oman's Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has launched a public consultation on draft regulations governing and permits for telecommunications services, as it seeks to strengthen oversight of the sector and improve the business environment.

The consultation invites telecom operators, service providers and other stakeholders to submit comments on the



proposed framework before the regulations are finalised. The draft rules are designed to establish a clearer regulatory framework for companies and individuals

providing telecommunications-related services, reflecting the sector's rapid technological development and evolving operational requirements.

The proposed regulations cover permits for a broad range of activities, including the installation and maintenance of telecommunications and information technology equipment, network construction and excavation works and more.

Oman's SMEs expand rapidly, boosting private sector participation

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

The small and medium enterprises (SMEs) sector in the Sultanate of Oman recorded accelerated growth during the first half of 2026, driven by an expanding base of businesses, increased funding and support programmes and a strengthened entrepreneurship ecosystem.

This reflects the growing role of this sector as a key driver of economic diversification and the achievement of the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Data from the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, based on statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information, showed that the total number of SMEs in the Sultanate of Oman reached approximately 267,535.

The number of businesses registered in the Authority's

database reached 136,459 in the first half of 2026, distributed as follows: 116,195 micro enterprises, 19,196 small enterprises and 1,068 medium enterprises.

Economic indicators confirmed the growing contribution of the sector to the national economy, reaching approximately RO 9.2 billion, equivalent to 21.8 per cent of GDP.

This reflects the increasing importance of SMEs in supporting economic activity and enhancing private sector participation.

As part of efforts to empower entrepreneurs, the first half of 2026 saw the issuance of 19,267 new entrepreneurship cards, bringing the total number of cardholders to 32,103. The card offers several supportive benefits, including easier access to business opportunities and access to training, consulting and government incentive programmes.



The total number of SMEs in the Sultanate of Oman reached approximately 267,535.

The Authority also continued to support innovation- and technology-based start-ups,

registering 321 start-ups for the Start-up Card, while 17,755 businesses benefited from specialised workshops in entrepreneurship and innovative financing.

On the capacity-building front, the Entrepreneurship Readiness Programme contributed to developing the skills of entrepreneurs in management, marketing and finance. A total of 8,200 trainees benefited from the programme and 7,601 participants received readiness certificates.

The financing sector witnessed significant expansion in cooperation with the Development Bank.

The Authority received 555 financing applications totalling approximately RO 48.9 million.

These loans covered industrial projects, franchises, working capital, incubated companies and the "Daman" programme.

Regarding support for the

innovation and incubation environment, 132 incubation contracts were signed and 16 new business incubators were opened, contributing to the creation of 284 job opportunities.

The graduation rate from entrepreneurship centres reached 14.5 per cent, reflecting the progression of several projects to more advanced and sustainable stages.

This rapid growth in the SMEs sector is attributed to a range of factors, most notably ongoing government support, the development of financing programmes and the strengthening of training and incubation systems.

This growth is further bolstered by increased business opportunities, the expansion of e-commerce and an improved investment climate, all aligned with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

BUSINESS FEATURE



AI AND DATA DRIVE TOURISM'S NEXT WAVE

PETRA HEDORFER
CEO, German National Tourist Board



YAMINA SOFO
Director, Marketing & Sales Office, Gulf Countries, German National Tourist Office



LIJU CHERIAN
@lijucherianoman

DESTINATION MARKETERS are betting on data intelligence, artificial intelligence and sharper regional storytelling to sustain inbound tourism growth as global travellers become more cautious, price-conscious and increasingly focused on safety and value.

‘Reiseland Deutschland’ — Destination Germany — enters 2026 with a strong global brand position. Petra Hedorfer, Chairwoman of the Executive Board of the German National Tourist Board (GNTB), said an Anholt & Co Nation Brands Index survey ranked the country first in image among 26 European nations in 2025 and second worldwide.

“Our core brand message is Germany simply inspiring”, Hedorfer said in an exclusive interview, highlighting ‘Vibrant Cities’, ‘Natural Beauty’ and ‘Historic Buildings’ as the three pillars of the destination’s identity.

She said the positioning has helped strengthen visitor loyalty, with three-quarters of international visitors returning travellers. GNTB’s quarterly industry panel, which surveys more than 250 international travel companies, also indicates a shift in booking behaviour towards greater safety awareness, last-minute decisions and closer destinations.

This trend works in the destination’s favour, with 93 per cent of respondents rating it a safe or very safe destination.

“Safety is currently the most important factor when choosing a destination”, Hedorfer said.

According to forecasts cited by Hedorfer from Tourism Economics, inbound tourism is expected to grow by 2.9 per cent in 2026 under a baseline scenario, driven by a 2.6 per cent increase from European markets and 3.8 per cent growth from overseas markets.

The tourism board is also investing heavily in digital transformation, including an Open Data and Knowledge Graph project designed to improve visibility across AI-powered search and booking platforms. It has also introduced AI travel companion ‘Emma’, alongside augmented and virtual reality tools aimed at inspiring travellers earlier in their decision-making journey, particularly younger audiences.

