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D A I L Y

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SALAH SCORES AS LIVERPOOL UNLEASH £270M NEW SIGNINGS

INBRIEF
HIS MAJESTY’S GREETINGS TO BOLIVIA, JAMAICA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Luis Alberto Arce of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, on his country’s Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan wished Bolivia permanent stability and further progress. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has also sent a cable of greetings to Dr Patrick Linton Allen, Governor-General of Jamaica, on his country’s Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to the Governor-General. His Majesty also wished the people of Jamaica further progress and prosperity.

HM’S GREETINGS TO PAKISTAN’S PRESIDENT



President Asif Ali Zardari of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan received Fahd bin Sulaiman al Kharousi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, at the Presidential Palace in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, on Tuesday. The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, along with His Majesty’s wishes of good health and happiness to the Pakistani President. His Majesty also wished the people of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan further progress and prosperity. The Pakistani President asked the ambassador to convey his sincere greetings along with his wishes of good health and well-being to His Majesty, wishing the Omani people further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HEAC CALLS CANDIDATES FOR ADMISSION TESTS

The Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Tuesday announced the list of students selected to undergo admission tests, personal interviews and medical examinations for 123 academic programmes requiring these assessments for the 2025/2026 academic year. The centre contacted 6,367 male and female students via SMS to notify them of the programmes they have been shortlisted for and to provide them with the necessary guidelines and information for this stage. The total number of available seats across these programmes is 2,617. **DETAILS ON P5**

BANGLADESH POLLS IN FEBRUARY 2026

Bangladesh will hold elections in February 2026, interim leader Muhammad Yunus said on Tuesday, the first polls since a mass uprising overthrew the government last year. “On behalf of the interim government, I will write a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner requesting that the election be arranged before Ramadhan in February 2026,” Yunus said in a broadcast on the one-year anniversary of the ousting of prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Yunus, 85, is leading the caretaker government until elections, and has said he will step down after the vote. — AFP

12,936 Omanis secured jobs in first half of the year

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour announced that as many as 12,936 citizens received jobs as part of a programme of employment and expatriate replacement in the government and private sectors during the first half of 2025.

Out of the total, the public sector

provided 2,316 jobs, while the private sector provided 10,620 jobs, thus achieving 38 per cent of the target rate.

The ministry said that the total number of training opportunities coupled with employment stood at 4,292 (achieving 39 per cent of the

target rate). Of those, the government sector offered 473 training opportunities, while the private sector offered 3,819 training opportunities.

The ministry noted that the total number of employment and training opportunities reached 17,228, achieving 38.28 per cent

of the target. Meanwhile, total employment (including both first-time workers and those with prior work experience) stood at 35,807 jobs — comprising 17,228 first-time employment opportunities and 18,579 for individuals with previous work experience. — ONA

Israel considers full Gaza takeover as more die

ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu favours a complete military takeover of Gaza for the first time in two decades, media reported, and was to meet senior security officials on Tuesday to finalise a new strategy in the 22-month war.

Mediation between Israel and Hamas has collapsed despite intense international pressure for a ceasefire to ease hunger and appalling conditions in the besieged Palestinian enclave.

Eight more people died of starvation or malnutrition in the past 24 hours, Gaza’s health ministry said, while another 79 died in the latest Israeli fire.

Netanyahu was to meet Defence Minister Israel Katz and military Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir to decide on a strategy to take to cabinet later this week, an Israeli official said. Strategic Affairs Minister Rob Dermer, a confidant of Netanyahu, would also be present.

Israel’s Channel 12, citing an official from Netanyahu’s office, said the prime minister was leaning towards taking control of the entire territory.

That would reverse a 2005 decision to pull settlers and military out of Gaza while retaining control over its borders, a move right-wing parties blame for Hamas gaining power there.

It was unclear, however, whether Netanyahu was foreseeing a prolonged occupation or a short-term operation aimed at freeing Israeli captives.

A Palestinian official said it may be a tactic to pressure Hamas into concessions, while the Palestinian



A Palestinian woman uses a sieve on the sand as she searches legumes or rice in Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip during an airdrop mission above the Israel-besieged Palestinian territory on Tuesday. — AFP

Foreign Ministry urged foreign nations to take heed of the reports.

“The ministry urges countries and the international community to treat these leaks with utmost seriousness and to intervene urgently to prevent their implementation, whether these leaks are meant to exert pressure, test international reactions, or are genuine and serious,” it said.

Nearly two years of fighting in Gaza has strained the military, which has a small standing army and has had to repeatedly mobilise reservists. It has throughout the war pushed back against the idea of Israel fully occupying Gaza and

establishing military rule.

In a sign of differences between some members of Israel’s ruling coalition and the military, far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir on X challenged military head Zamir to state he would comply with government directives even if a decision was made to take all of Gaza.

Foreign Minister Gideon Saar then said the military chief must give his professional opinion, while Defence Minister Katz weighed in to say the military would professionally implement whatever policy the government set.

— Reuters

Families flock to Dhofar as tourism surges

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 5

While much of the Arabian Peninsula swelters in peak summer heat, a different rhythm takes hold in southern Oman. The Dhofar Governorate, blanketed in mist and greenery during the monsoon season known locally as khareef, is once again drawing tens of thousands of families from across the Gulf.

In this remote corner of Oman, towering mountains turn emerald, seasonal waterfalls cascade through



What defines Dhofar’s rise is the experience it offers: safe, culturally grounded, family-friendly and deeply Omani.

valleys and cool breezes offer a rare reprieve. But it’s not just nature’s performance that stands out. What defines

Dhofar’s rise is the experience it offers: safe, culturally grounded, family-friendly and deeply Omani.

Over recent weeks, the Observer joined crowds on the ground across Dhofar — visiting mountain plateaus, coastal roads, bustling public parks and cultural venues. From Emirati families cooking over open fires to local Omani children chasing fog between banana groves, the atmosphere is vibrant, rooted and unmistakably unique.

“This is our summer tradition,” said Saleh, a visitor from Sharjah. “We feel at home here — safe, welcomed and surrounded by nature. The children never want to leave.”

TURN TO P3

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The agricultural opportunities aim to adopt modern farming techniques. — ONA

MOHUP OFFERS 14 INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

IBRA: The “Tatweer” platform of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) has launched 14 agricultural and commercial investment opportunities across several wilayats in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

These opportunities are available for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Al Sharqiyah North Governor’s Office, covering agriculture, real estate development and commercial investment.

The sale of investment prospectuses for these opportunities began on Tuesday, with some prospectuses set to be available starting on August 14.

Eng Hamad bin Rashid al Sawaei, Assistant Director-General of Agriculture and Water Resources in Al Sharqiyah North, explained that the investment opportunities are designed to enable private sector institutions and companies to benefit from diverse prospects in agriculture and commerce. The agricultural opportunities aim to adopt modern farming techniques by establishing advanced projects for cultivating various crops, including figs, onions, garlic, potatoes and date palms.

He added that these projects will adopt integrated production systems, leveraging modern technologies in farming, irrigation and post-harvest processes to ensure sustainability, high product quality and enhanced competitiveness in regional and global markets. Meanwhile, the commercial investment opportunities allow investors to establish strategic business projects aligned with the proposed requirements.

ARAB DELEGATION BRIEFED ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM



MUSCAT: The National Emergency Management Centre received a delegation from the Regional Office for Arab States for Disaster Risk Reduction. The delegation was briefed on Oman’s emergency management system and the centre’s role in coordinating efforts and ensuring integration within the framework of the National Committee for Emergency Management. — ONA

Two dams to come up in Al Sharqiyah North next year

IBRA: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has embarked upon the construction of a surface storage dam in the village of Al Rashbi in the Wilayat of Dima W’attayeen and a groundwater recharge dam in the village of Qiraisha’a in the Wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate at a cost exceeding RO 116,000.

Dr Abdulaziz bin Ali al Mashaikh, Director-General of Agricultural and Water Resources in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, said: “The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is implementing recharge, protection and surface storage dams across the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. These projects stem from the importance of dams in effectively contributing to



Al Sharqiyah North Governorate has 13 dams, including three groundwater recharge dams and 10 collection dams. — ONA

WHALE CARCASS WASHED ASHORE IN AL SHARQIYAH SOUTH

AL ASHKHARAH: A whale was found dead on the shores of Al Ashkharah in Al Sharqiyah South this week, after becoming fatally entangled in fishing nets — yet another example of the growing threat marine debris poses to wildlife along Oman’s coasts.

According to an initial examination, the whale had a rope tightly wrapped around its body, which restricted its movement and ultimately prevented it from breathing. The entanglement is believed to have originated from discarded or lost fishing gear drifting in the water — a recurring hazard in Omani waters.

Environmental experts say such cases underscore the dangers of ghost gear — abandoned fishing nets and ropes that continue to trap, injure



The entanglement is believed to have originated from discarded or lost fishing gear.

and kill marine animals long after they’ve been discarded. Large marine mammals like whales are especially vulnerable due to their size and the distances they travel.

After the carcass was discovered by locals, the Environment Authority was notified and dispatched a team to handle the situation. The authority confirmed the cause of death and carried out standard procedures for carcass removal.

In a statement, the Environment Authority reiterated calls for fishermen and sea-goers to properly dispose of fishing gear and avoid polluting marine environments. Officials warned that irresponsible dumping not only threatens marine life, but also disrupts delicate ocean ecosystems.

96% pilgrim satisfaction in quality of Haj service

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

THE Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) praised the successful Haj pilgrimage from the Sultanate of Oman during 1446 AH, corresponding to 2025.

The Omani Haj Mission reported significant improvements in services for Omani pilgrims in Mina and Arafat, with a 96 per cent success rate in a poll on 27 indicators of service quality during the Haj 1446 AH (2025) compared to 85 per cent in 1445 AH (2024).

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the annual Haj conclusion press conference, Ahmed bin Saleh al Rashdi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and Head of the Haj Mission for 1446 AH, said satisfaction with Haj and umrah companies reached 98 per cent.

“Similarly, the satisfaction rate with security services reached 100 per cent, and with health services reached 99 per cent during the Haj season of 1446 AH. The level of satisfaction based on the overall services provided at Mina and Arafat camps reached



The Omani Haj Mission reported significant improvements in services for Omani pilgrims in Mina and Arafat, with a 96-per cent success rate.

96 per cent, compared to 89 per cent for the 1445 AH season,” he said, appreciating all those involved in making the season smooth and hassle-free.

Regarding Haj and Umrah companies in Mecca and Madinah, he stated that the pilgrims’ satisfaction rate with the performance of the rituals, including awareness, guidance, logistics, food services and other services, exceeded the expected levels.

Additionally, Oman’s quota of 14,000 Haj

pilgrims has been maintained, and efforts are ongoing to keep it the same.

“The satisfaction rate with the electronic registration system for pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman reached 99 per cent. The number of pilgrims who travelled by land reached 5,122, and by air reached 8,878. The satisfaction levels with entry and exit services via land and air ports reached 97.6 per cent, which is a commendable achievement. In addition, the mobile vehicle initiative for performing the Tawaf and Sa’i rituals targeted 450 elderly pilgrims and those with special needs,” he said.

A total of 14,000 pilgrims attended Haj this year. Additionally, there were many qualitative initiatives during the Haj season of 1446 AH, including the ‘Awqaf Bait al Rabat’ initiative, which benefited more than 150 pilgrims, with a total amount exceeding RO 150,000.

On the other hand, there were challenges, according to Al Rashdi, which include the delay caused in approving the quota of service elements accompanying Haj companies, organisational and administrative challenges in pilgrims’ transit via the land route, and the readiness of the camp infrastructure during the pilgrimage.

SHABAB OMAN II DOCKS AT ESBJERG



COPENHAGEN: The Royal Navy of Oman’s (RNO) ship, Shabab Oman II, on Tuesday docked at the port of Esbjerg in Denmark as part of her seventh international voyage dubbed Glories of the Seas, to participate in the closing ceremony of the 2025 Tall Ships Race. Shabab Oman II seeks to embolden bonds of friendship and brotherhood between the Sultanate of Oman and various countries of the world, as well as promote authentic Omani culture at its various international stops. — ONA

SHORT TAKES



The step reinforces Oman's commitment to secure financial systems and the rule of law.

ROP TO RECEIVE COMPLAINTS ON DIRECT DEBITS

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) said it will receive complaints related to the non-cancellable direct debit tool under the National Payment Systems Law issued by Royal Decree No 8/2018, and related laws, through police stations in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

For this law, a direct debit means a payment order issued to debit the payer's bank account for the benefit of the beneficiary, at the latter's request. The regulations shall specify the provisions relating to direct debit, including its conditions, rules and procedures.

Article 33: A person may issue a direct debit order in settlement of a debt owed by him. This order may be revocable or irrevocable, as specified in the regulations. Article 34: The person issuing the direct debit order shall guarantee payment of its value, and any condition exempting them from this guarantee shall be deemed null and void. Article 35: It is not permissible to refrain from paying the value of a direct debit order if it has sufficient funds to pay, even if the deadline for submission has expired. If the drawee bank refrains from paying the value of the direct debit order, it must prove the refusal and the reason for it by issuing a statement stating the time the direct debit order was submitted and the amount due.

This statement must be dated, written and signed by the person issuing it. It is not permissible to refrain from issuing the statement mentioned in the previous paragraph upon the beneficiary's request.

Dhofar Khareef tourism expands beyond Salalah

FROM PAGE 1

The success of this year's khareef season is no accident. Authorities in Oman have invested heavily in logistics, infrastructure and coordination to elevate the visitor experience. The Dhofar Municipality, Governor's Office, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Royal Oman Police, Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, Environment Authority, and private sector players have all worked in sync.

This has translated into cleaner parks, well-managed traffic, better waste collection, more medical services, and expanded food and retail offerings. Roads once known for congestion are flowing more smoothly. Tourist sites are cleaner. And local markets are booming.

"We've seen our sales triple in just a few weeks," said a local vendor in Salalah's central market. "Demand is strong — from groceries to souvenirs."

Families here gather under foggy skies to picnic in the mountains, prepare traditional meals outdoors, and take long drives through the cloud-covered roads of Ittin, Rakhyout and Mirbat. Others visit seasonal springs, ancient frankincense valleys and camel-grazing pastures that feel more African than Arabian.

The cultural fit is equally important. As a socially conservative country, Oman aligns closely with Gulf family values. Modest dress, respectful social settings and traditional music festivals provide visitors with a comfortable, culturally familiar environment — one that feels like an extension of home.

One standout feature of this year's season is how tourism has expanded beyond Salalah. Events and performances now take place across multiple towns and wilayats — from coastal villages to mountain hamlets — allowing visitors to explore the governorate more deeply and avoid crowd bottlenecks.

This wider distribution has made short visits nearly impossible. According to several families interviewed, a proper experience now requires seven to 12 days — a significant increase from previous years.

226 VEHICLES REMOVED TO PROTECT DHOFAR'S GREEN PLAINS

SALALAH: As part of a joint operation between the Environment Authority, the Royal Oman Police and Dhofar Municipality, the 'Environmental Protectors' campaign continues its field activities during the Khareef Dhofar Season 2025.

The initiative aims to safeguard the governorate's unique green cover and protect its fragile ecosystem amid a surge in seasonal tourism.

According to the campaign's latest field report, a total of 226 vehicles were removed from green plains across various locations in Dhofar between July 25 and 31, 2025, due to



environmental violations involving off-road driving in restricted areas.

Additionally, four dirt roads were closed after they were found to cause

environmental damage and pose safety risks to visitors. The teams also dealt with three vehicles that had slipped and become stuck in waterlogged terrain.

The campaign is part of a broader initiative launched earlier by the Environment Authority under the banner of 'Environmental Protectors'.

The campaign has been reinforced this season with the deployment of four additional monitoring teams supporting operations in Salalah, Taqah and Mirbat, in addition to the existing enforcement units in other wilayats.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 5

A senior government official has lauded the remarkable improvements in infrastructure and public services across Dhofar during the Khareef Dhofar Season 2025, calling it a benchmark for coordinated development and enhanced visitor experience.

Speaking during a visit to Salalah's traditional market, the official expressed admiration for the upgrades, noting that the transformation is not only visible but also tangibly felt by both residents and tourists.

"This year's season stands out — not just because of the beautiful climate, but because of how well everything is organised, clean and accessible," he said. "We must protect these achievements and continue building on them in the years to come."

The khareef season has witnessed substantial infrastructure improvements across popular tourism zones. Road access to high-traffic sites such as Al Haffa Market, Ittin Gardens and Al Mughsail Beach has been widened and resurfaced, while parking facilities have been expanded to accommodate growing numbers of vehicles.

