

OMAN

دولة

DAILY

Observer

MINISTRY OF HEALTH WARNS E-GAMING RISKS

1

2

3

4

SUNRISE 05:35 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:11 AM

DHUHR 12:18 PM

ASR 03:41 PM

MAGHRIB 06:57 PM

ISHA 08:16 PM

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INBRIEF

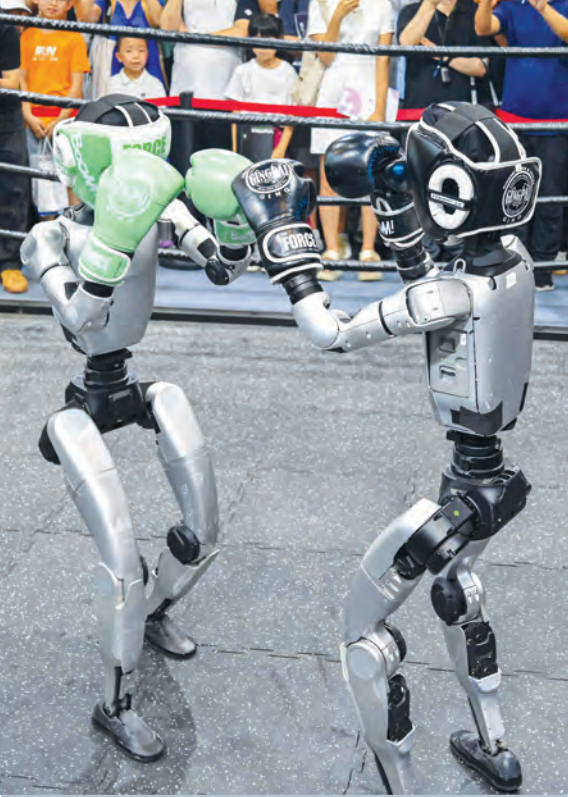
ROP STEPS UP
CRACKDOWN
ON NARCOTICS,
SMUGGLING

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP), in coordination with various law enforcement units, has intensified its efforts to combat the smuggling of narcotic substances and alcoholic beverages, with multiple operations successfully executed across the country in recent days.

In a recent case, the Coast Guard Police, led by the Musandam Governorate Police, seized a boat within Omani territorial waters carrying three Iranian nationals in possession of a quantity of alcoholic beverages. Legal procedures are underway against the suspects.

In another operation, the Coast Guard, in coordination with the General Directorate for Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, intercepted a smuggling vessel originating from the Islamic Republic of Iran. The boat, which attempted to evade patrols upon entering Omani waters, was tracked and intercepted. Three infiltrators of Pakistani nationality were apprehended off the coast of Qurayat in Muscat Governorate with more than 70 kilograms of hashish. **REPORT ON P2**

SPARRING FOR SUPREMACY



People watch humanoid robots boxing at an exhibition during the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai on Saturday. China's Premier Li Qiang warned that artificial intelligence development must be weighed against the security risks, saying global consensus was urgently needed even as the tech race between Beijing and Washington shows no sign of abating. — AFP

His Majesty’s greetings conveyed to US president

WASHINGTON: Donald Trump, President of the United States, received Talal bin Sulaiman al Rahbi, who presented his credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Sultanate of Oman to the US, at an official ceremony held at the White House.

The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik alongside His wishes of good health and happiness to the president of the USA; and continued progress and prosperity to the government and people of the USA. The US president asked the ambassador to convey his sincere greetings and his wishes of continued health and well-being to His Majesty; and further progress and prosperity to the government and people of the Sultanate of Oman.

The US president wished the Ambassador success in his duties hoping that bilateral relations between the two friendly countries would see further development and prosperity.

The ambassador expressed the Sultanate of Oman’s keenness to foster bilateral relations between the two countries and enhance cooperation in all fields to serve common interests.

— ONA



President Donald Trump with Talal bin Sulaiman al Rahbi at the White House.

16 GAZANS SHOT DEAD
WHILE WAITING FOR AID

ISRAELI soldiers shot and killed 16 people waiting for humanitarian aid to be distributed in the Gaza Strip, according to Palestinian doctors at the Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on Saturday.

The 16 Palestinians were waiting near the northern Zikim border crossing for trucks carrying humanitarian aid.

A further 300 people were injured, the doctors said. The Israeli military has not commented on the incident and the information could not initially be independently verified.

Gazans have been shot repeatedly while waiting for the distribution of humanitarian aid or near border crossings. An Israeli and UN-backed rival aid group called Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) has been operating in the coastal strip in recent times, but there have been widespread Palestinian media reports of Israeli attacks on those waiting in line for help.

GHF distribution centres are



Palestinians wait to receive food from a charity kitchen in Gaza City on Saturday. — Reuters

More than 100 people have already died of malnutrition, 80 per cent of whom were children, according to the local health authority

also guarded by private US security firms.

Israel’s military has said in the past that soldiers shoot at suspects if they approach troops without permission or enter restricted areas.

The foundation has repeatedly denied the reports but according to the UN, hundreds of deaths have already occurred at GHF distribution stations since the end

of May. Israel introduced the new distribution mechanism, claiming it was to prevent the Hamas from diverting aid supplies.

Previously, the UN operated around 400 distribution stations for the approximately 2 million Palestinians in the region. These stations are now barely functioning, as Israel has almost entirely blocked their resupply.

International aid organizations describe the situation on Gaza as catastrophic. As Israel allows only limited humanitarian aid into the sealed-off strip, most of the population is starving.

More than 100 people have already died of malnutrition, 80 per cent of whom were children, according to the local health authority. Israel denies that there is a famine in the Gaza Strip.

Israel blames UN organisations for the food shortage claiming they do not distribute the aid deliveries in the Gaza Strip. The UN says the Israeli military often does not provide safe transport routes within the coastal strip. — dpa

Lebanese musical giant and political satirist Rahbani dead at 69

BEIRUT: Ziad Rahbani, the Lebanese composer and musician who created a distinct Lebanese sound from Western and Arabic musical roots and whose sardonic critique of the country’s sectarian politics rang true to Lebanese across the divides, has died. He was 69.

Rahbani was much loved across Lebanon and his words remained relevant across generations, from those who grew up with him during the 1975-90 Civil War to the post-war generation who have struggled to shake the war’s legacy.

He passed away at a hospital in Beirut on Saturday morning after a long illness, the hospital said.

The son of living legend Fairuz, widely seen as one of the Arab world’s greatest singers and the innovative composer Assi Rahbani, Ziad Rahbani’s talents ran from piano to playwriting and acting.

Known for pioneering oriental jazz that blended Western standards with Arabic quarter-notes, a style exemplified in his 1978 Arabic funk album Abu Ali, Rahbani once described Lebanon, a tiny nation on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean between Europe and the Arab World, as “Falafel mixed with Hamburger”.

Composers who knew him dubbed him a musical genius. He



Ziad Rahbani

was also a giant of cultural criticism for people in the Arabic-speaking world for his satire of Lebanese society.

“You feel that you are simply unable to understand some of the things Ziad did, or to ever write anything like them”, said Lubnan Baalbaki, conductor of Lebanon’s national orchestra.

Among Rahbani’s best-known works was the 1985 song “I am not an infidel”, re-released in 2008, whose lyrics urge “those who pray on Fridays and those who pray on Sundays” — Muslim and Christian leaders — to attend to the plight of the destitute. Another

song references Lebanese people resorting to selling gold and diamond jewellery to afford food during the war, while his “O, the Era of Sectarianism” notes how easily money passes between the military barricades that keep people apart.

Born in 1956, Ziad Rahbani grew up listening to his father composing songs on the piano. A collection of his poetry was published by age 12 and he put on his first play, Nazel Surour, aged 18.

The music of Rahbani’s parents drew on Lebanese folklore — traditional stone arches, mountain villages, the return of emigrants from overseas. — AFP

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



The competition aligns with Oman's ongoing efforts to enhance road safety

PUBLIC AWARENESS
KEY IN TRAFFIC
SAFETY DRIVE

MUSCAT: The Main Committee of the Traffic Safety Competition convened at the General Traffic Department under the leadership of Major General Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police, Customs for Operations and Chairman of the Committee.

The session focused on the nomination mechanisms, evaluation procedures and the comprehensive media plan supporting the fourth edition of the competition for the year 2025-2026.

With representation from various government bodies, the meeting reaffirmed the essential role played by public and private stakeholders in fostering a nationwide culture of traffic awareness.

The initiative, now entering its fourth year, has directly influenced road-user behaviour, thereby contributing to a measurable decline in traffic accidents across the Sultanate of Oman.

The competition aligns closely with Oman's ongoing efforts to enhance road safety through sustained community participation, institutional collaboration and educational outreach — a collective mission rooted in the core values of public responsibility and national development.

— ONA

MUSCAT RESIDENT TO
BE HONOURED
WITH 'KNIGHTHOOD'

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef



Dr. Geevarghese Yohannan, a long-time Oman resident and chairman of various charity and business entities, has been selected for the esteemed title of Knight of the Ecumenical Medical Humanitarian Order — Knights of Charity.

This honour, awarded by the Ecumenical Medical-Humanitarian Order (Medicina Alternativa, Alma Ata-1962), recognises individuals who support charity initiatives worldwide.

According to the citation, Dr. Yohannan was chosen for his selfless service to society. He spearheads several charity organisations that assist financially disadvantaged families and is also the chairman of the MGM Group of Institutions and Nadan Trading in Oman.

The prestigious title will be conferred upon him at the International Congress of Integrative Medicine and the Investiture Ceremony, being held on Sunday in Bangkok.

The conferment of a Knighthood, a significant royal recognition, is granted through the Order of the Crown of Thailand. It is awarded for civil and military services by individuals and is categorised into several classes. The highest class, 'Knight Grand Cross', is given to both Thai nationals and foreigners. A distinguished name in education, philanthropy and entrepreneurship, Dr. Geevarghese established Nadan Trading LLC.