THE GULF OPPORTUNITY

The shift is especially visible in the Gulf market, where traveller expectations are evolving beyond traditional sightseeing. Yamina Sofo, Director, Marketing & Sales Office, Gulf Countries, German National Tourist Office (GNTO), said demand is increasingly moving towards experience-driven travel.

“The demand is clearly moving from classic sightseeing to experience-led travel”, Sofo said, pointing to growing interest in wellness offerings such as thermal spa towns and alpine retreats, as well as nature-based experiences.

Family travel remains a major segment, she added, but expectations have changed. Gulf families are seeking “comfort and convenience, but also enriching experiences that work across generations”.

GNTB’s 2026 GCC strategy focuses on three priorities: tailored storytelling for different traveller groups, stronger partnerships with airlines, tour operators and regional media; and improved connectivity through direct gateways into Berlin, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Hamburg and Munich.

Rather than shifting visitors away from established entry points, the strategy aims to use major cities as gateways to lesser-



GNTB’s AI-generated influencer, Emma



GNTB’s open data to automate different processes.

known regions. “Frankfurt and Munich will always play an important role for GCC travellers”, Sofo said, highlighting opportunities to encourage longer stays and deeper exploration of destinations such as the Rhine Valley, Heidelberg, the Black Forest, Bavaria’s lakes and alpine towns.

The approach supports GNTB’s global ‘Stay a little bit longer’ campaign, which encourages travellers to extend their itineraries and explore beyond major tourism hubs.

GEN Z-FOCUSED

Digital engagement is becoming central to the Gulf strategy, with upcoming campaigns focusing on short-form videos, creator partnerships and social search.

Sofo said initiatives such as ‘Your Next Stop: Travel Destination Germany’ and ‘Culinary Germany’ aim to showcase smaller cities and regional experiences while connecting with younger travellers through the platforms where they discover destinations. Cities such as Berlin, Hamburg, Leipzig and Freiburg are being promoted for their creative culture, food scenes and lifestyle offerings, alongside established favourites. For Gulf travellers, Sofo said the combination of world-class urban infrastructure with nature, wellness and slower-paced experiences remains a key differentiator.

Partnerships will continue to play a vital role, particularly airline connectivity, travel trade cooperation and media engagement. “The ambition is clear — to make Germany easier to discover, easier to understand and easier to choose”, she said.

Both Hedorfer and Sofo stressed that tourism success is no longer measured only by visibility and reach. Hedorfer said GNTB campaigns across social media, public relations and newsletters increasingly rely on business intelligence tools that track concrete travel decisions, visitor value and long-term economic impact rather than simply counting impressions.

As the destination continues to move beyond its traditional image as primarily a business travel hub, the message to Gulf travellers is evolving: discover the cities, but stay longer to experience the culture, nature and hidden destinations that lie beyond the familiar routes.

Pictures by GNTB, © DZT/Farideh Diehl

SHORTTAKES



Oman LNG Development Fund and Mars will each hold a 10 per cent shareholding in the companies that own 'Muscat LNG' and 'Musandam LNG'.

ASYAD SHIPPING SELLS STAKE IN TWO NEW-BUILD LNG CARRIERS

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 27

Asyad Shipping has sold a 20 per cent stake in each of its two new-build liquefied natural gas carriers, 'Muscat LNG' and 'Musandam LNG', bringing two Omani institutions into the ownership of the vessels.

In a disclosure to shareholders and market participants dated July 26, the company said it had signed an agreement with Oman LNG Development Foundation (ODF) and Mars Development and Investment LLC (Mars) following the sale.

Under the agreement, signed on July 26, ODF and Mars will each hold a 10 per cent shareholding in the companies that own 'Muscat LNG' and 'Musandam LNG', while Asyad Shipping will retain the remaining 80 per cent shareholding in each company.

"This partnership marks another important step in strengthening the national shipping industry and logistics sectors", said Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, Chief Executive Officer — Asyad Shipping. "The participation of strong Omani funds as partners in 'Muscat LNG' and 'Musandam LNG' reflects the confidence placed in these projects and reinforces our commitment to delivering in-country value while supporting economic development".

He added, "As the company transporting gas on behalf of Oman LNG, we look forward to building on this partnership and continuing to support Oman's upstream gas industry".

The transaction follows an earlier announcement by Asyad Shipping on May 21, 2026, confirming delivery of the two carriers, which are on a charter agreement to Oman LNG under a long-term contract.

Philippine business eyes Oman opportunities

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 27

PHILIPPINE business leaders expressed growing interest in expanding commercial links with Oman on July 26, as the Third Oman-Philippines Forum showcased investment opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman and called for stronger private-sector partnerships across strategic industries.

More than 200 delegates from government and the private sector attended the forum in Manila, where discussions focused on trade, investment, logistics, agriculture, fisheries, technology and food security as both countries seek to broaden economic cooperation.

Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy said that the bilateral relationship had evolved beyond diplomacy into a platform for practical business collaboration.

"We welcome the role of businesses, investors, entrepreneurs and innovators from both countries turning these opportunities into lasting ventures", Al Busaidy said.

"By creating stronger connections between our private sectors, we can expand economic cooperation and open new horizons for mutual benefit". He said Oman offers significant opportunities in trade, investment, logistics, tourism, energy and technology, supported by its strategic location connecting the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), East Africa, the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia.

Al Busaidy also described the Filipino community in Oman as a cornerstone of bilateral relations, saying its



Panelists discuss trade and investment opportunities between Oman and the Philippines during the Third Oman-Philippines Forum: Strategic Majlis in Makati City on July 26, 2026.

contribution to the Sultanate of Oman's development has strengthened confidence between the two countries and laid the groundwork for deeper economic cooperation.

Philippine business leaders said that Oman presents attractive prospects for companies looking to expand internationally.

Ferdinand Ferrer, President of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry, praised Oman's business environment, strategic geographic location and modern logistics infrastructure, saying these advantages make the Sultanate of Oman an attractive destination for Philippine enterprises seeking access to Gulf and neighbouring markets.

He encouraged Philippine businesses to explore

opportunities in fisheries, agriculture and food security sectors where both countries have complementary strengths and growing demand for investment. The forum also highlighted the role of technology in strengthening future economic cooperation.

Philippine Information and Communications Technology Secretary ,Henry Aguda, proposed an Oman-Philippines programme on digital innovation and smart logistics to foster collaboration in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, digital infrastructure, data centres and digital trade.

He said the initiative would help both countries strengthen innovation, improve connectivity and support investment-led growth.

Michaela Yap, Honorary

Consul of the Sultanate of Oman in Cebu, said this year's forum attracted more than 200 participants from across the Philippines, reflecting growing interest from the Philippine business community in exploring opportunities in Oman.

She described the forum as an important platform for connecting businesses, fostering investment and building long-term commercial partnerships between the two countries.

The programme included investment presentations, business-to-business meetings and panel discussions on trade, logistics, agriculture and fisheries, with organisers aiming to translate growing political engagement into concrete business ventures and cross-border investment.

MSX companies post 12% profit growth

MUSCAT: Companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) posted combined net profits of RO 866.98 million in the second quarter of 2026, up 12 per cent from a year earlier, driven by strong earnings growth in the industrial and financial sectors.

Financial statements released by listed companies showed that 87 per cent of firms reporting results remained profitable during the quarter, underlining the resilience of corporate earnings despite mixed performances across sectors.

The industrial sector recorded the strongest growth, with net profits jumping 51 per cent year-on-year to RO 172.00 million from RO 114.00 million. The financial sector followed with a 13 per cent increase in profits to RO 392.00 million,



The industrial sector recorded the strongest growth, with net profits jumping 51 per cent year-on-year to RO 172.00 million from RO 114.00 million.

compared with RO 346.00 million in the same quarter of 2025.

Investment and real estate funds reported profits of about RO 6.00 million, up from RO 5.00 million a year earlier, while the services sector was the only segment to post weaker earnings. Profits in the sector fell 4 per cent to RO 297.00 million from RO 309.00 million.

Despite the slower performance in services, the financial sector remained the largest contributor to overall corporate earnings, accounting for more than RO 392.00 million of total profits during the quarter.

At the company level, OQ Exploration and Production remained the most profitable listed company, reporting net earnings of RO 196.87 million.

Bank Muscat ranked second with net profits of RO 137.49 million, followed by Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO), which earned RO 80.22 million. Sohar International reported net profits of RO 53.00 million, while OQ Base Industries completed the top five with earnings of RO 43.30 million.

The results highlighted a broader distribution of corporate earnings across different sectors of the economy, with industrial companies delivering the fastest growth while financial institutions continued to generate the largest share of profits.

The high proportion of profitable companies, at 87 per cent of those disclosing results, represents one of the strongest earnings performances by listed firms in recent reporting periods. — ONA

ENERGY MARKETS

Oil tumbles on ceasefire hopes



Oil prices fell more than 5 per cent after the United States and Iran halted attacks, raising hopes for renewed diplomacy and the restoration of maritime traffic in the Gulf.

Brent crude dropped to \$91.89 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate settled at \$84.64. However, shipping data showed vessel movements through the Strait of Hormuz remained well below normal levels. — Reuters

INFLATION PRESSURES

Japan producer prices rise



Japan's services producer price index rose 3.2 per cent year-on-year in June, highlighting persistent inflationary pressures and reinforcing expectations of further interest rate increases.

The Bank of Japan said higher transport costs, up 5.3 per cent, reflected elevated fuel prices and supply disruptions linked to the Middle East conflict, keeping sea and air freight rates at high levels. — Reuters

CRYPTO MARKETS

Bitcoin tops \$65,000



Bitcoin climbed above \$65,000 as easing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and lower oil prices improved investor sentiment ahead of this week's US Federal Reserve meeting. The cryptocurrency rose 1.5 per cent to \$65,405.40, while Ethereum gained 4.1 per cent.

Investors are also awaiting earnings from major US technology companies for further market direction. — Reuters

OPINION

Do social media followers really make someone important?



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is strategic adviser, businessman and motivational speaker

MANY assume or even believe that people with huge social media followings must have it all: success, influence, happiness and purpose. The numbers unfortunately create an illusion. If someone had hundreds of thousands or even millions of followers, they must surely be living the perfect life.

Trust me, it’s an illusion and many, in fact, utilise it to portray a fake lifestyle. Question: Do you see the same person posting a less-than-perfect lifestyle? There you go; the proof is in the pudding.

There are always three sides to every story. Yours, theirs and the facts. The more I personally observed and witnessed the reality, the more I realised that followers tell only a tiny part of the story. Behind polished photos and videos (powered by filters) are people who may be struggling with anxiety, loneliness, financial pressure, burnout or uncertainty.

Some of them have openly spoken about taking breaks from social media because the constant pressure to stay relevant affected their mental well-being. A large audience does not guarantee a happy life. The numbers themselves can also be deceptive.

Industry estimates suggest that billions of fake accounts exist across social media platforms. Every year, platforms remove

millions of bots and spam accounts designed to inflate follower counts or manipulate engagement.

Entire businesses now sell followers, likes, comments and views, allowing almost anyone to appear more influential than they really are.

There have even been high-profile cases where celebrities and influencers were accused of buying followers or using engagement farms.

While follower counts looked impressive, independent audits often revealed unusually low engagement or large numbers of suspicious accounts. In digital marketing, this has led brands to focus less on follower counts and more on authentic engagement and conversion. I hope businesses here in Oman will also learn this lesson.

Companies should evaluate social media influencers based on engagement rates, audience quality and the ability to generate real business results.

They should not be deceived by simply the size of the followers of an account (which can easily be bought online).

In fact, many “micro-influencers” with few followers often outperform the ones with higher numbers because their communities trust them and genuinely interact with their content. The same applies to organisations too.

Industry estimates suggest that billions of fake accounts exist across social media platforms. Every year, platforms remove millions of bots and spam accounts designed to inflate follower counts or manipulate engagement. Entire businesses now sell followers, likes, comments and views, allowing almost anyone to appear more influential than they really are.

A company with one million followers but very few customers is far less successful than one with a smaller online community that consistently generates sales, referrals and loyal fans. Followers are a metric. Trust is an asset.

For individuals, the message is equally important. Never measure your worth by the number next to your profile picture.

Your knowledge, integrity, kindness and ability to create value cannot be measured by an algorithm. Chasing followers instead of purpose often leads to disappointment because algorithms change, trends fade and popularity is temporary.

Instead, focus on building credibility. Share ideas that educate. Solve real problems. Be authentic. Create meaningful conversations. Whether your audience is 100 people or 100,000, what matters most is the positive impact you have on those who choose to listen.

Social media is a powerful tool, but it should never become the measure of our self-worth.

Real influence is not about how many people follow you. It is about how many people trust you, learn from you and are better because you showed up. Until we catch up again next week, be worthy, be valuable and don’t always believe what you see on social media. Validate!

HOW FAST MONEY IS WARPPING MARKET LOGIC

JOACHIM KLEMENT

A tidal wave of “fast money” may be behind a series of seemingly irrational price swings in recent years, as fundamentals are being overwhelmed by the rush for the next big trade.

This suggests the weakness in semiconductor stocks is just beginning.

Americans have been piling into the stock market in recent years. The share of US households that participate in the stock market is estimated to have increased from 53 per cent in 2019 to 60 per cent in 2025, according to the securities exchange MEMX.

Moreover, US equity allocations as a share of total financial assets reached record highs at the end of 2025 and have consistently stayed above the peak of the last tech boom, according to the Federal Reserve. Interestingly, young Americans are also investing more. According to JPMorgan, the percentage of Americans between the ages of 22 and 25 who used investment accounts rose sixfold between 2015 and 2025 to 37 per cent.

It’s no wonder given that today’s young investors have never experienced a true bear market.

During the two major market crises of the past two decades – the global financial crisis of 2008 and the Covid-19 pandemic – central banks, most notably the Federal Reserve, responded by pumping as much liquidity into financial markets as was needed to stabilise them.

The Fed also slashed interest rates to near zero and kept them there for years.

This is a new phenomenon. In the past, central banks would typically cut interest rates during a crisis and then raise them when it was over.

Governments also helped out with stimulus measures, particularly during the pandemic when fiscal largess was measured in the trillions.

Given all this support, it’s unsurprising that the S&P 500 has only briefly entered bear-market territory since 2011.

It did so during the pandemic shock of 2020 and amid Fed tightening in 2022, but markets rebounded rapidly in both instances.

This means many younger US retail investors have never experienced a deep, multi-year bear market. They have been conditioned to rely on the Fed and the government to bail them out before stock prices fall too far – and that has likely only encouraged more risk-taking.

Retail investors are now clearly a force to be reckoned with. MEMX estimates that trading volume from retail wholesalers increased to 34 per cent of total volume in 2025, up from 27 per cent a year earlier.

The rise of retail investors – who are typically thought of as more fickle than institutional players – may help explain some of the strange equity moves we’ve seen in recent years. For starters, there’s the interesting divergence that emerged between gold mining stocks and European defence stocks throughout 2024. — Reuters

GREEN IS THE NEW OIL

EVERY generation inherits an anxiety about work. Ours has two: machines that learn faster than we do and a planet that warms faster than we act. Yet buried inside this double worry is the most underrated jobs story of the decade.

The green economy is no longer an environmental slogan; it has quietly become one of the world’s most reliable employment engines and nowhere is the opportunity more real or more urgent than in Oman.

Start with the global evidence. The World Economic Forum’s Future of Jobs Report 2025 projects that climate-change adaptation will be the third-largest contributor to net global job growth by 2030, adding around five million jobs, with climate mitigation adding another three million and clean-energy generation, storage and distribution a further one million.

Environmental engineers, renewable energy engineers and sustainability specialists now sit among the fifteen fastest-growing occupations worldwide.

The same report finds that “green hiring” has consistently outpaced overall hiring since 2021 and that postings requiring at least one green skill rose by nearly 22 per cent between 2022 and 2023 almost double the 12 per cent growth in workers actually acquiring those skills.

Demand, in short, is sprinting ahead of supply. That gap is not a problem; for a young jobseeker, it is an invitation.

The region has read the signal. Across the Gulf, economies built on hydrocarbons are racing to build the industries that will outlast them: solar at record-low tariffs, green hydrogen corridors, carbon markets.

Nearly half of employers surveyed globally by the WEF (47 per cent) expect decarbonisation efforts to transform their organisations by 2030; in carbon-intensive sectors such as mining, metals and automotive, that share rises to roughly seven in ten. When incumbent industries transform, jobs do not simply disappear; they migrate.

The question for every Gulf state is whether its own citizens



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The green economy is no longer an environmental slogan; it has quietly become one of the world’s most reliable employment engines and nowhere is the opportunity more real or more urgent than in Oman.

are ready to move with them. Oman has answered with unusual clarity.

Oman Vision 2040 placed diversification and human capital at the centre of national strategy long before it was fashionable and the commitment to net-zero emissions by 2050, reinforced in May 2026 when the Ministry of Energy and Minerals unveiled an updated Net Zero Strategy and a regulatory framework for carbon markets has turned ambition into architecture.

The green hydrogen programme, steered by Hydrom, targets roughly one million tonnes of production annually by 2030 and 7.5–8.5 million tonnes by 2050, underpinned by an estimated \$140 billion of investment across the value chain, according to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

The Eleventh Five-Year Development Plan (2026–2030) is designed precisely to convert these projects into livelihoods. And the macroeconomic footing is solid: the IMF’s 2025 Article IV consultation noted a fiscal surplus of 3.3 per cent of GDP in 2024, contained inflation and growth expected to firm towards 3.7 per cent, the kind of stability that lets a country invest in its own transition rather than merely survive it.

What does this mean in human terms? Think of the jobs a single hydrogen complex creates: solar and wind technicians, electrolyser operators, grid engineers, water-treatment specialists, logistics planners, safety inspectors, financiers who can price green risk, lawyers negotiating complex energy and offtake agreements and digital specialists managing increasingly intelligent energy systems.

Add the circular economy: waste-to-value industries, recycling, remanufacturing alongside building retrofits, sustainable tourism, ESG reporting and climate-tech start-ups and you have an employment ecosystem that is broad, skilled and difficult to automate.

These are quality jobs: technical, well-paid and globally transferable.

Honesty, however, requires naming the challenges. Artificial

intelligence will erode clerical and routine work here as everywhere; the WEF expects cashiers, data-entry clerks and administrative assistants to be among the fastest-declining roles globally.

Its arithmetic is sobering: of every 100 workers worldwide, 59 will need retraining by 2030 and 11 are unlikely to receive it. Oman’s education and training system, for all its progress, still produces more graduates for the economy we had than for the economy we are building.

Green skills from electrochemistry to energy auditing to environmental law remain underrepresented in curricula. And unless national statistics begin to measure green employment properly, we will be managing the transition blindfolded.

Three recommendations follow.

First, a National Green Skills Compact: government, universities, vocational colleges and the private sector agreeing on a common skills framework tied directly to the hydrogen, renewables and circular-economy project pipeline, with employer-sponsored apprenticeships built in from day one.

Second, retool rather than replace: fund mid-career transitions so that an oil-and-gas technician in Fahud can become a hydrogen technician in Al Duqm; the skills overlap is larger than we admit.

Third, measure it: task the National Centre for Statistics and Information with publishing a regular green-jobs account, so that policy follows evidence, not anecdote.

To Oman’s young men and women, the message is simpler. Yes, some doors are closing; your parents’ career map will not navigate your terrain. But a larger set of doors is opening and this time the wind, the sun and national strategy are all pushing in the same direction.

Previous generations found prosperity beneath the ground. Yours will build it in the open air in panels, turbines, molecules and ideas. The green transition is not a sacrifice Oman is making for the world. It is one of the most promising job opportunities the country has ever created. Claim it.

ART/LIFE



THE IRON POETRY OF JAMEEL AL BALUSHI > 20

FILMFESTIVAL

VENICE UNVEILS STAR-PACKED LINEUP



This year's edition stars Robert Pattinson, fresh from his acclaimed performance in current box-office champion "The Odyssey". — AFP

British star Robert Pattinson's latest film, Oasis brothers Noel and Liam Gallagher and a four-hour documentary about Elon Musk are set to feature at the Venice Film Festival in September.

Organisers unveiled a programme packed with independent and arthouse productions, but lacking major Hollywood support — a pattern seen at other European festivals this year. The festival is one of Europe's leading cinema showcases.

A total of 20 films will compete for the prestigious Golden Lion over the September 2-12 festival, including "Prime Time" by Lance Oppenheim, about an American television show that sought to expose paedophiles.

It stars Pattinson, fresh from his acclaimed performance as the villainous Antinous in Christopher Nolan's box-office champion "The Odyssey".

"This film is the true story of the unscrupulous host of a disturbing reality show by NBC", festival director Alberto Barbera told reporters.

Other competition highlights include "Wild Horse Nine", a dark comedy by Ireland's Martin McDonagh starring John Malkovich and Sam Rockwell; and "Bunker" by Florian Zeller, featuring Spanish power couple Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz.

As previously announced, the competition will open with a film about press baron Rupert Murdoch's transformation of the British media by "Trainspotting" director Danny Boyle.

Veteran filmmaker Werner Herzog's "Bucking Fastard", featuring sisters Kate and Rooney Mara, will also compete for the Golden Lion.

Hollywood studios and US streaming giants Netflix and Amazon, which brought a series of big-budget films to Venice last year, have steered clear this time.

European festivals typically rely on Hollywood to provide mass-market entertainment alongside the edgier independent cinema at the core of their programmes. US majors also largely blanked the Berlin festival in February and Cannes in May.

Some observers had expected Alejandro Inarritu's "Digger", starring Tom Cruise, to make a splashy entrance on the Venice Lido.

An exception is Disney's documentary about Manchester rock band Oasis and its comeback tour, "Don't Look Back in Anger".

"The Gallagher brothers have promised they will be in Venice", Barbera said.

Another documentary likely to attract attention — and test viewers' concentration — is American director Alex Gibney's four-hour exploration of Musk. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



HARVEST

A farmer collects tea leaves at a plantation in Meitan County, southwestern China. — AFP



COMIC-CON

Pedro Pascal attends the Marvel panel at Comic-Con International in San Diego, California. — AFP



ANIMALS

A sea otter is pictured at SeaWorld's marine life park on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



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D-DAY BEACHES JOIN UNESCO LIST



The designation is the culmination of a project launched nearly 20 years ago. — AFP

Normandy’s D-Day landing beaches were inscribed on Unesco’s World Heritage List on Sunday, completing an initiative that began nearly two decades ago.

The recognised site extends along more than 80 kilometres (50 miles) of coastline in northwestern France. It was on these shores that Allied forces landed on June 6, 1944, in a decisive military operation that helped liberate Europe from Nazism and paved the way for the end of World War II.

The nomination covers all five beaches associated with the historic landings, each remembered by the code name used during the operation: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword. Together, the five locations form a coastal landscape linked to one of the defining moments of the war.

For Normandy, the inscription is both an honour and a long-term commitment.

“This decision places a responsibility upon us”, said Hervé Morin, president of the Normandy Region. He said the recognition requires the region to preserve and protect the property, cherish it and promote its value.

The beaches now join more than 50 French properties included on Unesco’s World Heritage List. Among them are Mont Saint-Michel, Normandy’s island landmark and the Palace of Versailles.

The Unesco inscription acknowledges the beaches’ “outstanding universal value” while giving the site international recognition. It also commits the authorities to safeguarding the coastline and ensuring that its historical significance is preserved. The decision therefore marks both the conclusion of a lengthy nomination process and the beginning of a renewed responsibility to protect the beaches for the future. — AFP



Bollywood blast master keeps it real with fire and fury

FROM fireballs to gunfights, Bollywood special effects master Vishal Tyagi continues to create cinematic chaos the old-fashioned way, convinced that artificial intelligence cannot match the unpredictability of real fire, smoke and explosions.

The climax of his latest action film, “Dhurandhar 2”, involved a tanker explosion created with 500 litres of petrol and explosives in a carefully controlled stunt featuring star Ranveer Singh.

“The fragments and fires were 100 per cent real”, the 48-year-old said.

The sequence reflects growing interest among Indian filmmakers in practical effects that give action scenes an authenticity computer-generated imagery may struggle to reproduce.

Tyagi’s team used a real train as the base and constructed the tanker from acrylic panels mounted on a metal frame. The material created the appearance of fragments flying through the air during the explosion.

“Sometimes, to give a real look, we have to use something artificial”, he said.

Tyagi is also an arms specialist. His warehouse in suburban Mumbai is filled with prop rifles, sniper weapons and rocket launchers supplied to productions in India and abroad.

His company’s credits include the Oscar-winning “Slumdog Millionaire”, “Zero Dark Thirty”, Netflix’s “Extraction”, Salman Khan’s “Tiger” franchise and Shah Rukh Khan’s “Pathaan” and “Jawan”.

“Our core expertise lies in executing real, controlled effects, from firearms to large-scale explosions”, Tyagi said.

He inherited both the profession and his enthusiasm for it from his father, Mahendra Tyagi, who moved to Mumbai from Uttar Pradesh in the 1970s. After taking small acting roles, the elder Tyagi established a business supplying prop guns to the film industry.

Growing up around film sets, Tyagi became fascinated by the equipment and its operation. Even



As a child, Vishal Tyagi spent his days surrounded by guns and explosives on movie sets. — AFP

after his father died in a studio fire, he remained committed to the profession.

“I wanted to pursue this career in the correct manner”, he said, adding that limited budgets sometimes mean he is paid less than the work deserves. “But I never compromise on quality. It’s my passion”.

Despite rapid advances in AI, Tyagi does not believe technology threatens his craft.

“AI is not creating anything new. It will show you only what you feed into the system”, he said.

“Technology cannot compete with nature because nature is unpredictable”.

That unpredictability, he believes, is precisely what audiences value. Yet Bollywood crews are often expected to achieve Hollywood-scale results with far less preparation.

Tyagi cited the explosion in the James Bond film “Spectre”, which required weeks of planning and testing. Indian productions rarely offer similar lead time.

“We don’t get that kind of time here”, he said. “Here we are always on gas”.

His crew follows strict safety protocols, including controls on electronic devices that could accidentally trigger detonations, but the work remains hazardous.

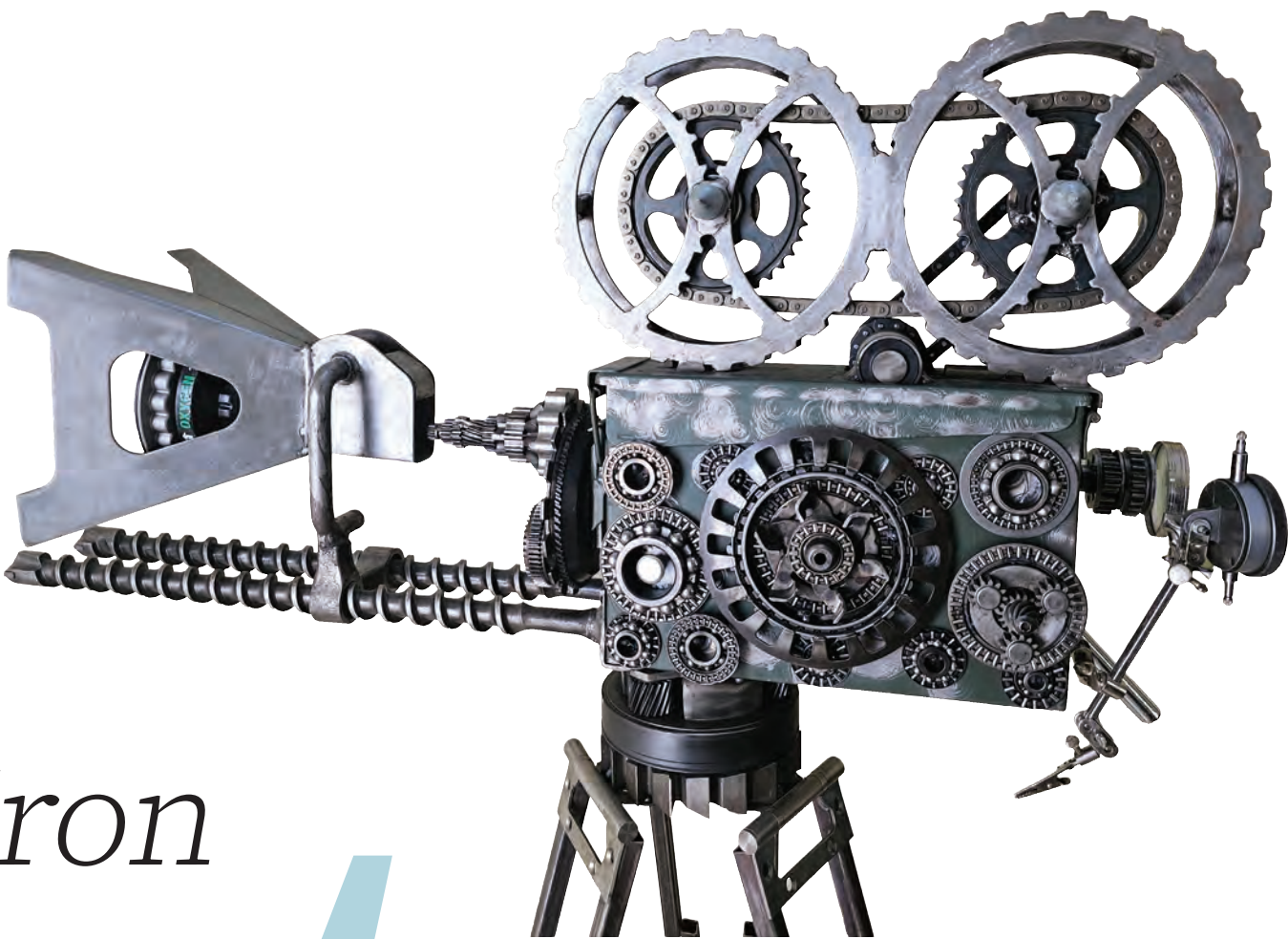
Tyagi recently injured his hand while staging a large explosion for Shah Rukh Khan’s forthcoming film “King”. He stayed in position until the blast was complete to ensure the shot was not lost.

For Tyagi, experience remains essential to balancing cinematic spectacle with responsibility and precision.

“Every day is a learning process”, he said. — AFP

FEATURES

Finding the right pieces of scrap is often the most difficult and time-consuming part of his work. Locating a piece that matches an idea can take longer than welding and assembling the sculpture itself.



The Iron Poetry

of Jameel al Balushi



BUTHAINA AL RIYAMI

In a hot, crowded workshop filled with welding smoke and the smell of metal, Omani sculptor Jameel bin Dadin al Balushi transforms discarded materials into art. Bicycle chains become tank tracks, cracked drill casings form helicopter bodies and worn gears are reshaped into traditional Omani coffee pots.

Al Balushi's journey began in 2017, when he joined what he believed was a competition. It was, in fact, an open community event.

While preparing his entry, he noticed a pile of old metal chains that reminded him of tank tracks. He gathered the chains and welded them into the shape of a tank, then challenged himself to make the sculpture move.

"That was the turning point", he says.

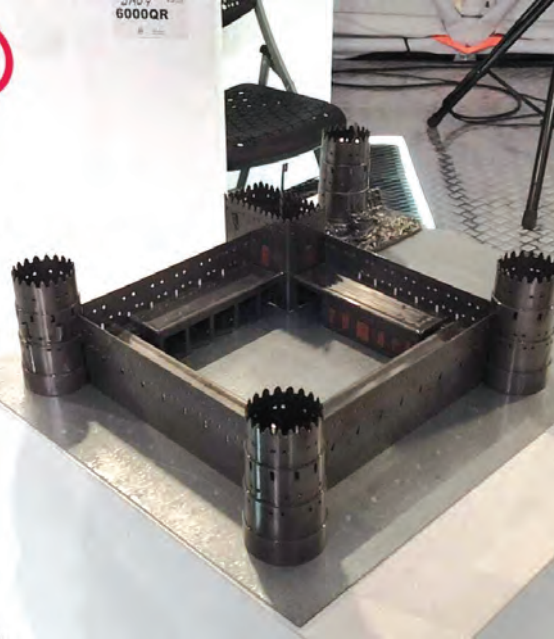
The experience, rather than a prize, made him realise that he had a talent for metal sculpture. Since then, he has learned to recognise the artistic potential of ordinary objects. Interlocking gears inspired the shape of a traditional dallah, while the casing of a broken electric drill suggested the body of a helicopter.

Al Balushi's approach has been shaped by years of working with metal and welding equipment. He believes this background explains why he chose metal rather than paint or clay.

"Metal combines strength and precision", he explains. "It gives me enormous freedom to invent and to turn hardness into beauty".

Finding the right pieces of scrap is often the most difficult and time-consuming part of his work. Locating a piece that matches an idea can take longer than welding and assembling the sculpture itself.

Even after he finds the right materials, building a sculpture involves trial and error. A joint may fail, the balance may shift or a mechanical part may not move as expected. However, Al Balushi considers these challenges part of the creative process. "In metal, you can always cut again, weld again, adjust again", he says.



Mistakes can sometimes lead to a better design and improve the final sculpture.

Omani identity is also central to Al Balushi's work. Forts, falcons and the dallah appear repeatedly in his sculptures, with recycled mechanical parts transformed into symbols of the country's heritage, history and landscape. He values these subjects because they represent strength, authenticity and identity.

One example is Saqr Al Tawazun, or "Falcon of Balance", a mechanical sculpture exploring stability and leadership in Oman. The work associates silver with peace, gold with stability and steel with protection.

Looking ahead, Al Balushi hopes to create a large mechanical sculpture for a public square in Oman. He envisions it as both a national landmark and a tourist attraction that presents the country's identity through metal and movement.