Authorities have also upgraded public lighting and deployed additional sanitation teams to manage waste more efficiently at outdoor markets and nature spots.

In a further effort to elevate the visitor experience, new public amenities have been installed, including modern restrooms,



New public amenities have been installed, including modern restrooms, wheelchair-accessible walkways and multilingual signage designed to help international tourists navigate with ease

wheelchair-accessible walkways and multilingual signage designed to help international tourists navigate with ease. These enhancements have helped reduce congestion and created a more seamless experience across major tourism sites.

The official credited these advancements to the joint efforts of Dhofar Municipality, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and the Royal Oman Police, among other entities.

He stressed that this high level of execution reflects a shared national commitment to improving tourism infrastructure and delivering quality public services. "These efforts are not temporary. They reflect a long-term vision for sustainable tourism," he added.

The upgrades align with Oman Vision 2040, which places tourism at the heart of economic diversification

and regional development.

Officials believe that the benefits are already being felt, from greater support for small and medium enterprises to improved job creation and stronger visitor satisfaction.

As the season progresses, the official called on both residents and tourists to play their part in maintaining these achievements. "The public sector has done its part. Now, the community and visitors must play their role in respecting and safeguarding the infrastructure," he said.

The Khareef Dhofar Season 2025 may be remembered not only for its misty hills and verdant landscapes but also as the year Dhofar demonstrated its readiness for a new era of modern, sustainable and inclusive tourism — setting a new standard for the seasons ahead.

Audience satisfaction with radio programmes at 76 per cent, TV at 73 per cent: NCSI survey

MUSCAT: Public satisfaction with the programme content reached 76 per cent for radio channels and 73 per cent for TV channels, according to a public opinion survey conducted by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in collaboration with the Ministry of Information.

Satisfaction with TV content covering national occasions, religious events and weather conditions reached approximately 88 per cent, while content related to raising awareness, government and tourism projects, social issues, and children's programmes scored around 69 per cent.

Omani viewers primarily engaged with Oman TV's religious and cultural programmes such as "Matoun", "Dhifaf" and "Al Fahras" as well as talk shows like "Al Bayt" (The House) and "Kunna Huna" (We



Omani viewers primarily engaged with Oman TV's religious and cultural programmes. — ONA

Were Here), and Ramadhan drama series such as "Al Waqeed" and "Al Madyoonir".

For radio content, satisfaction levels stood at 88 per cent for coverage of national occasions, religious events and weather conditions, and around 74 per cent for government

and tourism projects, social issues, and children's programmes. Omanis showed the highest interest in religious programmes, Ramadhan talk shows like "Layali Ramadhan" (Ramadhan Nights), and radio drama series such as "Sawalif Al Jadd Hameed", "Qala'ed Al

Yasmin", "Dalshad" and "Rihla Shaqqa".

At the governorate level, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate recorded the highest satisfaction with radio content at 84 per cent. Satisfaction was equal between genders at 74 per cent, while the age group 30-49 registered 78 per cent.

For TV content, Al Sharqiyah South and Al Dakhiliyah governorates recorded the highest satisfaction at 76 per cent, with equal satisfaction between genders at 73 per cent.

The survey aimed to strengthen communication between the Ministry of Information and the public by involving citizens in media evaluation, contributing to content development, and measuring satisfaction with the quality and diversity of programmes on Oman Radio and TV. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT

*Scents trigger
vivid memories
faster than
other senses*

*Fragrances
like oud and
frankincense carry
cultural meaning*

*Personal scents
evoke emotions tied
to love, family, and
childhood*

*Aromatherapy
uses scent to
support mental
well-being*



BALQEES AL ORAIMI

HAVE you ever caught the aroma of freshly baked bread or a whiff of incense and found yourself suddenly transported back in time? Scents hold a mysterious power — they can unlock hidden doors in our memory, bringing back vivid moments of childhood joy, family gatherings, or life’s most emotional experiences. A single fragrance can act like a time machine, stirring emotions of happiness, nostalgia, or even melancholy. Scientifically, our sense of smell is uniquely tied to memory. When we inhale a scent, it sends signals directly to the brain’s limbic system — the emotional and memory centre — bypassing the more logical pathways used by our other senses. That’s why a trace of perfume, the aroma of a beloved dish, or even the scent of rain on dry soil can instantly awaken memories long forgotten. According to psychologist Dr Sara Mohammed, “Scents are powerful triggers for emotional memory. A simple aroma — like jasmine or rain — can instantly bring back a sense of safety or a special moment from decades ago.” Some of our earliest and deepest memories are rooted in scent. The smell of new schoolbooks, traditional

“
Scents are powerful triggers for emotional memory. A simple aroma — like jasmine or rain — can instantly bring back a sense of safety or a special moment from decades ago
DR SARA MOHAMMED
Psychologist

WHEN SMELL BECOMES MEMORY

sweets, or breakfast at a grandmother’s home can unleash a flood of emotion. The scent of fresh coffee might remind us of quiet morning conversations, while frankincense or oud evokes the warmth and intimacy of traditional Omani gatherings. For Nasser al Amri from Muscat, the smell of rain is a portal to his youth.

“Whenever I smell wet earth after rain, I am instantly back in my mountain village, running barefoot among the trees and hearing my grandmother call us for lunch.” Scents are not just memory triggers — they’re emotional anchors. A perfume worn on graduation day, the salty breeze on a first trip with friends,

or the aroma of wedding flowers can become lasting imprints of emotion and experience. They can even be tools for healing. Aromatherapy uses lavender to soothe anxiety and citrus to sharpen focus, showing just how deeply scent influences our mental well-being. Shaikha al Junaibi, a frequent tourist from the UAE, recalls, “Every time I smell frankincense in the markets, I remember my first visit to Salalah during the monsoon. The scent brings back the sound of rain and the warmth of the people.” Unlike sights or sounds, scent triggers memory almost instantly. While we may forget a face or a phrase, a familiar fragrance can bring back entire scenes with vivid clarity. In Oman, fragrance is also deeply cultural. Oud and frankincense are more than aromas — they’re expressions of tradition and hospitality. Every home, souq and celebration carries a signature scent, weaving identity and emotion into memory. Though we can not hold onto time, a familiar scent allows us to relive it. With just one breath, fragrances take us home, back to childhood, to lost moments of joy — and remind us that the past is never truly gone. In the end, a scent may be the most powerful letter the past ever writes to us — wordless, timeless and unforgettable.

SHORT TAKES



Held as part of Labour Forum 2025, the event explored how Oman's work environment is evolving.

FORUM CHARTS BOLD VISION FOR OMAN’S LABOUR MARKET

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUG 5

The Ministry of Labour wrapped up its ‘Future of Work Forum’ on Tuesday, capping two days of dynamic discussions that brought together thought leaders, policymakers, and labour market experts from Oman and abroad.

Held as part of Labour Forum 2025, the event explored how Oman's work environment is evolving — and what must be done to make it future-ready. From social protections to career guidance and the rise of mental resilience in the workplace, the sessions reflected a bold vision to reshape how people live and work in Oman.

One of the headline sessions, “Fostering an Enabling Work Environment and Attracting Talent”, tackled some of the most pressing questions in the labour space. Experts discussed how stronger public-private partnerships, better occupational safety, and smarter social protection systems can empower Omanis to thrive in tomorrow’s economy.

Another key panel, “Social Dialogue and the Future of Labour Markets”, focused on how inclusive conversations among governments, businesses and workers can help shape balanced, fair and resilient labour policies. Participants called for new models of engagement to ensure that all voices — from factory floors to boardrooms — have a role in shaping the future of work.

Running alongside the main forum, the “Future Talents: Thought and Work” student exhibition continued to draw visitors. Featuring creative projects by vocational college students, the exhibition included a standout workshop on “Psychological and Professional Resilience” — a timely reminder that soft skills are just as vital as technical ones in today’s workplace. The exhibition remains open to the public until Thursday, August 7.

QUALIFIERS FOR HOLY QURAN COMPETITION HELD

SUR: The preliminary qualifiers for the 33rd annual Holy Quran memorisation competition, organised by the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science at the Diwan of Royal Court, were held at the Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Sur, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

A total of 76 male and female contestants are participating in the two-day event,



divided into seven age-based categories, namely full Quran memorisation, the memorisation of 24 consecutive parts, the memorisation of 18 consecutive parts, the memorisation of 12 consecutive parts, the memorisation of 6 consecutive parts, the memorisation of 4 consecutive parts and the memorisation of 2 consecutive parts. — ONA

HEAC selects candidates for tests and interviews

THE Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC) at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Tuesday announced the list of students selected to undergo admission tests, personal interviews and medical examinations for 123 academic programmes requiring these assessments for the 2025/2026 academic year.

The centre contacted 6,367 male and female students via SMS to notify them of the programmes they have been shortlisted for and to provide them with the necessary guidelines and information for this stage. The total number of available seats across these programmes is 2,617.

The centre clarified that being shortlisted does not guarantee admission into a programme. Final acceptance depends on the results of interviews, tests, or medical examinations as determined by the educational institution, the number of available seats and the student’s competitive scores compared to other successful candidates. Additionally, failure to attend the interview or test — whether due to travel or other reasons — will be considered a withdrawal from the selection process for these programmes.

The preference modification phase for the 2025/2026 academic year concluded last Thursday, with a total of 43,060 successful applicants registered — 20,081 male and 22,979 female students.

The centre will announce the

The centre contacted **6,367 male and female students** via SMS to notify them of the programmes they have been shortlisted. The total number of available **seats across these programmes is 2,617**. The centre clarified that being shortlisted **does not guarantee admission** into a programme



The centre clarified that being shortlisted does not guarantee admission into a programme. — ONA

results of the initial sorting on Tuesday, August 19, 2025. Students will then have until 12:00 pm on

Sunday, August 25, to complete their registration procedures at higher education institutions. — ONA

IRAN EARTHQUAKE HAS NO IMPACT ON OMAN

MUSCAT: The Earthquake Monitoring Centre (EMC) at Sultan Qaboos University reported that a moderate earthquake struck southeastern Iran on Tuesday morning,

registering a magnitude of 5.6 on the Richter scale.

The tremor was recorded at 9:06 am local time at a depth of 10 kilometres. The epicentre was located in the

Sistan and Baluchestan region, approximately 305 kilometres northeast of the Wilayat of Khasab.

No impact was reported within the Sultanate of Oman

and EMC confirmed that the seismic event poses no threat to Oman.

The centre continues to closely monitor regional seismic activity.

Environment sustainability commitment on the rise

SIHAM AL SAIDI
AL SUWAIQ, AUG 5

Aiming to strengthen environmental responsibility and prepare future leaders in sustainability, the Environment Authority in Al Suwaiq has successfully concluded its third consecutive environmental training programme since 2022. The initiative, held in collaboration with the Environment Authority in Al Khabourah and Al Suwaiq, targeted graduates from various environmental and scientific disciplines, including environmental engineering, geology, chemistry, biology and physics.

This year’s programme, which welcomed 17 participants, placed a stronger emphasis on environmental compliance, a growing national priority. Participants were introduced to the specific harsh environmental standards that institutions are



This year's programme, which welcomed 17 participants, placed a stronger emphasis on environmental compliance.

required to follow. Through guided field visits and evaluations, they learned how compliance is assessed and what key indicators define

an environmentally responsible organisation.

Institutions selected for these visits were chosen based on strict

environmental criteria and their current status under the national environmental compliance system. Sites included Al Suwaiq Commercial Port, Al Nasr Trading and Contracting Company, Ma'warid Mining Company at Al Ghaizain, Al Zain Water Factory and the Packing Limited Company. These visits not only showcased environmental technologies in action, but also allowed participants to observe how companies manage risks and embrace eco-friendly practices.

Shaikh Hamoud al Harrasi, Head of the Environment Authority in Al Khabourah and Al Suwaiq, highlighted the growing momentum of the initiative. He said: “Each year, the number of institutions complying with environmental standards increases. The programme is expanding its reach and will, starting next year, include graduates from Sohar University, the Vocational College in

Al Khabourah, and the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Al Musannah.”

Looking ahead, the Environment Authority is working to build strategic partnerships with the private sector to enhance graduate employment opportunities.

Discussions are underway to develop a structured pathway for graduates to transition into these industries, equipped with both the technical skills and environmental awareness needed for sustainable development.

The programme also serves as a vital link between academia and industry, fostering collaboration and mutual understanding.

By bridging the gap between graduates and employers, it aims to create a workforce ready to meet Oman's environmental goals while promoting innovation, accountability and long-term ecological associations.

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A demonstrator carries a clock during a gathering to honour the victims of the catastrophic port explosion in 2020 and to call for accountability for the blast, in Beirut. — AFP

Five years after Beirut port blast, Lebanese demand justice

BEIRUT: The loved ones of those killed in a catastrophic explosion at Beirut’s port five years ago gathered to demand justice on the anniversary of the blast on Monday, as Lebanon’s president vowed to hold those responsible to account.

The August 4, 2020 disaster was one of the world’s largest non-nuclear explosions, and devastated swathes of the Lebanese capital, killing more than 220 people and injuring over 6,500.

Authorities have said the blast was triggered by a fire in a warehouse where tonnes of ammonium nitrate fertiliser had been stored haphazardly for years after arriving by ship, despite repeated warnings to senior officials.

Hundreds gathered in Beirut on Monday afternoon to mark the anniversary, some brandishing signs reading “No compromises on justice” and “The crime of August 4 was not an accident”. Georgette Khoury, 68, was there to honour the memory of three of her loved ones who perished in the blast.

“Five years have passed, but it still feels like the explosion just happened. It’s a gaping wound in the heart of every Lebanese person,” she said, attending the commemoration for the first time.

Flash flood washes out India Himalayan town, killing four

DEHRADUN: A flash flood driving a torrent of mud smashed into a town in India’s Himalayan region on Tuesday, tearing down a mountain valley before demolishing buildings and killing at least four people. Videos broadcast on Indian media showed a terrifying surge of muddy water sweeping away multi-storey apartment blocks in the tourist region of Dharali in Uttarakhand state. Several people could be seen running before being engulfed by the dark waves of debris that uprooted entire buildings.

Uttarakhand State Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said rescue teams had been deployed “on a war footing”.

Senior local official Prashant Arya said four people had been killed, with other officials warning that the number could rise.

India’s army said 150 troops had reached the town, helping rescue around 20 people who had survived the wall of freezing sludge.

“A massive mudslide struck Dharali... triggering a sudden flow of debris and water through the settlement,” the army said.

Images released by the army, taken from the site after the main torrent had passed, showed a river of slow moving mud.

A wide swathe of the town was swamped by deep debris. In places, the mud lapped at the rooftops of houses.

“Search and rescue efforts are ongoing, with all available resources being deployed to locate and evacuate any remaining stranded persons,” army spokesman Suneel Bartwal said. — AFP

DEPORTATION PACT

Rwanda to accept 250 migrants from US



KIGALI: Rwanda said on Tuesday it would accept up to 250 migrants from the United States under a deal agreed with Washington but gave no details.

Washington has been pushing a deportation drive, with President Donald Trump’s administration negotiating arrangements to send people to third countries. The latest deal follows a cancelled agreement with Britain under which Kigali would have received deported illegal migrants from the UK.

BANGLADESH MARKS FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF HASINA’S OUSTER

DHAKA: Thousands of exultant Bangladeshis gathered in Dhaka to mark the first anniversary on Tuesday of the mass protests that toppled former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, as the interim government unveiled a symbolic roadmap promising democratic reform. Rallies, concerts, and prayer sessions were held in the capital as people celebrated what they called the country’s “second liberation”

The events culminated with Nobel peace laureate Muhammad

Yunus formally reading out the “July Declaration” — a 28 point document that seeks to give constitutional recognition to the 2024 student led uprising, sparked by economic woes and repression, that forced Hasina to flee to India on August 5.

“The people of Bangladesh express their desire that the student-people uprising of 2024 will get proper state and constitutional recognition,” said Yunus, the head of the interim government, as

representatives of political parties looked on. “The July Declaration will feature in the schedule of the reformed constitution as framed by the government formed through the next national election,” he said.

Supporters see the charter as a foundation for institutional reform, critics have warned its impact could be symbolic in the absence of a legal framework or consensus. “Together, we will build a Bangladesh where tyranny will never rise again”, Yunus said. — AFP

UN: Dismantle Israeli-US food distribution in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS special rapporteurs called on Tuesday for the Israel- and US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation to be immediately dismantled, saying aid was being “exploited for covert military and geopolitical agendas”.