MILITARY
DISCIPLINE
BUILDS TEAM
SPIRIT IN
DHO FAR

SALALAH: The second edition of the Military Discipline Programme for school students is ongoing in Dhofar Governorate, offering a structured mix of physical training, scouting and team-building activities aimed at instilling discipline and leadership in youth.

During the first week, students participated in a range of exercises designed to develop both physical and mental agility. The second week has moved into more advanced and specialised training sessions, deepening the participants' understanding of military discipline and collaborative work.



Students participated in a range of exercises

Air Sergeant First Class Majid bin Khamis al Hattali, an infantry trainer, emphasised that the programme is thoughtfully structured. "We begin with the

fundamentals of infantry training and discipline, then progressively build students' capabilities while nurturing teamwork and cooperation", he said. — ONA

ROP steps up crackdown
on narcotics, smuggling

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, JULY 26

THE Royal Oman Police (ROP), in coordination with various law enforcement units, has intensified its efforts to combat the smuggling of narcotic substances and alcoholic beverages, with multiple operations successfully executed across the country in recent days.

In a recent case, the Coast Guard Police, led by the Musandam Governorate Police, seized a boat within Omani territorial waters carrying three Iranian nationals in possession of a quantity of alcoholic beverages. Legal procedures are underway against the suspects.

In another operation, the Coast Guard, in coordination with the General Directorate for Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, intercepted a smuggling vessel originating from the Islamic Republic of Iran. The boat, which attempted to evade patrols upon entering Omani waters, was tracked and intercepted. Three



The ROP has intensified efforts to combat the smuggling of narcotic substances and alcoholic beverages

The operations underscore ROP's ongoing commitment to uphold security across Oman's borders

infiltrators of Pakistani nationality were apprehended off the coast of Qurayat in Muscat Governorate with more than 70 kilograms of hashish.

Separately, the Dhofar Governorate Police, through the Coast Guard unit, foiled an attempt to smuggle over 550 kilograms of

drugs. Three individuals of Yemeni nationality who had illegally entered Omani waters aboard a fishing boat were arrested and legal proceedings are underway.

In the Al Batinah North Governorate, a residential property in Suhar used by expatriate workers was raided for storing large quantities of alcoholic beverages. Two individuals of Indian nationality were arrested in possession of over 15,380 bottles and cans.

Meanwhile, at Salalah International Airport, the General Directorate of Customs, in collaboration with the General Directorate for Combating Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, thwarted a smuggling attempt involving 11.65 kilogrammes of marijuana. The contraband was expertly concealed in the luggage of two Indian nationals, who are now in custody as investigations proceed.

These operations underscore ROP's ongoing commitment to protecting the nation from illegal substances and upholding security across Oman's borders.

SHABAB OMAN II DOCKS AT PORT OF RISOR, NORWAY



OSLO: The Royal Navy of Oman's (RNO) ship, Shabab Oman II, docked at the port of Risor in Norway, on Saturday. Shabab Oman II ship is taking part in the third leg of the 2025 Tall Ships Race from the port of Aberdeen, Scotland, to the port of Kristiansand, Norway. — ONA

Dar Al Atta'a leads in helping people with smart, sustainable ideas

MUSCAT: Founded in 2002 and officially recognised in 2006, Dar Al Atta'a remains a cornerstone of charitable and humanitarian work in the Sultanate of Oman.

Under the stewardship of founder and chairperson Maryam bint Issa al Zadjaliyah, the organisation has expanded its programmes to touch every governorate, offering targeted assistance through education, housing, disaster relief and empowerment initiatives.

In 2024 alone, the association spent over RO 4.09 million on

various programmes. During the first half of 2025, it has already disbursed around RO 2.038 million, reflecting its ongoing commitment to aiding vulnerable families and fostering stability.

Al Zadjali noted that Dar Al Atta'a has recently launched a Department of Social Innovation to integrate modern technology into its programmes — streamlining services and enabling a qualitative leap in service delivery.

This pioneering move aims to improve internal efficiency and



Dar Al Atta'a builds green model homes in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah with solar power and clean water systems

expand outreach to underserved populations.

Among the association's standout projects is the second phase of the Al Atta'a Neighbourhood in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah, featuring 36 model homes equipped with solar energy and water purification systems, alongside a mosque and community centre. The eco-friendly neighbourhood will serve as a model for sustainable community housing.

So far, the organisation has delivered 175 fully built homes and maintained over 2,514 units across

the Sultanate of Oman.

These efforts have been instrumental in elevating the quality of life for many, demonstrating how grassroots efforts can drive national progress.

As Dar Al Atta'a continues to scale its impact, it remains firmly aligned with Oman's broader objectives of achieving sustainable development, strengthening public-private partnerships and reinforcing the charitable sector as a vital component of national resilience.

— ONA

SHORT TAKES



OMAN RENEWS WTO SUPPORT AT GENEVA MEET

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the World Trade Organization (WTO) General Council meeting held in Geneva, where it reviewed key outcomes of the 13th China Roundtable on WTO Accession, which Oman proudly hosted in Muscat this past May.

During the session, Oman highlighted the significant role WTO accession plays in driving structural reforms and fostering economic diversification — especially in conflict-affected and least developed nations.

Delivering the Sultanate of Oman’s address, Ambassador Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations and International Organizations in Geneva, stressed the roundtable’s importance as a platform for knowledge exchange, enhanced cooperation and meaningful dialogue on the challenges faced by accession states.

He underscored the importance of regional integration through entities like the Gulf Cooperation Council, noting it as a vital complement to WTO membership. — ONA



270 FEMALE LEADERS, GUIDES AT DHOFAR SUMMER CAMP

SALALAH: The 24th Summer Camp for Girl Guides and Advanced Girl Guides began at the permanent scout camp in the Jabal Ashur Plain, Dhofar Governorate. Organised by the Ministry of Education, the camp runs until July 30 under the theme ‘Community Partnership: Leadership to Build the Future’.

A total of 270 female leaders and guides from across Oman are taking part in the camp, which features a wide range of training workshops, scientific and cultural visits; and sports activities. A dedicated ‘Sports Day’ will be held at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, featuring team games and competitions, along with special events such as ‘National Day’ and ‘Talent Discovery’.

Amina bint Marhoon al Shabibiyah, the camp’s general leader, noted that the programme offers a valuable opportunity for participants to strengthen their self-leadership, learning and teamwork skills. — ONA

OMAN-CHINA FRIENDSHIP FORUM TO BOOST BILATERAL TIES

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, JULY 26

His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, will patronise the third Oman-China Friendship Forum at the Millennium Resort Salalah on July 31.

This year’s Forum, themed ‘Towards Limitless Partnerships: Chinese-Style Modernisation and Oman Vision 2040’, is organised through a tripartite partnership

between the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Oman, the Oman-China Friendship Association and Al Roya.

Hatem bin Hamad al Taie, Secretary General and Chairman of the Forum, described the event as a milestone in strengthening dialogue and partnership not only between the two governments but also their peoples, drawing on a shared heritage and vision for a modern future.

The second forum, held last year

in Salalah, explored the historical depth of Oman-China relations and identified avenues for future collaboration across culture, education, trade and investment.

Numerous experts presented papers focusing on enhancing the strategic partnership amidst changing global economic conditions.

Discussions addressed challenges and proposed practical solutions to promote sustainable, mutually beneficial development.

Women’s Day celebrates culture and family

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
AL ASHKHARAH, JULY 26

THE public park in Al Ashkharah came alive with energy and celebration during a special women-only event as part of the second week of the ‘Ajwaa Al Ashkharah 2025’ Festival.

Organised by the Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, the event offered a joyful, safe space to celebrate Omani heritage, women’s empowerment and family bonding.

Tailored exclusively for women and children, the day featured a mix of cultural performances, traditional music, crafts and child-friendly activities. Visitors were welcomed into a vibrant atmosphere where privacy, tradition and modern entertainment seamlessly coexisted.

The event opened with a captivating performance by a women’s folk ensemble in the heritage village, reviving cherished Omani dances and songs such as Razfah, Ziffah and Bughalah. For many, it was a moving, nostalgic experience.

“It reminded me of the celebrations my grandmother used to host”, said Umm Mariam al Ghailani, a visitor from Sur. “It’s beautiful to see these traditions preserved in such an elegant and



The day featured a mix of cultural performances, traditional music, crafts and child-friendly activities

Al Ashkharah Festival continues to highlight Oman’s rich cultural fabric while promoting domestic tourism, supporting local businesses and strengthening community ties

respectful way”.

A central part of the programme focused on children, with interactive play zones, storytelling and creative workshops. Mothers and children participated side by side, deepening family ties through shared experience.

“Today’s event was exceptional”, said Kholoud al Rawahi, a mother of three. “It allowed us to enjoy time together while I also had space for women-focused activities”.

Evening highlights included

the lively ‘Childhood Joy’ show, interactive competitions and a women-only prize draw featuring smart gadgets, shopping vouchers and locally sponsored gifts — a gesture that also supported small businesses and local entrepreneurs.

Festival organisers emphasised that the women-only day was an intentional effort to foster inclusion, comfort and empowerment.

“It wasn’t just about entertainment”, said the event organiser. “It was about reconnection — with tradition, with one another and with the joy of shared cultural experience”.

Looking ahead, the festival promises more exciting events, including a traditional Razhah performance by a folk group from Masirah, classic Omani games and roaming entertainers — ensuring the entire family remains engaged throughout.

Running until early August, Ajwaa Al Ashkharah 2025 continues to highlight Oman’s rich cultural fabric while promoting domestic tourism, supporting local businesses and strengthening community ties.

With its inclusive spirit and dynamic programming, Al Ashkharah is fast becoming a summer hotspot where tradition meets joyful innovation — and every visitor feels right at home.

RAINS FALL ACROSS AL DHAHIRAH GOVERNORATE



IBRI: Al Dhahirah Governorate witnessed rainfall of varying intensity, accompanied by strong winds, which caused several wadis to overflow, on Saturday.

In the Wilayat of Ibri, several villages and towns experienced moderate to heavy rainfall associated with strong winds in the town of Al Aridh. Rain also fell in the town of Hajimat resulting in overflowing wadis.

The Wilayat of Yanqul witnessed moderate to heavy rainfall leading to the flow of several wadis. Rainfall was also reported in areas of Al Marri, Ghadhiya, Falaj Al Sudairyeen, Al Buwairda, Al Rawdah, Al Safirat and Al Qura.

The Wilayat of Dhank witnessed rainfall of varying intensity in the towns of Qumayra, Bilt and Al Rahba which led to the flow of Wadi Qumayra. — ONA

Summer activities in full swing at Khasab Sports Complex

KHASAB: The Department of Culture, Sports and Youth in Musandam is driving high-impact engagement this summer with a vibrant lineup of sports and cultural activities at the Khasab Sports Complex.

Open to all age groups and genders, the programme aims to channel youth energy into skill-building, creativity and community participation.

Under its ‘Sports and Cultural Days’ initiative, the department has launched a series of integrated workshops and training schools that span disciplines from football, volleyball, handball, swimming and first aid to public

A series of integrated workshops and training schools spanning several disciplines has been launched



Certified coaches and cultural experts lead sessions for the children

speaking, photography, 3D printing and traditional crafts like palm weaving (Saff). Certified coaches and cultural experts lead sessions across the complex’s facilities, creating a space where physical fitness meets intellectual growth. Among the most attended sessions are mobile photography, Arabic calligraphy (Hurufiyat) and public speaking, drawing both citizens and residents in large numbers.

“Sports are more than games — they instil discipline and teamwork. Culture sparks imagination and growth”, said Abdulrahman bin Ahmed al Mulla,

Director of the Department.

“Through these programmes, we’re investing in the holistic development of youth during their summer break”, he added.

Significantly, the initiative ensures equal participation for women, with separate facilities and female trainers, reinforcing inclusivity in both physical and creative pursuits.

As attendance continues to rise, the Khasab Sports Complex stands out as a model for purposeful summer engagement, aligning with national goals to foster youth potential and community well-being. — ONA

SPOTLIGHT



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MINISTRY OF HEALTH WARNS E-GAMING RISKS



1 Gaming addiction linked to aggression, isolation

2 Screen overuse disrupts sleep, focus, say doctors

3 Ministry of Health issues age-wise screen time limits

4 Recommends sports, crafts, reading and outdoor play

AHMED AL KAABI

In today’s tech-driven world, electronic games have become deeply embedded in children’s lives, offering amusement and interactive play. Yet, this surge in digital entertainment has raised red flags among health experts who warn of the growing risks associated with unchecked screen time.

To address this, the Ministry of Health has released an awareness bulletin outlining the harmful effects of excessive gaming while offering parents practical strategies to promote balanced, healthy habits.

One of the most alarming outcomes is gaming addiction, with children spending hours immersed in virtual worlds, often at the cost of social interaction and real-world skills. The Ministry notes that violent games in particular may lead to heightened aggression, sleep issues and psychological imbalance.

Physical consequences include eye strain, weight gain due to inactivity and musculoskeletal tension from poor posture. These concerns are not abstract — they are becoming common in clinics, according to Dr Mona Mohammed, a general practitioner.


It’s not just about fun. It’s about understanding the deeper neurological and behavioural impact these games can have

DR MONA MOHAMMED
General practitioner

SCREEN TIME GUIDELINES

THE BULLETIN RECOMMENDS AGE-APPROPRIATE SCREEN TIME:

Ages 2–5: Limit to one hour per day, ensuring content is educational.

Ages 6 and up: No more than two hours daily, with supervision on content quality.

To counterbalance screen exposure, the Ministry encourages activities like cycling, basketball, crafts, reading and outdoor exploration to foster cognitive and physical growth.

Dr Mona warns that electronic games are engineered to engage children’s reward centres, flooding the brain with dopamine. Over time, this can affect sleep, attention span and academic performance. “It’s not just about fun”, she said. “It’s about understanding the deeper neurological and behavioural impact these games can have”.

The Ministry emphasises that active parental participation plays a pivotal role. Setting time limits, co-playing, modelling balanced tech use and encouraging tech-free family time are all crucial steps in maintaining digital wellness.

SHORT TAKES



Members of Libya's Anti-Illegal Immigration Agency conduct a raid, in Tripoli. — AFP

LIBYA DETAINS 1,500 UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANT WORKERS

TRIPOLI: Libyan authorities detained on Saturday some 1,500 undocumented migrant workers in a raid on a neighbourhood housing them east of the capital Tripoli. “Saturday’s inspections uncovered housing units where undocumented foreign workers were living”, Libyan labour minister Ali al Abed, who was present during the raid, told reporters. “These workers, of various nationalities, had no residency permits, no official passports and not even health records”.

With Italy some 300 kilometres away, Libya has become a key launchpad for tens of thousands of migrants who risk their lives at sea trying to reach Europe. The area targeted in the sweep east of Tripoli housed makeshift encampments surrounded by high walls and a large gate.

The labour minister said the site had “unregulated housing that fails to meet basic requirements for decent accommodation, health and workplace safety”. The detained migrant workers will be “transferred to centres run by the Anti-Illegal Immigration Authority and legal proceedings will be initiated against them according to national regulations”, Abed said. It remained unclear whether the migrants would be immediately deported. — AFP

GUNMEN STORM IRAN COURTHOUSE, KILLING SIX

TEHRAN: Gunmen stormed a courthouse in southeastern Iran on Saturday, killing at least six people, including three law enforcement personnel, the judiciary said. At least 22 people were also wounded, most of them civilians, said provincial chief justice Ali Movahedi Rad, cited by the judiciary’s Mizan Online news outlet. Mizan reported that the number of dead from the “terrorist attack” in the city of Zahedan had risen to six, revising an earlier toll of five.

The three attackers had been wearing explosive vests and had tried to enter the building disguised as visitors, Movahedi Rad said.

All three “have been killed according to the announcement of the Quds Headquarters of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps” (IRGC), he added. The dead included three law enforcement members who were protecting the courthouse. — AFP

FIFTY-FOUR CHILDREN SWIM FROM MOROCCO TO SPANISH ENCLAVE CEUTA

MADRID: At least 54 children and about 30 adults swam from Morocco to Spain’s North African enclave of Ceuta in rough seas and fog, Spanish television reported on Saturday.

Video footage on Spanish television channel RTVE showed Civil Guard launches making repeated rescue attempts to bring some of the swimmers to safety, while others swam across to the enclave. The children, who were mostly Moroccan, were taken to

temporary centres in Ceuta, where authorities called for help from the central government in dealing with the latest arrivals. “Don’t leave us alone. This is a matter of state. This has to be resolved”, Juan Rivas of the Ceuta regional government told reporters on Saturday.

On August 26 last year, hundreds of migrants took advantage of a thick mist to swim to Ceuta from neighbouring Morocco, local police said.

In 2021, one boy was seen

floating on empty plastic bottles in his attempt to reach Ceuta. Spain’s two enclaves on Morocco’s Mediterranean coast, Ceuta and Melilla, share the European Union’s only land borders with Africa. The enclaves sporadically experience waves of attempted crossings by migrants trying to reach Europe.

Moroccan nationals detained during the crossings are immediately sent back to Morocco unless they are underage or seeking asylum. — Reuters

Hamas rejects Trump take on Gaza talks breakdown

HAMAS officials expressed surprise on Saturday at US President Donald Trump’s accusation that the group “didn’t really want” a ceasefire and hostage release deal for Gaza. Trump made the allegation of Friday a day after Israel and the United States quit indirect negotiations with Hamas in Qatar that had lasted nearly three weeks.

“Trump’s remarks are particularly surprising, especially as they come at a time when progress had been made on some of the negotiation files”, Hamas official Taher al Nunu. “So far, we have not been informed of any issues regarding the files under discussion in the indirect ceasefire negotiations”, he added. Al Nunu, who is close to Hamas’s most senior political officials, said he was “surprised” that Israel and the United States had left the talks. Announcing the recall of US mediators on Thursday, Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff accused Hamas of not “acting in good faith”.

Though not part of the Hamas negotiating team, Hamas politburo member Izzat al Rishq insisted the group had shown “flexibility” in the talks. “The American statements deliberately ignore the real obstructionist to all agreements, Netanyahu’s government, which continues to put obstacles, deceive and evade commitments”, he said. Both Hamas officials called on the United States to be more even-handed in its role as mediator in the quest for a ceasefire after more than 21 months of fighting. “We call for an end to the US bias in favour of Netanyahu, who is obstructing any agreement”, Al Nunu said.

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Saturday spoke to his French and German counterparts and outlined UK plans to get aid to people in Gaza and evacuate sick and injured children, his office said. “The prime minister set out how the UK will also be taking forward plans to work with partners such as Jordan to airdrop aid and evacuate children requiring medical assistance”, a statement said.

In a phone conversation, Starmer, French President Emmanuel Macron and the German Chancellor Friedrich Merz discussed the humanitarian situation in Gaza “which they



Displaced Palestinians at the Nuseirat refugee camp haul food parcels and other items. — AFP

agreed is appalling”. “They all agreed it would be vital to ensure robust plans are in place to turn an urgently needed ceasefire into lasting peace”, according to a readout released by Downing Street. “They discussed their intention to work closely together on a plan... which would pave the way to a long-term solution and security in the region.

They agreed that once this plan was worked up, they would seek to bring in other key partners, including in the region, to advance it”, it added. The discussion comes a day after UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres slammed the international community for turning a blind eye to widespread starvation in the Gaza Strip, calling it a “moral crisis that challenges the global conscience”. Aid groups have warned of surging cases of starvation, particularly among children, in war-ravaged Gaza, which Israel placed under an aid blockade in March amidst its ongoing war with Hamas. That blockade was partially eased two months later. The trickle of aid since then has been controlled by the Israeli- and US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation.

In Gaza, civil defence agency said Israeli

operations killed 11 people on Saturday in the Palestinian territory devastated by over 21 months of war. Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal said that the toll included four Palestinians killed in an air strike on the Al Rimal neighbourhood of Gaza City in the territory’s north. One other person was killed “after Israeli forces opened fire on people waiting for humanitarian aid” northwest of Gaza City, the agency said.

Eyewitnesses said that several thousand people had gathered in the area to wait for aid. One of them, Abu Samir Hamoudeh, 42, said the Israeli military opened fire “while the people were waiting to approach the distribution point”, located near an Israeli military post in the Zikim area, northwest of Sudaniyah. Another man was killed by a drone strike near the southern city of Khan Yunis, while one was killed by artillery fire in the Al Bureij camp in central Gaza, the civil defence said.

Bassal also said that civil defence teams on Saturday recovered the bodies of 12 people in the area of the Morag Corridor north of Rafah following Israeli bombardment the previous night. — AFP

Modi renews ties with Maldives with offers of infra projects, funds

MALE: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrapped up a visit to the Maldives on Saturday, renewing ties by offering infrastructure projects and vital financial assistance to the cash-strapped Indian Ocean nation. Regional powerhouse India had been concerned that its small, yet strategically located neighbour was drifting towards the orbit of its rival China following the 2023 election of President Mohamed Muizzu on an anti-India platform. Since coming to office, Muizzu has secured the withdrawal of a small contingent of Indian military personnel who operated search-and-rescue aircraft in the archipelago. But he has since toned down his anti-India rhetoric and on Friday he touted the two nations’ collaboration on security and trade.

“India has long stood as the Maldives’ closest and most trusted partner”, Muizzu said in a banquet

speech alongside Modi, whom he met with twice last year. “We deeply value the friendship of India and are grateful for the timely assistance your country has extended to us in moments of need”, Muizzu added.

Shortly after his arrival on Friday, Modi unveiled a \$565 million credit line for the Maldives, which is facing a severe foreign exchange shortage despite its thriving tourism industry. India also reduced annual repayments of an earlier credit line from \$51 million to \$29 million and the two sides discussed a potential free-trade agreement.

Muizzu said the new credit line would bolster the Maldives’ security forces and improve healthcare, housing and education.

During his two-day trip, Modi also inaugurated a new defence ministry headquarters and several India-funded infrastructure projects, including roads and a 4,000-unit housing scheme. Modi’s visit had



India’s PM Narendra Modi (L) shakes hands with the President of Maldives Mohamed Muizzu during their meeting at the President’s Office in Male. — AFP

set “a clear path for the future of Maldives-India relations”, Muizzu wrote on X on Saturday as the Indian

leader left the capital Male after 60th Independence Day celebrations. “Our relationship continues to

grow, shaped by people-to-people ties and cooperation in various sectors”, Modi wrote in his own post on X. “India remains committed to supporting the aspirations of the Maldivian people”.

Known for its luxury tourism and pristine beaches, the Maldives is also a geopolitical hotspot, with key global shipping lanes passing through its 1,192 islands, stretching across 800 kilometres of the equator. China and India are the Maldives’ two largest bilateral lenders.

India remains apprehensive about China’s growing presence in the Indian Ocean, particularly in the Maldives and neighbouring Sri Lanka. Global east-west shipping lanes pass through the nation’s chain of 1,192 tiny coral islands, stretching around 800 kilometres across the equator. India’s government has traditionally regarded the Maldives, along with Sri Lanka, to be within its sphere of influence. — AFP

WORLD

SHORT TAKES



A view shows burned cars at the site of the Russian drone strike, in Dnipro. — Reuters

RUSSIA SEIZES TWO VILLAGES IN CENTRAL UKRAINE

MOSCOW: Russia on Saturday said it had wrested two villages in Ukraine, including one in the central Dnipropetrovsk region, marking a fresh advance into an area largely spared seizures of land since Moscow launched its offensive in 2022. Overnight strikes by both sides meanwhile claimed six lives — four in central Ukraine and two in western Russia, according to officials in both countries. The Russian army said its forces had “liberated the settlement of Maliyevka” in Dnipropetrovsk weeks after it seized the first village in the region — not one of the Ukrainian territories annexed by Russia.

In a separate message on Saturday, Moscow said it had “liberated the settlement of Zeleny Gai” in Donetsk region on the border with Dnipropetrovsk, adding that it was an important stronghold used by Ukraine to protect the area. Further north in Kharkiv, a Russian strike destroyed a large boiler room that will be impossible to repair before winter, while in Sumy, another strike hit a regional administration building, local authorities said.

Further Russian advances could harm Ukraine’s economy and energy supplies as Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk, which has been occupied since 2014, are part of Ukraine’s mining heartland, particularly for coal that powers the electricity grid. Ukrainian authorities have already been ordering civilians with children to flee a front line that is creeping closer. — AFP

NASA TO LOSE ABOUT 20 PER CENT OF ITS WORKFORCE

WASHINGTON: The US space agency NASA will lose about 3,900 employees under Donald Trump’s sweeping effort to trim the federal workforce — at the same time as the president prioritizes plans for crewed missions to the Moon and Mars. In an emailed statement, NASA said around 3,000 employees took part in the second round of its deferred resignation program. Combined with the 870 who joined the first round and regular staff departures, the agency’s civil servant workforce is set to drop from more than 18,000 before Trump took office in January to roughly 14,000 — a more than 20 per cent decrease.

Those leaving the National Aeronautics and Space Administration on the deferred resignation program will be placed on administrative leave until an agreed departure date. The figures could shift slightly in the coming weeks. “Safety remains a top priority for our agency as we balance the need to become a more streamlined and more efficient organization and work to ensure we remain fully capable of pursuing a Golden Era of exploration and innovation, including to the Moon and Mars,” the agency said. — AFP

SECURITY MEASURES

Senegal bans motorbikes near Mali border



Senegal officials have imposed a nighttime ban on motorcycles in an eastern region after groups used motorbikes in recent attacks in towns just over the border in Mali. A decree published this week said the prohibition was for “security reasons”, after attackers targeted army positions in several Malian towns on July 1. The midnight-to-dawn motorbike ban applies to the Bakel region in Senegal, which stretches around 230 kilometres along the border with Mali. — AFP

MULTI-SPEED EU INTEGRATION MODEL NEEDED TO SAVE BLOC, SAYS ORBAN

BUDAPEST: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said on Saturday that the European Union was at risk of “falling apart”, claiming that only a multi-speed integration model could save the bloc. The central idea of a multi-speed union is allowing some members to go faster -- or slower -- towards European integration with regard to certain policies and topics. The nationalist leader, known for wielding veto rights in the EU and criticising Brussels, made the

remarks after delivering a speech at a summer university in Baile Tusnad, a town in Romania’s Transylvania region, home to a sizeable ethnic Hungarian minority. Answering a question on what he would do if he were head of the European commission, Orban said he would give rights back to nation states and start building a “Europe of concentric circles”. The first such circle would be focused on security and could include Turkey and Ukraine, both

of which have ambitions of joining the EU, said Orban, who has raised a series of objections and obstacles to Ukraine’s EU integration. The second circle would include economic integration and the Schengen free movement area, in which he says Hungary should stay. The third would be the current eurozone, and the fourth would be a circle of “constitutional institutions” for those member states striving for an “ever closer union”. — AFP

Thai-Cambodia clashes spread along frontier

THAILAND

and Cambodia pounded each other with

heavy artillery fire for a third day on Saturday, as a border conflict that killed at least 33 people and displaced more than 150,000 from their homes spread across the frontier. Clashes broke out for the first time in the countries’ coastal regions where they meet on the Gulf of Thailand, around 250 kilometres southwest of the main frontlines thumping with blasts on Saturday afternoon. “It feels like I’m escaping a war zone,” 76-year-old Samlee Sornchai said at a temple shelter for evacuees in the Thai town of Kanthararom, after abandoning his farm near the embattled frontier.

Both sides say they are open to a truce in the combat being fought with jets, tanks and ground troops, but have accused the other of undermining armistice efforts. Tensions initially flared over long-contested ancient temple sites before fighting spread along the countries’ rural border region, marked by a ridge of hills surrounded by wild jungle and agricultural land where locals farm rubber and rice.

Cambodia’s defence ministry said 13 people have been confirmed killed in the fighting since Thursday, including eight civilians and five soldiers, with 71 people wounded. Thai authorities say 13 civilians and seven soldiers have been killed on their side, taking the toll across both nations higher than it was in the last major round of fighting between 2008 and 2011.



An aerial view shows people taking shelter near a pagoda in Oddar Meanchey province. — AFP

Tensions initially flared over long-contested ancient temple sites before fighting spread along the countries’ rural border region, marked by a ridge of hills surrounded by wild jungle and agricultural land where locals farm rubber and rice

Both sides reported a coastline clash around 5:00 am on Saturday, with Cambodia accusing Thai forces of firing “five heavy artillery shells” into Pursat province, bordering Thailand’s Trat province. The conflict has also forced more than 138,000 people to be evacuated from Thailand’s border regions, and more than 35,000 driven from their homes in Cambodia. After an urgent UN Security Council meeting in New York on Friday, Cambodia’s UN ambassador Chhea Keo said his country wanted a ceasefire. “Cambodia asked for an immediate ceasefire — unconditionally — and we also call for the peaceful solution of the dispute,” he told reporters. Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa said on Saturday that for any ceasefire or talks to proceed, Cambodia needed to show “genuine sincerity in ending the conflict”. “I urge Cambodia to stop violating

Thai sovereignty and to return to resolving the issue through bilateral dialogue,” Maris told reporters. Thai Foreign Ministry spokesman Nikorndej Balankura said on Friday, before the UN meeting was held, that Bangkok was open to talks, possibly aided by Malaysia. Malaysia currently holds the chair of the ASEAN regional bloc, of which Thailand and Cambodia are both members. Both sides have blamed the other for firing first. Additionally, Cambodia has accused Thai forces of using cluster munitions, while Thailand accused Cambodia of targeting civilian infrastructure, including a hospital hit by shells and a petrol station struck by at least one rocket. Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra — still an influential figure in the kingdom — visited shelters on Saturday to meet evacuees. — AFP

MALAYSIANS PROTEST RISING LIVING COSTS

KUALA LUMPUR: Tens of thousands of Malaysians took to the capital’s streets on Saturday to protest rising living costs and a perceived lack of reform by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim’s unity government. The rally organised by opposition parties marked the first major protest in Southeast Asia’s sixth-largest economy since Anwar was propelled to power after general elections in 2022. Protesters gathered at various points around the city centre before converging on the central Merdeka (Independence) Square in drizzling rain, carrying placards saying “Turun Anwar” — “Step down Anwar” in Malay — while police kept a close eye. — AFP



ALARMING CRISIS

600 malnourished children die in Nigeria



More than 600 malnourished children have died in northern Nigeria in six months after failing to receive proper care as foreign aid dries up. Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said northern Nigeria is “currently facing an alarming malnutrition crisis”. “Unfortunately, 652 children have already died in our facilities since the beginning of 2025 due to a lack of timely access to care,” the charity, which is known by its French initials, said. — AFP

MASSIVE BLAST

Anti-terror police probe Greek explosion



A strong blast early on Saturday damaged an apartment building in a suburb of Greece’s second city Thessaloniki, wounding two passersby and shattering windows of nearby buildings. Six cars were also damaged in the explosion in the suburb of Sikies and anti-terror police were probing the incident. The blast damaged the ground floor of the building leaving gaping holes in the wall. The head of a prison officers’ union lives in the building. — AFP

The New York Times

Was this artifact from King Tut’s tomb?



ALEX MARSHALL

The writer is a European culture reporter for The New York Times

AFTER discovering King Tutankhamen’s tomb, British archaeologist Howard Carter spent years cataloging the thousands of priceless artifacts inside, including life-size statues of the ancient Egyptian pharaoh, glittering thrones and the boy king’s funeral mask. Now one object that Egyptologists have for decades said that Carter likely stole is to be auctioned, despite some experts saying the sale should not occur.

Apollo Art Auctions, a small auction house in London, is to sell the so-called Guennol Grasshopper. The intricately carved ivory and wood container is in the shape of the noisy insect, with wings that swing outward to reveal a hole to store perfume. The grasshopper, which the auction house says in promotional material is “from the age of Tutankhamen,” has an estimated price of up to 500,000 pounds, or about \$675,000. The auction listing says the item previously traded hands for \$1.2 million.

Apollo Art Auctions said in an emailed statement that there was “no documented evidence” that the vessel came from the pharaoh’s tomb. “The item does not appear on any official excavation inventories,” the statement said. Still, for some Egyptologists there is little doubt about its origins. Christian Loeben, of the Museum August

Kestner in Hanover, Germany, who has written about Carter’s career, said in an interview that he was “quite convinced” that the grasshopper could only have come from the tomb.

The artifact is of a style that existed in Egypt at “exactly the period” of Tutankhamen’s reign in the 14th century BC, Loeben said, while the vessel’s lack of damage indicates that it came from a sealed chamber like the boy king’s. Historical records also show that Carter sold the item after returning to England. Loeben said the grasshopper should go back to Egypt. “It’s a moral question,” he said.

Christina Riggs, a professor at Durham University in northern England who has written extensively on Tutankhamen and on Carter’s behavior, said Carter took other small artifacts, including some designed to look like animals. Some, she said, are still in Western museum collections. Riggs said it was unsurprising that there was no documentation of the grasshopper’s origins: Carter wouldn’t have listed items he stole as being among the tomb’s contents. She said the auction house should have consulted the Egyptian government. The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities did not respond to requests for comment for this article; nor did a spokesperson for the Egyptian government. Apollo Art Auctions said it was “confident

Today on the outskirts of Cairo, more than 5,000 artifacts from the boy king’s tomb are intended to be the biggest draw in a new Grand Egyptian Museum, although for now the Tutankhamen galleries are closed

that the sale complies fully with all applicable laws and international standards, and we have taken all necessary legal and ethical steps to ensure the legitimacy of the object’s provenance.” The auction house also said that the Art Loss Register, a London-based company that maintains a database of stolen artifacts, had issued a “certificate of clearance” confirming that the item was not listed.

When Carter and his patron, the Earl of Carnarvon, began searching for Tutankhamen’s tomb in 1914, they hoped for a big payday. At the time, the Egyptian government let archaeologists keep half of any discoveries if robbers had already broken into a tomb. Carter argued that this was the case for Tutankhamen’s chamber, although many have disagreed with his assessment.

Today on the outskirts of Cairo, more than 5,000 artifacts from the boy king’s tomb are intended to be the biggest draw in a new Grand Egyptian Museum, although for now the Tutankhamen galleries are closed. Tutankhamen’s gold funeral mask is displayed at the old Egyptian Museum in the city.

Erin Thompson, a professor of art crime at John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York, said in an interview that the she wasn’t surprised that the sale was occurring at a lesser-known auction house.

Reports on Russian role in poll don’t show what Trump says



CHARLIE SAVAGE

The author writes about national security and legal policy for The New York Times

THE Trump administration in recent weeks has released a series of reports intended to undermine the conclusion reached by intelligence agencies before President Donald Trump’s first term that Russia had favored his candidacy in 2016 and sought to improve his chances of winning. That assessment, an unclassified version of which was made public in January 2017, has long infuriated Trump. In disclosing the reports, he and his team are proclaiming that President Barack Obama and his team torqued the intelligence analysis process to deliberately discredit Trump’s election.

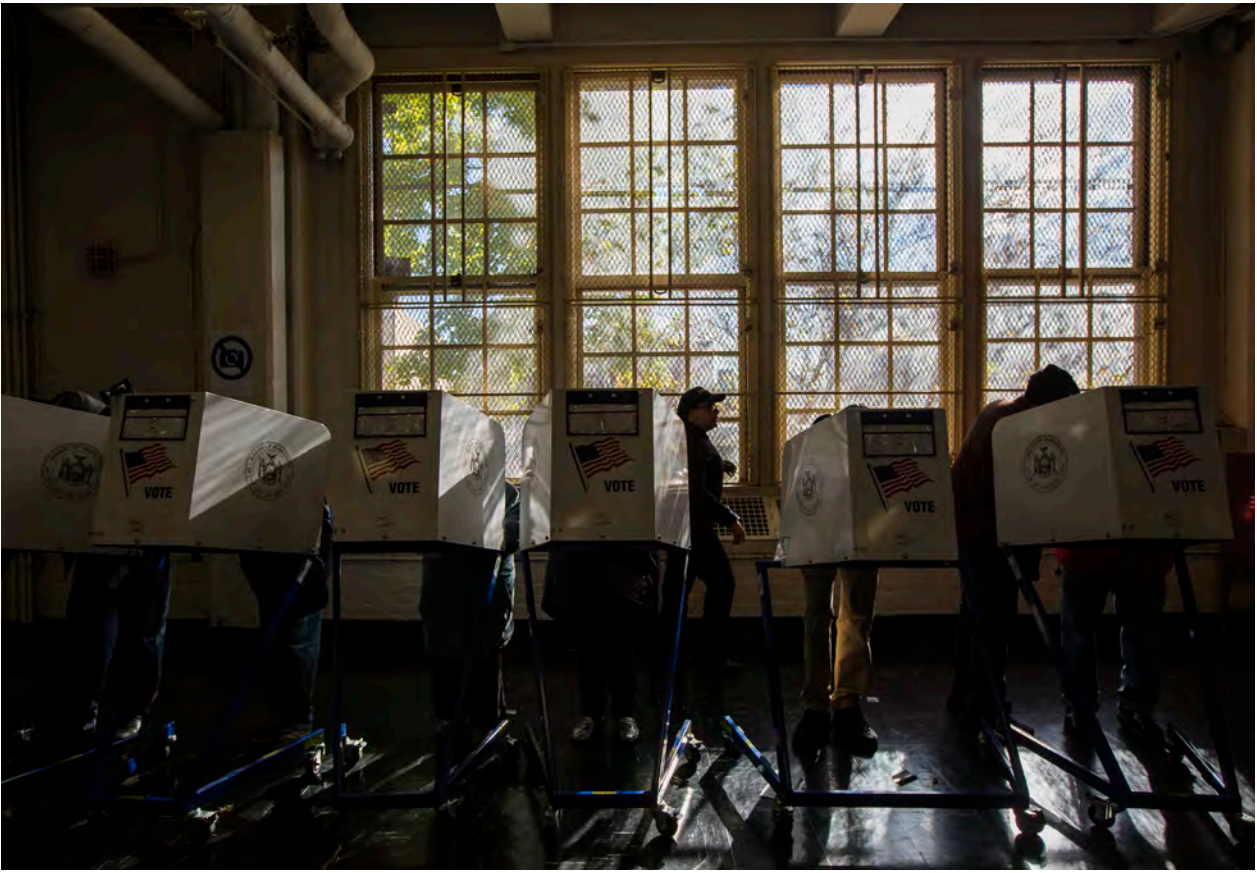
The administration has coupled that case with overheated and attention-grabbing claims. Trump has accused Obama of treason, and his top officials have made criminal referrals about national security officials under Obama. Still, even if the administration’s use of the reports is wildly overstated, some of the information has not been made public before. It provides some messy details about how the intelligence community assessment was hurriedly produced during Obama’s final months in office.

The assessment said that President Vladimir Putin of Russia had ordered a multifaceted information operation targeting the US presidential election, including by hacking and releasing Democratic emails and by seeding social media with messages promoting Trump and denigrating his rival, Hillary Clinton. The assessment also attributed three motivations to Putin. Two have not been seriously challenged: He wanted to undermine public faith in democracy and to damage Clinton, who until election night was widely seen as the

next US president. But Trump and his allies have long chafed at the third asserted goal — that Russia also hoped to help him win.

Their case seeking to undermine the assessment has focused on the unusually rushed and tightly controlled process to complete the document, in which senior leaders including CIA Director John Brennan and FBI Director James Comey played a more direct role than is typical. And their criticism has focused on two main elements. One is the role played by the so-called Steele dossier. The dossier, a compendium of later-discredited claims about Trump-Russia ties compiled by a former British spy, was part of a Democratic-funded political opposition research effort. The government had warned the public before the 2016 election that Russia was behind the hacking and dumping of Democratic emails. In early December 2016, after Trump’s surprise victory, Obama directed the intelligence community to produce a comprehensive analysis of Russia’s election meddling, drawing on all available sources of information. The terms of that mandate appear to have led the top officials overseeing the process to include material that might otherwise have been excluded.

The Steele dossier is an example. It had been known that the FBI thought the dossier should be used because the standard was to draw on all available sources, while CIA analysts objected because the sourcing for the claims was then unknown. Ultimately, agency leaders negotiated a compromise and put a summary of it in an annex appended to the assessment. Brennan has publicly said the Steele dossier material was not incorporated or used in the assessment itself because of the CIA’s concerns. In 2017, he



A polling place in the Bronx borough of New York on Election Day. — NYT file photo

The assessment said that President Vladimir Putin of Russia had ordered a multifaceted information operation targeting the US presidential election, including by hacking and releasing Democratic emails and by seeding social media with messages promoting Trump and denigrating his rival, Hillary Clinton.

told Congress that the dossier “was not in any way used as a basis for the intelligence community assessment that was done.”

The newly disclosed material complicates that narrative. For one, it showed that Brennan internally defended appending a summary of the dossier to the assessment after CIA analysts resisted the compromise, too. For another, the material has revealed that the classified version of the assessment alerted readers to the existence of the annex. It did so in a fourth bullet point under the judgment that Putin aspired to help Trump’s chances of winning.

Obama’s mandate to take account of all available information also led the CIA to draw upon some raw intelligence that it might otherwise not have seen fit to publish, or disseminate for analysts to use. The newly disclosed material shows that after Obama’s direction, Brennan ordered a “full review,” including the publication of any relevant intelligence that had been collected before the election but not

disseminated. CIA officials had previously held back each of those three, according to a newly declassified 2020 report by Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee, because of tradecraft concerns about the information within them. It said the assessment did not flag those worries. The most important of them was something the US mole in the Kremlin had said: that Putin made public the hacked Democratic emails after deciding that Trump, “whose victory Putin was counting on, most likely would not be able to pull off a convincing victory.”

The reports released by the Trump team are limited to evaluating the use of intelligence that was available in December 2016, and do not address subsequent developments. That includes Putin’s statement at a news conference with Trump in Helsinki, Finland, in 2018, in which he said through a translator that he had indeed wanted Trump to win the election “because he talked about bringing the US-Russia relationship back to normal.”

OPINION

The emotional struggles of mental health caregivers



**DR HAMED
AL SINAWI**

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

AHMED (not his real name) was in his early twenties when he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. He believed he was a time traveller who had lost his time machine and become stuck in the present.

He kept calling me his father, ‘the old man’ who kidnapped him and kept his time machine hidden.

Ahmed would sneak out of his home and walk to the police station in his town, asking for their help to unite him with his time machine.

Luckily, the police knew where he lived, so they would return him home. Over time, the responsibility of caring for Ahmed fell almost entirely on his father.

He accompanied him everywhere, helped him shower, ensured he was fed and stayed awake on many nights while Ahmed spoke to imaginary voices or tried to ‘communicate’ with his machine.

As the rest of the family grew frustrated, even fearful, it was the father — now in his seventies — who remained the only caregiver.

After many years to the local healers, the family consulted a doctor who diagnosed Ahmed with schizophrenia. Despite multiple hospital stays and changes in medication,

Ahmed’s condition did not get better.

Although he stopped talking about his time machine, he became withdrawn and entirely dependent.

His father, physically frail and emotionally depleted, continued to care for him — driven by love, duty and fear of other family members who mistreated his son, labelled him ‘spoiled’ or threatened him during his nighttime pacing.

Caregivers of people with severe mental illness can find it challenging and emotionally draining. Unlike physical illnesses that receive public sympathy, mental illness still carries stigma that isolates both patients and those who care for them.

These caregivers experience chronic stress, anxiety, guilt and grief. They mourn the loss of the person they once knew, fear future relapses and struggle with the unpredictability of the illness.

So how can caregivers be supported and support themselves?

The first step is to acknowledge your struggle and allow yourself to feel the frustration, sadness and even anger without guilt.

Suppressing these emotions can increase your risk of burnout. Some caregivers choose to suffer in silence because they worry others

Caring for people with severe mental illness can be challenging and emotionally draining

may not understand them or even judge them.

Joining caregiver support groups can offer a sense of community as you meet people who can understand your struggles and exchange with you validation and practical tips.

Involve other family members in caring, even when they seem less patient or understanding. Start by giving them small tasks and educating them gradually about the condition.

Remember to take care of your well-being: ensure you get sufficient rest, engage in gentle physical activity — such as a brief walk outdoors.

When attending medical appointments, make the most of your time by asking questions, seeking second opinions and exploring available support services.

In my opinion, caregivers provide love, care and support for a person with severe mental illness, but this needs to be accompanied by community awareness and support from others.

By recognising their sacrifice and ensuring they too are cared for, we uphold not only the dignity of the patient but the humanity of those who stand beside them — day after day, night after night.

Southern Belgian faces ‘forever chemicals’ scandal

MATTHIEU DEMEESTERE

A water contamination scandal has gripped a leafy corner of southern Belgium, causing anxious residents to queue up for blood tests to confirm potential exposure to so-called forever chemicals.

On an early summer afternoon about a dozen people waited to get their samples taken at a municipal building in Braine-le-Chateau, a picturesque town in the French-speaking Wallonia region.

“Initially local authorities told us that measurements were reassuring, but in reality, they didn’t have any and were simply trying to keep people calm as best they could”, Douglas, a 35-year-old consultant who preferred only to give his first name, said.

“This kind of game has to stop”, he said, adding he hoped the blood-sampling campaign launched in June would help shed light on the situation.

Anger in the region first erupted in 2023 when an investigation by local broadcaster RTBF revealed the authorities had ignored longstanding warnings about high levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), often called forever chemicals.

It emerged that the US military, which has an airbase in the small city of Chievres, had warned the local water company in 2017 about high PFAS levels in drinking water, following an incident involving firefighting foam.

The US base advised its personnel to drink bottled water — but locals were left in the dark for years, even after the regional government was told of the issue in 2018.

PFAS are a family of synthetic chemicals that take an extremely long time to break down.

Chronic exposure to even low levels of the chemicals has been linked to liver damage, high cholesterol, reduced immune responses, low birth weights and several kinds of cancer.

A group of more than 10,000 human-made chemicals that repel heat, water and oil, PFAS are used in nonstick pans, stain-proof carpets and other products.

But their use is increasingly being restricted across the world due to adverse health effects.

In June an Italian court sentenced executives at a chemical plant to jail terms of up to 17 years for polluting water used by hundreds of thousands of people with the chemicals.

Water samples in Braine-le-Chateau last year revealed levels five to six times higher than a safety standard of 4 nanograms/litre (ng/L) for four PFAS recently agreed by Belgian authorities. — AFP

The plague of rental fraud

A concerning pattern of corruption has emerged within Oman’s rental property sector, with fraudulent practices becoming so commonplace that they risk undermining the integrity of the entire real estate market. What began as isolated incidents has evolved into a systematic problem that exploits tenants, property owners and municipal authorities alike.

The scope of the problem is worrying. The rental fraud scheme has infiltrated even established estate agencies across Oman, where some managers choose to look the other way rather than confront the illegal activities occurring under their noses.

While these established firms may not officially endorse such practices, their passive tolerance allows the corruption to flourish unchecked. The most vulnerable parties in this web of deception are ordinary tenants seeking housing and property owners trying to rent their assets legitimately.

Meanwhile, municipal authorities lose substantial revenue through systematic tax evasion, as perpetrators deliberately avoid the mandatory 3 per cent municipal duty required for new tenancy agreements.

Here is how the scam works. The fraudulent scheme operates through a carefully orchestrated deception that exploits legal loopholes and preys on people’s desire to save money. Here’s how the scam typically unfolds. An individual establishes himself as an estate agent without properly registering his company — a clear violation of Omani commercial law. Operating in this legal grey area, the fraudulent agent targets both tenants and property owners with promises of financial savings.

Here is the scammers pitch to the tenant. The fake agent approaches prospective tenants with an attractive proposition: accept a verbal agreement instead of a written tenancy contract and you can enjoy



**KARIM
EASTERBROOK**

The writer is Former School Principal Cambridge UK

The reluctance or inability to bring these cases before the Courts allows the perpetrators to operate without meaningful consequences

reduced rent. The agent explains that this arrangement allows the property owner to avoid municipal fees and legal documentation costs, savings that can be passed along to the tenant.

Simultaneously, the fraudulent agent contacts the property owner with a different story. He claims that the best achievable rental rate is significantly lower than the property’s actual market value, positioning himself as the intermediary who can secure the best possible rental income.

In a typical example, a property worth RO 525 per month in rent becomes the centre of a three-way deception. The tenant pays RO 500 monthly, believing they’re receiving a RO 25 discount. The owner receives only RO 450, thinking this represents the best available market rate. The fraudulent agent pockets the RO 50 difference in rental income while also collecting a 5 per cent commission (RO 25) from the owner, totalling RO 75 in unearned monthly profit. When maintenance issues arise, the fake agent directs tenants to contact the owner directly, absolving himself of any agency management responsibilities while continuing to collect his illicit profits.

Unfortunately corruption extends beyond property rentals into employment practices, where similar patterns of deception target expatriate workers. Employers lure foreign workers to Oman with comprehensive contracts promising accommodation, competitive salaries and other benefits.

Upon arrival, these workers discover that their promised accommodations have vanished, their salaries have been reduced or their employment terms have been unilaterally modified. This bait-and-switch tactic leaves expatriate workers in particularly vulnerable positions, as they often lack the local knowledge, resources or legal connections necessary to seek redress through Oman’s Court system.

Despite Oman’s deserved

reputation for maintaining a well-organised and comprehensive legal framework, these fraudulent operators continue their activities with relative impunity. The gap between the country’s robust legal infrastructure and the enforcement of regulations against these small-scale but systematic fraudsters represents a significant challenge to market integrity.

The reluctance or inability to bring these cases before the Courts allows the perpetrators to operate without meaningful consequences, emboldening others to adopt similar tactics and perpetuating a cycle of corruption that undermines confidence in Oman’s property and employment markets.

This widespread fraud creates multiple layers of harm across Omani society. Tenants pay inflated rents while believing they’re receiving discounts. Property owners receive below-market rates for their assets while paying unnecessary commissions.

Municipal authorities lose tax revenue that should fund public services and infrastructure development. Perhaps most damaging is the erosion of trust in legitimate business practices.

Addressing this crisis requires coordinated action from multiple stakeholders. Enhanced enforcement of existing business registration requirements could eliminate unregistered operators from the market. Stronger penalties for rental fraud and employment deception would create meaningful deterrents.

Public awareness campaigns could help potential victims recognise and avoid these fraudulent schemes. Most importantly, the legal system’s capacity to process these cases efficiently must be strengthened to ensure that Oman’s comprehensive legal framework translates into practical justice for fraud victims.

The integrity of Oman’s property market and its reputation as a reliable destination for international workers depend on swift and decisive action to address these systemic problems.

No winners, when you play stupid games



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

ANDY Byron, the fifty-year-old CEO of Astronomer, a data and AI giant in Cincinnati, Ohio and Kristin Cabot, the company’s HR chief have, in a perverse sort of way, achieved global notoriety after they were ‘caught out’ by the ‘Kiss Cam’, at a concert in Boston, Massachusetts last week.

Coldplay have been termed by influential musical guru, ‘Afisha’s’ Sergey Stepanov, as “This century’s equivalent of the Beatles”, having sold over 100 million albums, reached an audience of 90 million Spotify listeners and stayed relevant to the ‘pop’ genre for almost forty years. From hard rock, through soft rock, their romanticism has kept them at the forefront of the performing arts and made theirs the ‘go to’ concerts, especially during the summer. It’s where you would take the one you love, the one close to you and surrender to the romance that Chris Martin, Jonny Buckland, Guy Berryman, Will Champion and Phil Harvey inspire.

Ironically for Byron and Cabot, they were ‘snapped’ by the ‘Kiss Cam’, rocking gently, romantically, lovingly, as Martin chatted to their audience between gentle romantic melodies. Their slowly dawning awareness, his darting for the cover of darkness and her realisation of what had just occurred before turning away, distraught yet with much more

dignity than her ‘beau’ at least offered her more class than his ‘rat deserting a sinking ship’ imitation.

Anyway, I’m not casting stones, or passing judgement, but I found it ironic that my favourite Coldplay song is ‘Viva La Vida’, a song and lyrics inspired by the illusions of power and success; and how quickly they come and go, poetic, introspective, provocative, the lyrics echo the Frida Kahlo painting of the same name, an image of the death of Louis XVI. It’s portrayal of his struggle to be heard by the baying mob as he faces the realities of life and death, may be interpreted as our own needs to Viva la vida, or ‘live life’, as nothing is permanent.

Certainly, for Byron and Cabot, their lives will never be the same again and it’s just as well they both have independent means, although Byron’s bank balance will surely be battered by his cuckolded wife, who, along with both families, will surely exact her own form of retribution. It’s difficult to see the ‘canoodlers’ staying together either... I mean, he ‘got out of there and left her to ‘face the music, didn’t he? What a bounder, a cad, a rogue, rascal and scoundrel, of the first order!

And I wonder if they will ever be able to ‘park’ what happened? Probably not, as few of us could ever see them again the cuckolds suppress either a smile at their being ‘outed’,

As much as the pair probably don't deserve our sympathy as such, I do hope they are supported, their suffering can be mitigated to some extent and they don't do anything even more stupid!

or our anger at their betrayals. As much as the pair probably don’t deserve our sympathy as such, I do hope they are supported, their suffering can be mitigated to some extent and they don’t do anything even more stupid!

Oh, how must the aggrieved ‘other halves’, and their families feel? In the face of a barrage of mirth and the very public betrayals, a groundswell of sympathy may not be enough, as they feel their own intense disappointment and seek ways to put this all behind them. Hurt comes in so many guises and comfort in so few. I hope they have faith and friends to help them navigate the difficult times ahead, as, rest assured, though smiling at the mirth inspired by the ‘Kiss Cam’ episode, most of us will feel a far greater measure of genuine sympathy for those betrayed.

History hasn’t been kind to ‘couples’ throughout history, has it? Right from the beginning Adam and Eve departed from their script and nothing was the same after; and while Romeo and Juliet is an eternal Shakespearean tale in which the star-crossed young lovers tragically perished together, the capricious and notorious Bonnie and Clyde died in a hail of bullets... and that list is endless.

We like nothing more than to see the rich and famous stumble... well, these two did.

World court climate ruling: Non-binding but game changing

KELLY MACNAMARA

The world’s top court may not be able to compel polluting states to halt planet-warming emissions, but experts say its momentous climate decision gives potent legal and political firepower to countries and campaigners on the frontlines.

An advisory opinion like the one issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) this week is not binding and so is not directly enforceable, but that does not mean it has no weight.

By saying that all countries were firmly bound to a swathe of legal obligations under existing laws and treaties, experts say the ruling will influence courts, climate negotiations and policy decisions across the world.

The ICJ “couldn’t have been clearer” on the binding nature of a range of climate duties, said Cesar Rodriguez-Garavito, Professor of Law and Director of the Climate Law Accelerator at New York University.

“The consensus among the judges is fully behind the conclusion that international law establishes clear and binding obligations for states not to cause massive harm to the environment in general and not to harm the climate system in particular”, he said.

These included ensuring national climate plans reflect the highest possible ambition to stay within the Paris agreement’s safer global warming cap of 1.5°C above pre-industrial times — a level that the world could reach this decade.

If those obligations are not met, the court said states may be obliged to repair damaged infrastructure or ecosystems — and if that is not possible, they could face compensation claims.

This will ripple into future litigation, said Markus Gehring, professor at the University of Cambridge.

“We are a far cry from a contentious case between two countries, where someone is demanding liability for past and present climate change damage, but in theory, the court lays out an avenue towards such claims”, he said.

Major petrostates like the US may take little heed of the court’s warning that expanding production of oil, gas and coal could constitute an “internationally wrongful act”.

But Gehring said countries could choose to ignore ICJ advisory opinions “at their peril”.

He cited the court’s 2019 advice that the UK should end its occupation of the Chagos islands.

After Britain initially rejected the ruling, a UN General Assembly resolution demanded it cede the islands to Mauritius, which it eventually did in 2024. The move by US President Donald Trump to withdraw from the Paris deal also would be unlikely to absolve the country from its duties, Gehring added, because the obligation to address climate change is now “crystal clear in international law”.

ICJ judge Sarah Cleveland said countries’ “significant responsibilities” to protect the climate system may also affect interpretation of international investment law.— AFP

A shameful silence in the face of Gaza’s starvation

THE humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip has escalated to a critical level. The suffering of the civilian population continues without interruption and the international reaction remains slow.

Many people in Gaza are facing extreme shortages of food, clean water, medicine, electricity and shelter. Families live on very limited amounts of basic food.

Children are dying due to hunger and lack of care. The situation is directly linked to the blockade enforced by Israel, which controls the entry of supplies by land, sea and air.

Israel has maintained strict control over Gaza’s borders for many years. This includes restrictions on goods, people and essential services. Since the beginning of the current military operation, the siege has become tighter.

The destruction of infrastructure, attacks on distribution routes and daily bombardments have made life extremely difficult for the population. Reports from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification describe millions of people facing catastrophic hunger. These are not isolated cases. The entire population is affected.

Hospitals in Gaza have stopped functioning at full capacity. Many are unable to accept new patients. They lack fuel for generators, medicines and medical equipment. Some hospitals have been damaged or destroyed.

The healthcare system has reached a state of collapse. Ambulances are unable to move freely, and healthcare workers are struggling to treat the wounded. The education system has also been affected. Schools are closed or turned into shelters. The public service system is failing.

Israel continues to defend the siege by saying it is a security measure. However, the result is the restriction of basic rights for two million people. The international community has repeatedly called for humanitarian corridors, but the practical access for aid remains extremely limited. Humanitarian organisations such as the Red Cross, UNRWA and WHO have warned of



BADR AL DHAFARI

The writer is head of proofreading, translation at Oman Observer

International institutions must respond with actions that protect civilians, especially children, women and the elderly



Palestinians wait to receive food from a charity kitchen, in Gaza City. — Reuters

starvation. Aid convoys are delayed or denied entry. Even when supplies arrive, they are not sufficient to meet the needs.

Aid workers and civilians collecting food have come under attack in several incidents. There have been deaths and injuries near distribution centres.

In some cases, the roads used by humanitarian convoys have been bombed. These events raise serious concerns under international humanitarian law.

The safety of aid workers must be respected and the delivery of food, water and medicine must be guaranteed. Gaza’s roads, warehouses and bakeries are heavily damaged. This affects every part of daily life.

The media continues to publish reports, photos and video coverage of the destruction. But despite strong evidence of large-scale hunger and malnutrition, there has been no official declaration of famine.

Political hesitation plays a role in delaying the use of that term. Governments and institutions are cautious about taking clear positions. This delay in definition results in a delay in action. While discussions continue, children in Gaza continue to die from causes that could be prevented.

The root cause of this

humanitarian collapse is the ongoing military siege and blockade carried out by Israel. Without lifting these restrictions, humanitarian aid cannot be effective. Fuel cannot reach hospitals. Food cannot be distributed safely. Water cannot be cleaned or delivered. International institutions must respond with actions that protect civilians, especially children, women, and the elderly. Neutral language and indirect statements are not solving the crisis.

The responsibility of Israel, as the occupying power, is defined in international law. It must ensure access to basic needs for civilians. The use of starvation as a method of war is prohibited under the Geneva Conventions.

Blocking the entry of food and medicine, damaging public infrastructure and targeting humanitarian operations are actions that have legal and moral consequences.

The international community must act without delay. Statements of concern are no longer enough. Strong and urgent steps are required. Full and continuous access for humanitarian aid must be demanded.

The world must recognise who holds the power and who holds the responsibility. Ending the siege is the first step towards saving lives.

SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Sprinter Mohammed al Suleimani (C) during Men's 800 event

OMAN ATHLETES SHINE AT FISU GAMES

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 26

Oman's beach volleyball team made a strong impression at the Rhine-Ruhr 2025 FISU World University Games as the men's duo of Yousef al Abri and Al Yaqdhan al Saadi concluded their journey in the Round of 16. The global multi-sport event, hosted in Germany, featured top university athletes from around the world competing at elite levels.

The Omani pair faced off in the knockout stage against Lithuania's strong duo Danielius Cumakas and Karolis Paubinskas. Despite a spirited performance, the Omani team suffered a 2-1 defeat. The Lithuanian side took the opening set 21-17, but al Abri and Al Saadi showed remarkable resilience by claiming the second set 21-13. The decisive third set saw the Lithuanian duo regaining control and sealing their victory with a 15-13 scoreline, thus ending Oman's impressive run in the tournament.

Oman's campaign began with a thrilling group stage encounter in group D against world leaders Australia, represented by Jed Walker and Oliver Merritt. Despite falling behind in the first set by 21-15, the Omani team made a strong comeback in the second set to win 21-18. In a nail-biting decider, the Australian pair narrowly edged past with a 15-13 victory.

In their second group stage match, Oman's al Abri and al Saadi bounced back in style by defeating Hungary's Boldizsar Borbely and Domonkos Doczi. Both sets were closely contested, but the Omani duo held their nerve to win 21-19 in both sets, securing a key victory in their qualification campaign. The final group stage match saw Oman secured their place in the Round of 16 with a default win over Moldova's pair Maxim Korsakov and Egor Dobcis, who withdrew from the competition.

In athletics, Oman also recorded a significant milestone through sprinter Mohammed bin Hamdan al Suleimani in the men's 800m event. Competing in heat 4 of the opening round, al Suleimani clocked a season best time of 1:49.34, finishing fourth and advancing to the semifinals. His performance marked a promising step forward for Omani athletics at the university level.

Oman's participation in the Rhine-Ruhr 2025 Games was represented by Oman University Sports Committee (OUSC) and it led by its chairman Dr Salim al Orami. The event provided a valuable platform for the Sultanate of Oman's student athletes who managed to gain international experience and compete among the best in the world. Oman's athletes delegation took part in different sports discipline including: table tennis, swimming and Taekwondo.



Part of Oman's beach volleyball participation at FISU World University Games

Omantel League begins on August 16 with new norms

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 26

THE Omantel Football League for the 2025/2026 season will kick off on August 16, with two opening matches. The first match will see Al Nahda host Samayel at the Al Buraimi Sports Complex, while Al Shabab face Ibri. The rest of the first round will unfold over four days. On August 17, Sur take on Al Nasr, and Oman Club meet Dhofar. On August 18, two more matches will be played: Saham vs Bahla and Al Rustaq vs Sohar. The round will conclude on August 19, with defending champions Al Seeb facing Al Khabourah at Seeb Stadium.

According to the announced schedule, the league will pause after the first round and resume on September 12. It will then pause again after the fourth round on September 27, with play resuming on October 20. The dates for the remaining seven rounds of the first stage have yet to be announced.

Among the changes this season, Al Shabab's home matches will now be held at Seeb Stadium instead of Al Rustaq, while Ibri's matches will be played at the Al Buraimi Complex instead of their main stadium in Ibri.

NEW REGULATIONS

The OFA has issued a new set of regulations for managing the Omantel League. These regulations require clubs to strictly adhere to the statutes of both the Oman Football Association and Fifa, especially concerning player eligibility, competition rules, and commercial and technical contracts. Clubs must also attend official meetings and events and comply with fair play regulations. The league will follow a home and away (two-round) format. At the end of the season, two teams will be relegated to the First Division League. As part of the fair play policy, clubs will face a fine of RO 100 for every four warning points accrued. Additionally, each club must register at least 16 players in the electronic system no later than 10 days before the start of the season. The Association clarified that registering a player does not automatically mean they are eligible to play; clubs are responsible for ensuring only eligible players participate, or face disciplinary sanctions. Only professional players are



Omantel League will kick off on August 16, with two opening matches



The Omantel Football League Shield

allowed to play, with a maximum of four foreign players per team, and signing a foreign goalkeeper is not permitted. Youth players born in 2009 and later, as well as those born in 2008, are allowed to participate provided they do not play two matches on consecutive days.

STRICT REQUIREMENTS & ACCESS RESTRICTIONS

The technical regulations require clubs to have a qualified technical staff, including a head coach with a Pro license from either the AFC or UEFA, an assistant coach with an A license, a goalkeeping coach with a C license, a certified fitness coach, a Ministry of Health approved team

doctor, a certified physiotherapist and masseur, and a qualified translator. The team manager is not allowed to sit on the bench. Each club is allowed to add only two additional members to the official team roster through the electronic system. These individuals must obtain official ID badges, and unregistered board members are prohibited from entering locker rooms or the field. Any changes to the technical, administrative, or medical staff must be reported officially at least three business days before the next match.

GENEROUS PRIZE MONEY ANNOUNCED

The Oman Football Association (OFA) has allocated a total of RO 130,000 prize money for the season as a way to honour the efforts of participating teams and encourage fair competition. The champion will receive RO 50,000, the championship shield, and 50 gold medals. The second place team will receive RO 30,000 and 50 silver medals, while the third place team will get RO 20,000 and 50 bronze medals. Financial rewards will also be given to teams finishing fourth through sixth: RO 15,000 for fourth, RO 10,000 for fifth, and RO 5,000 for sixth reflecting the association's commitment to recognising strong performances across the standings.

Oman fall to Qatar in West Asia semifinals

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 25

Oman's national volleyball team saw their dream of reaching the final of the West Asian Men's Championship come to an end after suffering a straight-sets defeat to Qatar in the semifinals. The match was held at the Isa Bin Rashid Hall in Isa Town, Kingdom of Bahrain. The encounter was marked by clear dominance from the Qatari side, who capitalised on Oman's errors especially in serving and blocking to claim victory with set scores of 25-18, 25-19, and 25-20.

STRONG START BY QATAR, SCATTERED OMANI RESISTANCE

Qatar began the match with high intensity, setting the tempo both offensively and defensively. With a well-organised block and effective backline coverage, they quickly exposed Oman's



Qatar began the match with high intensity, setting the tempo both offensively and defensively

weaknesses, particularly in serve reception and missed serves. Despite individual efforts from Ismail al Haidy, Mahmood al Saadi, and Younis al Amri, the first set went to Qatar 25-18.

In the second set, Oman showed clearer intent to recover and improve.

The introduction of Adam al Juradi injected some energy into the team, helping

Oman level the score at 11-11. However, Qatar regained control through cohesive play and effective counterattacks, eventually taking the set 25-19.

The third set began on a relatively even footing, with the score tied at 2-2 before Mohammed al Muqbali put Oman ahead briefly. Yet, a service error from Yousuf al Shukeili allowed Qatar to equalise, and from there they gradually took over, exploiting Oman's poor receptions. Qatar sealed the set 25-20 and the match 3-0.

STATS HIGHLIGHT THE GAP

Match statistics underscored the disparity between the two sides. Qatar scored a total of 75 points to Oman's 57, committing only 15 errors compared to Oman's 25. Qatar registered two direct service aces, while Oman failed to record any, and committed 10 service errors compared to Qatar's six.

In blocking, Qatar recorded

11 points to Oman's six. Individually, Qatar's Youssef Jalaf stood out with 14 points (12 from spikes and two from blocks), while Oman's top scorer, Ismail al Haidy, managed only 11 points and committed five errors.

BAHRAIN BOOK FINAL SPOT

In the other semifinal, Bahrain secured their place in the final with a 3-1 victory over Saudi Arabia. Despite losing the first set 28-26, Bahrain rallied to win the next three sets 25-16, 25-22, and 25-22. They will now face Qatar in the final.

Iranian coach Reza Hossein Vakeeli expressed disappointment with the outcome, stating that the team failed to deliver the expected performance and that both individual and tactical errors cost them a place in the final. Qatar played very well and deserved to win, said Vakeeli. But we made many mistakes, especially in serving and reception.

SHORTTAKES



Red Bull’s Max Verstappen poses with a trophy after winning the sprint race alongside second place McLaren’s Oscar Piastri and third place McLaren’s Lando Norris. — