

O M A N عَمَان D A I L Y

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12 SUTHAR SHINES AS INDIA CRUSH LANKA IN 600TH TEST

IN BRIEF

HM CONGRATULATES HUNGARY PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Andr s Baka of Hungary, on the occasion of his country’s National Day. In his cable, His Majesty extended his sincere felicitations and best wishes to President Baka and the people of Hungary. His Majesty wished the relations of cooperation between Oman and Hungary further progress across various domains.

INITIATIVE TO PREPARE OMANIS TO STUDY ABROAD

The Royal Academy of Management (RAM), in partnership with the Ministry of Education, has announced the opening of applications for the ZAD: Promising Omani Leaders Initiative, designed to prepare Omani students for the academic, personal and cultural transition to studying abroad. Applications will be open from August 20 to 27 for eligible students preparing to pursue their studies abroad.

The initiative begins with a three-day Pre-Departure Orientation that takes place on September 3-5 at the German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech). **SEE ALSO P2**

33,031 STUDENTS GET OFFERS IN FIRST ROUND

The Higher Education Admission Center at the Ministry of Education on Wednesday announced the results of the first admission round for the 2026/2027 academic year for General Education Diploma holders and their equivalents. A total of 33,031 students have received academic offers, representing 70.4 per cent of the total successful applicants, which numbered 46,934. Students were notified of their results via SMS and directed to review their admission outcomes and the latest competitive cut-off scores for all programmes to which they had applied through the student registration portal of the admission system, should they wish to do so. **DETAILS ON P5**

TO REOPEN NEXT YEAR



Khasab Fort is one of the most prominent historical and heritage landmarks in Musandam Governorate. According to statistics from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, based on the latest recorded data for 2025, the fort received around 6,305 visitors by the end of October 2025, before it was temporarily closed for restoration and development works aimed at preserving its historical value and enhancing its museum facilities. It is scheduled to reopen during the first half of 2027, further strengthening its role in preserving heritage. **DETAILS ON P3**

MISTY BLANKET OVER THE HILLS



Khareef mist blankets the green hills and valleys of Taqah in Dhofar, as seasonal rains transform the landscape during southern Oman’s annual monsoon season.

Israeli strike on police station kills 9 in Gaza

ISRAELI MINISTER’S ‘INHUMANE’ GAZA REMARKS CONDEMNED

GAZA health officials said an Israeli strike on the municipal police headquarters in Gaza City killed nine people on Wednesday, with the Israeli military saying it targeted a commander in that strike and another further south.

Attacks in the Palestinian territory have continued in recent days, despite a renewed push by the United States to advance a long-term Gaza peace plan.

Gaza City’s Al-Shifa Hospital reported the arrival of nine bodies, including a woman and a girl, and at least 20 wounded following the strike in Gaza City.

The territory’s civil defence agency, which operates as a rescue service under Hamas, confirmed the toll.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem condemned what he called Israel’s “complete disregard for all calls for a ceasefire”.

He said US President Donald Trump’s Board of Peace, which is tasked with implementing the ceasefire plan agreed last October, “bears responsibility for this escalation due to its failure to fulfil its obligations by pressuring the occupation” to abide by its commitments.

Trump’s envoy Jared Kushner said on Monday that progress on moving forward with the Gaza peace plan could begin within a month following a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The sit-down came two weeks after Hamas endorsed the latest



A woman reacts during the funeral of Palestinians killed in an Israeli strike on a cafe in Gaza City. — Reuters

Germany and France condemned remarks by Israel’s far-right national security minister, who declared that Israel should kill ‘30 or 40’ people every night in the Palestinian territory of Gaza

stage of Trump’s Gaza plan.

Meanwhile, Germany and France condemned remarks by Israel’s far-right national security minister, who declared that Israel should kill ‘30 or 40’ people every night in the Palestinian territory of Gaza.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz “strongly condemns the inhumane appeals made by Minister (Itamar) Ben Gvir, which violate international law,” German government spokesman Sebastian Hille said. “They are unacceptable.”

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot also slammed the

remarks, calling them “intolerable and inhumane” in an interview with the La Montagne regional newspaper.

Ben Gvir, who is already facing calls from several European countries for bloc-wide sanctions, made the call for mass killings during a podcast.

Lars Klingbeil, German vice-chancellor and finance minister, said in a TV interview that Ben Gvir’s comments “must have consequences”, adding that sanctions were being discussed at the European level. — Agencies

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



It is recommended to stay in a safe and stable place inside the boat to ensure safety. — File Photo

MSC ISSUES SAFETY TIPS FOR BOAT RIDES

MUSCAT: Oman's Maritime Security Center (MSC) has said that maintaining boat balance and passengers' adherence to safety instructions are essential to avoid falling overboard or loss of control, especially at high speeds or in rough seas. It is recommended to stay in a safe and stable place inside the boat to ensure safety when waves are high, avoid sudden movements and moving between sides of the boat while sailing and follow the boat captain's instructions to ensure everyone's safety.

It is essential to avoid maintain passengers' balance inside the boat and avoid crowding on one side, avoid passengers standing while sailing, especially at high speeds and avoid sitting on the edge or bow of the boat while sailing. The Coast Guard Command of the Royal Oman Police recently rescued three people who were drowning after their boat capsized while they were kayaking near Al Qurum Beach.

In another incident, a patrol from the Coast Guard in the Al Batinah North Governorate spotted a child about to drown off the Silver Jubilee Park in the Wilayat of Suhar. The team rescued him and provided him with first aid; he was in good health.

GDAA TEAMS MONITORING MOUNTAIN BLAZE



MUSCAT: Firefighting teams from the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) in Al Batinah South Governorate are monitoring a fire that broke out among trees and grass at the summit of a mountain in the Al Madrouj area of Al Rustaq. The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority said there are currently no flames at the site. Teams are continuing field inspections, in coordination with the relevant authorities, to ensure that the fire does not reignite.

Youth achieve advanced levels in ICT skills, surpassing global averages

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

The latest data issued by the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-STAT) show that young people in the GCC countries have achieved advanced levels in a number of information and communication technology skills, outperforming their peers globally. This reflects the impact of investments directed towards education and human capacity-building, driven by the increasing attention GCC countries devote to investing in education and developing youth skills, thereby enhancing their readiness for technological transformations and the requirements of the future

labour market. Government expenditure on education in some GCC countries reached approximately 17 per cent in 2024, exceeding the global average of 12.6 per cent. Information and communication technology skills are becoming increasingly important for young people amid the rapid transition towards the digital economy, given the opportunities they provide for empowerment in the labour market, stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship, and supporting lifelong learning, in addition to their role in protecting privacy and promoting responsible digital citizenship. Data contained in the weekly bulletin issued on the occasion of International Youth Day indicate that



GCC youth recorded a high level of proficiency in file-copying skills, reaching 100 per cent, compared with 54 per cent globally.

GCC youth recorded a high level of proficiency in file-copying skills, reaching 100 per cent, compared with 54 per cent globally. The proportion possessing social networking skills stood at approximately 95.2 per cent,

compared with 68 per cent globally. Meanwhile, the proportion of young people possessing privacy settings skills reached 75.9 per cent, compared with 34 per cent globally. In the area of information

verification, the proportion among GCC youth reached 61.6 per cent, compared with 24 per cent globally, while programming skills stood at approximately 31.8 per cent, compared with 6 per cent globally, highlighting the gap in the levels of basic and advanced digital skills possessed by GCC youth. The emphasis on investing in education and developing human skills forms part of the GCC countries' efforts to prepare a generation capable of keeping pace with technological transformations and labour-market needs, and to equip young people with the knowledge and skills that enable them to participate effectively in economic and social development. These indicators are linked to the Sustainable

Development Goals, particularly Goal 1 on ending poverty, through the target concerning the proportion of total government spending on essential services, including education, as well as Goal 4 on quality education, which seeks to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship by 2030. These indicators confirm that investment in education is no longer limited to expanding access to knowledge, but has become a pillar of human capital development, enhanced competitiveness and preparedness for the requirements of the digital economy.

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SHORT TAKES

OMAN, TÜRKİYE REVIEW RELATIONS



MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Political Affairs, met with Musa Kulaklıkaya, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Türkiye, at the Foreign Ministry, on Wednesday. They reviewed the growing bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Türkiye and ways to bolster them. They also discussed current regional developments and exchanged views on a number of regional issues of common concern. — ONA

MUNICIPALITY WARNS AGAINST UNLICENSED SPEED BUMPS

MUSCAT: Muscat Municipality has urged the public to refrain from installing unlicensed speed bumps, stressing that such measures must meet approved safety and technical requirements. The municipality said speed bumps must comply with officially approved dimensions and technical specifications. Warning and directional signs should also be installed ahead of the bumps, while reflective paint in approved colours must be used to ensure clear visibility. The location of each speed bump must be approved after assessing traffic density and the requirements of the area.

THUNDERSTORMS REPORTED IN SOME PARTS OF OMAN



Oman Meteorology added that the rainfall could lead to the flow of streams and wadis.

MUSCAT: Rainfall of varying intensity was recorded in parts of the Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday, Oman Meteorology said. Some showers could develop into thunderstorms accompanied by strong downdraft winds, with weather activity expected to expand to more areas over the coming hours. Oman Meteorology added that the rainfall could lead to the flow of streams and wadis. The Wilayat of Ibra experienced moderate to heavy rainfall in the villages of Al Haimah, Qafsfah, and Jadya, and surrounding villages, causing several wadis to overflow. In the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi, moderate to heavy rainfall was recorded in the Niyabat of Samad Al Shan and surrounding villages, including Al Rawdah, Baad, Khadra Bani Difa’a, Al Ainain, and Al Fatah. In the wilayat’s centre, the rain caused wadis to overflow in Andam, Al Falij, Ghabrat Al Wafi, Al Rawdah, and Baad. The Wilayat of Bidiyah experienced heavy rains on the villages of Al Rakah, Al Wasil, and Al Dhahir and the surrounding villages, causing several wadis to overflow. The Wilayat of Al Qabil experienced rainfall of varying intensities causing the flow of the wadis of Suqa, Al Sarm, Suwa, Shannah, Al Aqidah, and others in the villages of Wadi Nam.

Cloud seeding increases average rainfall by 13.6%

ABDULAZIZ AL ABRI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

CLOUD SEEDING has proved successful in the Sultanate of Oman, boosting average rainfall by 13.6 per cent through 14 stations distributed over mountainous regions. The Sultanate of Oman applies ionisation technology to stimulate precipitation from rainy clouds, without using harmful chemicals. Eng Khalid bin Salem al Houti, Director of the Cloud Seeding Centre at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said, “The analysis of cloud seeding data between 2013 and 2022, which was conducted in cooperation with a specialised institute, proved the success of the artificial precipitation project in the Sultanate of Oman, with a 13.6 per cent increase in average rainfall.”

In 2016, a station for artificial precipitation was established in the Wilayat of Qurayat in the Muscat Governorate and another one was established in the Wilayat of Al Khaboura in Al Batinah North Governorate. In 2017, two stations were established in the Wilayats of Liwa in the Al Batinah North Governorate and Bidbid in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. Two more stations were



Two more stations were established in 2018 in the Wilayats of Rakhyout and Dhalkout in Dhofar Governorate.

The Sultanate of Oman applies ionisation technology to stimulate precipitation from rainy clouds, without using harmful chemicals.

established in 2018 in the Wilayats of Rakhyout and Dhalkout in Dhofar Governorate. A cloud seeding station was established in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi in 2023 at an altitude of 800 metres, and another one was established on Mount Harim in the Wilayat of Khasab in Musandam Governorate in 2026 at an altitude of 1224 metres with its effects extending to the Wilayat of Khasab and the surrounding areas, he said. Al Houti said that studies continue to establish new cloud seeding stations in suitable locations from both a technical and meteorological perspective, according to the geographical and

climatic characteristics of each region, and that there is a future plan to expand the cloud seeding project in a number of wilayats. The director of the Cloud Seeding Centre noted that the ionisation technology applied in the Sultanate of Oman is considered safe and environmentally friendly because it does not use harmful chemicals. He pointed out that the most significant challenge facing the project after more than a decade of operation is the difficulty of access given that most of the stations are located on mountaintops and high-altitude areas, in some cases, it may be necessary to use helicopters for operation and maintenance work.

Khasab Fort to reopen in 2027 after restoration

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

Khasab Fort is one of the most prominent historical and heritage landmarks in Musandam Governorate, standing as a living witness to its deep-rooted history, strategic importance, and the transformations and events the region has experienced across different historical periods, while embodying aspects of its cultural identity and authentic Omani heritage. Khasab Fort’s status as a historical, cultural and tourist destination is reflected in the number of visitors it attracts. According to statistics from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, based on the latest recorded data for 2025, the fort received around 6,305 visitors by the end of October 2025, before it was temporarily closed for restoration and development works aimed at preserving its historical value and enhancing its museum facilities. It is scheduled to reopen during the first half of 2027, further strengthening its role in preserving heritage, introducing visitors to Musandam’s history and cultural legacy, and reinforcing its identity for future generations. Khasab Fort’s status as a historical, cultural and tourist destination



The number of visitors to Khasab fort, which exceeded 6,000 by the end of October 2025 before its closure for restoration and maintenance works, reflects its continued importance as one of the governorate’s prominent historical and tourist landmarks.

is reflected in the number of visitors it attracts. According to statistics from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, based on the latest recorded data for 2025, the fort received around 6,305 visitors by the end of October 2025, before it was temporarily closed for restoration and development works aimed at preserving its historical value and enhancing its museum facilities. It is scheduled to reopen during the first half of 2027, further strengthening its role in preserving heritage, introducing visitors to Musandam’s history and cultural legacy, and reinforcing its identity for future generations.

SYMBOL OF IDENTITY Nawfal bin Mohammed al Kamzari, Assistant Director of the Heritage and Tourism Department in Musandam Governorate, explained that Khasab Fort is one of the governorate’s most important historical landmarks due to its connection to the region’s history and its strategic role at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz. He noted that the fort has passed through several historical periods that reflected Musandam’s importance and position in Omani history. Al Kamzari noted that Khasab Fort is a historical landmark and one of the most prominent cultural symbols embodying

the identity of Musandam Governorate, with its links to the region’s maritime and commercial history and traditional social life. He stressed that the fort holds a special place in the memory of the local community as a witness to the various historical periods through which the governorate has passed. He explained that the fort has received considerable attention as part of efforts to preserve the national heritage. It was restored in the early 1990s, before being restored and developed again in 2006 and transformed into an integrated museum housing a range of heritage and cultural elements from Musandam Governorate, including traditional artefacts, handicrafts, maritime tools and traditional clothing that document aspects of local life across generations. Al Kamzari stressed that this role has helped strengthen the fort’s position as a cultural and tourist centre reflecting the governorate’s authenticity and heritage. He said that the number of visitors to the fort exceeded 6,000 by the end of October 2025 before its closure for restoration and maintenance works.



خريف
ظفار
KHAREEF
DHO FAR



KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

WHILE much of the Arabian Peninsula swelters under summer heat, southern Oman transforms into a misty, emerald escape each year. And this monsoon season, trekking in Dhofar has surged as trekkers trade desert dunes for cloud-covered mountains, waterfalls, and frankincense trails.

For hikers, it's the only time of year Oman feels like a temperate rainforest as the Khareef season, the southwest monsoon between June and September, drenches the Dhofar Governorate and wadis that roar with water, hills carpeted in grass, and temperatures that hover around a cool 22°C to 26°C.

"It's completely different from what people imagine," said Aji George, a photographer and a member of the Salalah Hikers group, who has been trekking for many years. "Instead of rock and sand, you get fog rolling through the mountains, cows grazing on the hills, and paths that smell like wet earth and frankincense."

According to the group, which has members from a cross-section of society, there are three routes that have become the centre of attention this year.

Wadi Darbat trek is the most popular entry point for first-time trekkers. A 6-km loop takes hikers past Darbat Waterfall, limestone cliffs, and natural pools deep

DHO FAR: TREKKER'S PARADISE

This monsoon season, trekking in Dhofar has surged as trekkers trade desert dunes for cloud-covered mountains, waterfalls, and frankincense trails.



enough for a swim. Because of Khareef, the falls are at full strength through late August. Local tour operators now run guided sunrise walks to avoid crowds and catch the mist.