An exceptionally-large group of the UN-mandated experts voiced grave concerns over the GHF’s operations.

The private organisation began distributing food in Gaza Strip in May as Israel began easing a more than two-month aid blockade on the Palestinian territory that had exacerbated existing shortages.

“The GHF ... is an utterly disturbing example of how humanitarian relief can be exploited for covert military and geopolitical agendas in serious breach of international law,” the experts said in a joint statement.

“The entanglement of Israeli intelligence, US contractors and ambiguous non-governmental entities underlines the urgent need for robust international oversight and action under UN auspices.

“Calling it ‘humanitarian’ adds on to Israel’s humanitarian camouflage and is an insult to the humanitarian enterprise and standards.”

On July 22, the UN rights office said Israeli forces had killed more than 1,000 Palestinians trying to get food aid in Gaza since the GHF started operations — nearly three-quarters of them in the vicinity of GHF sites.

“Without clear accountability, the very idea of humanitarian relief

“The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation ... is an utterly disturbing example of how humanitarian relief can be exploited for covert military and geopolitical agendas in serious breach of international law

UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPORTEURS



Women search the sand for legumes or rice in Nuseirat on Tuesday. — AFP

may ultimately become a casualty of modern hybrid warfare,” the special rapporteurs said.

“The credibility and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance must be restored by dismantling the GHF, holding it and its executives accountable, and allowing experienced and humanitarian actors from the UN and civil society alike to take back the reins of managing and distributing lifesaving aid.”

Meanwhile Gaza’s civil defence agency said 26 people were killed by Israeli gunfire and air strikes on Tuesday, including 14 who were waiting near an aid distribution site inside the Palestinian territory.

Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal told AFP that eight

people were killed by Israeli gunfire while waiting for aid near the south Gaza city of Khan Yunis.

Six more people were killed and 21 injured by Israeli fire in central Gaza while waiting for food near a distribution centre, according to Bassal. The Israeli army told AFP it was looking into the incidents.

Media restrictions in Gaza and difficulties in accessing many areas mean AFP is unable to independently verify the tolls and details provided by the civil defence agency and other parties.

Thousands of Gazans gather daily near food distribution points across Gaza, including four belonging to the US- and Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation.

— Agencies



THE WORLD’S SMELLIEST FLOWER BLOOMS

Visitors view a blooming titan arum, also known as the corpse flower, which has blossomed for the first time in four years, at the University of Warsaw Botanic Garden in Warsaw, Poland, on Tuesday.

Native to the equatorial rainforests of Sumatra, the giant corpse flower (*Amorphophallus titanum*) can reach heights of up to 10 feet (3 metres) and widths of around 5 feet (1.5 metres). It emits a pungent odor resembling rotting flesh to attract pollinating insects, earning its reputation as the world’s most malodorous flower. — Reuters

\$6-BILLION DEAL

Australia to buy 11 warships from Japan



SYDNEY: Australia will upgrade its navy with 11 Mogami-class frigates built by Japan’s Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Defence Minister Richard Marles said on Tuesday. Billed as one of Japan’s biggest defence export deals since World War II, Australia will pay \$6 billion over the next 10 years to acquire these stealth frigates. Australia is in the midst of bolstering its navy with long range firepower in an effort to deter China.

BOOST BIRTH RATES

China to offer free pre-school education



BEIJING: China said on Tuesday it would introduce free pre-school education from the autumn, as the world’s second most populous nation seeks to boost childbirth in the face of a looming demographic crisis.

China’s population has declined for three consecutive years, with UN demography models predicting it could fall from around 1.4 billion today to 800 million by 2100. There were just 9.54 million births in China last year.

SHORT TAKES



Only healthy animals are accepted by the zoo, which has been accepting donated animals for several years.

Danish zoo in hot water over public call for animals as food

COPENHAGEN: Any chickens or rabbits to spare? Denmark’s Aalborg Zoo is seeking animals to feed to its predators — after they have been euthanised — a plea that has sparked a public backlash.

“We are looking for small livestock, not pets,” Anette Sofie Warncke Nutzhorn, one of the zoo’s managers, said on Tuesday. “It can be for instance a chicken that doesn’t lay eggs anymore.”

“Predators usually catch prey of this size, so it’s like the natural course,” she added.

The zoo has found itself in hot water since sending out the appeal in social media.

“If you have an animal that, for various reasons, has to go, you are welcome to donate it to us,” it wrote last week.

The zoo specified that it was looking in particular for chickens, rabbits, guinea pigs and horses.

“The animals are carefully put down by qualified staff and then used as food,” it said.

Only healthy animals are accepted by the zoo, which has been accepting donated animals for several years.

“It is a very common practice, we were just sending a friendly reminder,” Warncke Nutzhorn said.

The zoo later turned off the comments section on the social media post in response to what it called “hateful” postings. Practices at Danish zoos, particularly the euthanasia of healthy animals to limit the risk of inbreeding, have in the past triggered fierce international criticism.

In 2014, a giraffe calf named Marius was put down at the Copenhagen Zoo and staff later performed an autopsy on the carcass in front of visitors, before feeding it to the lions. — AFP

Brazil judge puts ex-president under house arrest

BRASÍLIA: A Brazilian judge on Monday placed former president Jair Bolsonaro under house arrest for breaking a social media ban, escalating a dramatic standoff between the court and the politician, who is accused of plotting a coup.

Bolsonaro is on trial at the Supreme Court for allegedly plotting to cling onto power after losing 2022 elections to President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

President Donald Trump has sought to punish Brazil, a longtime US ally, for what he sees as a politically motivated “witch hunt” targeting Bolsonaro by imposing eye-watering tariffs on Latin America’s biggest economy.

The 70-year-old Bolsonaro is banned from social media for the duration of the proceedings, and third parties are barred from sharing his public remarks.

But on Sunday, his allies defied the order by sharing footage online of a call between the former army captain and his eldest son Flavio at a solidarity rally in Rio de Janeiro.

Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes reacted furiously, declaring that the judiciary would not allow a defendant to “treat it like a fool” because of his “political and economic power.”

Criticizing Bolsonaro’s “repeated failure” to comply with the court’s restrictions on him during the trial, he placed him under house arrest at his home in the capital Brasilia.

He also barred the country’s former leader (2019-2022) from receiving visitors, apart from his lawyers, and from using mobile phones, and warned that any new transgression would lead to him being detained. — AFP



JAIR BOLSONARO
Former Brazilian President

UN push on treaty to curb spiralling plastic menace

NATIONS must resolve the global plastics crisis, the head of UN talks told negotiators from 180 countries gathered in Geneva on Tuesday to forge a landmark treaty on eliminating the life-threatening waste.

“We are facing a global crisis,” Ecuadoran diplomat Luis Vayas Valdivieso said at the start of 10 days of negotiations.

“Plastic pollution is damaging ecosystems, polluting our oceans and rivers, threatening biodiversity, harming human health, and unfairly impacting the most vulnerable,” he said.

“The urgency is real, the evidence is clear, and the responsibility is on us.”

Three years of negotiations hit the wall in Busan, South Korea in December when oil-producing states blocked a consensus.

Key figures steering the negotiations at this new attempt said they were not expecting an easy ride this time, but insisted a deal remained within reach.

“There’s been extensive diplomacy from Busan till now,” UN Environment Programme executive director Inger Andersen said.

UNEP is hosting the talks, and Andersen said conversations between different regions and interest groups had generated momentum. “Most countries, actually, that I have spoken with have said: ‘We’re coming to Geneva to strike the deal’.

“Will it be easy? No. Will it be straightforward? No. Is there a pathway for a deal? Absolutely.”

Plastic pollution is so ubiquitous that microplastics have been found on the highest mountain peaks, in the deepest ocean trench and scattered throughout almost every part of the human body.

In 2022, countries agreed they would find a way to address the crisis by the end of 2024.

However, the supposedly final negotiations on a legally-binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the seas, flopped in Busan.

One group of countries sought an ambitious deal to limit production and phase out harmful chemicals.

But a clutch of mostly oil-producing nations rejected



A wild elephant rummages near an electric fence through garbage dumped at an open ground in the village of Digampathana in north-central Sri Lanka. — AFP file photo

“Most countries, actually, that I have spoken with have said: ‘We’re coming to Geneva to strike the deal’. Will it be easy? No. Will it be straightforward? No. Is there a pathway for a deal? Absolutely

INGER ANDERSEN
UNEP Executive director

production limits and wanted to focus on treating waste.

Valdivieso insisted that an effective, fair and ambitious agreement was within reach.

“Our paths and positions might differ; our destination is the same,” he said on Monday.

“We are all here because we believe in a shared cause: a world free of plastic pollution.”

More than 600 non-governmental organisations are in Geneva. NGOs and civil society have access to the discussions tackling the thorniest points, such as banning certain chemicals and capping production.

“To solve the plastic pollution crisis, we have to stop making so much plastic,” Greenpeace delegation chief Graham Forbes said.

The group and its allies want a treaty “that cuts plastic production, eliminates toxic chemicals, and provides the financing that’s going to be required to transition to a fossil fuel, plastic-free future”, he said.

“The fossil fuel industry is here in force,” he noted, adding: “We cannot let a few countries determine humanity’s future when it comes to plastic pollution.”

More than 400 million tonnes of plastic are produced globally each year, half of which is for single-use items.

While 15 per cent of plastic waste is collected for recycling, only nine per cent is actually recycled.

Nearly half, 46 per cent, ends up in landfills, while 17 per cent is incinerated and 22 per cent is mismanaged and becomes litter.

But Matthew Kastner, spokesman for the American Chemistry Council, said the plastics industry and its products were “vital to public health”, notably through medical devices, surgical masks, child safety seats, helmets and pipes delivering clean water. — AFP

Some US travellers to pay bonds up to \$15,000

WASHINGTON: The US could require bonds of up to \$15,000 for some tourist and business visas under a pilot programme launching in two weeks, a government notice said on Monday, an effort that aims to crack down on visitors who overstay their visas.

The programme gives US consular officers the discretion to impose bonds on visitors from countries with high rates of visa overstays, according to a Federal Register notice. Bonds could also be applied to people coming from countries where screening and vetting information is deemed insufficient, the notice said.

President Donald Trump has made cracking down on illegal immigration a focus of his presidency, boosting resources to secure the border and arresting people in the US illegally. He issued a travel ban in June that fully or partially



Consular officers will have three options for visa applicants subjected to the bonds: \$5,000, \$10,000 or \$15,000, but will generally be expected to require at least \$10,000

blocks citizens of 19 nations from entering the US on national security grounds.

Trump’s immigration policies have led some visitors to skip travel to the United States. Transatlantic airfares dropped to rates last seen before the COVID-19 pandemic in May and travel from Canada and Mexico to the US fell by 20 per cent year-over-year.

Effective August 20, the

new visa programme will last for approximately a year, the government notice said.

Consular officers will have three options for visa applicants subjected to the bonds: \$5,000, \$10,000 or \$15,000, but will generally be expected to require at least \$10,000, it said.

The funds will be returned to travelers if they depart in accordance with the terms of their visas, the notice said.

A similar pilot programme was launched in November 2020 during the last months of Trump’s first term in office, but it was not fully implemented due to the drop in global travel associated with the pandemic, the notice said.

A State Department spokesperson listed the criteria that will be used to identify the countries that will be affected, adding that the country list may be updated.

“Countries will be identified

based on high overstay rates, screening and vetting deficiencies, concerns regarding acquisition of citizenship by investment without a residency requirement, and foreign policy considerations,” the spokesperson said.

The State Department was unable to estimate the number of visa applicants who could be affected by the change.

Many of the countries targeted by Trump’s travel ban also have high rates of visa overstays, including Chad, Eritrea, Haiti, Myanmar and Yemen.

US Travel Association, which represents major tourism-related companies, estimated the “scope of the visa bond pilot programme appears to be limited, with an estimated 2,000 applicants affected, most likely from only a few countries with relatively low travel volume to the United States.” — Reuters

OPINION

The reason we keep repeating the same patterns



HYESHA BARRETT

The writer is a Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner

HAVE you ever wondered why life sometimes feels like a loop? The same types of relationships, the same setbacks, the same moments where you promise yourself “Never again!”, yet somehow, again rolls around. It’s not that you’re weak or incapable. There’s something quietly running the show behind the scenes, and until you notice it, the loop will continue. Most of the patterns we repeat are not random. They are the habit loops created by the brain and nervous system. They are echoes of old stories: scripts written long ago, often during childhood, before we even had words for what we were feeling. The way we were comforted or left alone, the moments we felt safe or unsafe, the tiny heartbreaks and victories of our earliest years - they plant seeds. These seeds, these early experiences form subconscious beliefs about safety, love and self-worth. The reason we repeat the same patterns

isn’t laziness nor bad luck. It is the subconscious protective part of us. These beliefs shape automatic reactions and behaviours, even decades later. This part of us is similar to a small child, clutching the old story for safety, even when it no longer serves us. These beliefs become invisible walls in our adult lives, directing us like unseen hands. We repeat what is familiar, even if it hurts, because our nervous system equates familiar with safe. Breaking free feels terrifying, not because we want to suffer, but because part of us doesn’t yet know how to live differently. So how do we break the cycle? The good news is that our brain is neuroplastic, meaning it can change. The first step is awareness - not the cold, critical kind. The gentle awareness of a compassionate witness, looking at our life and saying: “Ah! I see what’s happening. I see where this comes from.” Each time you pause to notice a pattern and respond differently, you create

Remind yourself that your past does not define you and you are not doomed to be on repeat.

a new neural pathway. Over time, these new responses become stronger than the old ones, and the cycle begins to break. So, when you notice a repeated pattern, pause and ask yourself: “Is this reaction protecting me, or keeping me stuck? What new story am I ready to write?” Thereafter, take one small action that contradicts the old pattern. Say no when you usually say yes. Pause before reacting. Ask for help when you would usually remain silent. These tiny acts are the building blocks of change. Breaking patterns is not about flattening the past; it is about holding the hand of the part of you that is scared and showing it a new way forward. Over time, the loop loosens. The story softens. What once felt like a life sentence becomes a doorway to freedom. Remind yourself that your past does not define you, and you are not doomed to be on repeat. The key is not force, it is awareness, gentleness and the courage to step, ever so tenderly into the unfamiliar.

Bees in Rwanda being wiped out by dangerous pesticides

MOSES GAHIGI

The use of pesticides in East Africa, some sold by European firms despite being banned in the EU, is killing off bees in large numbers and threatening whole ecosystems, scientists say. Joseph Ruzigana, of Muhanga district in southern Rwanda, woke up one morning to find all the bees in his 20 newly constructed beehives had died. “Fellow beekeepers have also lost plenty of bees to these dangerous pesticides. It looks like we won’t get any honey this season,” he said. Ruzigana said many beekeepers, who number more than 100,000 in Rwanda according to officials, were giving up. “The few bees left are very weak and unproductive... I used to get up to 25 kg of honey from one beehive in a month-long season; my family was well taken care of, but all that has collapsed,” he said. Changing climate conditions are part of the problem: longer rains this season were not favourable to beekeeping. But the main issue is pesticides, say locals and experts. Bees pollinate crops including coffee, tea, avocados, mangoes, beans and tomatoes — making them key to an agricultural sector that accounts for 30 per cent of GDP and 70 per cent of employment in Rwanda. It is the same across the region. Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Kenya have all reported increasing bee mortality rates due to pesticides, according to the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology in Nairobi. Rwanda is a poor and landlocked country striving to feed its people through improved maize and rice cultivation. But many pesticides affect bees’ navigation and reproduction, and have been linked to colony collapse disorder, when worker bees abandon a hive. Rwanda grows large amounts of pyrethrum, a flower that could be used to make a natural pesticide, but exports all its pyrethrum liquid. Instead, Rwandan farmers use imported synthetic pesticides. A 2022 study by Türkiye’s Ondokuz Mayıs University found that 72 per cent used Rocket, containing profenofos, which is highly toxic to bees. Jeanne Nyirandahimana, part of a women’s beekeeping cooperative, said average earnings have fallen from around 250,000 Rwandan francs (\$178) per season to around 30,000 (\$21). An earlier study by the University of Rwanda found that 22 per cent of farmers around Lake Kivu used malathion, also deadly to bees. Despite being banned for use in the EU, malathion is still exported by Denmark, France and Germany — 12.5 tonnes in 2023, according to the European Chemicals Agency. — AFP

The America we knew is rapidly slipping away



THOMAS L FRIEDMAN

The writer is reporter, author and The New York Times columnist

for the first time I believe that if the behaviour that this administration has exhibited in just its first six months continues and is amplified for its full four years, the America you know will be gone. And I don’t know how we will get it back

the Labor Secretary Chavez-DeRemer and the US trade representative Jamieson Greer — will not only fail to defend them but will actually offer them up as a sacrifice to Trump to keep their jobs? Shame on each and every one of them — particularly on Bessent, a former hedge fund manager, who knows better and did not step in. What a coward. As Bessent’s predecessor, Janet Yellen, the former Treasury secretary and also the former chair of the Federal Reserve — and a person with actual integrity — told my Times colleague Ben Casselman of the BLS firing: “This is the kind of thing you would only expect to see in a banana republic.” It is important to know how foreigners are looking at this. Bill Blain, a London-based bond trader who publishes a newsletter popular among market experts called Blain’s Morning Porridge, wrote on Monday: “Friday, Aug. 1 might go down in history as the day the US Treasury market died. There was an art to reading US data. It relied on trust. Now that is broken — if you can’t trust the data, what can you trust?” In May, the director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, fired two top intelligence officials who oversaw an assessment that contradicted Trump’s assertions that the gang Tren de Aragua was operating under the direction of the Venezuelan regime. Their assessment undermined the dubious legal rationale Trump invoked — the rarely used 1798 Alien Enemies Act — to allow the suspected gang members to be thrown out of the country without due process. And now this trend towards self-blinding is spreading to further corners of the government. One of America’s premier cyberwarriors, Jen Easterly, who was the director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency during the Biden administration, had her appointment to a senior teaching position at the US Military Academy at West Point revoked last week by Army Secretary Daniel Driscoll after

Laura Loomer, a far-right conspiracy theorist, posted that Easterly was a Biden-era mole. Read that sentence again very slowly. The Army secretary, acting on the guidance of a loony Trump acolyte, revoked the teaching appointment of — anyone will tell you — one of America’s most skilled nonpartisan cyberwarriors, herself a graduate of West Point. And when you are done reading that, read Easterly’s response on LinkedIn: “As a lifelong independent, I’ve served our nation in peacetime and combat under Republican and Democratic administrations. I’ve led missions at home and abroad to protect all Americans from vicious terrorists I’ve worked my entire career not as a partisan, but as a patriot — not in pursuit of power, but in service to the country I love and in loyalty to the Constitution I swore to protect and defend, against all enemies.” And then she added this advice to the young West Pointers she will not have the honour of teaching: “Every member of the Long Gray Line knows the Cadet Prayer. It asks that we ‘choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong.’ That line — so simple, yet so powerful — has been my North Star for more than three decades. In boardrooms and war rooms. In quiet moments of doubt and in public acts of leadership. The harder right is never easy. That’s the whole point.” That is the woman Trump did not want teaching our next generation of fighters. And that ethic — always choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong — is the ethic that Bessent, Hassett, Chavez-DeRemer and Greer know nothing of — not to mention Trump himself. That is why, dear reader, though I am a congenital optimist, for the first time I believe that if the behaviour that this administration has exhibited in just its first six months continues and is amplified for its full four years, the America you know will be gone. And I don’t know how we will get it back.

Achieving sustainability in food system



SAMUEL KUTTY

The writer is a freelance journalist and author who worked in Oman and India

AS conflicts and climate emergencies worsen and the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic persist, a glimmer of hope is found in a report indicating that global hunger has decreased. The Independent Stakeholders' Report at the UN Food Systems Summit in Addis Ababa, co-authored by multiple United Nations agencies, found that global hunger declined slightly in 2024 after peaking in 2021 and 2022, thanks to progress in Asia and South America.

"It's inspiring to observe the global progress in combating hunger, but we must acknowledge that this progress is not uniform," stated UN Food and Agriculture Organization Director-General Dr Qu Dongyu at the summit.

Nevertheless, 8.2 per cent of the global population — estimated between 638 and 720 million individuals — continued to experience hunger last year, and the conditions were deteriorating, especially in Africa, where the rate stands at 20.2 per cent.

"Famine drives unrest and weakens harmony. Hunger must never be viewed as a tool of war," Antonio Guterres stated during the summit, using a video link.

Food security, which ensures that everyone has access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food, is a complex challenge with significant ethical, economic and social implications. It is not only about having enough food, but also involves the accessibility, availability and proper utilisation of that food, as well as the

stability of the food supply.

The report highlighted the significant distance remaining to achieve its objective of eradicating global hunger by 2030. Present estimates indicate that approximately 512 million individuals will remain undernourished by the decade's conclusion, with 60 per cent residing in Africa.

AFP quoted Alvaro Lario, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, as stating, "Global hunger statistics have shown minor enhancements when compared to 2022 and 2023."

Nonetheless, advancements have not been uniform worldwide, as food insecurity persisted in many sub-regions of Africa and Western Asia.

A worsening hunger crisis has plagued Gaza for weeks due to Israel's tight control over all resources, igniting increasing global outrage over individuals perishing from starvation in the area. "Conflict persists in fuelling hunger from Gaza to Sudan and elsewhere," stated UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during his online address.

The World Health Organization has alerted that malnutrition in the occupied Palestinian territory has hit "alarming levels" since Israel enforced a complete blockade on Gaza.

During his speech at the Addis Ababa summit, Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, mentioned that Oman has made considerable progress in various food and nutrition security indicators.

"Important initiatives encompass the

Guided by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Oman has developed a comprehensive food security strategy that outlines various goals aimed at enhancing the nation's food supply in areas such as production, importation, storage and distribution

Food Security Strategy, National Nutrition Strategy, National Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Strategy, Environment and Natural Resources Strategy, and the Genetic Diversity Strategy for Local Livestock," he stated.

Oman stands out among the Gulf countries for its strategic planning and rigorous policies aimed at preserving its status as a food-secure nation. Self-sufficiency in food, characterised by reduced reliance on imports, is continuously increasing in the Sultanate of Oman.

Guided by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the country has developed a comprehensive food security strategy that outlines various goals aimed at enhancing the nation's food supply in areas such as production, importation, storage and distribution.

Oman's 2040 Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy seeks to enhance sustainability in the agricultural sector through investments, boost economic income, generate job opportunities for citizens, assist rural communities and address structural disparities in agriculture.

The nation placed third in the Arab region and 35th in the Global Food Security Index for 2022. The index relies on assessment criteria drawn from universally recognised components of the food security concept, which include food accessibility, food availability, food quality and safety, food sustainability and adaptability, with a comparison encompassing 113 nations.

DEATH OF A DELTA... PAKISTAN’S INDUS SINKS AND SHRINKS

ZAIN ZAMAN JANJUA

Salt crusts crackle underfoot as Habibullah Khatti walks to his mother's grave to say a final goodbye before he abandons his parched island village on Pakistan's Indus delta.

Seawater intrusion into the delta, where the Indus River meets the Arabian Sea in the south of the country, has triggered the collapse of farming and fishing communities.

"The saline water has surrounded us from all four sides," Khatti said from Abdullah Mirbahar village in the town of Kharo Chan, around 15 km from where the river empties into the sea.

As fish stocks fell, the 54-year-old turned to tailoring until that too became impossible with only four of the 150 households remaining.

"In the evening, an eerie silence takes over the area," he said, as stray dogs wandered through the deserted wooden and bamboo houses. Kharo Chan once comprised around 40 villages, but most have disappeared under rising seawater.

The town's population fell from 26,000 in 1981 to 11,000 in 2023, according to census data.

Khatti is preparing to move his family to nearby Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, and one swelling with economic migrants, including from the Indus delta. The Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, which advocates for fishing communities, estimates that tens of thousands of people have been displaced from the delta's coastal districts.

However, more than 1.2 million people have been displaced from the overall Indus delta region in the last two decades, according to a study published in March by the Jinnah Institute, a think tank led by a former climate change minister.

The downstream flow of water into the delta has decreased by 80 per cent since the 1950s as a result of irrigation canals, hydropower dams and the impacts of climate change on glacial and snow melt, according to a 2018 study by the US-Pakistan Center for Advanced Studies in Water. That has led to devastating seawater intrusion.

The salinity of the water has risen by around 70 per cent since 1990, making it impossible to grow crops and severely affecting the shrimp and crab populations.

Beginning in Tibet, the Indus River flows through Kashmir before traversing the entire length of Pakistan. The river and its tributaries irrigate about 80 per cent of the country's farmland, supporting millions of livelihoods.

The delta, formed by rich sediment deposited by the river as it meets the sea, was once ideal for farming, fishing, mangroves and wildlife.

But more than 16 per cent of fertile land has become unproductive due to encroaching seawater, a government water agency study in 2019 found.

In the town of Ketī Bandar, which spreads inland from the water's edge, a white layer of salt crystals covers the ground. — AFP

Ruining the climate cause

PROGRESSIVES

are caught in a trap of their own making. In an era of overlapping and mutually reinforcing crises, they have come to view every issue – climate change, public health, energy, inequality, trade and war – as part of a single, all-encompassing political battle: the “everything struggle.”

At first glance, this approach may appear compelling. These issues really are interconnected, and no one lives in isolation. But forcing every cause into a single battle has serious downsides. Arguing that reducing greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions also requires abolishing capitalism, rethinking gender categories and freeing Gaza is a formula for political paralysis. Even if each individual fight is worthy on its own, combining them often undermines the broad coalitions needed to achieve meaningful progress.

Progressives would do well to keep this in mind ahead of November's United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Belém, Brazil. After the lacklustre summits in oil-rich Azerbaijan and the United Arab Emirates, many activists are hoping that COP30 will mark a return to progressive principles. In that spirit, thousands of climate advocates are expected to descend on Belém for the so-called Peoples' Summit, a gathering of civil society and climate groups held in parallel with the official negotiations.

Given today's economic turmoil and escalating geopolitical tensions, the chances of global policymakers producing a bold climate plan at COP30 are slim. But even if they succeed, the broader climate fight is bound to fail without public support.

Alarming, support for the climate agenda appears to have declined significantly. From the United States and Germany to Canada, South Korea and India, climate change barely registered as a major issue in recent elections.

By now, it is obvious that the “everything struggle” is a losing strategy for progressive parties serious about combating climate



The chances of global policymakers producing a bold climate plan at COP30 are slim.



MICHAEL BRÖNING

The writer is author of Die Hetzer sind immer die Anderen (Verlag am Park, 2024), serves on the Basic Values commission of Germany's Social Democratic Party

change. Even worse, it fuels public scepticism about the viability of climate action.

To be sure, well-funded disinformation campaigns remain the primary cause of declining public trust. But overreaching by some progressive activists also plays a role. The Peoples' Summit manifesto is a case in point. Drafted by a broad coalition of NGOs and activists, the document denounces “false climate solutions” as “instruments for deepening inequality.” Only “socio-environmental, anti-patriarchal, anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist, anti-racist and rights-based” approaches, it insists, can solve the “climate, ecological and civilisational crisis.” Though certainly well-intentioned, one must ask: Is this how broad coalitions are built, or is this how they unravel?

In fact, most people do care about climate change. A recent IPSOS poll covering 32 countries across five continents found that 74 per cent of respondents are concerned about its impact on their own countries. But when practical, technical solutions are dismissed as ideological betrayals, climate policy risks becoming little more than a quest for moral purity.

It wasn't always this way. While calls for sweeping change have long been part of the climate movement – and rightly so – its agenda once

focused on sustainability: cutting GHG emissions, conserving resources, protecting forests and preserving biodiversity.

Today, however, many activists view climate action as a revolutionary vehicle for dismantling the status quo and prompting a broad moral reckoning. The problem is that while the fervour of the “everything struggle” may energise activists, it tends to alienate the wider public.

Most voters are looking for workable solutions, not a sermon on the need to reinvent society, especially when that sermon echoes the failed revolutionary fantasies of the past. They want clean air, clean energy and a livable planet for their children. But bundling those priorities with every perceived injustice in the world drives away the very people needed to achieve real change.

When fringe ideas take centre stage, mainstream support dwindles. By rejecting practical steps like nuclear energy simply because they don't “dismantle the system,” progressives risk trading impact for ideology. When responsibly managed, nuclear energy is clean and reliable, and electrification cuts emissions. Essential tools for advancing the climate cause are not betrayals of it.

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SPORTS

STRONGSHOW



Vice-Chairman Jijad al Sheikh said the club has retained the team’s core by renewing the contracts of most players. Photo by **FAISAL AL BALUSHI**

OMAN CLUB TARGET TOP POSITION IN 2025–26 OMAN LEAGUE

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 5

Oman Club have announced the completion of their preparations for the 2025–2026 Omantel League season during a press conference held at the club’s headquarters in Al Khuwair, attended by the Board of Directors, technical and administrative staff. The conference reflected a positive atmosphere and clear ambitions, as the club aims to deliver a season befitting its rich history and the progress it has made in recent years.

Jihad bin Abdullah al Sheikh, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors, confirmed that the team’s preparations are progressing positively, noting that the players began assembling at the start of July. New players have been carefully selected to strengthen the squad, in consultation with the club’s football committee. He explained that the club has retained the team’s core by renewing the contracts of most players, while also working to address gaps identified in last season’s line-up.

He added that the squad now consists of 26 players, including young talents from the Olympic team alongside experienced players, with the aim of nurturing youth and providing them with the necessary experience for upcoming seasons. He also indicated the possibility of adding more players in the coming days, pending the technical staff’s evaluation and approval.

Al Sheikh expressed optimism for a strong season, stressing the club’s respect for all league competitors, such as Seeb, Al Nahda, Al Shabab and Dhofar. He affirmed that Oman Club will be a strong contender against these teams. The team recently held a 10-day closed domestic training camp, which included morning and evening sessions to boost players’ physical and technical readiness ahead of the league’s kickoff.

HIGH TECHNICAL AMBITIONS

For his part, Idris al Mourabti, head coach of the first team, expressed his happiness to return to leading the team, confirming the club’s ambition to maintain the strong performance shown in recent seasons. “Last season we finished the league in third place, and this places a great responsibility on us to remain in the top positions and compete strongly this season,” he said.

Al Mourabti praised the players’ discipline and cooperation with the technical staff during the preparation period, affirming that the coaching team is working to develop the players’ technical, skill, and mental aspects. He expressed strong confidence in their ability to deliver an outstanding season that will compel other teams to take Oman Club seriously.

Meanwhile, team captain Mohamed al Ashri confirmed that this season’s preparations build on the past two seasons, during which the team was a strong contender. “Our ambition this season is even greater, and we thank the management for appointing coach Idris al Mourabti, who is a great technical asset to the team. We aim for this season to be a fruitful one after achieving third place last season,” he said.

Al Ashri stressed that the team will enter the league with the ambition to compete for the title, despite the strength of the competition. He acknowledged the pressure, as is the case with all clubs, but emphasised that the team is determined to achieve positive results, starting with their opening match against Dhofar, which they view as a final before the league’s break. The team aims to secure the three points and start their campaign strongly.

OMAN NEED SMART WORK TO ACHIEVE WC DREAM: QUEIROZ



OFA spokesperson Saif al Jabri reiterated the association’s full backing for the coach.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 5

THE newly appointed national team head coach, Carlos Queiroz, voiced strong determination in his strategic vision to lead Oman to its historic debut at the Fifa World Cup 2026 during the first official press conference which took place on Tuesday at the Oman Football Association (OFA) headquarters in Seeb Stadium.

Speaking to media representatives, the experienced Portuguese tactician affirmed that the task ahead is challenging but achievable through collective effort and intelligent preparation. “We will work in a smart way to secure the desired target and register success. Reaching the Fifa World Cup is not just about football but it is about putting Oman’s name, culture and pride on the global map,” he said.

Since arriving in Oman, Queiroz wasted no time in assessing the football landscape. He closely reviewed the domestic players, attended the Super Cup and the recently concluded friendly tournament in Salalah, and held some meetings with local club coaches. “I have already begun a full evaluation of the team and the players. Most of the squad featured in the Salalah tournament. I know the challenges are tough, but I believe in smart work, not just hard work,” he stated.

Queiroz highlighted that the



Carlos Queiroz affirmed that the task ahead is challenging but achievable through collective effort and intelligent preparation.

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CARLOS QUEIROZ
Oman head coach

mission of qualifying to the World Cup is a shared responsibility. “This is a job for everyone including players, clubs, officials, media and fans. If we work against each other, we will fail. But if we come together, we can snatch this golden opportunity. Oman is a nation of five million hearts, but we must beat as one,” he said.

The coach also called on fans to act as the “12th player”, urging them to support the team with passion during both training and matches.

Queiroz stressed the importance of proper preparation, outlining the team’s training schedule. The first domestic camp will begin on Wednesday in Muscat at Seeb Stadium excluding

players from Seeb Club due to their participation in the AFC Champions League Two. A key overseas training camp will follow in Istanbul from August 19, which may include friendly matches including one of them tentatively set for August 27. The squad will then travel to Uzbekistan to participate in the Central Asia tournament before resuming domestic league duties.

The technical staff supporting Queiroz will include Rogerio De Sa as assistant coach, Hamed al Azani as first assistant, Carlos Marques as fitness coach, Vasco Evora as goalkeeper coach, Eduardo Vingada as scouting analyst, Bruno Fidalgo as team/player analyst, and Ibrahim Al Mayahi as assistant analyst.

OFA spokesperson Saif al Jabri reiterated the association’s full backing for the coach. “Queiroz has not come for just two matches. He is here for the long term, and the contract is renewable,” he stated.

Queiroz concluded the press conference by reaffirming his commitment: “I do not have a fixed percentage for success as it depends on our collaboration, our smart work, and our preparation. But rest assured, I will give my best to leave a legacy for Oman football.”

With the final round of the AFC Asian Qualifiers – Road to 26 set to begin in October, Oman are placed in Group A alongside Qatar and the UAE, with all matches scheduled in Doha.

200MVICTORY



Noah Lyles (left) defeats Kenny Bednarek to win the 200m, 19.63 to 19.67, during the USATF Championships at Hayward Field. — *Imagn Images*

LYLES SAYS BEST TO COME AFTER TESTY TRIALS WIN

EUGENE, United States: Noah Lyles believes he is rounding into form at the right time ahead of next month's World Championships in Tokyo after a scintillating world-leading 200m victory at the US trials on Sunday.

Lyles, the reigning Olympic 100m champion, will attempt to defend both his 100m and 200m world crowns in Japan, aiming to emulate Usain Bolt with a fourth consecutive world 200m gold.

The 28-year-old from Florida warmed up for that challenge in Eugene on Sunday by clocking a world-leading 19.63secs in a testy battle with Kenny Bednarek.

Lyles angered Bednarek by turning his head to stare down his rival just before he took the tape. Bednarek shoved Lyles in the back over that apparent taunt. Lyles refused to comment about the flashpoint after his win. "Under coach's orders, no comment," Lyles said before brushing off further attempts to talk about the spat.

Bednarek, though, was more expansive. "That's unsportsmanlike ..., and I don't deal with that," Bednarek said. "I don't deal with any of that stuff. It's not good character."

The feud sets up the possibility of an intriguing rivalry over the remaining months of the season between the two US sprinters.

While both men are planning to run in Europe ahead of the World Championships, they will almost certainly duel again in Tokyo.

Lyles, who has endured a patchy season disrupted by niggling ankle and groin injuries, believes that his best is yet to come and that Sunday's win augurs well for his world championship hopes. "If they ain't gonna beat me now, they ain't gonna beat me ever," Lyles said.

Bednarek, meanwhile, plans to be lying in wait for Lyles in Tokyo. The 26-year-old from Tulsa has three silver medals in the 200m at major championships but is so far waiting for his breakthrough gold. "Next time we line up, I'm gonna win. That's all that matters to me."

Bednarek noted too that while Lyles had run only three races in Eugene — scratching from the 100m after his opening heat — he had raced all five rounds of the 100m and 200m. "I've said it for years, Noah's gonna be Noah. If he wants to stare me down, that's fine. But I ran five rounds, and he was fresh. We can line up again when we're both fresh and let's see what happens — because I'm very confident I can beat him," he said. — *AFP*

ZVEREV, RYBAKINA INTO CANADIAN OPEN SEMIFINALS

ALEXANDER ZVEREV reached his 21st Masters 1000 semifinal on Monday by ending the Canadian title defence of Alexei Popyrin 6-7 (8/10), 6-4, 6-3 at the ATP Toronto Masters. The final game, with Zverev serving at 5-3, was interrupted by shouts from an unruly fan who was tossed out by security.

The distraction ended a run of 14 consecutive points on serve, with the seed double faulting once he was able to continue serving. He finished off the evening with a sharp volley winner at the net on his first match point.

Zverev completed his 40th win of the year in just over two and a half hours.

The world number three won the tournament in 2017 but had not been past the quarterfinals in Canada since.

"After losing the first set, I had to tell myself we were both playing well," the holder of seven Masters trophies said.

"I had one or two mistakes at the end of the first, but it was a high-level match.

"I felt that if I kept playing well, I would get my chances — and I did. I can't complain about the second and third sets."

Zverev will bid for the oddly scheduled Thursday final against three time semifinalist Karen Khachanov, who dismissed young American Alex Michelsen 6-4, 7-6 (7/3). "It was a very close, competitive match," Khachanov said. "I had to come back from some tough situations.

"How you handle that mentally is important. I was glad to close it out in the second set.

"I had to try and not give him the opportunity to step in and attack; that's what I did today."

Zverev has won five of the seven matches he has played against Khachanov. Popyrin and Zverev duelled throughout



Alexander Zverev (GER) serves to Alexei Popyrin (AUS) during quarterfinal play at Sobeys Stadium. — *Imagn Images*



Elena Rybakina (KAZ) returns the ball to Dayana Yastremska (UKR) in fourth round play at IGA Stadium. — *Imagn Images*



Victoria Mboko (CAN) reacts after winning her fourth round match against Coco Gauff (USA) at IGA Stadium. — *Imagn Images*

the evenly matched 71-minute opening set as it went into a tiebreaker. Zverev was unable to convert on two winning chances, but Popyrin came good on his own second opportunity with a net cord winner that caught his opponent stranded at the baseline. The German began to turn the tables in the second set, taking a 4-1 lead only to see the Aussie level at 4-all. Zverev pulled away to level the match at a set apiece, breaking for 6-4 as Popyrin sent a volley wide. The top seed began the final set with a 3-0 lead on his way into the tournament final four at the pre-US Open event.

Popyrin remains winless against Zverev after losing all four of their matches.

RYBAKINA TO FACE TEEN MBOKO

Elena Rybakina, the 2022 Wimbledon champion, and Canadian teen Victoria Mboko advanced to a WTA Canadian Open semifinal matchup with triumphs on Monday in the Montreal hard court event.

World number 12 Rybakina of Kazakhstan led 6-1, 2-1 when Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk retired in the second set with a wrist injury.

Mboko, the shocker of the event, dispatched Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 6-4, 6-2 by taking the final six games to reach her first WTA 1000 semifinal in pursuit of her first trip to a WTA final.

"I'm so excited to be in the semifinal here," Mboko told the supportive home nation crowd. "I want to thank everyone for your support once again. It has been unreal."

Rybakina won their only prior meeting 6-3, 7-5 last month in the second round at Washington. The top five seeds and seven of the top 10 seeds were ousted before the quarterfinals, opening the door for such upstarts as 18-year-old Mboko, who eliminated top seed Coco Gauff.

World number 85 Mboko, who began the year raked 333rd in the world, has ensured herself a jump into the top 50 for the first time in her career next week.

Mboko broke 51st-ranked Bouzas Maneiro for a 5-3 lead. The Spaniard broke back in the ninth game only to drop the first set after 43 minutes when Mboko broke again.

Bouzas Maneiro broke to open the second set then held but Mboko never dropped a game from there, taking the match after 77 minutes when the Spaniard sent a backhand beyond the baseline.

The crowd, which chanted "it's not over" in French after the match, has been the best part of the amazing run, Mboko said.

"I train here (in Canada) and it's always a great opportunity to be here," Mboko said. "My first time playing in Montreal has been an unreal experience and I couldn't be more grateful."

Rybakina, seeded ninth, seeks her third WTA title after Rome and Indian Wells in 2023. She has not reached a final since last year at Miami.

Rybakina broke 24th-seeded Kostyuk to open the match and led 2-1 when Kostyuk received medical treatment on her right wrist and forearm.

In the second set, Rybakina held twice before Kostyuk retired after 54 minutes due to her wrist issues, walking off the court in tears. — *AFP*

Summer Football Programme concludes in Muscat

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 5

The Football Training Centre concluded its activities as part of the Summer Sports Days Programme in Muscat Governorate, organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), with a five-a-side football tournament featuring the participation of 50 players.

The tournament was marked by a high level of challenge and competitiveness, with players showing notable improvement in performance and skills thanks to the intensive training programme that spanned a month and a half since its launch on June 29. The sessions were held at the main hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

The centre catered to two age groups: the first from 7 to 11 years old, and the second from 12 to 16 years old, with each group attracting over 100 participants. This turnout reflects the programme's significant success in engaging young talents



The 'Sports Caravan' will take place in Quriyat in mid-August.

and honing their football abilities. The training sessions incorporated a variety of technical and physical exercises, in addition to tactical drills simulating real match scenarios.

Mohammed al Subhi, Supervisor of the Summer Sports Days Training Centres at Sultan Qaboos Sports

Complex in Bausher, confirmed that the Five-a-Side Football Centre has witnessed strong participation since its inception. Al Subhi pointed out that the centre's conclusion coincided with the wrap-up of other training centres last week, the most notable being the Women's Training Centre, which, for the first time, saw

a record participation of 230 girls, reflecting the growing interest in women's sports. The Gymnastics Centre also concluded, attracting participants of various ages, along with the Tennis and Table Tennis Centres.

He also explained that the management introduced a

new Tennis Centre this year in cooperation with the Oman Tennis Association, where a mini indoor tennis court was set up to overcome the summer heat.

Al Subhi highlighted that the training centres focused on utilising young Omani talents in coaching and administration, in cooperation with the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University (Physical Education Department) as well as physical education teachers.

He concluded by pointing to upcoming events in Muscat's Summer Programme, including the 'Sports Caravan', which will take place in Qurayat in mid-August. This travelling event aims to promote physical activity in local communities. Additionally, the major annual event 'Ghaya'tuh Namshi' (Its Goal is to Walk) will return at one of the major shopping malls in a more comprehensive format this year, featuring interactive sports stations and family competitions.

SPORTS

FIRSTLOOK



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah in action. — Reuters

SALAH SCORES AS LIVERPOOL UNLEASH £270M NEW SIGNINGS

LONDON: Liverpool showcased £270 million (\$359million) worth of new signings in the 3-2 friendly victory over Athletic Bilbao but the goals still went to established Premier League winners Mohamed Salah — who also missed a late penalty — and Cody Gakpo.

Florian Wirtz's first look at Anfield gave fans a glimpse of why the club made him their — and with add-ons potentially a British-record signing with some clever touches and interplay and almost the opening goal.

Head coach Arne Slot believes the Germany international will replace the creativity they lost from the departure of Trent Alexander Arnold to Real Madrid.

"I think there is always room for improvement in every department and we have added a few, in my opinion, extra weapons," said the Dutchman.

"Florian has a lot of creativity in the final third and we have lost with Trent a lot of creativity from the back."

"Trent's crosses and picking out runners was so special — Flo has this quality in a totally different position. He brings that creativity."

Wirtz's fellow new signings also showed they were settling in well as Jeremie Frimpong linked up well with Salah, fellow full-back Milos Kerkez was solid and Hugo Ekitike showed flexibility across the forward line.

Wirtz headed onto the crossbar before Ekitike crossed for Salah to fire home and Gakpo scored twice after the break after Oihan Sancet had levelled.

Liverpool went into the double-header with just one recognised centre back with Virgil van Dijk ill and Joe Gomez injured and looked vulnerable at set pieces, with Maroan Sannadi heading an equaliser from a corner.

"The other games pre-season we have conceded a few too many chances but today we hardly conceded anything at all and that pleased me as well," added Slot.

"So to concede two set piece goals in the second game is not what you want, especially if you play Crystal Palace next week who are a team who are very strong on set pieces. That's another thing to work on."

In both matches Diogo Jota, who died in a car crash last month, was remembered with fans standing and clapping and singing the forward's song. When the clock showed 20, action on the pitch also halted as players and officials joined in the applause.

Liverpool's second string won 4-1 earlier, after an erroneous fire alarm had evacuated the Main Stand before kick-off, with 16-year-oldRio Ngumoha continuing his impressive pre-season form with a goal after just 87 seconds.

Ben Doak, three years his senior, also scored while there were goals for Darwin Nunez and Harvey Elliott, two players whose futures appear to be away from Anfield.

Nunez, who has been linked with Al Hilal for a while with AC Milan also opening talks over the Uruguay international, thumped the badge on his shirt in front of the Kop while Elliott was the last to leave the pitch having blown kisses to all four sides of the ground. — dpa



Team Shito-Ryu Oman Karate Do Kai athletes pose with their medals.

Team Shito-Ryu Oman make history in Singapore

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
@anuroop_ath

TEAM Shito-Ryu Oman Karate Do Kai made history in the 14th Shito-Ryu International Karate Championship 2025 held in Singapore recently by claiming a record haul of 13 medals.

The Muscat-based team – represented by 11 athletes and led by coach Shihan Bava Ahamed – bagged four gold, six silver and three bronze medals in kara and kumite categories.

Majid al Battashi, Chairman of Shito-Ryu Oman centre, congratulated the athletes and the support staff for the remarkable achievement.

"It is a great honour for us to congratulate the athletes for the great performance of our team. The team made all of us in Oman proud by winning 13 medals, under the leadership of the esteemed coach Shihan Bava Ahamed."

Team manager, Sherly C Mathew, said it was a challenge and honour to prepare the athletes for the world championship-level event at Our Tampines Hub Indoor Stadium in Singapore from July 25 to 27.

"As the team manager, the responsibility of preparing our athletes for the event was both a challenge and a great honour. Today, I return to Oman with deep satisfaction, proud of what our team has accomplished on the international stage.

"Congratulations to all the team members for their dedication and performance. My sincere gratitude goes to their supportive parents, our coach Shihan Bava Ahamed, and our captain Renshi Haleen Sree Hruday, whose leadership was invaluable.

"A special thanks to our respected Chairman Majid al Battashi for his unwavering support and vision, and to the Oman Karate Committee for empowering Shito-Ryu Karate to reach such heights. It was a proud moment to see the Oman flag held high among the nations of the world. Let this success inspire many more young talents in Oman to dream big and aim high through the spirit of karate."

Haleen Sree Hruday, Team Captain, said the tournament was a



Shaima al Shali with coach Shihan Bava Ahamed.



Gold-winner Shaima al Shali on the podium.

The Muscat-based team – represented by 11 athletes and led by coach Shihan Bava Ahamed – bagged four gold, six silver and three bronze medals in kara and kumite categories in the 14th Shito-Ryu International Karate Championship 2025.

great experience.

"Standing at the helm as team captain during Taikai 2025 has been an experience I will cherish for years to come. Witnessing the incredible performance and results achieved by our team fills me with immense pride. Each student's unwavering dedication, discipline and resilience were on full display, and it is their hard work that truly made this journey remarkable."

DOUBLE GOLD

Shaima al Shali, 15, was a star of the team with two gold medals in kata and kumite.

"After months of hard and consistent training, I'm truly happy with what I achieved. Every session, every struggle it was all worth it.

"The whole experience was unforgettable. On July 26, we had

the seminar full of energy, learning, and inspiration. Then on the July 27, the competition brought out the best in every athlete. I met so many amazing participants and coaches from all around the world and I'm so proud of every single player for giving their absolute best."

"I'd like to give a special thank you to our team coach Shihan Bava Ahamed, team manager Sherly Mathew, and our team captain Haleen Sree Hruday for their constant support and guidance. I'm also extremely grateful to our chairman, Majid al Battashi, for believing in me and helping make this journey possible."

"I'm so proud to be a part of this amazing team, and of course, a huge thank you to my parents and the entire Shito-Ryu Oman team none of this would've been possible without your love, support, and encouragement," Shaima added.

Shaima's father Ahmed al Shaliyya praised the team management and the coach for helping the players achieve good results.

Muhammad Umar Qureshi won a bronze in the highly-competitive event.

"It was quite a learning experience for me personally. I underwent my Dan belt grading this year and achieved my Second Dan Black Belt certificate. I also competed in Kata and Kumite, where I won a bronze medal in Kumite—not the result I expected, but you either win or you learn."

"I think I can say this for all of us: this Taikai was a great success for Team Oman. We all worked very hard for this tournament. We met fellow practitioners from around the world, made many new friends, and had the privilege of learning from masters of the craft, skilled coaches, and instructors."

Rashika Ramesh Kumar, a participant, reflected that this Taikai will remain an unforgettable event, full of learning.

"Our team had trained hard for the Shito Ryu International Taikai event in Singapore, and our efforts paid off really well. We also had the opportunity to take part in the seminar and interact with the international karate community. The experience was wholesome and insightful."

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SHORT TAKES



Private vehicles made up the largest share of the total, accounting for 79.3% or 1,425,308 vehicles.

VEHICLE REGISTRATIONS IN OMAN RISE BY 5.5% IN H1 2025

MUSCAT: The number of registered vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 5.5% year-on-year to reach 1,798,062 by the end of June 2025, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Private vehicles made up the largest share of the total, accounting for 79.3% or 1,425,308 vehicles. Commercial vehicles followed with 264,913 registrations (14.7%), while rental vehicles represented 2.3%, or 41,386 vehicles.

The remaining registrations were distributed among taxis, government vehicles and others.

White remained the most popular vehicle colour, representing 42.3% of the total or 761,358 vehicles.

Silver was the second most common with 12.9% (231,822 vehicles), followed by grey with 181,140 registrations.

In terms of engine size, vehicles with capacities ranging from 1,500 to 3,000 cm³ were the most common, accounting for 54.5% of the total or 979,300 vehicles.

Vehicles with engines between 3,001 and 4,500 cm³ followed with 22.2% or 399,770 units.

By weight, the majority of vehicles — 90.7% or 1,631,392 units — fell under the category of vehicles weighing less than three tonnes, highlighting a continued preference for lighter private and commercial vehicles in Oman. — ONA

Oman advances CO₂, green hydrogen pipeline studies

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 5

OQGN, the majority state-owned natural gas pipeline operator, has announced significant progress in its mandate to roll out dedicated pipelines for green hydrogen and carbon dioxide (CO₂), in support of Oman's energy transition strategy.

Publicly traded OQGN — part of Oman's integrated energy group OQ — stated in its newly issued 2024 Sustainability Report that its initiatives are aligned with national strategies to develop new low-carbon industries focused on green hydrogen production and Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) technologies, both of which are key to Oman's Net-Zero 2050 targets.

This commitment aligns with OQGN's designation as a National Champion for Green Hydrogen and CO₂ Transportation, conferred by Hydrom, the state-run architect of Oman's green hydrogen industry.

"We are (...) actively exploring opportunities in hydrogen and carbon capture infrastructure, aligning with global energy trends shaping the future of our industry", said Mansoor al Abdali, CEO of OQGN. "Looking ahead, we are poised to play a central role in Oman's energy future. As we invest in network



'We launched detailed feasibility studies focused on establishing the technical, commercial and regulatory aspects of the pipeline networks': OQGN

expansion, digitalisation and decarbonisation initiatives, we remain aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and its sustainability goals", he added in the CEO's Message.

In 2024, OQGN began working closely with key industry stakeholders to establish itself as "the partner of choice for hydrogen and CO₂ pipeline transportation". As part of this ambition, the company initiated collaborations with CCUS developers to create commercial-scale projects that address CO₂ transportation

needs. "We also launched detailed feasibility studies focused on establishing the technical, commercial and regulatory aspects of the pipeline networks", the company stated.

Furthermore, in collaboration with Hydrom, OQGN has been leveraging its extensive pipeline expertise in the development of Oman's hydrogen and CO₂ transportation infrastructure.

Central to this initiative is a vision for an open-access pipeline connecting green

hydrogen production blocks (powered by wind and solar) with derivative plants located along the coast for efficient processing and export.

"This hydrogen pipeline network is being developed in coordination with Hydrom's planned projects in Al Duqm, Salalah and Al Jazir. As domestic demand for low-carbon hydrogen grows, the network will expand to serve industrial clusters in northern and eastern Oman", OQGN noted.

"In an additional step, an open-access CO₂ pipeline network will also link emission sources to sinks. As natural gas demand declines, stranded natural gas pipelines may be repurposed and recommissioned as part of the green hydrogen transportation network", the company added.

According to OQGN, a comprehensive long-term Decarbonisation Strategy is currently in place to accelerate the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across the company.

"The strategy drives us towards the goal of Net-Zero by 2050, with ambitious interim targets: a 42% reduction in GHG emissions by 2030 and 82% by 2040.

These milestones have been set with consideration for emerging technologies, evolving regulations, shifting stakeholder expectations and our investment strategy — while also balancing urgency with feasibility", it stated.

Suwaiq Port cargo volume nears 400K tonnes in H1 2025

AL SUWAIQ: Suwaiq Port in Al Batinah North Governorate recorded significant growth in cargo traffic during the first half of 2025, handling a total of 399,615 tonnes — up from 374,168 tonnes during the same period last year.

The number of vessels received also increased, with 429 ships docking at the port compared to 408 in the first half of 2024.

However, the volume of dry bulk cargo declined to 243,359 tonnes from 286,278 tonnes a year earlier. In contrast, the handling of foodstuffs — including vegetables, fruits and other consumer goods — rose to 54,401 tonnes, up from 47,291 tonnes in the same period of 2024.

Engineer Samir bin Ghulam al Balushi, Director of Suwaiq Port, said that the increase in overall traffic reflects operational improvements across the facility.

These include enhanced unloading and loading efficiencies, upgraded handling procedures and the deployment of modern



ENG SAMIR BIN
GHULAM AL
BALUSHI

Director of Suwaiq
Port

commodities handled at the port, alongside construction materials, machinery and general cargo.

Development works are under way to boost operational efficiency, including the reorganisation of internal yards, upgrades to security and inspection systems; and enhancements to electronic operating platforms.

Al Balushi confirmed that preliminary studies for the port's expansion project are nearly

complete, with administrative processes currently being finalised to begin implementation.

The project is intended to align with Suwaiq Port's growth trajectory and support future demand.

Suwaiq Port is designed to handle small and medium-sized



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vessels with capacities of up to 10,000 tonnes. Strategically located between Muscat and Suhar; and in close proximity to Khazaen Dry Port, it serves as a critical logistics corridor for regional trade and distribution.

The port facilitates the movement of goods and food

products to both local and regional markets, as well as international markets in the Indian subcontinent and the Horn of Africa.

Through its ports and free zones, Asyad Group continues to work on strengthening Suwaiq Port's capabilities, enhancing service quality and boosting marketing efforts locally and abroad.

These efforts are part of the group's broader strategy to deliver integrated logistics solutions and embed Al Suwaiq within the national and global logistics network, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

Suwaiq Port is designed to handle small and medium-sized vessels with capacities of up to 10,000 tonnes. Strategically located between Muscat and Sohar, and in close proximity to Khazaen Dry Port, it serves as a critical logistics corridor for regional trade and distribution.

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ADVERTORIALS

SUSTAINEDSTRENGTH

AHLIBANK
ANNOUNCES
FINANCIAL RESULTS
FOR H1 2025



SAID ABDULLAH
AL HATMI
CEO of ahlibank

MUSCAT: Amidst the positive momentum witnessed by the Omani economy, ahlibank announced its interim financial results for the first half of 2025, reflecting sustained strength across both operational and financial indicators.

This performance is the result of a forward-thinking strategy anchored in innovation, sustainability, and deeply rooted values. Throughout its journey, ahlibank upheld its distinguished track record through high-quality financing initiatives, advanced digital offerings, and socially driven programmes, demonstrating its steadfast commitment to serving the nation and addressing the evolving needs of its diverse stakeholders. As the ‘Partner in Excellence’, the bank continues to shape meaningful progress across the financial landscape.

During the six-month period ending June 30, 2025, ahlibank recorded notable gains across all key performance metrics, demonstrating a consistent upward trajectory compared to the same period in 2024. Net loans, advances, and financing rose by 12.7% to RO 3,161.7 million, driven by strong demand across both retail and corporate segments.

Total assets increased by 13.6%, reaching RO 3,911.5 million, reflecting the bank’s expanded portfolio and prudent balance sheet growth. Customer deposits advanced by 15.6% to RO 3,020.4 million, supported by growing customer trust, sustained engagement, and the bank’s solid market positioning.

Operating income climbed 13.1% to RO 57.26 million, while operating expenses rose by 14.6% to RO 24.60 million during the same period. Net profit for the first half of 2025 stood at RO 22.36 million, marking a 10.7% year-on-year increase. These outcomes highlight the bank’s disciplined execution of its strategic agenda and its capacity to deliver sustainable value across a broad-based performance spectrum.

Commenting on the bank’s performance, Said Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO of ahlibank, stated: “Our first-half results for 2025 reflect our clear strategic direction, relentless innovation, and the enduring trust of our stakeholders. We are proud to support Oman’s economic vision while maintaining sustainable growth across our operational and banking solutions.”

During the first half of 2025, ahlibank continued to strengthen its contribution to driving economic growth in the Sultanate of Oman through its pivotal role in financing strategic projects in the renewable energy sector. These efforts support the nation’s objective of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The bank also reinforced its leading position in the capital markets by successfully managing the issuance of sovereign sukuk on behalf of the Government of Oman, a testament to investors’ strong confidence in the bank’s financial expertise and capabilities.

Additionally, ahlibank affirmed its leadership in the debt capital market by managing the issuance of Tier 1 perpetual bonds for United Finance Company, the first such issuance in Oman’s leasing and finance sector in recent years.

OOREDOO
DRIVES
SMART CITY
VISION WITH
ADVANCED
INDOOR 5G
TEST

MUSCAT: Ooredoo has successfully tested a next-generation indoor 5G solution at Muscat Grand Mall, marking the first-ever deployment of compact 5G indoor radio units in Oman.

Achieving download speeds exceeding 1 Gbps, Ooredoo set a new benchmark in Q1 2025 for indoor mobile performance in high-capacity venues. Dr Jihad bin Ahmed al Ansari, Acting Chief Technology and Information Officer at Ooredoo, commented: “This milestone highlights our commitment to bringing innovative connectivity to Oman.

By pioneering indoor 5G, we are delivering a future-ready experience that meets the digital needs of our customers while laying the foundation for smarter venues and more connected communities.”

The project was led by Ooredoo technical teams, in close collaboration with building management at Muscat Grand Mall, who facilitated the deployment.



DR JIHAD BIN
AHMED AL ANSARI

Acting Chief
Technology and
Information
Officer at Ooredoo.

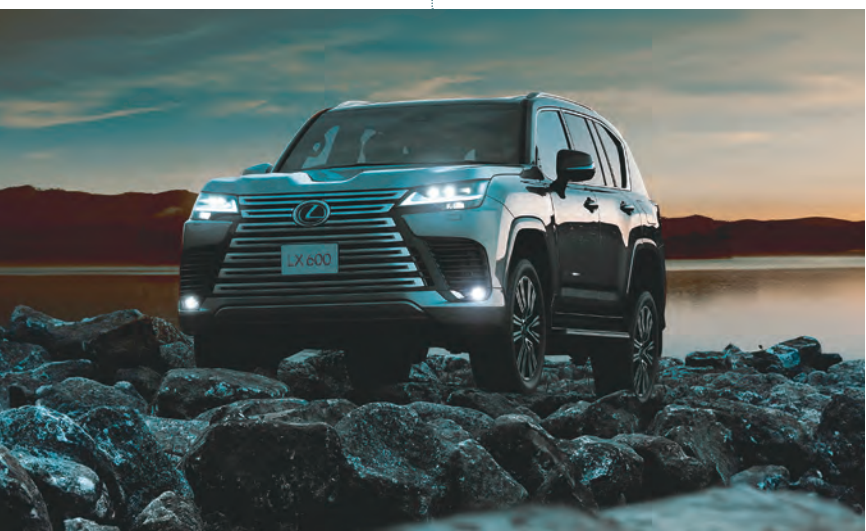
The test also leveraged advanced radio technology provided by Ooredoo’s strategic partner, Huawei. Together, the teams delivered a live mall deployment that enhanced end-user experiences with significantly improved indoor speed and coverage, demonstrating the strength of collaboration in advancing digital infrastructure. This achievement brings Ooredoo’s vision of advancing Oman’s smart city ambitions and modern infrastructure development, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Shine in the bold and
powerful Lexus LX600

MAKE every experience extraordinary with a Lexus LX600, the bold, daring large-size SUV that is designed to enhance lifestyles. The LX600 surpasses all expectations in comfort with luxurious interiors, high-performance with its muscular appearance and captivating features. The SUV brings a new-paradigm of luxury for those who seek pure perfection.

Designed to impress and powered by a mighty 3.5L turbocharged 6-cylinder engine, the SUV delivers high performance with rugged capabilities at its core.

Mated to a 10-speed automatic transmission, the Lexus LX600 is equipped with advanced safety features that include Active Height Control with Adaptive Variable Suspension, Panoramic View Monitor, Multi-Terrain Mode with 4 Cameras, Blind Spot Monitor (BSM), for a



The SUV brings a new-paradigm of luxury for those who seek pure perfection.

balanced and smooth drive.

For an immersive driving experience, Inside the Lexus, it introduces the head-up display leather and wood wrapped steering wheel, enabling better focus and clarity of the road ahead.

The 25-Speaker Mark

Levinson Audio system to lift the ride mood and the Kick Sensor for Hands-free backdoor opening when your hands are full. To make things more interesting, the built-in 11.6” Dual Rear Seat Entertainment Screens with 2 Headphones and heated/ventilated front and rear

seats take comfort to the next level.

Moreover, the Lexus Safety Sense features the Pre-Collision System, Lane Departure Alert, Lane Tracing Assist, SRS Airbags for improved protection including Knee Airbags - Driver + Passenger, and a Tyre Pressure Warning System to thwart life-threatening situations.

Every ride is a delight in the Lexus LX600. To know more details and experience the LX600, head to your nearest Saud Bahwan Automotive Showroom and take a test drive.

For more information, please visit [www.lexusoman.com] (<http://www.lexusoman.com>), subscribe to the YouTube channel “Lexus Oman,” like Lexus Oman on Facebook, or follow @Oman. Lexus on Instagram. For further details and to confirm stock availability, please visit your nearest Saud Bahwan Automotive Showroom or call 99427102.

PREPARATIONS LAUNCHED FOR 2ND SUHAR INVESTMENT FORUM

MUSCAT: The organising committee of the Suhar Investment Forum has officially announced the start of preparations for the forthcoming edition of the forum, scheduled to take place on February 4–5, 2026.

The theme of the Forum is ‘Suhar: Industrial Investment Destination.’ This step reflects the growing ambition to reinforce Suhar’s position as an advanced industrial hub and a leading investment destination in the region.

The announcement was made during the first meeting of the forum’s organising committee, chaired by Eng Said bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry – Al Batinah North Branch.

The meeting included representatives from various public and private sector entities involved in investment and industrial development across the Sultanate of Oman.



ENG SAID BIN
ALI AL ABRI

OCCI chairman –
North Al Batinah
branch

Memoranda of Understanding and served as an effective platform for dialogue between investors and decision-makers while presenting promising investment opportunities in Al Batinah North

During the meeting, the committee discussed key focus areas for the upcoming edition, including building on the notable success of the previous forum, which saw wide regional and international participation.

The 2024 edition of Suhar Investment Forum led to the signing of multiple

Governorate. In this context, Al Abri emphasised that the upcoming forum will highlight the industrial sector as a core pillar for achieving economic diversification.

He noted that the forum would serve as a strategic platform for displaying industrial investment opportunities, strengthening public-private partnerships, and attracting high-value investments in sectors with strong value-added potential.

He further highlighted Oman’s competitive advantages that enhance its investment appeal—chief among them being its strategic geographic location linking Asia, Africa, and Europe; advanced infrastructure including integrated ports, airports, and logistics networks; as well as the availability of specialised industrial zones, and well-designed legislative and economic incentives.

Meethaq Islamic banking crowned best Islamic bank in Oman

MUSCAT: Reinforcing its leadership in Sharia-compliant banking and financial solutions across both retail and corporate customers, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has been awarded as the “Best Islamic Bank in Oman 2025” title at the Euromoney Private Banking Awards.

This accolade reflects Meethaq’s significant role in offering innovative Sharia-compliant banking services and facilities tailored to the diverse needs of its customers.

On this occasion, Ali Ahmed al Lawati, Assistant General Manager – Meethaq Corporate Banking, expressed his pride in



This accolade reflects Meethaq’s significant role in offering innovative Sharia-compliant banking services.

the ongoing global recognition Meethaq continues to receive. He noted: “We are deeply honoured by this recognition, which reflects Meethaq’s pioneering role in the industry by offering comprehensive solutions that meet the varied requirements of customers.

Meethaq has significantly contributed to reshaping the Islamic banking landscape in the Sultanate of Oman, evident in the trust and strong uptake from customers for the Meethaq’s Sharia-compliant financial solutions, while maintaining a commitment to excellence and innovation.

Meethaq will continue upholding its ongoing dedication to delivering

distinguished and forward-thinking Islamic banking solutions aligned with customers’ aspirations and financial goals.”

Meethaq provides a full suite of Sharia-compliant banking products and financing solutions designed to serve the needs of individuals, SMEs, and corporate entities.

All offerings are subject to the regulatory framework of the Central Bank of Oman and undergo thorough Sharia audit and supervision by Meethaq’s Sharia Supervisory Board to ensure full compliance with Islamic jurisprudence.

The Sharia-compliant offerings which Meethaq provides to its

retail customers include deposit products such as savings accounts, current accounts, children’s savings accounts, and Meethaq’s structured savings plans.

On the financing offerings, Meethaq offers a range of Islamic finance facilities including personal finance, auto finance, home finance, and funding for travel, education, marriage, and personal purchases.

For its SME and corporate customers, Meethaq provides a variety of commercial banking solutions including current accounts, project finance, short-term and long-term financing facilities, trade finance based on “Ijarah”, and large-scale project financing.

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES

Oman and Mongolia explore investment opportunities



The meeting highlighted the strong and growing relationship between Oman and Mongolia.

ULAANBAATAR: Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, held a high-level meeting with Batsetseg Batmunkh, Mongolia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, to discuss ways to deepen bilateral relations and explore new avenues for cooperation, particularly in the economic and investment sectors.

The meeting, held in the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar, highlighted the strong and growing relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Mongolia.

Both parties reviewed opportunities to establish partnerships in key sectors and discussed mechanisms to enhance coordination and expand collaboration in the near future.

Also present at the meeting was Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Hinai, Ambassador at the Foreign Ministry of Oman. — ONA

Oman delegation visits UAE Space Agency



The visit aimed to enhance joint cooperation between the two sides in the space sector.

ABU DHABI: An Omani delegation, headed by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, on Tuesday paid an official visit to the UAE Space Agency and some of the vital facilities related to the sector.

The visit aimed to enhance joint cooperation between the two sides in the space sector, review the most prominent achievements and successful experiences achieved by the UAE in developing this strategic sector and explore opportunities for cooperation and partnerships between academic institutions and specialised companies in the two brotherly countries. — ONA

MSX Index closes 0.36 per cent up

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) 30 Index closed on Tuesday at 4,817.01 points, up 17.1 points, compared to the last trading session’s close of 4,799.87 points. Trading value reached RO 23,483,011, a decrease of 32.1% compared to the last trading session’s value of RO 34,559,970. MSX indicated that market capitalisation increased by 0.465 % compared to the last trading day, reaching approximately RO 29.31 billion. The value of non-Omani purchases on the stock exchange amounted to RO 1,022,000, representing 4.35%, while the value of non-Omani sales amounted to RO 1,211,000, representing 5.16%. — ONA

SINGLED OUT

India accuses EU, US of double standard



India has sharply criticised the US and the EU, saying it is being unfairly singled out by them over its Russian oil purchases when they both trade with Moscow despite the war in Ukraine. India’s criticism followed a renewed threat by US President Donald Trump on Monday to raise tariffs on goods from India over its Russian oil purchases, deepening the trade rift between the two countries. — Reuters

COUNTERED CONCERN

Oil slips on weaker global demand



Oil slipped about 1 per cent on Tuesday as rising Opec+ supply and worries of weaker global demand countered concern about US President Donald Trump’s threats to India over its Russian oil purchases. Brent crude futures were down 70 cents, or 1 per cent, to \$68.06 a barrel at 10:52 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude slipped 79 cents, or 1.2 per cent, to \$65.50. — Reuters

GROWING EXPECTATIONS

Gold hovers near two-week high



Gold slipped on Tuesday due to an uptick in the dollar, though prices remained near a two-week high on growing expectations of a US rate cut in September. Spot gold was down 0.2% at \$3,365.45 per ounce. US gold futures were unchanged at \$3,423.20. The dollar index rose 0.2% from a one-week low hit, reducing gold’s appeal to other currency holders. — Reuters

Alara secures licence for second copper project

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 5

ALARA Resources Limited, a base and precious metals explorer and producer listed on the Australian Securities Exchange, has announced the award of a mining licence over the Daris 3A5 prospect, part of the Daris Copper-Gold Project in Oman. The licence, granted by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, represents a significant step forward in Alara’s strategy to expand its copper mining footprint in the Sultanate.

The newly granted licence is the second awarded to an Alara joint venture in Oman, reinforcing the company’s position in the country’s growing mining sector. The licence covers a 0.65 km² portion of Block 7, a mineral-rich zone located approximately 150 km west of Muscat.

The Daris Copper-Gold Project is operated by Daris Resources LLC, a joint venture in which Alara holds a 50 per cent stake and management rights, with an option to increase its interest to 70 per cent.

In a statement by Alara Resources, the company noted that the mining licence followed a thorough and lengthy approval process, which involved extensive technical assessments and stakeholder consultations. It emphasised that while the licence allows for future mining activities, further exploration work is still required to determine whether potentially economic mineralisation exists at the Daris 3A5 site.

“This Announcement does not imply that potentially economic mineralisation has been discovered at Daris 3A5,”



The licence covers a 0.65 km² portion of Block 7, a mineral-rich zone. Image for illustration only.

the company clarified. “Further exploration is required to ascertain whether economic mineralisation exists at this prospect.”

Initial exploration work carried out by Alara between 2010 and 2012, which included airborne electromagnetic (VTEM) surveys, ground magnetic surveys, and diamond drilling, confirmed high-grade copper mineralisation at the Daris 3A5 prospect.

Notable drill intercepts included 3.45 metres at 10.28% copper, 17.2 metres at 8.05% copper, and 30.75 metres at 4.69% copper. These promising results laid the groundwork for the mining licence application submitted in 2013.

Looking ahead, Alara plans a comprehensive development programme over the next 12 months to define the resource and prepare for potential mining operations.

This includes conducting new geophysical surveys, further diamond drilling, and metallurgical test work to evaluate recovery potential. Should the findings warrant

it, the company aims to issue a mineral resource estimate and reserve classification under the JORC Code, alongside detailed mine planning and potential toll treatment agreements with existing copper processing facilities in Oman.

Commenting on the development, Alara Managing Director Atmavireshwar Sthapak said: “The award of the Daris 3A5 Mining License marks another pivotal achievement for Alara and reaffirms our deep commitment to the Sultanate of Oman’s mining industry.

Over the past 15 years Alara has delivered consistently – from completing exploration programs and feasibility studies to building Oman’s first copper mine and processing facility at Wash-hi Majaza.

Daris 3A5 is poised to become our second copper mining operation, and we are excited to unlock further value for our shareholders.” He also expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Alara’s joint venture partners, and the company’s staff for their role in advancing the project.

Supporting the sentiment, Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani, Chairman of Al Tamman Trading and Establishment, which is part of the joint venture, said: “We are excited by the granting of the Daris 3A5 Mining License, which represents a significant step forward for the development of Oman’s mining sector.

This achievement is the result of close collaboration between our team, Alara, and the Government authorities...

The Daris project reflects our shared vision of building a sustainable and economically impactful mining industry in the Sultanate of Oman.”

The Daris 3A5 licence award comes at a time when Oman is prioritising the development of its mining and minerals sector as part of its Vision 2040 economic diversification strategy.

Alara’s progress not only signals investor confidence in the country’s mineral potential but also adds momentum to broader efforts to establish Oman as a hub for copper production in the region.

Duqm Summer Series off to a flying start

AI DUQM: SEZAD kicked off the Duqm Summer Series on Tuesday, spotlighting AI and automation as key drivers of local business innovation. The inaugural session, featuring Saeed Abdul Ghafoor, CEO, Star Drones offered practical insights into successfully integrating AI into operations.

Abdul Ghafoor, whose company built TARIQ, Oman’s first locally manufactured drone, emphasised the transformative potential of AI-driven innovation.

“Integrating AI isn’t just about deploying technology it’s about creating a new mindset”, Abdul Ghafoor remarked. “At Star Drones, we’ve seen AI-driven automation cut operational downtime by 40% and improve yield accuracy by nearly 30%. This isn’t just innovation for innovation’s sake, it genuinely enhances productivity”. Eng Ahmed Akaak, CEO, SEZAD, highlighted the urgency of adopting AI more broadly in



SAAAD ABDUL GHAFOOR

CEO, Star Drones

manufacturing and related sectors.

“Companies globally are seeing unprecedented benefits from AI and AI Duqm is perfectly positioned to replicate and even exceed these successes,” Akaak noted.

“Today, the focus isn’t merely on theoretical applications but on practical strategies that deliver tangible outcomes for businesses”.

International data supports this. According to McKinsey & Company’s 2024 research, manufacturers deploying AI see, on average, productivity increases of up to 45%, alongside cost reductions nearing 20%.

Moreover, the World Economic Forum reports that advanced AI adopters in its Global Lighthouse Network achieve reductions in material waste by 30% and emissions by as much as 50%.

“AI adoption is no longer optional, it’s a fundamental element of competitive advantage”, Akaak added.

“Through the Duqm Summer Series, we’re ensuring our local business leaders can effectively translate global lessons into local successes”.

The next session in the Duqm Summer Series will be held at 1 pm on Tuesday, August 12. Led by Development Bank’s Aful Afi, the session will address workplace development, continuing SEZAD’s commitment to practical, impactful discussion. To attend the Duqm Summer Series, please register: <https://shorturl.at/uKJ0a>

OPINION

Renewables surge, but REN21 warns of systemic gaps



NAJAH AL RIYAMI

The writer is a Media and Communication Master's graduate.

GLOBAL renewable energy deployment reached an all-time high in 2024, with 740 gigawatts (GW) of new capacity added — more than in any previous year. Solar PV led the momentum, accounting for over 80% of that growth and helping renewables supply nearly a third of the world's electricity.

The numbers are impressive, but according to a new international report, they're still not enough.

The Renewables 2025 Global Status Report, published in June by REN21 (Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century), paints a picture of rapid progress—but also of an urgent need to go further.

REN21, a global network of governments, industry and research organisations, has tracked the global energy transition for two decades. Its annual report is considered one of the most comprehensive assessments of renewable energy worldwide.

This year's edition highlights a widening gap between what has been achieved and

what is still required to meet the COP28 goal of tripling global renewable capacity by 2030.

The target calls for more than 11 terawatts (TW) of installed capacity.

So far, the world has deployed just under 3.8 TW. That leaves a gap of over 6 TW — greater than all current renewable capacity combined.

“We are deploying renewables in record numbers”, said REN21 Executive Director Rana Adib, “but we are not building the systems needed to transition to a renewables based economy.

”The report points to several barriers. While clean electricity is expanding, many countries have yet to align their national policies with post-COP28 ambitions. Investment in supporting infrastructure — such as grid upgrades, storage systems and sector coupling — lags behind.

Electrification of transport, industry and buildings remains slow, with fossil fuels still dominant in heating and mobility.

“Without coherent policies, coordinated planning and resilient infrastructure

This year's edition highlights a widening gap between what has been achieved and what is still required to meet the COP28 goal of tripling global renewable capacity by 2030. The target calls for more than 11 terawatts (TW) of installed capacity.

including grids and storage”, Adib added, “even record deployment cannot deliver speedy and lasting transformation.”

Yet the outlook is far from discouraging. REN21 notes that renewable energy costs continue to fall, making clean power more accessible than ever.

Clean energy investment hit record levels in 2024 and innovations such as floating solar, green hydrogen and long-duration storage are gaining traction.

China remains the leader in capacity and electrification, but other regions are beginning to scale up.

The report's overall message is one of possibility — with a caveat. The foundation is strong, but reaching global targets will require more than momentum.

It demands alignment across sectors, long-term planning and faster political response.

As Adib and the REN21 network make clear, the world is not starting from zero. It's building from its strongest position yet. The challenge now is not catching up — but keeping up.

US-INDIA STANDOFF IS ABOUT MORE THAN RUSSIAN OIL

UNA GALANI

THE STANDOFF between the US and India may well get worse before it gets better. Having slapped a 25% tariff on goods the South Asian country sends to America, Donald Trump is vowing to ratchet up the rate over the \$4 trillion economy's purchases of Russian oil.

New Delhi calls the threat unjustified and unreasonable. A deal with Washington is possible, but diffusing the situation looks tricky.

Far from being a winner in the US president's global trade war, India is rapidly emerging as a big loser alongside China.

Trump's desire to isolate the People's Republic — and its exporters routing goods through Southeast Asia — was initially expected to benefit India, which sent \$87 billion of goods to the US last year.

His sudden cooling on Russia, though and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reluctance to open up his country's agriculture market out of a desire to protect millions of poor farmers, have put India in his firing line.

India's economy can withstand Trump's aggressions, for now. Nomura, a Japanese bank, reckons the 25% US tariff on imports from India might shave 20 basis points off its 6.2% GDP growth forecast for the country's current financial year.

Sure, New Delhi argues its purchases of cheap Russian oil, which comprise 40% of its crude imports, are a “national compulsion” and keep global prices in check.

But India can manage without it: at 2.1%, its consumer price inflation is at the lowest level since January 2019, so giving up the roughly \$4 discount per barrel on Russian supplies would not cause too much domestic pain at current prices.

Yet India has a lot more besides oil to lose from giving Russia the cold shoulder.

The duo's longstanding relationship may be undergoing a managed decline as New Delhi diversifies its weapons supplies, but Moscow remains a reliable partner to India and relations with the country buttress its multipolar foreign policy.

Trump's decision to work with Pakistan to develop its oil reserves and his subsequent taunt that it perhaps will sell oil to neighbouring India one day, further underscore why New Delhi may always keep some distance from Washington.

India can perhaps afford to wait and see what the US agrees with China.

Beijing has vowed to protect its energy sovereignty in response to similar US threats over Russian oil purchases.

That poses a major obstacle for Trump to strike any grand bargain with the world's second-largest economy.

Ultimately the US may see value in preserving a warm relationship with India as a counterbalance to China. The wait, however, will be awkward. — Reuters

Digi silver: An emerging investment option

THE investment landscape is evolving. There are many investment options available, including bank deposits, mutual funds, stocks, bonds, debentures, government securities, chits, commodities, real estate and cryptocurrencies.

Ideally, one needs to have a combination of at least a few of these to maximise the return, considering their risk tolerance and financial objectives.

Investment in gold and silver is considered safe and secure, in addition to being highly liquid. Investing in gold and silver can hedge against inflation and, hence, can be a prudent investment during turbulent times.

There are risks associated with physical investment in these, like purity, safe custody, damage and other related expenses.

Digital gold and digital silver are modern and convenient ways to invest in gold and silver without the need for physical storage. As said earlier, digital silver is an excellent investment option for portfolio diversification.

It is worth noting that over the past few years, silver has outperformed gold. While investing in virtual gold is good, investing in virtual silver is emerging and it is considered an undervalued investment.

Like gold, silver is also a rare commodity and unlike gold, silver is widely used in the industrial sector.

Silver is a crucial component of solar panels, electric vehicles and smart grid technology. Its demand is expected to increase.

Currently, silver is trading at \$38 per troy ounce in the international market and may cross \$42. Price may go up further in the medium to long-term horizon and a double-digit return is expected.

HOW TO BUY DIGI SILVER

There are different ways to buy silver in virtual form. When you buy virtual silver, you own real, high-purity (24 carat — 99.99 purity) silver, which is securely stored in insured vaults. Under this method, silver can be bought in small quantities at your convenience.

There is no risk associated with the purity or physical storage. You can buy silver in demat form through various platforms and instruments. The following are a



Various banks, fintech companies and investment firms offer the facility of purchasing virtual silver.

Investment in digital silver is not about substituting other investments. It should find a place in your investment basket as part of a portfolio diversification



R MADHUSOODANAN

The writer is the Executive Advisor to the Board, Global Money Exchange, Muscat.

couple of popular means of buying digital silver.

ONLINE PLATFORMS

Various banks, fintech companies and investment firms offer the facility of purchasing virtual silver.

You can easily do an online registration with them and start investing. This is flexible and convenient. The investment size can be very small.

Under this, the silver purchased in digital form can be redeemed in physical silver, cash, or ornaments/coins/bars/utensils, or a combination of all of these.

In India, MMTC-PAMP (A joint venture of MMTC, a Government of India undertaking versus PAMP and a Swedish bullion brand) offers this facility. A large number of other fintech companies are also offering the buying and selling of digital silver.

SILVER ETFs

Silver ETFs (Exchange Traded Funds) are another option to invest in digital silver. A demat account is required for this purpose. A large number of ETFs are available. The

ETFs can be bought and sold easily through the stock exchanges.

Here, the investment can be redeemed only in cash and not in physical form.

Silver ETFs track the spot price of silver in the open market and the Net Asset Value (NAV) changes accordingly.

The London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) mandated 99.99 per cent purity of silver and kept in a safe vault as backing.

Investment in digital silver is not about substituting other investments.

It should find a place in your investment basket as part of a portfolio diversification.

Considering features of silver, such as its rarity, industrial usage and undervaluation, investing in silver in electronic form can earn a robust return on your investment.

The interest rates of fixed-income securities are coming down due to the reduction of key policy rates by central banks.

In this context, investing in commodities like digital gold and digital silver may be considered as an alternative.

BUSINESS

MUSCAT: Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest), a leading investment company in the region, announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Outward Bound Oman for the second edition of the “Ominvest Young Shapers” programme, as part of the company’s long-standing commitment to developing leadership capabilities among Omani youth.

Outward Bound Oman, in collaboration with Global Shapers Muscat Hub, will deliver six comprehensive leadership courses benefiting 100 participants until the end of 2025. The programme will target job-seekers, students, employees and entrepreneurs from across Oman.

The inaugural edition of the programme in 2024 trained 95 individuals through outdoor leadership experiences.

The curriculum is specifically designed to align with key UN Goals (SDGs), focusing on quality education, leadership, digital skills and climate awareness. Participants will be challenged to develop skills in a hands-on, real-world context across Oman’s

The curriculum is specifically designed to align with key UN Goals (SDGs), focusing on quality education, leadership digital skills, and climate awareness.

MOU SIGNED FOR 2ND EDITION OF “YOUNG SHAPERS” PROGRAMME



The programme will target job-seekers, students, employees and entrepreneurs from across Oman.

diverse landscapes, including Salalah, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Rimal Al Sharqiya. This immersive approach goes beyond traditional learning, building character, resilience and a deep appreciation for the country’s natural heritage.

“Our core strategy at Ominvest is to create lasting value for all our stakeholders by fostering sustainable growth, and that starts with investing in people,” said Badar bin Awadh al Shanfari, Chief Operating Officer of Ominvest.

“The Young Shapers programme is a powerful example of this strategy in action. By equipping young Omanis with critical leadership skills, we’re directly contributing to Oman Vision 2040’s goals of economic diversification and job creation.

“These are the future innovators and entrepreneurs who will drive progress and ensure the long-term prosperity of our nation.”

Waleed bin Nasser al Yarubi, Chief People, Corporate Communication and Sustainability Officer, emphasised the programme’s connection to Ominvest’s broader sustainability commitments.

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ART/LIFE



A R T

HOW AN OMANI CONTEMPORARY ARTIST CHALLENGES VIEWS ON MIGRATION > 20

DISCOVERY

Salvador Dali painting bought for £150 in UK identified as original



A SALVADOR Dali painting that was discovered at a house clearance sale in the United Kingdom and bought for £150 (\$200) has been valued at up to £30,000 after it was authenticated as an original.

The art dealer who purchased the mixed media piece, who wished to remain anonymous, discovered it had previously been offered for sale at Sotheby's in the 1990s fully attributed to Dali.

The painting is to be offered for sale by Cambridgeshire auctioneers Cheffins on October 23.

Gabrielle Downie, an associate at Cheffins, said: "The loss of an attribution is quite rare in the modern art world making this a significant rediscovery for Dali scholars. "To handle a genuine rediscovery of a work by who is easily one of the most famous artists in the world and the godfather of Surrealism, is a real honour".

It has been an exciting process researching and having this painting authenticated and it is a testament to the sellers' significant art knowledge that he was able to spot this picture at a house clearance sale.

"While Dali's work is often some of the most recognisable, this is an unusual piece which shows a different side to his practice when working in watercolour."

The artwork, titled Vecchio Sultano, was discovered in a Cambridge-based house clearance sale in 2023.

It has been certified as authentic by Dali expert Nicolas Descharnes and has a pre-sale estimate of £20,000 to £30,000.

The image, made with water colour paint and felt tip, measures 38 cm by 29 cm.

It is an illustration of a scene from The Arabian Nights, a series of 500 pieces which Dali intended to create of Middle Eastern folktales, which was commissioned by wealthy Italian couple Giuseppe and Mara Albaretto.

Downie said: "The Albaretto's who commissioned this work had initially asked Dali to illustrate a bible in 1963, but upon Dali's insistence, he instead ended up illustrating scenes from 1,001 Nights — a collection of Middle Eastern folktales.

"It seems Dali was fascinated with Moorish culture and believed himself to be from a Moorish line".

It seems that this project was abandoned, with Dali only having completed 100 of the intended 500 works. — PA Media/dpa

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



LIFESTYLE

Mahmoud Abou Farag, a farm owner, shows a prickly pear known locally in Egyptian Arabic as "Teen Shoki", at a farm in Meet Kenana village. — Reuters



FILM

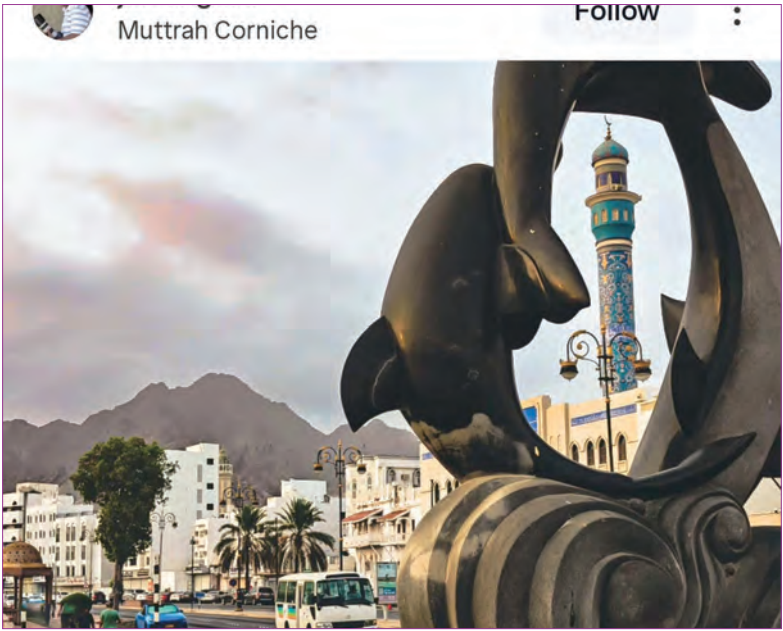
British actor Babou Ceesay poses arriving for the European premiere of the series 'Alien: Earth' in London. — AFP



CULTURE

Representative of the Lebou community El Haje Djibril Ndoeye poses for a portrait during a Xooy (call) divination ceremony in Fatick. — AFP

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Lindsay Lohan comes full circle with ‘Freakier Friday’



LINDSAY LOHAN says she drew upon her own experiences of motherhood for “Freakier Friday”, the highly-anticipated sequel to her hit 2003 movie “Freaky Friday”.

Lohan, 39, welcomed her first child in 2023, a year before the Disney movie was filmed.

“It felt full circle for me and also the timing was pretty impeccable considering that I’m a new mom and I was able to bring being a mom into the character”, Lohan said at the film’s London premiere on Thursday. “It’s the first time I’m able to do that on screen”.

“Freaky Friday”, with a reported budget of \$26 million, was a surprise hit, making over \$160 million worldwide and obtaining a cult following.

The 2025 follow-up sees Lohan and actress Jamie Lee Curtis reprising the roles of mother and daughter duo Tess and Anna Coleman. Twenty years on, Anna is a single parent to tomboy teen daughter Harper, played by Julia Butters.

Their relationship comes under stress when Anna falls for Eric (Manny Jacinto),

the father of Harper’s new British classmate Lily (Sophia Hammons) and they decide to get married. The future stepsisters, with a mutual dislike for one another, decide to intervene.

While the 2003 film saw a body swap between Tess and Anna, things get “freakier” this time around with Tess and Anna switching bodies with Lily and Harper.

Before signing on to the sequel, Lohan ensured that Anna returned as a multi-faceted and relatable character.

“It was important to me that we explained who Anna is today and how she’s evolved and the dynamic between her and her daughter as she’s a single working mom. There are some basic points that I wanted to get across because I want people to see the movie and find a piece of it that they can grab onto and be like, ‘okay, I get that’”, she said.

Directed by Nisha Ganatra, the movie also sees actor Chad Michael Murray reprising the role of young Anna’s love interest, Jake. — Reuters



Tourism boom sparks backlash in historic heart of Athens

SURROUNDED by a hubbub of blaring music, restaurant terraces and rumbling suitcase wheels slaloming between overflowing litter bins, Giorgos Zafeiriou believes surging tourism has made his historic Athens neighbourhood unrecognisable.

The Greek capital’s Plaka district “is threatened by overtourism”, said Zafeiriou, who has lived there for more than three decades and leads its residents’ association.

This year, 10 million people are expected to visit Athens, an increase of two million from 2024 which reflects the city’s growing popularity as a tourist destination since the Covid-19 pandemic ended.

Despite its label as the cradle of Western civilisation, Athens was previously regarded as a mere stopping point between the airport and the port of Piraeus, from where tourists explore Greece’s myriad of picturesque islands.

Nicknamed “the neighbourhood of the gods”, Plaka is nestled below the ancient Acropolis hill, a world heritage site hosting the millennia-old Parthenon temple which welcomed almost 4.5 million visitors last year.

Plaka is now awash with tourists who navigate its warren of narrow streets lined with cafes, taverns, souvenir shops, small Byzantine churches and relics from Antiquity and the Ottoman era.

Plaka “is Europe’s oldest neighbourhood which has been inhabited continuously since Antiquity”, said Lydia Carras, head of the Ellet association working to preserve the environment and cultural heritage.

“We cannot see it lose its soul”, she added.

— ‘Saturated with tourists’ —

Tourism is a pillar of the Greek economy, which endured years of painful austerity following the 2008 global financial crash and the ensuing eurozone debt crisis.

For souvenir shop seller



Konstantinos Marinakis, “Greece is finally doing better thanks to the good health of tourism which allowed the economy to recover and create jobs”. But the flourishing sector has generated a backlash in Europe’s most sought-after locations, with locals complaining of soaring housing prices and the impact on their neighbourhoods.

Protesters have targeted tourists with water pistols in Spain’s Barcelona, while the Italian city of Venice has introduced a charge in a bid to control visitor numbers.

Mayor Haris Doukas said with pride that Athens was now one of the world’s 10 most-visited cities, but acknowledged “areas like Plaka which are saturated with tourists”.

“We are not yet at the stage of Barcelona, but we must act before it is too late”, he said.

An “intervention unit” for Plaka was recently created to enforce rules

with the support of the police.

Any resident who spots a restaurant terrace encroaching on public space or cars parked on the pavement can report the offenders to this team.

“Between 1960 and 1980, Plaka was overwhelmed by discos and bouzoukias” and “many residents had already left”, explained Carras, referring to clubs that play traditional Greek music.

A 1993 presidential decree shut the clubs, protected homes and specified the use of each building in the neighbourhood, with hotels only allowed on certain streets.

— Rules ‘dodged’ — But “these rules have been dodged”, with “entire houses converted into several apartments” advertised on short-term rental platforms, said Dimitris Melissas, a lawyer specialising in urban planning.

Plaka’s population of 2,000 can be swamped by up to four times as many tourists in the summer, added Melissas, although no official statistics exist because the census measures Athens as a whole.

Representing Ellet, the lawyer has taken a case over the legality of 16 buildings converted entirely into seasonal rentals to the Council of State, Greece’s top administrative court.

He argued they are actually hotel premises in disguise because they have receptions or serve breakfast on terraces. A decision, which could set an important legal precedent, is expected by the end of September.

The conservative government has banned new registrations of apartments on short-term rental platforms for at least a year in central Athens, where more than 12,000 seasonal lets existed in 2024, fuelling rent rises.

“But when I still read adverts in newspapers to invest in apartments that can be converted into Airbnbs, I doubt the effectiveness of this measure”, said Melissas.

“The problem in Greece is not voting laws but enforcing them”.

— AFP

FEATURES



the moments of dislocation and loss that linger long after the physical journey.

The powerful use of the stop signs in her installation shifts their usual role as traffic signals — instruments of order and movement — into symbols of existential stasis. Her “migrants” are tired bodies, exhausted and fatigued, caught in a never-ending state of waiting or suspension. The headphones whisper six individual stories, each a fragment of a life interrupted, a hope deferred and a journey that cannot be fully completed.

Just as Raqiya’s work invites reflection, it also aligns with a global artistic movement dedicated to illuminating migration’s deeper, often neglected narratives. Artists like Palestinian creator Emily Jacir have used their work to convey the aspirations and regrets of exiled populations. Jacir’s “Where We Come From” gives voice to those who remain longing for a homeland never fully lost — or a place they can never return to.

Similarly, Ai Weiwei’s renowned “Law of the Journey” presents a hauntingly monumental scene: a 70-metre-long boat filled with faceless refugee figures, symbolic of the mass displacement that defines our times. His approach—research-driven, provocative, visceral—forces viewers to confront the scale and brutality of forced migration. The Chinese artist’s work reminds us that migration is not merely a personal story but a collective trauma etched into the very fabric of global society.

These artists, juxtaposed with Raqiya’s subtle yet visceral installation, form a compelling chorus of voices asking hard questions. Why do borders often symbolise more than just physical barriers? What does it mean to belong when entire communities are uprooted, displaced, or exiled? And why has this moment in history seen migration take on such heightened urgency?

Contemporary art’s engagement with migration has become more than a reflection — it’s a form of activism, an act of remembrance and a challenge to complacency. Through their work, artists provoke us to reconsider migration not as a straightforward movement from A to B but as a complex web of standstills, fears, memories and hopes.

Raqiya’s installation pushes the viewer to dwell in this ambiguity. It resists offering neat resolutions or

HOW AN OMANI CONTEMPORARY ARTIST CHALLENGES VIEWS ON MIGRATION

BY BUTHAINA AL RIYAMI

IN AN era where movement across borders has become both a necessity and a crisis, art continues to serve as a powerful lens through which to explore the multifaceted narratives of migration. A striking new exhibition invites viewers to pause, reflect and feel — not just see — the silent stories that migration leaves behind. Central to this evocative display is Raqiya al Maamari’s installation “The Final Standstill”, a profound meditation on the emotional landscape of displacement, told through the quiet language of signs and whispers.

This installation transforms what we typically see on the roads into a contemplative space within a gallery. Instead of hurriedly flashing traffic instructions, the work features a cluster of battered stop signs, their once-clear directives repurposed to serve as existential markers of emotional paralysis.

Paired with six suspended headphones whispering personal



migrant stories, these signs beckon visitors to slow down, listen deeply and confront the often-overlooked emotional residues of migration.

Raqiya, an Omani artist whose background began in digital design, has moved into both conceptual and humanitarian art — an evolution driven by her desire to expand the narrative of migration beyond the clichés of boats and borders. She describes her work as “a wider stage”, a means to interrogate the slow unraveling of presence, the pauses and repressed dreams that are part of every migrant’s journey.

“I wanted to depict not just the act of leaving but the echo of what’s left behind — the silence, the fears, the hopes that can’t be spoken aloud”, she explains. Her installation is neither literal nor literalistic. Instead, it is an immersive reflection on the fragments of memory,

clear narratives; instead, it invites a collective pause. In a society where migration is often reduced to headlines or political debates, this work calls for a pause — to listen, to feel and to remember.

In doing so, the installation underscores a vital truth: migration is no longer just a matter of individual stories. It has become central to understanding human identity in the 21st century. As crises of displacement proliferate, art that confronts these realities — like Raqiya’s — becomes an essential catalyst for empathy and awareness. It reminds us that behind every headline and statistic lies a silent story, waiting to be heard.

And in this quiet, profound listening, perhaps we find a pathway towards greater understanding — one stop sign at a time.