For experienced hikers, Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve is the place to be. This 12-km ridge trek climbs into Oman's largest nature reserve, home to the elusive Arabian leopard. The path winds through juniper forests and terraced farms. Guides say bookings are up 40 per cent compared to last year, driven by eco-tourism groups from the GCC and Europe.

There is also the Frankincense Trail to Wadi Dawkah, a cultural trek that blends hiking with history. The 8-km route follows ancient caravan paths where frankincense was once traded. Trekkers can stop at Unesco-listed trees and learn tapping techniques from local farmers.

"People don't just want views, but also want stories as well and to live the experience. This trail gives all these," said members of the

trekking group.

A spokesperson from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said that three factors are fuelling the interest in hiking. "First, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has invested in marked trails, safety signage, and local guide certification ahead of Khareef Dhofar Season 2026. Secondly, direct flights to Salalah from Dubai, Riyadh, and Doha have increased, making weekend trips easier. Third, social media has turned Salalah's green mountains into a viral alternative to typical Gulf summer destinations," he said.

"We had groups from Kuwait and Bahrain who came just for 3 days of trekking," said Fatima al Balushi, who runs Dhofar Adventures. They're tired of malls in summer and prefer fog, waterfalls, and cool air."

Officials urged caution while trekking in the mountains of Dhofar, as trails can get slippery, flash floods are possible in wadis after heavy rain, and mobile signal drops in the mountains.



SHORTTAKES



The new Sultan Qaboos Hospital is being developed as a major addition to Dhofar’s healthcare infrastructure.

HEALTH MINISTER VISITS NEW SULTAN QABOOS HOSPITAL IN SALALAH

ADEL BIN RAMADHAN BAIT NASIB
SALALAH, AUGUST 19

Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, inspected the new Sultan Qaboos Hospital project in Salalah as work advances towards completing the major healthcare facility in Dhofar Governorate.

During the visit, the minister reviewed construction progress and assessed the readiness of the hospital’s medical, technical and engineering facilities.

He was accompanied by Dr Hani bin Ahmed al Qadhi, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate; Eng Yousuf bin Yaqoub Ambu Ali, Director-General of Projects and Engineering Services at the Ministry of Health; and a number of ministry officials and specialists.

Eng Ambu Ali briefed the minister on the project’s implementation status, progress across its construction components and the approved schedules for completing the remaining work.

The minister later toured several key departments and facilities, where he inspected engineering readiness and medical equipment that has already been installed. Technical teams also briefed him on the equipment’s expected operational role in supporting specialised healthcare services.

Dr Al Sabti stressed the importance of ensuring that construction and technical installations remain aligned with the hospital’s future operational requirements, with particular attention to safety, quality and efficiency.

He also directed the project teams to address any challenges that could affect implementation and to maintain the pace of work in accordance with the approved schedules.

The new Sultan Qaboos Hospital is being developed as a major addition to Dhofar’s healthcare infrastructure, with modern facilities and medical equipment intended to strengthen specialised healthcare services and meet growing demand from citizens and residents.

The project forms part of Oman’s wider efforts to expand and modernise healthcare infrastructure and enhance the quality and capacity of medical services.

DO NOT EXPLOIT CHILDREN, DOMESTIC WORKERS FOR MEDIA CONTENT



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

Content creators who negatively exploit children under the age of 15 or domestic workers in media content may face imprisonment for three years, a fine of RO 5,000, or either penalty, the Public Prosecution has warned.

The same penalties apply to those who publish content promoting violence or excessive horror to children.

The Public Prosecution urged content creators to consider who could be harmed by the material they produce and publish online.

The penalties are stipulated under Article 36(7) of the Law on Combating Cybercrimes, issued under Royal Decree No 61/2026.

Over 33,000 receive offers in first round of admission

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

THE Higher Education Admission Center at the Ministry of Education on Wednesday announced the results of the first admission round for the 2026/2027 academic year for General Education Diploma holders and their equivalents.

A total of 33,031 students have received academic offers, representing 70.4 per cent of the total successful applicants, which numbered 46,934. Students were notified of their results via SMS and directed to review their admission outcomes and the latest competitive cut-off scores for all programmes to which they had applied through the student registration portal of the admission system, should they wish to do so.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Azri, Director-General of the Higher Education Admission Center, stated in a press release that the indicators from this first admission round reflect a notable expansion in available admission opportunities for General Education Diploma graduates.

He noted that the total number of available academic seats reached 34,113, marking a year-on-year growth rate of 17 per cent. This expansion coincided with a rise in the number of students receiving offers—from 27,537 in the first round of the previous academic year to 33,031 this year, an increase of 5,494 offers and a growth rate of approximately 20 per cent.

He emphasised that over 7 out of every 10 eligible applicants securing an offer in the first round demonstrates the level of admission opportunities available, with continued competition for vacant seats in subsequent admission stages.

He further explained that the

The total number of available academic seats reached 34,113, marking a year-on-year growth rate of 17 per cent. This expansion coincided with a rise in the number of students receiving offers—from 27,537 in the first round of the previous academic year to 33,031 this year, an increase of 5,494 offers and a growth rate of approximately 20 per cent.



The Higher Education Admission Center will announce dates for the second round at a later time.

admission offers were distributed across government higher education institutions, domestic scholarships and grants at private higher education institutions, and external scholarships and grants.

Government institutions claimed the largest share with 17,430 offers, accounting for 52.8 per cent of the total, followed by domestic scholarships and grants with 14,950 offers (45.3 per cent), and external scholarships with 651 offers (approximately 2.0 per cent).

The Director-General also reported that the round’s results left 1,082 seats unfilled, representing 3.2 per cent of the total available seats, due to the insufficient number of applicants meeting the admission requirements for certain programmes. He clarified that the utilisation of available seats depends on the alignment of students’ qualifications and preferences with programme-specific admission criteria, capacity limits, competitive cut-off scores, and ranking preferences—factors that may result in unfilled seats in some programmes even while other students remain without offers in this stage.

He added that the centre, in

coordination with higher education institutions and relevant authorities, will work to fill available seats in subsequent admission rounds in accordance with approved regulations and procedures.

Regarding the most competitive programmes, the Director-General stated that the results indicated high competitive cut-off scores in medical, health, and education programmes, as well as a number of external scholarship programmes.

He noted that the lowest competitive cut-off score for admission to the General Medicine programme at Sultan Qaboos University was 98.15 per cent for males and 99.2 per cent for females; at the National University of Science and Technology, 98.3 per cent; and at Dhofar University, 97.9 per cent. For Oral and Dental Surgery, the cut-off stood at 95.1 per cent for males and 97.55 per cent for females.

In education specialisations, the average lowest accepted competitive score at Sultan Qaboos University was 91.65 per cent for males and 96.05 per cent for females, while at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences it was 91.35 per cent for males and 96.6 per cent for females.

Khareef Dhofar can attract more Indian tourists

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 19

Oman’s khareef season offers strong potential to attract more Indian leisure travellers, particularly from northern India, by combining a cool summer climate, green mountain landscapes, beaches and desert experiences within a relatively compact destination, according to a senior Indian travel executive visiting the country.

Ankush Jain, Managing Director of Go Now Travels Pvt. Ltd., a Delhi-based travel company, said that Dhofar Governorate stood out during a week-long familiarisation visit aimed at assessing destinations and experiences that could be marketed to Indian clients.

“Oman is so near to India, yet we know very little about Oman as far as tourism is concerned,” Jain told the Observer.

His visit covered both northern Oman and Salalah, during Khareef — the annual monsoon season that typically runs from June to September and transforms parts of southern Oman into green, mist-covered landscapes.

For Jain, that seasonal transformation gives Salalah a tourism product that differs sharply from the image many international travellers associate with the Arabian



More than 472,000 visitors reached Dhofar between June 21 and July 31, up 6.9 per cent from the comparable period of 2025.

Peninsula.

“The greenery and vegetation grow afresh. The colour is really very different,” he said.

He said the combination of mountains, coastline and nearby desert could be particularly attractive to travellers from northern India, where beaches and sand dunes would add variety to a short-haul overseas holiday.

“Sand dunes and the sea, and then this greenery — I think Salalah is certainly a very



ANKUSH JAIN

good destination for Indians,” he said.

India is already one of Oman’s largest tourism source markets. Indian nationals accounted for 382,015 visitors to Oman in the first half of 2026, making India the second-largest source market after the United Arab Emirates, according to National Centre for Statistics and Information data.

Dhofar is also seeing another strong khareef season. More than 472,000 visitors reached

the governorate between June 21 and July 31, up 6.9 per cent from the comparable period of 2025, according to preliminary official figures.

Khareef is the peak domestic and regional tourism season in southern Oman, drawing visitors to Salalah and surrounding areas for its cooler temperatures, green mountains, flowing wadis, beaches and cultural attractions.

Jain said Oman’s opportunity in the Indian market extends beyond Salalah.

While Dhofar provides a distinctive summer proposition, he said northern Oman could appeal during the cooler months through desert stays, marine activities, mountains and cultural experiences.

He highlighted snorkelling, dolphin-watching, desert activities and the turtle reserve at Ras Al Jinz on Oman’s eastern coast among the experiences that could be incorporated into packages for Indian travellers.

That combination, he said, allows travel companies to sell different parts of Oman at different times of the year.

But Jain said the way those experiences are packaged would be as important as the attractions themselves.

“The itinerary is the main thing,” he said. “There are a lot of ‘wow’ factors here.”

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



Students hide under tables during a drill by police officers to prepare for an active shooter scenario at Surasakmontree School in Bangkok. — Reuters

Thai schools hold shooting response drills after attack

BANGKOK: Thai schools conducted active shooter drills on Wednesday, as authorities moved to strengthen security measures two weeks after a 14-year-old opened fire at a school and killed at least eight people. At the Surasakmontree School in Bangkok, students took part in a “run, hide, fight” exercise, with a police officer dressed in black and acting as a mock attacker, armed with a handgun and an assault rifle firing blanks. Students ran from the gunman and hid under tables and behind locked doors, while others used furniture to block entrances. In one scenario, students tackled and pinned down the attacker after he entered the classroom. The drills follow a directive signed on August 10 by Education Minister Prasert Jantarauangtong requiring schools to draw up security plans and rehearse emergency response procedures. “Every school is responding because this is a new-age threat that can happen anywhere,” said Visitsak Vipattanamongkol, superintendent of the Explosive Ordnance Disposal unit at the Patrol and Special Operations Division of the police. “Every school is on alert, adjusting their plans, and preparing so students can respond to incidents and threats of all forms,” he said. — Reuters

Pakistan govt to challenge court on moving ex-PM Khan



A car enters Shifa International Hospital after the Supreme Court moved former PM Imran Khan to the hospital in Islamabad. — Reuters

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan’s government will challenge the Supreme Court’s order to move jailed former prime minister Imran Khan to a private hospital for medical checks, the law minister said. The ruling “does not fall within the four corners of the law”, Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar said in a video statement shared by state broadcaster Radio Pakistan. The government was submitting a petition for a review that would call for 73-year-old Khan’s medical tests to be conducted at a government hospital, instead of a private facility as the court had ordered. “Until such time as evidence or material is available to show that government hospitals are unable to provide this type of treatment or cannot do so, such arrangements are normally not made,” Tarar said. The court decided that the ex-cricket captain would be moved “within the next two days” to Shifa International Hospital in the capital Islamabad. He would also be allowed to meet with his family once a week and speak to his sons via telephone twice weekly. — AFP

TRAGIC TOTAL LOSS

No survivors in Kenya tourist helicopter crash



A helicopter carrying six tourists and a pilot crashed on Wednesday in Kenya’s Samburu County, north of the capital, Nairobi, killing all those on board, authorities said. The accident happened at 09:13 am local time after the aircraft departed from the Loisaba wildlife reserve. “There were 7 people on board the helicopter, one pilot and six passengers,” Fredrick Kabunge, director of the Aircraft Accident Investigation Department (AAID), said, confirming that no one survived. — AFP

UN LAMENTS TOLL OF 350 AID WORKERS KILLED IN 2025

UNITED NATIONS: The number of aid workers killed worldwide in 2025 reached 350, with the most fatalities in Gaza and Sudan, the United Nations said on Wednesday, calling attacks on humanitarians “unacceptable.” Some 186 humanitarians were killed in Gaza — the deadliest place for aid workers for the third year running — followed by Sudan with 71 killed. 2025’s death toll was slightly lower than that of 2024, when 377 aid workers were killed. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) cited the figures

from the research and advisory group Humanitarian Outcomes in a statement marking World Humanitarian Day. “More than 1,000 aid workers have been killed in just three years and that is utterly unacceptable,” Tom Fletcher, under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, said in the statement. “But just calling it out will not protect the next aid worker. States must uphold international humanitarian law and use every tool to protect civilians and our colleagues,” he said. “And for those who break the rules, there must be real

consequences.” Since the start of 2026, 82 more aid workers have been killed, with 97 more injured and 39 abducted worldwide. OCHA voiced particular concern over the proliferation of armed drones “that are putting lethal power into ever more hands and sending more explosive weapons into towns and cities.” In Sudan, armed drones caused 80 per cent of civilian deaths in the first four months of 2026, hitting markets and health facilities, the statement said, noting casualties from drone attacks in the Russia-Ukraine war. — AFP

Türkiye slams Israel’s claims after strikes on Syrian base

TÜRKIYE FIRMLY rejected on Wednesday what it called “untenable allegations” by Israel regarding its military position in Syria, after Israel bombed a Syrian air base near the Turkish border and said Syria was on the verge of permitting Turkish troops to deploy there. Israel carried out air strikes against the Abu Al Duhur base near Aleppo on Tuesday, drawing condemnation from Türkiye and criticism from a US envoy who called the attack an “unnecessary escalation”.

In a statement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said late on Tuesday that Syria was on the verge of violating a “status quo agreed with Israel in security matters” by allowing Turkish troops to deploy at the airbase, adding that such a deployment would threaten Israel’s security and it would not tolerate this. In response, Türkiye’s presidency said the “imputations” from Netanyahu’s office stemmed from his intention to pursue “expansionist and destabilising policies” ahead of elections in Israel, adding that lasting regional peace could only be achieved if Israel respected international law and abandoned its “aggressive and

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A member of Syrian government forces stands guard at the Abu Al Duhur base in Idlib province. — AFP file photo

coercive policies”. “The untenable allegations put forward by the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office are intended to legitimise Israel’s unlawful air strikes targeting Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” it said on X, without explicitly referring to any potential deployment plans. “Türkiye will resolutely continue to cooperate with the Syrian Government on a legitimate basis for the establishment of peace, stability, and prosperity in Syria, and will never allow the destabilisation of Syria.” The strikes on Tuesday follow worsening security tensions between Israel and Türkiye and increasingly sharp rhetoric between the two countries over Syria, where

both countries’ militaries are active. Türkiye, which has Nato’s second-largest army and has emerged as one of Syrian President Ahmed al Sharaa’s main allies, accuses Israel of trying to destabilise Syria and undermine its new administration, repeatedly calling for international pressure and measures on Israel to respect Syria’s territorial integrity. Ankara has been training Syria’s army, helping it rebuild its state institutions and infrastructure, and providing military and diplomatic support. Last year, Türkiye and Israel - also sharply at odds over the war in Gaza - established a line of communication to avoid any incidents in Syria. — Reuters

ISRAELI AIR STRIKE KILLS NINE PALESTINIANS

GAZA: An Israeli air strike killed nine Palestinians at a police station in Gaza on Wednesday, medics said, two days after US envoy Jared Kushner ended a trip to the region that failed to push forward Donald Trump’s plan to end the war in the enclave. Medics and police sources said several officers, some of them high-ranking, were among those killed at what the Hamas-led interior ministry said was the headquarters of the municipal police. Fifteen others were wounded, they said. Earlier on Wednesday, in Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, a separate Israeli air strike killed one Palestinian, medics said, taking Wednesday’s death toll to at least 10. On Tuesday, an Israeli airstrike killed at least seven Palestinians, including a child, at a beachfront cafe, medics said. On Wednesday, a Hamas official said the group had told ceasefire mediators, Egypt, Qatar and Türkiye that if there was no halt to Israel’s targeted attacks, “it would influence their stance on the agreement”. — Reuters

DEADLY LANDSLIDE

Mine collapse kills 100 people in C Africa



A landslide at an illegal gold mine has killed at least 100 people in the Central African Republic on the border with Cameroon, local sources said. Search operations are still under way after the collapse on Tuesday afternoon at the Zamboye mining site, about 50 kilometres from the town of Baboua. Video images showed a part of the ground at the huge open-pit mining site, where hundreds of miners work, break away and bury people in its path. — AFP

DISEASE TRACING

Sweden reports rare measles outbreak



Sweden’s Public Health Agency said on Wednesday it had recorded 21 cases of measles connected to a folk music festival in the country’s north. The agency said the cases were reported in several regions but all connected to the music festival Urkult, which was held in the north of Sweden in late July and early August. A majority of those affected were under the age of 18 and most of the cases involved people who had not been vaccinated. — AFP

SHORT TAKES



A policeman stands at a cordoned off street near damaged vehicles following an earthquake in Granada. — AFP

AFTERSHOCKS
RATTLE GRANADA
OVERNIGHT

MADRID: At least 10 earthquakes struck Granada in southern Spain overnight, authorities said on Wednesday, continuing seismic activity that began in the region five days ago and has caused light injuries and damage to buildings. Many shops, churches and museums were closed while the local government shuttered offices as a precaution. Local media reported that some residents fled to the coast while others opted to stay outdoors for fear of structures collapsing.

The strongest quake of the sequence was of magnitude 3.4 at 10.35 pm on Tuesday, with its epicentre in Ogijares, 7 km south of Granada city, according to the National Geographic Institute (IGN). It was followed by nine tremors between 1.5 and 2.5 magnitude and dozens of smaller aftershocks.

Health services said they treated 14 cases — mostly panic or anxiety attacks — and more than 500 calls were made to emergency services. About 600 people were evacuated from apartment blocks that required inspection, Andalusian official Antonio Sanz said. “There’s clearly no imminent danger and the public hasn’t been at risk,” Sanz said, adding that it was still impossible to determine the full extent of the damage. — Reuters

23 DIE AS BUS, TRUCK COLLIDE IN BRAZIL



At least 23 people died in a head-on collision between a bus and a truck on the BR-373 highway in Brazil’s southern state of Parana in the early hours of Wednesday, the Federal Highway Police said. Five others were injured when the vehicles crashed around 3 am, police said. Most of those killed were on the bus, and the truck driver also died, the statement read. Early evidence suggested the truck crossed into the opposite lane, it added. The bus involved in the accident belonged to the Imbituva municipal health department and was heading to hospitals in the region of Parana’s capital Curitiba, roughly 180 km away. — Reuters

BERN EYES
BOOSTING
AIR DEFENCE
BUDGET BY
OVER \$1 BN

GENEVA: Switzerland’s government said on Wednesday it was seeking to boost its 2026 investments in air defence spending by more than \$1.0 billion, pointing to escalating threat levels and drawn-out delivery times. “To guarantee delivery times for air defence acquisitions,” the government “will request an additional 970 million Swiss francs from parliament” towards its 2026 budget, it said in a statement following a ministerial meeting.

In March, Bern had requested appropriations for this year’s armament programme to the tune of 3.4 billion Swiss francs. The government stressed that “hybrid operations and long-range attacks constitute the most likely threats to Switzerland”, cautioning that “the armed forces do not have the necessary resources to ensure sufficient protection of the country against aerial threats”. It also highlighted the tense situation on the international arms market

amid soaring demand and with production capacity “saturated” for years to come, causing increasingly long delivery times. In addition, it said that “manufacturers are more and more frequently demanding substantial down payments, without which urgent acquisitions could be delayed for several years”. According to the government, 970 million francs will go towards down payments for short-range and medium-range ground-to-air defence systems. — AFP

ICC says US sanctions on
chief ‘flagrant attack’

THE International Criminal Court on Wednesday lashed out at the United States after Washington slapped sanctions on ICC President Tomoko Akane, calling it a “flagrant attack” on the court’s independence. The US sanctioned Akane of Japan and trial lawyer Abdoulaye Seye of Senegal on Tuesday, as part of Washington’s campaign against what it calls a “corrupt and fatally politicised” body.

The EU’s top officials immediately threw their support behind Akane, saying they “stand firmly” with the ICC president and her top officials. In twin statements on X, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen and European Council head Antonio Costa the court “must be able to act independently and without external pressure.” Germany echoed the stance, with its foreign ministry calling the court’s independence “of central importance”; while the Netherlands, which hosts the court at The Hague, also voiced its disapproval.

The court said in a statement: “These sanctions are a flagrant attack against the independence of an impartial judicial institution.” “Such measures targeting judges, prosecutors and staff... undermine the rule of law,” it added. Washington’s latest move follows sanctions it imposed on several ICC officials, seen as largely in response to the court’s investigations involving Israel, a US ally.

Japan also objected to the sanctions, saying the country has “consistently supported the ICC... in its efforts to prosecute and punish the most serious crimes of concern to the international community and to uphold the rule of law.” The measures are “very unfortunate,” foreign ministry press



Japanese Judge Tomoko Akane, President of the International Criminal Court (ICC), delivers a speech during a press conference in Tokyo. — AFP file photo

secretary Toshihiro Kitamura said in a statement. Japan is the biggest funder of the ICC and a close US ally — which is not a party to the international treaty that established the court.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio earlier said in a statement, without providing examples, that the sanctioned “individuals have directly engaged in efforts by the ICC to investigate, arrest, detain, or prosecute officials whose government has not consented to ICC jurisdiction”. Established in 2002, the ICC prosecutes individuals accused of the gravest atrocities and acts as a last resort when countries do not have adequate legal systems to ensure accountability.

President Donald Trump’s administration has already imposed sanctions against officials of the ICC, which issued in 2024 an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the war in Gaza. The measures bar them from entering the US and from carrying out transactions in the

The court said in a statement: “These sanctions are a flagrant attack against the independence of an impartial judicial institution.” “Such measures targeting judges, prosecutors and staff... undermine the rule of law,” it added

US financial system. In an X post on Tuesday, Netanyahu applauded the US sanctions and called the ICC “a kangaroo court that cloaks its abuse of power in the language of international law”. Last month, Washington launched a major diplomatic offensive against the ICC, accusing it of “threatening” Americans and calling on partners to withdraw from the body — a move already announced by Chad and Venezuela, which has aligned with the United States since the capture and ouster of leader Nicolas Maduro. The ICC expressed concern over those withdrawals, asserting that such countries risked undermining the collective pursuit of justice.

The US signed the Rome Statute establishing the ICC but never ratified the treaty. Israel, Russia and China are not ICC members either. “The Trump Administration has been clear: the International Criminal Court is a corrupt and fatally politicised supranational court that has maliciously abused its authority and exceeded its mandate. We will not tolerate its assault on state sovereignty,” Rubio’s statement said.

Last week, four human rights groups sued Trump in a New York court over his sanctions targeting the ICC, saying the measures block victims of war crimes from pursuing justice. In 2023, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin over the war in Ukraine, prompting Moscow to issue its own arrest warrants for senior court officials. These included Akane, 70, an ICC judge since 2018 who was elected as the court’s president in March 2024. “Even if one judge were to die, we are easily replaceable, so there is really no value in targeting us,” she said after the Russian announcement. — AFP

Belgian fire of the century keeps crews battling efforts high

SOURBRODT: Firefighters hacked their way through boggy terrain overnight to fully surround Belgium’s largest wildfire in a century, but crews were still battling numerous flare-ups in the High Fens nature reserve. Crisis cell spokesman Tony Hosmans said the fire burning since Friday “has been contained and should no longer be able to spread” — after threatening to spill over the German border to the east. “But the affected area is extremely large and there are numerous flare-ups that we need to combat both on the ground and from the air,” he cautioned.

The blaze charring the expanse of peatland, pine trees and hiking trails grew over the weekend to half the size of Manhattan — 3,000 hectares — although hundreds of firefighters working night and day managed to stop it spreading further. Hosmans said the new flare-ups were being “brought under control” as they

emerged, with Wednesday’s goal to finally tame the fire — if possible with aerial support Water-bombing aircraft flown in from Norway, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands have been grounded by low clouds, and the local governor’s office said it “remains to be confirmed” whether they would be able to deploy.

On-site operations have been complicated by the fens’ terrain — a patchwork of heath, peat bogs and raised wooden boardwalks. The last area to be circumscribed was a hard-to-access front closest to the German border, with ground crews working all night to close the gap, coming in from the east and north under very difficult conditions.

Europe has been swept by weeks of devastating wildfires fuelled by dry conditions and a historically hot summer, with France, Greece, Portugal and Spain also battling major blazes. The High Fens blaze



A firefighter carries a water hose as smoke emanates from burnt vegetation during operations against a wildfire at the Hautes Fagnes (High Fens). — AFP

broke out for reasons still unknown

in an area that was ravaged by massive fires in 1911, during a similar period of heatwaves. It is the country’s largest wildfire since.

The fire triggered evacuation orders in the German border town of Monschau as well as two Belgian villages, although residents of the hamlet of Sourbrodt have been given the green light to return home. Even once brought under control, officials have warned it will take weeks or even months of soaking and dousing to prevent the fire from reigniting. “The fire is burning in the peat, so it is actually underground, sometimes quite deep,” explained area fire chief David Covens on a trip into the fire zone.

In peatland terrain like the High Fens, a fire can smoulder underground and resurface some distance away, a phenomenon known as a “zombie fire” that can also attack tree roots, increasing the risk of them collapsing. “At first

glance, it may seem under control, but it can flare up again because it re-emerges, sometimes from great depths,” explained regional government spokesperson Stephanie Ernoux. To detect flare-ups more effectively, firefighters were using drones equipped with heat-sensing detectors, she said.

In forests, peat is an accumulation of spongy, highly flammable, carbon-rich material formed over time through the decomposition of plant matter. It is an ideal fuel for buried embers, which can lie dormant until favourable conditions, such as wind and dry weather, allow them to reignite in broad daylight. “Whenever we disturb the ground, when we cut down a tree and expose the soil, the fire can reignite,” said fire chief Covens. “We’re doing everything we can with the resources available, but we know this is going to take a long time.” — AFP

OPINION

Restraint has an ecology



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI
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The writer is environmental strategist and advocate for sustainable development

THERE is an hour before sunrise on our coast when the tide has finished its work and left everything it carried in a single line along the sand, shells and weed and cuttlebone and the occasional float from some other country, all of it sorted by weight, with no interest at all in origin.

I have walked lines like that most of my working life. The sea keeps no record of where anything came from; it delivers, and then it moves on, and whatever arrives becomes the property of the shore that received it.

This week gave us two deliveries, and I have found it impossible to think about either alone. Oil reached our coastline, carried by currents. In both cases, the arrival was the only part of the process we were present for.

What a coastline holds before anything happens to it is the part nobody counts. Loggerheads coming ashore at Masirah in the dark, hauling themselves up the same beaches their mothers used, working for an hour in the sand before laying, covering, and turning back towards the water ahead of the light.

Humpbacks that never leave the Arabian Sea, the only population of their kind anywhere in the world that stays home.

Sardines running in numbers that hold up whole villages.

Weathered crude is a patient substance. It smells of asphalt with something sweeter underneath, and it declines to stay on the surface where hands can reach it; it works down into sand, settles into sediment, releases for years, and travels upward through everything that eats until it arrives in a household as a smaller catch and a thinner month. The beaches will photograph well again long before any of that has finished.

Loss becomes hardest to dismiss when somebody counted before it happened. The ordinary work of walking beaches in ordinary years with a clipboard and quadrat decides whether change can be demonstrated, responsibility established and recovery measured. Baselines are built when nobody expects to need them. A crisis spends what is already there.

Countries hold memory too. Oman's restraint lives in relationships maintained across difficult years, institutions that establish facts before urgency bends them, and channels kept open when conversation offers little reward. The reserve was drawn on again this week. A sentence takes seconds to utter and can spend trust accumulated over 50 years.

Our coast receives trade, wildlife, weather

Reciprocity keeps that ecology alive. Those who move cargo through shared waters carry obligations towards the environments and communities exposed to their choices, and those who rely on Oman's access and credibility carry obligations towards the sovereignty and respect that make both possible

and pollution; our diplomacy receives the fears, demands and contradictions of competing powers. Holding the middle carries dignity because others depend on it, and cost because pressure arrives from every direction.

Restraint has an ecology because it depends on relationships that sustain one another. Experts measure what others cannot see; institutions create order before urgency becomes panic; diplomats preserve enough trust for another conversation; communities grant these systems the time and legitimacy to work. Every element holds something the others will eventually need.

Reciprocity keeps that ecology alive. Those who move cargo through shared waters carry obligations towards the environments and communities exposed to their choices, and those who rely on Oman's access and credibility carry obligations towards the sovereignty and respect that make both possible.

The tide will lay down another line tomorrow morning, sorted by weight, indifferent to where any of it began. I have always found something steadying in that indifference, and this week I have started to wonder whether we have come to treat our own steadiness the same way, as a feature of the place, arriving on schedule and asking nothing of anybody.

HOW NARWHALS GROW NATURE’S ONLY STRAIGHT TUSK

DANIEL LAWLER

Narwhals have nature’s only straight tusk, a single tooth up to three metres long. The tusks have fascinated scientists ever since, but they have proven extremely difficult to study because these odd-looking, blubbery whales spend most of their lives under the Arctic ice.

But on Tuesday, a large international team of researchers announced they had solved a long-running mystery about the tusks: how they get their uniquely spiralled yet arrow-straight form.

The left canine tooth of male narwhals grows through their jaw and upper lip, jutting out into the animal kingdom’s only single tusk. Their right canine stays buried in their head. “Imagine that you had to ride on a bicycle with a broom strapped to your head,” said Henrik Birkedal, the senior author of a study in Nature Communications describing the discovery. That is how it must feel for male narwhals to dive deep underwater, the chemist at Aarhus University in Denmark said. Yet despite this huge “Monty Pythonesque” protuberance, the animals seem to get about just fine, he added. To solve what they called the “narwhal tusk puzzle,” the team of biologists, chemists and physicists used advanced 3D X-ray technology, including three European particle accelerators called synchrotrons.

The tusks are made out of two kinds of dental tissue: dentin on the inside, cementum on the outside. On a molecular level, the inner dentin forms a right-handed spiral while the outer cementum forms a left-handed spiral, the powerful X-ray scans revealed.

These two counteracting forces give the tusks the straight structure that is so different to the curved tusks of other animals such as elephants.

The scientists were also surprised to find growth layers similar to tree rings inside the tusks, which offer a glimpse into their lives that can last up to 80 years. This was not the only lingering mystery about narwhal tusks. There has also been great debate between scientists about the exact purpose of the world’s weirdest tooth.

There are several hypotheses, including that the whales use their tusks for hunting or to sense temperature and salinity in the water.

But the team behind the new paper believes these options are unlikely because tusks are almost exclusively grown by male narwhals — and females would have needed them also for these purposes. — AFP

Transform gatekeepers of sustainability to catalysts

IN 2010, my team and I were over the moon. Tawasul Think Tank had just won its first regional recognition at the Arabia CSR Awards in Dubai. The award mattered, but what I learned outside the ceremony mattered more. A distinguished English gentleman approached me, perhaps because my Omani dishdasha caught his attention. He was the event’s keynote speaker and told me that, as a young geologist around 1970, he had worked in Oman for a major international energy corporation.

He recalled meetings involving the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and the late legendary Oil, Gas and Minerals Minister Said bin Ahmed al Shanfari. One lesson stayed with him for decades: they paid attention not only to presentations, but to presenters, their eyes, body language and attitudes. Characters could reveal what maps and PowerPoints could not.

We discussed something that has occupied much of my professional journey since: How corporate social responsibility, sustainability and what we now call In-Country Value (ICV), now reduced to the term local content, could become engines of socioeconomic development rather than a peripheral corporate programme. He told me he would raise those ideas. I thought a little of our conversation, yet a few weeks later I got a call confirming that whom I met was no other than Sir Mark Stuart-Moody, the former Chairman of Royal Dutch Shell, Director of HSBC Holdings and Accenture and that he discussed sustainability, CSR and ICV with the late Sultan, and how a small Omani company won a regional award. The following years saw something much bigger taking shape across the



KHALID AL HURAIBI
The writer is an innovator and an insights storyteller

The ultimate purpose of sustainability is not to sustain programmes; it is to create progress that can eventually sustain itself.

country. PDO formally launched its ICV programme in 2013. By the end of 2024, its locally retained spending had risen from 18 per cent in 2013 to 42 per cent, approximately RO 1.5 billion, while its programme had contributed to establishing 83 local industrial facilities. That is real progress.

However, after more than 15 years working around CSR, social investment, sustainability, entrepreneurship and local-value creation, including as a former social investment manager of a multinational energy corporation, I increasingly believe our biggest challenge is no longer convincing institutions that these things matter. It is changing the role of the people who lead them.

Too often, sustainability and local-content professionals become gatekeepers: Guarding budgets with a scarcity mentality, approving applications, checking certificates, administering tenders and measuring compliance. A catalyst asks different questions with an abundance mentality. What new Omani company can this procurement create? What technology can we localise? Which SME or startup can become an exporter? Which graduate can acquire a globally valuable skill? What education, energy and environmental problems could become somebody’s business opportunity?

History provides a useful benchmark. When Norway discovered oil, it could simply have collected petroleum revenues while allowing foreign corporations to supply most of the expertise and technology. Instead, the state progressively built Norwegian participation, established Statoil in 1972, developed demanding

standards and used its domestic market to help create a sophisticated supplier industry. Today, Norway’s petroleum supplier ecosystem comprises roughly 2,000 companies and has become internationally competitive rather than permanently dependent on protection.

So our next question should not simply be: How much did we spend locally? It should be: What became stronger because we spent it? Imagine every major sustainability, CSR and ICV programme publishing a simple annual impact dashboard: Omani companies scaled, technologies localised, quality jobs created, patents or intellectual property developed, carbon avoided, exports generated, SME and startup revenues increased and businesses graduating from preferential support into open competition.

Then go further. Give relevant leaders incentives and objectives for creating other successful leaders as suppliers, not merely managing and processing them. Use procurement pipelines to signal opportunities several years ahead. Connect large buyers with universities, startups and manufacturers. Reward consortiums that transfer technology and intellectual property. Use AI to identify procurement leakage and localisation opportunities. Most importantly, publish comparable outcomes so society can distinguish events or activities from impact.

I have watched this field evolve for more than 15 years. We have moved from philanthropy to CSR, from CSR to sustainability, and from sustainability towards ESG and ICV. The next evolution must be more important still: From gatekeeping to catalysing. The ultimate purpose of sustainability is not to sustain programmes; it is to create progress that can eventually sustain itself.

Celestial splendour in constellation storytelling



SONIA
AMBROSIO

The writer is a journalist, academic and researcher in media studies

It doesn't matter how many times I visit the same places in Oman; there is always something new. I don't mean tourist spots with manufactured branding, but the pieces of sand, earth, water, and sky. Each of these geological and astronomical existences fills me with feelings.

The various directions of wind over the golden dunes whisper differently into my ears, even after dozens of visits. The dunes, the wind, and sunsets have become part of me, though the voices within the whispers are always new. Sometimes, they offer a gentle kiss on my cheek; other times, a gust of wind reminds me of my insignificance against its strength. At times, the wind carries a veil of sand, obscuring the sight for just a moment, to show how blind we can be.

Often, I also go to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. Its dramatic canyon views, cool temperatures, terrace farming, and exotic trees are a magnet for me. The silhouettes decorating the rocky mountains along the trails and the water running deep in the canyons are forever part of me.

On many occasions, I went camping for stargazing, only to be greeted by the familiar 'hee-haw' of a donkey's bray. And not for the first time, I was awakened by a donkey snorting over my head.

Under the vast, dark skies of Al Jabal Al

Akhdhar, illuminated by tiny diamonds, some visible to the naked eye and others only visible through a telescope during a stargazing talk by a local astronomer, I felt transported to a time when people studied the cosmos to understand the solar system and its effects on Earth, oceans, and daily life.

The history of ancient astronomy and modern space telescopes illuminates our understanding of calendars and shapes our perception of the universe.

Early astronomers believed that the pattern of stars had spiritual and religious significance, suggesting that understanding their patterns could unlock comprehension of the universe, both physically and mystically.

From Babylonian records, astronomers mapped constellations and visible planets. People used the stars and constellations to track the changing seasons for farming and used the North Star as a fixed point to determine directions. Voyagers memorised star paths using physical memory to navigate across open seas and vast deserts.

In storytelling, cultures projected their myths, legends, and history onto the stars to pass down moral lessons through generations. Stargazing influences modern astrotourism and Arab cultural revivals.

Anwar, a local amateur astronomer from Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, was invited by our trip

The various directions of wind over the golden dunes whisper differently into my ears, even after dozens of visits. The dunes, the wind, and sunsets have become part of me, though the voices within the whispers are always new

organisers to give a stargazing talk. With his impressive telescope and a pot of tea, he engaged in a conversation about planets and stars, while also explaining how mobile phone cameras can be used to photograph the intricate cosmos. Anwar took us into the celestial world of constellation storytelling.

To see Saturn's bright rings or to photograph the Milky Way, which appears as a hazy, glowing white band of light stretching across the night sky, is to travel through celestial bodies.

We were shown the Scorpio constellation, whose composition marks the tip of a curved tail that can be literally read as 'the (creature with) a burning sting.' Or, as one of the many versions of mythology, Scorpio is in the sky as a reminder for mortals to temper their pride.

Stars and constellations have frequently been central to artistic creation, sparking original stories and serving as reminders to humankind. Classical Arabic poetry frequently used constellations and planets as metaphors for romance, beauty, and nobility.

I had my gaze fixed on the sky, reflecting on the people throughout history who have observed the celestial sphere and identified patterns representing animals, mythological subjects, or inanimate objects.

The tapestry of the night sky can draw intense inspiration and emotion. 'Life seems almost enchanted after all' (Van Gogh).

CHINA GOES RURAL WITH DATA CENTRES TO POWER AI

AGATHA CANTRILL

In China's hilly Guizhou province, a cluster of European-style buildings complete with a clock tower and multi-arched bridge emits a low, permanent hum - a clue to its unexpected identity as tech giant Huawei's largest data centre.

The town-like complex is unique in design, but not in its placement. Dozens of data centres have been constructed in the southwestern province in recent years. They are part of a government strategy that has seen much of the digital infrastructure for breakneck AI development across China's eastern seaboard established in the country's less populated, rural west.

The build-out is ongoing. China is on course to nearly double its data centre capacity within the next five years, as a tech race with the United States intensifies and countries everywhere try to swerve a computing crunch that could stymie AI expansion. The projects have transformed some places - such as Guian New Area, where the Huawei data centre and others are located.

"It used to be a barren mountain, but since the area has developed, transportation has become more convenient, trade has picked up, and business opportunities have emerged," local shopkeeper Shu Peihua said.

When AFP visited last month, street vendors were catering to data centre workers on their lunch break near a roadside banner calling for "promoting high-quality development", a government tech policy catchphrase.

In Europe and the United States, data centre construction has often been met with resistance from local communities citing concerns around energy prices, as well as environmental issues such as water usage and noise.

Residents in Guian were positive about the changes to their area. A vendor selling savoury pancakes, who did not give his name, said two universities had been established since the facilities were built.

Another local, Li Xixiu, said the main road had been developed because of the centres, which in general had "really boosted the economy of this entire area".

"All the villagers in our neighbourhood now find jobs nearby, unlike before, when they had to go to other places," Li said.

In 2021, the government gave its strategy a name: "Eastern Data Western Computing".

The logic of construction in places like Guizhou, with its cooler climates, abundant renewable energy and empty space, is multifaceted.

AI processing is extremely energy intensive, and China has demanded that data centres draw 80 per cent of their power from renewable sources by the end of this decade. That makes regions like Guizhou and Inner Mongolia, which have massively expanded renewable capacity like solar and wind, ideal for operators looking to meet those commitments, said Simeng Deng, a senior analyst at Rystad Energy. — AFP

'American Doctor' shows brutality of Gaza conflict

MARK Perlmutter has treated patients hit by natural disasters and conflicts across 30 countries, including in his native United States. Yet, nothing prepared him for the horrors he would witness under Israeli bombardment.

"Just our first week in Gaza was worse than all of my experiences combined," the orthopaedic surgeon said of deployments that included the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in New York, Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, and the 2010 Haiti earthquake.

The suffering Perlmutter and his colleagues have seen in Gaza hospitals since Israel launched its retaliation for the October 2023 attack forms the core of "American Doctor," a documentary that premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and arrives in select US theatres this Friday.

In her documentary debut, director Poh Si Teng makes no attempt to explain the rights or wrongs of the conflict itself, focusing instead on the work in Gaza of three American doctors from different backgrounds. Perlmutter is Jewish; Thaeer Ahmad is a Muslim of Palestinian descent; and Feroze Sidhwa is the son of Zoroastrian parents.

"People feel like they have to have a PhD in this topic to understand it, or to discuss it sensibly," Sidhwa said.

"The question isn't how well you know Arab-Israeli history. The question is: Do you or do you not support the murder of children? Do you or do you not support the torture of physicians? Do you or do you not support the bombing of hospitals?"

The attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 killed 1,221 people. Israel's military response has resulted in more than 73,300 deaths in Gaza, according to the Health Ministry, whose figures the United Nations considers reliable.

Israel acknowledges it has intentionally hit medical facilities, but says it is targeting fighters using tunnels underneath those hospitals.

The three doctors in the



Boys react during the funeral of Palestinians killed in an Israeli strike on a cafe in Gaza City on Wednesday.

—Reuters



PAULA RAMON

The writer is a Venezuelan journalist who has lived and worked in China, the United States, Brazil, and Uruguay. She is currently a correspondent for Agence France-Presse, based in Los Angeles

documentary say they have not seen tunnels in any of the hospitals where they have worked in Gaza.

One of the documentary's most harrowing sections shows a so-called "double-tap" where missiles strike first responders who are treating patients following a bombing at Nasser Hospital in Khan Yunis.

Deciding what to show on screen was a challenge for Teng, who has previously worked as a visual journalist for AFP, among other outlets.

"You show too much, and it's gratuitous, and nobody's gonna watch, and you want to be effective in telling the truth. You show too little, and it's not real," she said.

The film begins with precisely this dilemma. When Teng feels that including a photo of dead children violates their dignity, Perlmutter chides her, insisting that their obligation is to show Americans what their tax dollars are funding.

"Israel took away their dignity," he says.

"You're not dignifying them unless you let their memory, their bodies tell the story of this trauma, of this genocide. You're not doing them a service by not showing that," he says, pointing to the photo.

"It was a moment for me where, you know what, there's no halfway in this," Teng said.

For the three doctors in the documentary, having to endlessly reiterate the "urgency" of the situation in Gaza during media interviews or meetings with members of Congress is frustrating.

"If I tell you that there are kids starving, or if I tell you that there are mothers who are struggling to feed their children, or that there are teenagers who are being killed by these massive bombs, your response should be: 'We have to stop this,'" emergency physician Thaeer Ahmad said.

"I should not hear from you: 'Oh, but what were they doing, or where were they, or what background are they from? What religion do they follow, or where were they born?'"

Teng said she frequently encountered this resistance, and at times found it difficult to get funding for the project as donors shied away from putting cash behind a project showing the damage being done by US-funded Israeli munitions.

But, she said, the moment felt like it was changing, and she hopes "American Doctor" might further shift the narrative.

It's a hope Perlmutter shares. "The avalanche of truth starts with snowflakes," he said.

"I'm optimistic that we're all snowflakes in that snowball that's getting bigger and bigger."

SPORTS

EMPHATIC START

BAHLA HIT FIVE AS SOHAR INTERNATIONAL CUP KICKS OFF



Fanja and Oman Club players in action in Muscat. — Abdulwahid al Hamadani

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

Bahla made an emphatic start to the 2026-27 Sohar International Cup with a 5-0 victory over Sur, while Dhofar defeated Al Nasr 3-1 and Oman Club shared the points with Fanja following a 1-1 draw as Group 1 action launched the new domestic football season on Tuesday.

The competition was previously known as the Oman Football Association Cup. It has been renamed the Sohar International Cup after Sohar International became the official and exclusive sponsor of the tournament for the 2026–27 season.

Fourteen Jindal League clubs are competing in two geographically divided groups of seven. The group stage is played in a single round-robin format, with the top two teams from each group progressing directly to the semifinals. Sohar enter the tournament as defending champions after beating Al Nahda 1-0 in last season's final to claim their first title in the competition.

Bahla produced the standout performance of the opening day, sweeping aside Sur at Sur Sports Complex. Faisal al Aghbari gave the visitors a perfect start in the fourth minute, converting Husni al Hinai's cross to open the scoring.

Mohammed al Aufi doubled the advantage in the 21st minute after latching onto a through ball and directing his effort into the corner. Sur struggled to establish a consistent attacking threat, while their defence appeared vulnerable against Bahla's organised movement. The visitors could have added a third before the interval, but Sur goalkeeper Ahmed al Araimi denied Yazeed al Rawahi following a one-on-one opportunity in the 25th minute.

Bahla remained in control after the break, and Nasser al Saqri made it 3-0 in the 61st minute after meeting a cross inside the penalty area. Three minutes later, al Aghbari struck again to complete his brace and put the result beyond doubt.

Jackson Bisan rounded off the scoring in the 85th minute, heading home another delivery from al Hinai to complete a commanding five-goal victory.

IMPRESSIVE WIN FOR DHOFAR

At Al Saada Sports Complex, Dhofar opened their campaign with a 3-1 win over Al Nasr. The Salalah giants took the lead in the 43rd minute when Al Nasr defender Saif al Dhabari diverted Omar Adel's cross into his own net. Substitute John Paul Rashford extended Dhofar's advantage in the 69th minute before Tiemori Keita converted a penalty for Al Nasr in the 86th minute. Rashford struck again in the 90th minute to secure all three points for Dhofar.

Meanwhile, Oman Club and Fanja settled for a 1-1 draw at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Ondongo Varane headed Oman Club in front in the 45th minute, but second-half substitute Khalid al Buraiki brought Fanja level in the 69th minute.

Bahla lead Group 1 on goal difference ahead of Dhofar, while Oman Club and Fanja have one point each.

Oman to host 2028 Beach Handball World Cup

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

OMAN has been awarded the hosting rights for the 2028 Beach Handball World Cup, marking a major milestone for the country's sports sector and strengthening its position as an emerging international destination for major sporting events.

The decision by the International Handball Federation (IHF) follows a competitive bidding process involving several European countries. The tournament is expected to bring together 32 national teams, with 16 men's and 16 women's teams, making it one of the largest beach handball events ever staged in Oman.

The championship will be held in Dhofar during the Khareef Dhofar Season, providing the tournament with an important tourism dimension while showcasing the governorate's unique natural and cultural attractions to teams, officials and visitors from around the world.

This will be Oman's second time hosting the Beach Handball World Cup. The country successfully staged the fifth edition in 2012 at the Al Musannah Sports City, where 24 men's and women's teams competed. Oman finished eighth in that edition, while the tournament earned widespread recognition for its strong organisation and helped establish the Sultanate of Oman as a capable host for international beach sports events.

Oman's successful bid has been supported by the rapid development of beach handball in recent years. In 2025, the national team won the third Gulf Beach Games title in April before securing the Asian Beach Handball Championship crown in May. The team also made its ninth World Cup appearance in Croatia in 2026.

These achievements, combined with Oman's successful hosting of the 2025 Asian championship, strengthened international confidence in the country's



This will be Oman's second time hosting the Beach Handball World Cup.



MOOSA BIN KHAMIS AL BALUSHI

Chairman of Oman Handball Association

organisational capabilities. IHF President Dr Hassan Moustafa attended part of the Asian championship in Muscat, while IHF representatives monitored the event and assessed the country's facilities and organisational preparations.

SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT

Moosa bin Khamis al Balushi, Chairman of the Oman Handball Association, welcomed the decision, describing it as a significant achievement for Omani sport.

"We are extremely happy to win the hosting rights. Hosting the World Cup was one of the key objectives set by the OHA board from the beginning of its current mandate," Al Balushi said.

He expressed his appreciation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for their continued support, stressing that the

successful bid was the result of long-term planning and sustained efforts to develop beach handball in Oman.

Al Balushi said preparations would begin with a comprehensive plan covering facilities, playing venues, services and the national team's preparations. He added that hosting the tournament in Dhofar during the Khareef Dhofar Season would create a valuable opportunity to promote sports tourism and showcase Oman internationally.

The OHA also aims to use the event to inspire young Omani athletes and strengthen cooperation with government institutions, private-sector partners, clubs and sports organisations.

"We will work to write a new chapter in the history of Omani sport and make our beaches a global platform for excellence and creativity," Al Balushi said.

With Oman's strong record of international participation and growing expertise in hosting major beach sports events, the 2028 World Cup is expected to provide another landmark opportunity to elevate the country's sporting profile while generating wider tourism and economic benefits for Dhofar.

Oman swimmers gear up for Arab Championships

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

Oman's national swimming teams have stepped up preparations for their upcoming international commitments by entering an overseas training camp in Egypt, as the Oman Aquatics Association (OAA) seeks to raise the swimmers' technical and physical readiness ahead of two Arab championships later this year.

The training camp will run until August 31 and forms part of the federation's preparations for the Arab Open Water Swimming Championship in Tunisia from October 2 to 4, followed by the Arab Swimming Championship in Bahrain from November 13 to 17. The national team recently completed an intensive domestic camp at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher before travelling to Egypt to continue its preparations. The programme is focused on improving technical performance, physical conditioning and competitive readiness ahead of the two major regional events.

Dr Awwad bin Salim al Ajili,



OAA Chairman, said the training camp reflects the federation's commitment to developing national swimmers and providing them with comprehensive preparation programmes.

"The delegation travelled to Egypt for a preparatory camp ahead of the Arab championships in open-water and pool swimming," Al Ajili said.

"These preparations are part of the federation's strategy to focus on our swimmers, particularly as most of our national team members are young and we currently have no swimmers over the age of 20."

He explained that the



DR AWWAD AL AJILI

Chairman of Oman Aquatics Association

preparation programme goes beyond technical and physical training to include mental preparation and the overall development of the swimmer.

"The objective is to build the swimmer in an integrated manner

and ensure that our athletes are properly prepared for international competition," he said.

Following their return to Oman, the swimmers will continue their preparations under the supervision of the coaching staff. Greater attention will initially be given to open-water swimming because the Tunisian championship is the first major

commitment on the calendar, while preparations for the Bahrain event will continue ahead of November.

FEMALE SWIMMER

The OAA is also considering a historic step by potentially including a female swimmer in an upcoming international competition. Al Ajili stressed, however, that no final decision has been made, as the necessary procedures, assessments and readiness requirements are still being completed.

He said the federation is also working to develop women's national teams with the aim of beginning official participation in international competitions from next year.

The delegation includes head coach Mohamed Bouguerra, assistant coach Hamad al Kalibi and physiotherapist Hussein Belarif, along with swimmers Naif al Qasmi, Nasser al Kindi, Ibrahim al Wahibi, Shehab al Battashi, Mohamed al Wahibi, Hamad al Hasani, Mahmood Oulad Thani, Khalil al Hasani, Ghaith al Wahibi, Yousef al Salti, Elias al Harthi, Khalid al Hasani, Mohamed al Rahbi and Moamin al Abdali.

THIRDEDITION



Salalah will host the Khareef Dhofar Open Karate Championship on August 21 and 22.

KHAREEF DHOFAR
OPEN KARATE DRAWS
160 ATHLETES

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

Salalah is set to host the third edition of the Khareef Dhofar Open Karate Championship on August 21 and 22, with more than 160 athletes representing different age groups expected to take part at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex



DR FAISAL AL
MAAWALI

Chairman of Oman
Karate Committee



DR SADIQ AL ISSA

Secretary of Oman
Karate Committee

tourism and sporting profile, particularly during the Khareef Dhofar Season, which attracts significant visitors and creates a vibrant social and cultural environment.

Holding the championship during Khareef Dhofar Season, he added, provides an opportunity to connect sport with tourism and showcase the governorate’s natural, cultural and tourism attractions.

Al Maawali said the committee hopes to develop the championship into an international open event in the coming years, attracting leading athletes from the Gulf region and beyond.

Dr Sadiq al Issa, OKC Secretary, said the current board, which began its mandate about a year ago, had developed an annual strategy focused on establishing a stronger foundation for the sport. The plan includes organising athlete categories and developing the technical and administrative structures for players, coaches and referees.

Al Issa noted that the committee had expanded its international activities, participating in events in Riyadh, Doha, the UAE and Bali, Indonesia, while Oman’s national team also competed at the Asian Junior Championship in Jordan.

A referee development course will be held ahead of the championship, focusing on the latest amendments to international karate regulations.

for Culture and Entertainment. The championship, organised by the Oman Karate Committee (OKC), forms part of the activities accompanying the Khareef Dhofar Season. Dr Faisal al Maawali, OKC Chairman, said the championship reflects the committee’s efforts to develop the local competition system while expanding karate across the governorates.

“Sport should be a platform for competition and talent development, while also contributing to the presence of sport within national and tourism seasons and events,” Al Maawali said.

He explained that Dhofar was selected because of its strong

Muscat GP to put Oman on
global athletics map: OAA

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

The inaugural Muscat Grand Prix – World Athletics Continental Tour Bronze is set to mark a significant milestone for Omani athletics, with Muscat preparing to welcome athletes from around the world on September 5 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

Organised by the Oman Athletics Association (OAA) in direct collaboration with World Athletics, the one-day international meeting is expected to bring together around 300 athletes, including approximately 100 Omani athletes, in a wide-ranging programme featuring sprinting, middle-distance races, hurdles, relay events, jumps and throwing competitions. The event will not only provide a high-level competitive platform for athletes but also represents an important step in Oman’s ambition to strengthen its position on the international sports map and establish Muscat as a destination for major athletics events.

Major General (Ret) Said bin Mohammed al Hajri, Chairman of the Oman Athletics Association and Event Director, said the association had been working intensively to complete the technical, organisational and logistical preparations required for the event. “This is the first-Grand Prix-of-its-kind to be held in Muscat and we are very pleased to organise this prestigious event in direct collaboration with the World Athletics. We expect around 300 athletes from different parts of the world, including around 100 athletes from the Sultanate of Oman,” Al Hajri told *Oman Observer*.

NEW CHAPTER

The competition programme will feature 22 events for men, women and the Under-20 category, covering a broad range of athletics disciplines. The programme will include the 100m, 110m hurdles, 200m, 300m, 400m, 800m, Under-20 800m, 3,000m and 4x100m relay, alongside hammer throw, shot put, javelin throw, long jump and triple jump. The Muscat event will form part of the World Athletics Continental Tour Bronze series, followed by an international challenge competition within the recognised World Athletics global circuit. This will provide participating athletes with opportunities to earn valuable ranking points and strengthen their qualification prospects for major international championships.

For Oman, the significance goes beyond hosting another sporting competition. Al Hajri described the inaugural Grand Prix as a strategic step towards establishing Oman as an active host within the global athletics calendar. “Hosting the first edition of the Grand Prix represents a qualitative step for Omani sport. It is not simply a competition; it is an announcement that the Sultanate of Oman has entered the global athletics scene and has the capability to become an active part of the international competition system,” he said.

He added that the event would demonstrate Oman’s organisational and human capabilities in hosting major international sporting events while showcasing the



The one-day international meeting is expected to bring together around 300 athletes.



MAJOR GENERAL
(RET) SAID BIN
MOHAMMED AL
HAJRI

Chairman of Oman
Athletics Association
and Event Director

country’s hospitality and ability to welcome athletes, officials and spectators.

INTERNATIONAL
PARTICIPATION

The meeting is expected to attract athletes from Asia, Africa and Europe, including competitors with strong records in sprinting, middle-distance events and field disciplines. Al Hajri stressed that the inclusion of the

competition within the World Athletics circuit gives it significant technical importance. “The diversity of the programme, covering sprints, middle-distance races, relays, jumps and throws, provides a comprehensive competitive platform for athletes. Over recent months, the association has worked to prepare the track, facilities and supporting infrastructure in line with international standards,” he said.

The OAA has also coordinated with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MoCSY), security and tourism authorities and other relevant institutions to ensure that the event meets the required organisational and technical standards. Preparations include the competition track, timing systems, judging arrangements, athlete facilities and logistical services for participating delegations.

The Muscat Grand Prix will also provide a major opportunity for Omani athletes to compete alongside international competitors on home soil. Al Hajri believes

this exposure will play an important role in the development of the national team. “Competing against athletes with world-class standards gives our athletes experience that cannot be gained except through participation in events of this level. The ranking points available through the competition are also important and could open opportunities for our athletes to compete in bigger continental and international championships,” he said.

The association is also using the event as an opportunity to develop the wider athletics ecosystem by preparing national coaches, judges and technical personnel through specialised workshops and courses held alongside the competition.

PLATFORM FOR TOURISM

The significance of the Muscat Grand Prix extends beyond the athletics track, with the OAA viewing the event as part of Oman’s broader efforts to use sport as a platform for tourism promotion, international visibility and economic development. Al Hajri said hosting international sporting events was closely aligned with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, particularly in developing human capabilities, promoting tourism and strengthening Oman’s international profile.

“Sport has become an influential element in economic and tourism development, and we believe in its ability to promote Oman internationally. We also aspire to host larger competitions in the coming years, eventually reaching the stage of organising global events,” he said.

The OAA prepared a promotional and fan-engagement programme for the event, including media campaigns, affordable ticketing and accompanying activities featuring sports and tourism exhibitions and family-oriented entertainment programmes.

Qurayat hit 13 as Al Amerat bounce back in Junior Hockey League

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

Qurayat strengthened their grip on top spot in Group 1 of the 2026 Hockey Oman Junior League with a commanding 13-0 victory over Al Bashayer, while Al Amerat bounced back with a 3-0 win over Seeb at Hockey Oman Stadium on Tuesday.

In the first match, Al Amerat responded strongly to their opening-round defeat against Qurayat by handing Seeb their first loss of the competition.

The opening quarter ended goalless as both sides remained organised and limited the number of clear opportunities. Al Amerat broke the deadlock in the 27th minute when Bader Salim scored a field

goal, giving his team a 1-0 advantage at half-time.

Al Amerat doubled their lead in the 37th minute through Naif Ibrahim, who converted from a penalty corner during the third quarter. Khazrag Sbit then completed the victory with a field goal in the 56th minute, while the Al Amerat defence maintained a clean sheet throughout the four quarters.

QURAYAT SINK AL BASHAYER

The second match produced a dominant attacking display from Qurayat, who scored in every quarter during their 13-0 win over Al Bashayer.

Qurayat made a rapid start and established a 3-0 lead by the end of the opening quarter. They added



Seeb and Al Amerat players fight for the ball at Hockey Oman Stadium.

— Hussein al Muqbali

three more goals in the second quarter to enter half-time with a commanding 6-0 advantage.

Their pressure continued after the interval, with another three goals taking the score to 9-0 at the end of the third quarter. Four further strikes in the final quarter completed the biggest victory of the group stage so far.

Said bin Salim al Fazari led the scoring with four goals in the 11th, 36th, 41st and 55th minutes. Abdullah bin Fathi al Dughaisi and Saad bin Salim al Fazari scored twice each.

The remaining goals came from Badr bin Qais al Mujaini, Omar bin Talib al Nasri, Azzan bin Qais al Mujaini, Ahmed bin Said al Musharfi and Asem bin Younis al

Wahaibi. Qurayat’s final two goals were scored from penalty corners, while their first 11 came from field goals.

The result moved Qurayat to six points from two matches, having scored 16 goals and conceded only once. Al Amerat and Seeb are level on three points, while Al Bashayer remain without a point.

The preliminary round concludes on Friday, when Al Amerat face Al Bashayer at 6 pm before Qurayat take on Seeb at 8 pm at Hockey Oman Stadium.

The final standings will determine the semifinal pairings, with the group winners facing the fourth-placed team and the runners-up meeting the third-placed side on Sunday.

SPORTS

FOURTHROUND



Aryna Sabalenka acknowledges fans after defeating Xinyu Wang (CHN) during the Cincinnati Open at Lindner Family Tennis Center. — **Imagn Images**

NO 1 SABALENKA
SLAMS WANG
TO ADVANCE AT
CINCINNATI

CINCINNATI: Aryna Sabalenka unleashed her big game with devastating effect on Tuesday, hammering China’s Wang Xinyu 6-1, 6-3 to reach the fourth round of the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Masters.

The world number one took only 20 minutes to blow through the first set against her 36th-ranked opponent and began the second set with a break of serve.

Sabalenka kept up the pressure in the second set with Wang double-faulting on the top seed’s first match point after 54 minutes.

The victory marked the 45th in a row for Sabalenka at the Masters 1000 level.

“I cannot complain. She’s a tough opponent,” Sabalenka said. “To win in straight sets like this in under an hour is insane.

“I’m super happy to be through. I really trusted myself and went for my shots. I wasn’t over-thinking. I was able to stay focused and be in every point.”

Sabalenka next plays Czach Sara Bejlek, a 4-6, 6-1, 6-2 winner over Ekaterina Alexandrova.

Fourth seed Coco Gauff needed to battle following a sizzling first set in a 6-1, 7-6 (7/3) victory over fellow American Ann Li.

The 2023 champion had it all her own way in the opening set against her 29th-ranked foe, winning in 30 minutes. The pair exchanged early breaks in the second on the way to a tie-breaker, in which Gauff seized a 4-1 lead and won on her third match point.

Mirra Andreeva’s French Open reigning champion status counted for little as the fifth seed struggled to close out a 6-1, 7-6 (7/5) victory over Janice Tjen. The Indonesian challenger ranked 37 was bowled over in the first set but made Andreeva work to finally advance.

Eighth seed Elina Svitolina was forced to withdraw before her match against Wang Xiyu with an ankle injury.

Canada’s second-seeded Felix Auger-Aliassime eliminated Argentina’s Juan Manuel Cerundolo 7-5, 6-1 in 90 minutes.

Washington winner and fifth seed Taylor Fritz fired eight aces in defeating Daniel Merida 6-3 6-4 in 83 minutes. The Spaniard made 25 unforced errors as Fritz booked a fourth-round match against Australian Chris O’Connell, who is 0-3 against the American.

Last week’s Montreal finalist Brandon Nakashima came from the brink to upset fourth seed Daniil Medvedev 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/4), 6-1.

Portugal’s Nuno Borges defeated 2021 runner-up Andrey Rublev 6-3, 6-4 in 72 minutes. — **AFP**



India’s Manav Suthar shows the ball after taking a six-wicket haul as he celebrates his team’s win at the end of the fifth day of the first Test match between Sri Lanka and India at the Galle International Stadium in Galle on Wednesday. — **AFP**

Suthar shines as India
crush Lanka in 600th Test

LEFT-ARM spinner Manav Suthar finished with 10 wickets as India thrashed Sri Lanka by 165 runs in the first Test in Galle on Wednesday to take a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

Playing only his second Test, Suthar impressed with his line and length to ensure India a memorable win in their 600th Test match.

Suthar, 24, took four wickets in the first innings and kept up the onslaught to take 6-55, helping bowl out the hosts for 206 shortly after lunch on the final day.

Set a target of 372, Sri Lanka’s batters failed to apply themselves other than Sonal Dinusha, who top-scored in both innings.

India captain Shubman Gill called the victory “very satisfying”.

“We were in a comfortable position but were not sure if the match would go on (because of weather), but the team responded well,” he said.

Gill praised Suthar and the batsmen for their effort on a wicket that was not easy to score runs off.

“He has been bowling magnificently. Looks like a very promising guy and someone who can play for India for a long time,” he said.

India claimed two wickets in the morning session after Sri Lanka resumed on 84-4 and then quickly ran through the tail.

Captain Dhananjaya de Silva (59) and first-innings centurion Dinusha tried to fight back, batting for over two hours to add 95 runs for the fifth wicket.

‘IT WAS NOT EASY’

De Silva, dismissed off a no-ball early in his innings, looked set to make the most of the reprieve, posting his 20th half-century.

But his knock ended after he attempted



India’s Ravindra Jadeja (C) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Sri Lanka’s captain Dhananjaya de Silva during the fifth day of the first Test in Galle. — **AFP**

a sweep shot off Ravindra Jadeja and was caught at short fine leg by Suthar.

“It was not easy (batting fourth,” said De Silva.

“They won the toss, got the runs on the

board, and with our batting, we lost wickets and it went downhill from there.”

Wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella posted a half-century in the first innings but couldn’t make an impact in the second.

Dickwella fell for 10 when he attempted to hit Prasadh Krishna over the slips but ended up edging one to the wicketkeeper.

Suthar triggered a late-order collapse with a triple-wicket maiden after lunch and then in his next over claimed the last wicket of Keshara Nuwantha as Sri Lanka folded 36 minutes after lunch.

The last four wickets fell for seven runs with Suthar claiming all four.

The 25-year-old Dinusha (84) put up a solid effort despite little support from his teammates.

Playing his fourth Test, he showcased maturity beyond his age, taking on India’s spinners with nimble footwork.

He was dismissed when Dhruv Jurel at leg slip took a bat-pad catch. He faced 128 deliveries during his defiant knock and hit eight fours and one six.

“We believed that we could draw the game even at lunch,” said Sri Lanka head coach Gary Kirsten.

“Our instruction to the lower order batters was to bat as long as they could. We just needed one big partnership but once Dinusha was dismissed, it all fell off quickly.”

Apart from Suthar, the other stand out performer for India was batter Devdutt Padikkal, who posted 167 and 44 in the game, having come in as a late injury replacement.

“The wicket had its natural wear and tear but it was a good Test wicket,” Padikkal said.

“Turned a lot more from the third day onwards. In the end it was all about who came out on top with their skill-set.”

The teams head to Colombo for the second Test starting on Sunday. — **AFP**

Champions crowned at Oman Sailing Championship in Ras Al Hadd

MUSCAT: Five days of high-calibre maritime competition drawn to a close as the Oman Sailing Championship officially concluded in Ras Al Hadd, Sur. Featuring 56 sailors across the Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, and ILCA 7 fleets, the event brought together 43 Omani sailors from Oman Sail’s national network along with visiting international sailors from the United Arab Emirates and Sri Lanka.

Sailors faced gruelling conditions across up to 12 high-intensity races off the coast of Al Sharqiyah South, putting into practice weeks of preparation built during Oman Sail’s High-Performance Summer Training Camp.

The closing and prize-giving ceremony was held at the conclusion, attended by Dr Khamis



Top finishers in the Optimist overall category.

bin Salim al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, who presented the medals, and attended by Mohammed bin Juma al Mukhaini, Senior Manager of Communication and Community Affairs at Oman LNG.

The ceremonies celebrated the outstanding performances, athletic discipline, and sportsmanship displayed throughout the regatta which is a testament to Oman Sail’s commitment to nurturing both

talented athletes, role models and future ambassadors for the nation on the global sporting stage.

In the Optimist competition – the largest fleet of the championships – all of the races were very close battles on the water. Mohammed al Qasmi finished first overall, just ahead of Khaled bin Yahya al Suraihi in second and Theyab al Mehri from the UAE in third. Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Balushi was the highest-ranked junior and secured the Under-12 title, while Abeer bint Khalil al Zakwani was the highest-ranking girl and winner of the Optimist Girls competition.

The ILCA 4 saw fierce competition throughout all 12 races. Ultimately it was Abdulrahman bin Khalid al Hadi who triumphed, finishing ahead of Hassan Nassar al Wahaibi

in second. Aws bin Maher al Busaidi finished in third.

The ILCA 6 category was won by Mohamed bin Abdulkareem ahead of Elias bin Badr al Fadhli in second, with Zakariya bin Mohammed al Ghafri in third.

Ali bin Husain al Sadi won the ILCA 7 competition, while Aslem bin Ali al Hamdani was a close second, and Al Mutasim al Farsi finished third.

Abdulaziz al Shidi, Acting Director of Sailing at Oman Sail, said, “Seeing our national sailors execute high-level tactics alongside international competitors underscores the strength of our youth pathway and high-performance development. It was also a great privilege to welcome the sailors from the UAE and Sri Lanka.”

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE
7,549.595

BUSINESS

CRUDE OIL
OMAN \$93.22
BRENT \$91.95
LIGHT \$85.01



SHORTTAKES



Venture capital firm Cyfr Capital has completed five new investments through its Seed Fund in collaboration with Future Fund Oman.

CYFR CAPITAL COMPLETES FIVE SEED DEALS WITH FFO

BALARAB AL TAMIMI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

Muscat-based venture capital firm Cyfr Capital has completed five new investments through its Seed Fund in collaboration with Future Fund Oman (FFO), extending early-stage backing to companies working in car trading, food delivery, tourism, artificial intelligence and packaging.

The five are Sooq Cars, iO Eats, Darrbak, Decoil and Pack’N, according to an announcement published by the firm on August 18. Cyfr Capital did not disclose the value of the individual investments, the total committed under the Seed Fund, or the size of the stakes acquired.

Sooq Cars operates a vehicle-trading platform covering Oman and the wider Gulf, spanning ready stock, imports, spare parts and leasing. Cyfr Capital said the platform’s user base exceeds one million.

iO Eats runs a food-delivery application supported by cloud kitchens at six locations, allowing customers to order from more than 30 restaurants in a single basket without additional charges, the firm said.

Darrbak offers a booking platform for tourism experiences in Oman, listing more than 260 activities across adventure, sports, nature, arts and culture and drawing on more than 76 local providers.

Decoil supplies data and artificial intelligence services aimed at helping organisations process unstructured data and convert it into usable insight, while Pack’N provides customised packaging and smart storage solutions to food and beverage businesses.

Cyfr Capital described the transactions as part of its approach to funding companies at the product-development and early-expansion stage; and framed the tie-up with FFO as supporting Oman’s entrepreneurship ecosystem.

be’ah advances carbon credits via landfill gas

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

OMAN Environmental Services Holding Company (be’ah) is expanding its carbon-management efforts into a potentially significant new revenue stream by developing carbon credits from greenhouse-gas (GHG) emission reductions across its waste-management operations, with landfill gas (LFG) recovery emerging as a key pillar of the strategy.

The initiative is anchored by be’ah’s Carbon Management Framework, established to cover the full carbon lifecycle — from emissions measurement and reduction planning to carbon-credit registration and verification, issuance and eventual financial integration.

The framework is structured around five phases: carbon accounting; identification of reduction opportunities and projects; carbon-credit registration and verification; issuance, sale and retirement of credits; and accounting and financial integration.

The framework follows be’ah’s completion of its 2024 GHG inventory, which put combined Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions at 1.285 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent (tCO₂e). Scope 1 emissions accounted for 1.279 million tCO₂e, while Scope 2 emissions stood at 6,672 tCO₂e.

The inventory identified solid-waste disposal sites as by far the largest emissions source, accounting for 91.9 per cent of Scope 1 emissions.

Mobile combustion, primarily associated with the municipal solid-waste collection fleet, contributed another 4.9 per cent, while flaring accounted for 1.5 per cent.

These findings have directed be’ah decarbonisation efforts towards landfill methane — a



Two Landfill Gas recovery projects at the Al Multaqa and Barka landfills have been registered under Verra’s Verified Carbon Standard.

The projects are designed to move beyond methane destruction towards productive utilisation, including on-site electricity generation and potentially electricity exports at full recovery capacity.

potent GHG generated through the decomposition of organic waste.

Capturing the gas instead of allowing it to escape and subsequently flaring or utilising it, creates measurable emission reductions that can potentially be converted into tradable carbon credits. be’ah has previously partnered with OQ Trading (OQT) — the global marketing arm of OQ Group — to identify carbon-credit opportunities and support project development, certification, verification and marketing.

Two LFG recovery projects at the Al Multaqa and Barka landfills were registered under Verra’s Verified Carbon Standard in 2024 as projects #4544 and #4550.

The Al Multaqa project received credits for 2021 and 2022, while Barka received credits for 2022.

The carbon-credit programme is now being complemented by efforts to convert recovered landfill gas into useful energy.

At Al Multaqa, an existing flaring system with a capacity of 2,000 Nm³/hr has an estimated LFG recovery potential of around 430 Nm³/hr and electricity-generation

potential of approximately 460 kW.

At Barka, the corresponding figures are 2,500 Nm³/hr of flaring capacity, around 530 Nm³/hr of recoverable gas and approximately 600 kW of potential electricity generation.

The projects are designed to move beyond methane destruction towards productive utilisation, including on-site electricity generation and potentially electricity exports at full recovery capacity.

By end-2025, overall progress on the Al Multaqa and Barka utilisation projects had reached around 55 per cent, with the projects scheduled for completion in July 2026.

With landfill emissions accounting for the overwhelming majority of be’ah measured GHG footprint, the company’s carbon-credit strategy offers a route to link Oman’s waste-management transition with climate finance — turning methane abatement, resource recovery and energy generation into quantifiable environmental and potentially financial value.

Al Wusta road improvements support Khareef Dhofar economy

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

Maintenance work continues on paved roads in Al Wusta Governorate as part of a project valued at approximately RO 6.4 million. This project encompasses the maintenance of 1,244 kilometres of roads, contributing to the preservation of the road network’s efficiency, especially in light of the increased traffic and tourism during khareef Dhofar Season.

The importance of these projects extends beyond improving safety and traffic flow; they also support economic activity related to tourism, services, transportation and hospitality.

Al Wusta Governorate holds strategic importance due to its location, making its roads a major thoroughfare for travellers, trucks and tourist vehicles heading to Salalah during the season.

The Sultanate of Oman is proceeding with the implementation of a



Given its strategic location, Al Wusta’s road network represent a major thoroughfare for travellers, trucks and tourist vehicles heading to Salalah during the Khareef Dhofar Season.

comprehensive package of road projects aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the transportation network, improving connectivity between governorates and wilayats and supporting commercial, logistical and tourism activities, in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Work is also underway to complete a section of the Sultan Said bin Taimur Road north of Haima, spanning 850 kilometres, at a cost of RO 44 million.

The project is expected to be completed within 24 months. Work continues on the third phase of the Sultan Said bin Taimur Road

project, spanning 124.5 kilometres, at a cost of RO 70 million with a three-year implementation period.

Eng Bakhit bin Salem al Awaid, Director of the Roads Department in Al Wusta Governorate, stated: “During the Khareef Dhofar Season, we intensify our efforts to carry out road maintenance work.

This includes removing sand, dust and other obstacles, painting road markings, repairing asphalt damage and painting bridges and city entrances. These efforts contribute to raising traffic safety standards and improving the efficiency of the road network”.

Khareef is one of the most prominent tourist seasons in the Sultanate of Oman.

This influx of tourists impacts a wide range of economic activities, from hotels, hotel apartments and restaurants to car rentals, gas stations, shops and tourist-related businesses.

Therefore, developing the roads leading to Dhofar is not merely a service project, but rather an investment in the infrastructure of

tourism and the local economy.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) also benefit from the increased traffic during the season, particularly those operating in the transportation, hospitality, restaurant, retail and tourism services sectors.

The economic benefits are not limited to the Dhofar Governorate.

The Al Wusta Governorate also benefits from the increased traffic on the main roads, through the increased demand for gas stations, restaurants, rest areas, auto repair shops and various services related to overland travel.

With the continued implementation of strategic projects throughout 2026, investments in roads appear to be a key driver of infrastructure spending in the Sultanate of Oman, with an expected impact on the competitiveness of the transport and logistics sector and an improved business environment, in line with the economic diversification goals of Oman Vision 2040.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES



BankDhofar advances Oman’s cashless economy with digital banking.

BANKDHOFAR LEADS OMAN’S CASHLESS DIGITAL ECONOMY

Oman’s payments landscape is undergoing a rapid transformation under the guidance of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), aligned with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Through modernised clearing systems, real-time settlement infrastructure and progressive regulatory frameworks, the CBO has strengthened the foundations of a secure, efficient, and increasingly cashless financial ecosystem.

Digital payments are now widely embedded across consumer, corporate and public-sector transactions, driven by the growing adoption of mobile wallets, contactless cards and instant transfers.

National initiatives such as the “Maal” payment card and fintech-friendly regulatory sandbox environments continue to enhance interoperability, reduce transaction friction and accelerate innovation across the financial sector.

Against this backdrop, BankDhofar has emerged as one of the most progressive and digitally advanced banks in the Sultanate of Oman, playing a key role in enabling the shift towards a digital-first economy.

On the retail front, the bank has established a strong mobile-first ecosystem, enabling QR payments, instant fund transfers, bill payments and seamless account management via its mobile application. Early adoption of contactless and tokenised payments — including Dhofar Pay, Tap-to-Pay and integration with global wallets such as Apple Pay and Samsung Pay — has reinforced its leadership in everyday digital payments.

Equally significant is BankDhofar’s advancement in Corporate and Institutional Banking (CIB) digitisation. Its next-generation Neo Corporate Internet Banking platform enables corporates, government entities and large institutions to process high-volume bulk transactions, including payroll, supplier payments, collections and mass disbursements, with enhanced speed, control and straight-through processing.

A key differentiator is the bank’s API-based and Host-to-Host (H2H) connectivity, allowing seamless integration between corporate ERP or treasury systems and the bank’s payment infrastructure.

This enables automated payment initiation, bulk file processing, real-time transaction updates, reconciliation and reporting — significantly reducing manual intervention and operational risk while supporting 24/7 transaction processing at scale.

Al Jenaibi International Automobiles, the official importer for BMW in Muscat, Oman today unveiled the all-new BMW iX3, the first-series-production model of the Neue Klasse, a new car architecture that will underpin the next generations of BMW models. The name is intentional: in 1962, the original Neue Klasse defined the modern sports sedan and shaped BMW’s identity for the next six decades. Today, the all-new BMW iX3, a fully electric Sports Activity Vehicle (SAV), opens a new chapter of

Sheer Driving Pleasure with a distinctive new design language that reflects the technological progress of the Neue Klasse. Built on sixth-generation BMW eDrive technology, the iX3 offers up to approximately 805 km of range (WLTP) and a peak charging rate of 400 kW, roughly ten minutes of charging is enough for a further 300–370 km. A new electronic architecture built around four high-performance “superbrain” computers processes data up to 20 times faster than before,

ICAUR SUMMIT ESCAPE ’26 BRINGS ADVENTURE TO JABAL AKHDAR

iCAUR Oman successfully hosted the iCAUR Summit Escape ‘26, an exclusive weekend customer getaway from Muscat to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

Designed to celebrate the brand’s growing community in Oman, the retreat brought together iCAUR owners for a weekend of scenic convoy drives, off-road adventures and memorable experiences that captured the true spirit of the iCAUR lifestyle.

The journey reflected the brand’s



iCAUR Oman celebrates its community with Summit Escape ‘26.

“Born to Play” philosophy, offering customers a chance to explore Oman’s dramatic mountain landscapes while experiencing the capability and versatility of their iCAUR vehicles firsthand.

The convoy made its way through Al Jabal Al Akhdhar’s stunning mountain scenery, stopping at the historic Bayt Al Ridaydah Fort before heading to a dedicated off-road venue, where participants put their iCAUR vehicles to the test across challenging terrain.

Drive home Toyota Raize with akeed benefits

TOYOTA Akeed offers customers even more reasons to choose the Toyota Raize this season, a compact SUV that brings together efficiency and everyday capability, making it a natural fit for motor enthusiasts navigating the mix of city streets and open highways that define daily life in Oman.

As part of the ongoing Toyota Akeed campaign, every qualifying purchase comes with a 5-year or 50,000 km service package, Thiqah Loyalty Points and one year of complimentary registration, adding lasting value on top of an already dependable SUV, with the offer running until October 7.

Its agile footprint and dependable engineering give everyone the confidence to handle busy urban routes on weekdays and venture further afield when the weekend calls. Efficient Power, Confident Handling

At the core of the Raize is a 1.0-litre turbocharged engine producing 96.5 horsepower and 14.28 kg-m of torque, paired with a Continuously Variable Transmission that simulates a seven-speed sequential shift for smooth low-speed response and refined highway cruising.

A lightweight yet rigid body structure works alongside a well-tuned suspension to deliver stable handling and a comfortable ride, while a tight 5.1-metre turning



Toyota Raize combines everyday drive with exclusive benefits.

radius makes tight parking spots and city manoeuvring effortless.

A Cabin Designed Around the Driver

Behind the wheel, the Raize offers a clear, commanding view of the road through a well-organised instrument panel, with steering-mounted controls placing multimedia and vehicle functions within easy reach.

An illuminated centre console adds a useful touch of convenience after dark, rounding out a cockpit built for everyday ease.

Space and Features That Work Harder

The cabin is equally practical, with an 8-inch multimedia display and USB connectivity for effortless device integration, complemented by a four-speaker audio system for enjoyable in-car listening.

ahlibank supports students for new school year

Reinforcing its commitment to investing in people and expanding access to quality education, ahlibank has announced the signing of an agreement to launch its ‘Back to School’ initiative for the 2026/2027 academic year, in collaboration with Al Rahma Association and a network of charitable associations and volunteer teams across the Sultanate of Oman.

This partnership represents the largest initiative of its kind ever undertaken by the bank, making it one of the most impactful community initiatives within the banking sector.

This year’s initiative will support more than 5,000 children from orphaned and underprivileged families across the Sultanate of Oman’s governorates and wilayats by providing essential school



ahlibank supports 5,000 students through back-to-school initiative.

supplies, enabling them to begin the new academic year with confidence, dignity and equal opportunity. By easing the financial burden on families and empowering children to pursue their education, the

initiative reflects the bank’s belief that education is one of the most powerful drivers of long-term social and economic progress.

The agreement was signed during an official ceremony attended by representatives from charitable organisations, strategic partners and volunteer teams from across the Sultanate of Oman, reaffirming the importance of unified national efforts and cross-sector collaboration in delivering meaningful and far-reaching community impact.

Through this initiative, ahlibank continues to leverage its extensive branch network to connect charitable organisations with local communities, ensuring support is delivered efficiently, effectively and where it is needed most.

The all new BMW iX3 brings the Neue Klasse to Oman



while the all-new BMW Panoramic iDrive projects key information across the base of the windscreen for every occupant.

“The iX3 represents far more than one single model”, said Rachid Zamani, Managing Director of Al Jenaibi International Automobiles. “It marks the beginning of a new era and a reminder that reinvention, for BMW, is earned. BMW built the Neue Klasse before. For our customers in Oman, that means the excitement of something genuinely new, with the confidence of a

brand whose promises have lasted decades”.

Sustainability is engineered in rather than added on: the iX3 is made up of around one-third secondary (recycled) materials, part of BMW’s circular-design approach across the vehicle’s life cycle. On the road, the new “Heart of Joy” control unit and BMW Symbiotic Drive bring more than a century of driving-dynamics expertise into the electric era.

The Heart of Joy looks after drivetrain and driving dynamics management.

SHORTTAKES



FSA suspends audit firm over compliance violations.

FSA SUSPENDS LICENCE OF AUDIT CONSULTANCY FOR NON-COMPLIANCE

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

The Financial Services Authority (FSA), represented by its Professional Conduct Committee, has issued a decision suspending the Ideal Value Auditing and Financial Consultancy firm from practising accounting and auditing for six months. According to a statement issued by the Authority, the action follows an inspection and review of the firm's activities that identified several violations of the Law Regulating the Accounting and Auditing Profession, as well as international auditing requirements and standards.

The violations centred on the owner of the firm allowing an individual to work and practise the profession on behalf of the firm without completing the prescribed procedures for formal appointment and obtaining the necessary approvals.

The violations also included breaches of auditing requirements, including preparing financial statements and auditing them, failure to document the terms of engagements with clients, failure to document audit work, procedures and results; and failure to determine materiality during the planning and audit implementation stages for the purpose of assessing risks of material misstatement.

Other violations included failure to perform the necessary audit procedures to verify the physical existence and condition of material inventory, failure to perform audit procedures on related-party transactions, failure to present the auditor's opinion in certain audit reports in accordance with the prescribed procedures and failure to include performance comparisons when disclosing audited financial reports.

Salalah auto city project reaches 45% completion

THE Wilayat of Salalah is currently witnessing the implementation of the Automotive City project, which is intended to become an integrated and specialised destination for the automotive sector and related services in Dhofar Governorate.

The project is being developed on an area of 53,000 square metres, with the first phase costing up to RO 6 million. This includes construction and development works, as well as the preparation of the project's core components.

Implemented by Al Amal Al Daim International Company in partnership with Dhofar Municipality, the project includes a wide range of activities, such as car showrooms and dealerships; maintenance centres; spare-parts, tyre and battery outlets; car-care services; financing and insurance companies; banks; and other supporting commercial services.

Faisal bin Alawi al Dheeb from Al Amal Al Daim International Company, said that implementation work on the project is progressing steadily, with the completion rate currently standing at approximately 45 per cent. The first phase is expected to be completed by May 2027.

Speaking to the Oman News Agency (ONA), Al Dheeb said the project aims to establish an integrated destination serving the automotive sector and bringing together the services users need in one location — from car showrooms, maintenance, spare parts and car care to financing, insurance, banking and other supporting commercial services.

He added that the project was designed for long-term leasing. During its first phase, the focus will be on developing a tenant mix and selecting activities and brands that add genuine value to the project



Salalah automotive city project reaches 45% completion as development progresses.



FAISAL BIN ALAWI AL DHEEB

from Al Amal Al Daim International Company

while enhancing its appeal and sustainability.

He noted that Salalah was selected based on the economic, demographic and tourism advantages of Dhofar Governorate, alongside the expansion of commercial activity and growing demand for automotive services, particularly during the Khareef Dhofar Season.

He announced that preliminary reservations are now open for sites and leasable spaces to local and international companies and institutions wishing to join Salalah Automotive City. This will give them the opportunity to select

suitable sites and spaces at an early stage, particularly because some activities require specific entrance and frontage specifications, internal areas and technical services.

He expected the project to benefit several related sectors, including contracting, supply and technical services during the construction phase, followed by operations, employment, logistics, hospitality and marketing during the opening phase.

The project is also expected to strengthen competition, improve service quality and provide consumers with a wider range of options. — ONA

SOHAR Port and Freezone advances industrial investment

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 19

SOHAR Port and Freezone, Oman's integrated port and freezone, delivered sustained operational performance during the first half of 2026, recording total cargo throughput of 52 million metric tonnes, a 52% increase compared with the same period last year.

The results reflect SOHAR's ability to respond to the requirements of both regional and international trade through its combined maritime, logistics and industrial ecosystem.

The port maintained solid performance across its diversified cargo portfolio during the first half of 2026. Ship-to-ship cargo handling reached 24.38 million metric tonnes, reflecting the demand for SOHAR's



SOHAR Port and Freezone cargo Volumes jump 52% in H1 2026.

maritime services. Container throughput increased by 40% to 545,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs), primarily driven by higher transshipment activity, while breakbulk cargo nearly doubled to 1.24 million metric tonnes.

Although dry bulk volumes moderated during the period, the port handled 1,555 vessel calls, demonstrating operational resilience and reinforcing SOHAR's role as a strategic gateway for regional and international trade.

Execution of existing and expansion projects progressed across SOHAR Port and Freezone during the reporting period, representing a combined investment value of RO 2.62 billion. These investments continue to advance SOHAR's industrial and logistics ecosystem by expanding

infrastructure, increasing industrial capacity and enhancing long-term competitiveness.

Emile Hoogsteden, CEO of SOHAR Port, said the first-half results reflect SOHAR's ability to provide a platform for trade, industry and investment in the international trading environment.

He said: "The first half of 2026 demonstrates the adaptability of SOHAR's integrated port and freezone model and the strength of our long-term strategy.

As trade continues to evolve, we remain committed to investing in world-class infrastructure, strengthening maritime connectivity and enhancing operational excellence to ensure SOHAR continues to create long-term value for customers, partners and the wider economy.

SUPPLY STRANGLE

Oil jumps amidst Hormuz uncertainty



Oil prices hit a three-week high on Wednesday as uncertainty over shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and ongoing supply disruptions supported the market.

Brent crude futures climbed 45 cents, or 0.49%, to \$91.47 by 07:54 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude futures were up 45 cents, or 0.53%, to \$85.39 a barrel.

— Reuters

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold rebounds as dollar, yields ease



Gold rebounded on Wednesday as the US dollar weakened and global bond yields eased from multi-decade highs, while markets awaited minutes from the Federal Reserve's latest policy meeting for guidance on the interest rates as inflation risks persist.

Spot gold gained 0.5% to \$4,356.29 per ounce by 09:08 GMT, while US gold futures slipped 0.2% to \$4,410.30.

— Reuters

ROBOT SURGE

China robot makers eye mass adoption



China's robot makers showcased their latest machines at a Beijing conference on Wednesday, seeking to convince investors and customers that the technology is moving forward for broader commercial adoption.

More than 300 companies are attending the World Robot Conference which runs through Sunday, displaying over 2,000 exhibits and launching more than 150 products. — Reuters

OPINION

The importance of registering employment contracts



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

GOVERNMENTS attach great importance to registering employment contracts between employers and employees because such contracts provide legal protection for both parties and help prevent or resolve administrative and legal disputes. In Oman, the Ministry of Labour has established electronic procedures that facilitate the registration of employment contracts for both Omani and non-Omani workers.

From an economic perspective, registering employment contracts is far more than a legal or administrative requirement. The absence of properly documented contracts can become a structural issue affecting labour-market efficiency, economic data, productivity, government revenues and the sustainability of Oman's national employment and Omanisation policies.

Written employment contracts provide reliable information about the labour market. They identify the number of workers employed legally on a permanent, temporary or part-time basis, as well as their occupations, salaries and working conditions.

Such information enables government institutions and businesses to understand labour demand and anticipate future workforce requirements.

Contract data can also provide valuable indicators regarding wage levels, annual labour turnover, vacant and newly created positions and the distribution of workers across economic sectors and business activities. Accurate labour-market data allows

policymakers to identify shortages, improve workforce planning and direct training programmes towards areas where skills are most needed.

A registered employment contract also establishes a clear and transparent relationship between the employer and employee. It normally defines the employee's occupation, salary, working hours, benefits, responsibilities and other conditions of employment.

Without such documentation, workers may be assigned duties different from those originally agreed upon or have their responsibilities changed without sufficient clarity. Such practices can negatively affect employee morale, efficiency and productivity and may ultimately slow down business activity.

Furthermore, documented contracts reduce the cost of labour disputes. When disagreements arise, the absence of a contract — or failure to update it — can make it difficult to establish the employee's actual salary, occupation, working hours, benefits and other entitlements.

Proper documentation therefore serves as an important mechanism for reducing transaction costs and improving confidence in the labour market.

The issue is particularly relevant to Omanisation. National employment policies are not simply about achieving numerical employment targets; they also require employers to recruit Omanis, train them, improve their skills, provide suitable working conditions and create opportunities for career development and retention.

From an economic perspective, registering employment contracts is far more than a legal or administrative requirement. The absence of properly documented contracts can become a structural issue affecting labour-market efficiency, economic data, productivity, government revenues and the sustainability of Oman's national employment and Omanisation policies.

For young Omanis entering the private sector, a clear employment contract is particularly important. They need to understand the nature of their job, monthly salary, benefits, working hours, contract duration, promotion opportunities and rights upon termination.

Clarity in these areas can strengthen job stability, encourage productivity and reduce the likelihood of resignation caused by uncertainty or unsuitable working conditions.

At the same time, labour regulations should recognise the operational realities facing businesses. Companies may occasionally need to temporarily assign employees to different departments to address labour shortages or operational gaps until permanent solutions are found. Such flexibility should be possible within a clear regulatory framework.

Labour inspections should therefore seek to ensure compliance while avoiding excessive financial penalties that could place unnecessary pressure on businesses, increase operating costs and contribute to losses.

A balanced approach that protects workers' rights while allowing reasonable operational flexibility would strengthen both enterprises and the labour market. Ultimately, registering employment contracts is an essential component of a modern and efficient labour market.

It protects workers and employers, improves economic data, supports productivity, reduces disputes and strengthens the foundations of sustainable employment and Omanisation.

THREE THOUGHTS: AI, UBER AND INTERVENTION

MIKE DOLAN

This week's market headlines have been dominated by Iran war rhetoric, long-bond blues and a sudden tech stock wobble.

But strategists looking beyond the breaking news are digging deeper into recent developments to figure out how best to diversify away from AI, how to cope when everyone's bullish and whether the recent US-Japan currency intervention raised more questions than it answered.

Loss of Concentration

AI is creating a growing diversification problem for investors. Buying a supposedly diversified S&P 500 index now gives investors around 50% exposure to AI-linked companies, including hyperscalers, chipmakers and infrastructure firms.

The concentration extends into credit markets. AI-related bond issuers account for about a third of US investment-grade net issuance this year.

Apollo estimates the five major AI hyperscalers could increase their share of the investment-grade index from less than 5% today to nearly 10% by 2030. High-yield markets are also increasingly exposed. Data-centre financing has rapidly become a major source of high-yield borrowing, with companies such as Core Scientific and TeraWulf raising money to convert bitcoin-mining facilities into AI data centres.

The problem is that assets that appear diversified may all depend on the same AI investment cycle. Equities, semiconductors, data centres, power infrastructure, construction and credit are increasingly linked to the same underlying theme.

If the AI boom continues, this concentration could deliver strong returns. But if the AI trade suffers a major reversal, investors may discover that they have far fewer places to hide than they thought.

Uber Invested

Investors are showing little appetite for retreating into cash. Bank of America's latest global fund manager survey, covering 180 funds with around \$525 billion under management, found that cash allocations fell to an "uber low" 3.5% in August from 3.6% in July.

That was the sixth-lowest reading in the survey's 28-year history and, according to BofA, sits in "sell" territory. Investors held a 56% net overweight to global equities, the highest level since 2021.

The bullish mood is supported by strong economic expectations. Almost 60% of investors expect no landing for the US economy, while more than 70% expect no reduction in AI-related capital expenditure forecasts this year. — Reuters

Boutique banks eye European growth

BOUTIQUE investment banks are expanding in Europe after a bumper period for M&A, even as deal activity has lagged the US.

The so-called elite boutiques are eyeing fresh growth in London and other European locations as many unveiled record revenue, fuelled by mega-deals in the US.

"A big part of our experience in Europe right now is that we've been in a real build mode and we've added substantial people and assets throughout Europe", said John Weinberg, chief executive of Evercore on a call with analysts discussing results.

"We feel like we've really been able to build a much more diverse and deep business. So we're seeing a lot of activity".

Evercore's £146 million acquisition of UK-focused advisory firm Robey Warshaw last month was a signal of its increased ambitions in Europe. Robey Warshaw has been involved with a number of big-ticket deals involving UK Plc and adds significant firepower to Evercore despite its small size of around 13 bankers.

Meanwhile, Moelis has moved into new, bigger London headquarters in Marylebone, which will allow it to house more dealmakers. The boutique hired Matthew Rosedale from Jefferies for its European financial sponsors team, and the bank has another dealmaker recruit in the pipeline focused on chemicals, it said.

Chief executive of Moelis, David Mahmoodzadegan, said the bank was "super committed to our build in Europe", despite the region lagging the US.

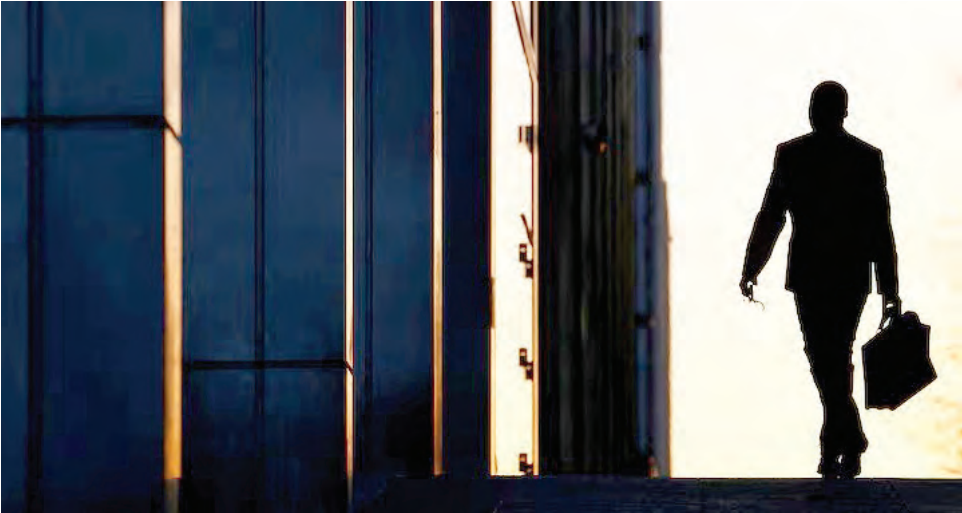
"It is a critically important part of the world. If you're going to have a world-class investment bank on a global basis, you have to be strong in Europe and we're committed to that region", he said. "But the pace of the M&A market, the dynamism of the M&A market is still not what we're



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

The boom period for boutiques has largely come from megadeals in the US, with these firms typically securing roles alongside bigger rivals. M&A activity has jumped to \$1.8 trillion globally in the first few months of 2026, with the US accounting for \$885 billion.



European boutique banks are ramping up expansion as M&A activity surges across the continent.

seeing in the United States".

Perella Weinberg Partners acquired UK boutique Gleacher Shacklock in April, which will add 30 dealmakers to its ranks.

Moelis's \$319.8 million in first quarter revenue was a record for the boutique and up 4 per cent compared with a year earlier, while Evercore's advisory revenue jumped 123 per cent to \$1.2 billion in the first three months of the year. PJT Partners brought in \$418.2 million for the period, an increase of 29 per cent.

The boom period for boutiques has largely come from megadeals in the US, with these firms typically securing roles alongside bigger rivals. M&A activity has jumped to \$1.8 trillion globally in the first few months of 2026, with the US accounting for \$885 billion.

Relatively speaking, European activity is growing faster, with an 88 per cent gain to \$505.8 billion so far this year.

Chief executive of PJT Partners, Paul Taubman, said the market for talent was becoming increasingly competitive, but cited some European locations as growth areas.

"We've made a commitment to Italy. We've made a commitment to Nordic region", he said. "Those

are, to some extent, greenfield operations. But I think they'll scale faster than other markets would have because we've built a strong reputation for ourselves".

Meanwhile, on another issue — new prime minister, Andy Burnham, has been warned that breaking up the government department behind Britain's AI strategy could unsettle global investors and damage the country's standing as a technology hub.

Burnham has been considering abolishing the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and splitting its responsibilities between the Department for Business and Trade and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

The plans have not been confirmed. Downing Street, the Cabinet Office and DSIT all declined to comment. The prospect of an overhaul of the department has triggered a response from the tech sector, which has argued that Britain's priority should be maintaining momentum in one of its fastest-growing industries.

In a joint letter to Burnham, techUK and the Startup Coalition described abolishing DSIT as "the wrong change at the wrong time".

CLASSIFIEDS

The image displays two smartphones side-by-side, both showing the Oman Observer website. The left phone, a white iPhone, shows the homepage with a dark blue header containing the site's logo and navigation links. The main content area features a large, bold headline "we shall overcome" in white text. Below this, there is a section for "Oman Observer" with a profile picture and a "Contact Us" button. The right phone, a black Samsung, shows a news article titled "BREAKING NEWS" with a sub-headline "88 new Covid-19 cases in Oman, Muscat crosses 1,000-mark". The article text mentions that the cases were reported by the Ministry of Health and that the total number of cases in Muscat has reached 1,000. The phone's status bar at the top shows the time as 12:32.

ART/LIFE



QALIB BREAD HERITAGE AND LIVELIHOOD

> 20

HOLLYWOOD NEWS

KIDJO FIRST AFRICAN WOMAN TO RECEIVE HOLLYWOOD STAR



Beninese musician and actress Angelique Kidjo became the first Black African to have a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. — AFP

Five-time Grammy winner Angelique Kidjo on Tuesday became the first Black African to be honoured with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

In a ceremony held beneath the palm trees and California skies, Kidjo was joined by film stars, music industry figures and admirers as she unveiled her star on the thoroughfare. “We Africans don’t know what we’ve given to the world”, the 66-year-old singer told the gathering. “Without us, there’s no music possible on this planet”.

After expressing her gratitude to her family, team and longtime supporters, Kidjo broke into song as those present listened in rapt attention. Born in Benin, Kidjo has built an international career spanning more than four decades and 18 albums. Widely known for her powerful voice, stage presence and distinctive fusion of African musical traditions with global influences, she has become one of the continent’s enduring cultural ambassadors.

Her achievements extend far beyond the recording studio. Kidjo has been named among Time magazine’s 100 most influential people, while the BBC listed her among Africa’s 50 most iconic figures. The Guardian has also recognised her as one of the world’s 100 most inspiring people.

Harvey Mason Jr of the Recording Academy described Kidjo as a “rare artist” whose influence has reached beyond entertainment.

“Your example has elevated our global music community and your work continues to remind us that music is more than entertainment; it’s connection”, he said.

Mason said the star represented a lasting symbol of her extraordinary achievements, while her greater legacy could be seen in the people she has inspired, the barriers she has broken and the connections she has created across cultures and continents.

Actor Willem Dafoe, who also attended the ceremony, praised Kidjo’s immense energy, commitment and vitality as a live performer.

“The first time I saw Angelique perform live, I thought her music, her dancing, her commitment were incredible”, the “Platoon” star said. “She is, without a doubt, the hardest-working woman in show business”.

Dafoe said her humanitarian dedication was even more impressive, highlighting the work of the Batonga Foundation, which seeks to empower girls and young women throughout Africa.

“This is not a token celebrity involvement; it is an extension of what she does with her music”, he said. “She stirs us, lifts us up and reminds us that we’re all connected and that love and understanding is the way”.

The Hollywood honour permanently places Kidjo’s name among the entertainment industry’s most celebrated figures, while recognising the cultural influence of an artist whose music and activism have consistently crossed geographical, linguistic and generational boundaries. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



BULL RUN

Participants run in front of heifers, or young cows, during the Encierro del Pilon in the Navarrese town of Falces, northeastern Spain. — AFP



MUSIC

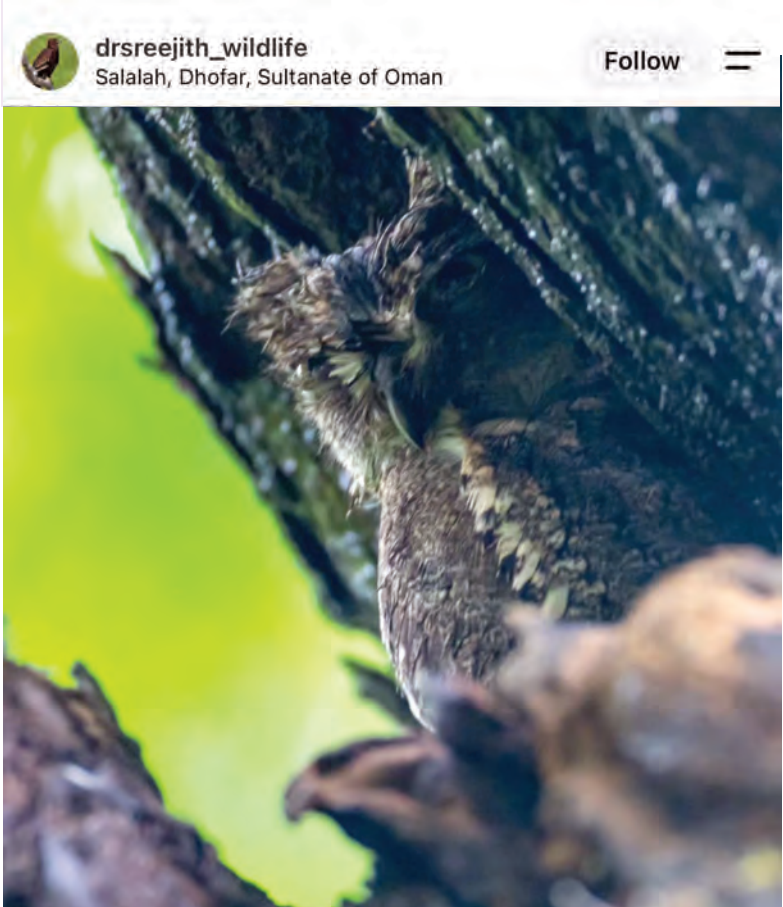
Nubian musician Ramadan Bahr performs with the band “YaNuba” during the 34th Citadel Music Festival at Cairo’s medieval citadel. — AFP



FOOD

A Kuwaiti man looks at a bunch of dates at a stand during the 4th Al-Abdali farmers festival for dates in Kuwait City. — AFP

INSTA PICKS



“Arabian Scops Owl: the master of camouflage”



“Forget the city lights, this is the skyline I came looking for”

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ZZ TOP DRUMMER FRANK BEARD DIES AT AGE 77

Frank Beard, longtime drummer of American blues-rock group ZZ Top, has died aged 77, the band and its publicist announced on Tuesday.

Beard, whose beats drove hits including “La Grange” and “Sharp Dressed Man”, stepped back from touring last year over health issues.

Lead singer Billy Gibbons paid tribute to Beard as a “great friend and collaborator”.

“The world lost one of the most naturally innovative drummers and a great and true son of Texas”, Gibbons said in a statement. “His signature backbeat was key to keeping ZZ on top”.

“The band of which he was part for six decades is going to keep on keeping on, as he had wished” he added.

Beard died while receiving hospice care at his ranch in Richmond, Texas, surrounded by family, band representative Bob Merlis said.

Born in Frankston, Texas, in 1949, Beard joined ZZ Top in 1969. He remained with the trio as its music evolved from heavy blues to experimental synthesizers in the 1980s.

The group also gained fame for music videos, including



Frank Beard, pictured here in 2013, was the longtime drummer of ZZ Top. — AFP

(Gimme All Your Lovin’), winning three MTV Video Music Awards.

ZZ Top’s original bassist, Dusty Hill, died in 2021.

The band, now comprising Gibbons, bassist Elwood Francis and touring drummer Michael Monahan, canceled dates in Salt Lake City and Colorado Springs following Beard’s death.

However, it said it would resume shows this weekend at Austin City Limits in Texas, which it described as “one of Frank’s favourite venues” in a city that had become a second home to him. — AFP



A labourer harvesting dates at a palm orchard in Khairpur, in Pakistan’s Sindh province. — AFP

HARVESTING DATES UNDER A FIERY SUN

SAMEER MANDHRO

IN blazing temperatures, Muhammad Idrees ladles boiled dates from a vat simmering over an open flame, work that labourers lament is getting hotter each year in Pakistan’s southern Sindh province.

Date season arrives in July, when temperatures in Sindh regularly hit the mid-40 degrees Celsius.

Workers start before sunrise and split the day into short shifts, but the heat soon catches up with them.

Their gruelling routine involves harvesting and boiling fruit picked from palms that line Khairpur district, which produces more than half the country’s dates and supports thousands of farmers and seasonal labourers.

Idrees, who has worked the date harvest for more than a decade, said the heat has now become “unbearable”.

Date labourers are one of many professions in agriculturally-dependent Pakistan that are becoming more difficult and dangerous as temperatures rise.

“It used to be less intense”, Idrees said as temperatures hit 42°C.

Now “the heat is much harsher and the days are extremely hot. We fall ill because of it”.

Multiple workers said they often suffer heatstroke, fainting and fever.

“When the heat makes us sick, we go to the doctor for treatment and then return to work”, Idrees added.

Pakistan is among the countries globally most vulnerable to climate change despite contributing less than one per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

The country has experienced increasingly frequent heatwaves, erratic monsoon rains and devastating floods, including catastrophic 2022 floods that inundated around one-third of the country and displaced millions, hitting Sindh province particularly hard.

HEAT AND HARVEST

Workers descend on date farms to begin work around 2 am to avoid the worst of the daytime heat and take a break before continuing until the late evening.

Idrees said the physically demanding work earns him around 1,200 Pakistani rupees (\$4) a day.

“We harvest the dates, load them onto trolleys and bring them here”, he said.

“They are boiled over the fire and then spread outside in the sun to dry”.



Labourers transporting dates on a tractor trolley near a palm orchard at Khairpur. — AFP

Pakistan is among the countries globally most vulnerable to climate change despite contributing less than one per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions

Pakistan, the world’s fifth-largest date producer, normally earns more than \$120 million a year in exports, according to industry estimates.

Date farmer Shah Nawaz Phulpoto, who owns more than 1,500 palm trees, said that heavy monsoon rains from shifting weather patterns have hampered date crops and caused financial losses.

But for now the main challenge is the heat, he added, as the sun blazed overhead. “The temperature rises every year”, he said.

“We are seeing the effects of climate change every year”. — AFP

FEATURES



Taliiah bint Naseeb bin Farag, known as Umm Abdulrahman, prepares traditional Qalib bread in the Wilayat of Taqah



After resting, the dough is divided into small balls and flattened by hand.



The prepared dough is carefully arranged before being transferred to the traditional tanoor

QALIB BREAD: HERITAGE AND LIVELIHOOD

RUQAYA AL KINDI

THE Khareef Dhofar Season in Dhofar Governorate is not only associated with fog and drizzle. As visitors flock to the governorate, local flavours appear on their tables, carrying stories about the place and its people.

Among these is Qalib bread, also known as Salalah cake, a traditional Dhofari bread prepared using a method that has been passed down through generations. It is increasingly finding its way to visitors during the season, offering them a taste of daily life in southern Oman.

In the Wilayat of Taqah, Taliiah bint Naseeb bin Farag, known as Umm Abdulrahman, sits in front of her dough, reviving through movements she has practised for three decades one of the food traditions that has accompanied her since childhood, as many Dhofari women do.

For her, the story began with old gatherings that brought her together with her mother, aunts and older women, where she would silently observe and learn by watching. There was no written recipe or set of step-by-step instructions; the knowledge was simply passed from hand to hand and from one generation to the next.

At the heart of the bread-making process is the clay tool known as the “Qalib”, meaning mould, which features raised lines.

“When a ball of dough is lightly struck with it, those lines leave their mark on

It is one of the most popular types of bread in Dhofar Governorate and is prepared for various occasions, particularly Eid celebrations and weddings. It also holds special significance during the autumn season



Demand for Qalib bread increases during Dhofar's autumn season, providing local women with a source of income

the surface of the bread, giving it its distinctive shape. This is where the name Qalib bread comes from”, she noted.

She explained that the process begins with simple ingredients: flour, sugar, salt, ghee and nigella seeds are mixed together before water is added until the dough comes together. The dough is then left to

rest for a while.

Next, the dough is divided into small balls. Once a sufficient number of dough balls have been prepared and flattened, the baker begins using the mould, lightly tapping each one until the lines that will become its distinctive mark after baking appear.

But the journey does not end there. The pieces of dough are then transferred to the tanoor — a small pit in the ground used for cooking — which can hold around 15 pieces of bread, depending on their size. When the bread turns reddish-brown, she knows it is ready.

Qalib bread is one of the most popular types of bread in Dhofar Governorate and is prepared for various occasions, particularly Eid celebrations and weddings. It also holds special significance during the autumn season.

As visitors flock to Dhofar to enjoy its lush greenery and misty atmosphere, demand for local cuisine increases. Qalib bread becomes one of the flavours visitors seek out in order to experience another facet of the region's culture.

Here, tradition intersects with economic opportunity. For her, as for many women in Dhofar, this craft is no longer merely an inherited domestic skill, but has also become a source of income, particularly during seasons when demand is high.

She said with a smile, “We, as older women, cannot stop practising this craft. We love it, enjoy doing it and it provides us with a good source of income”.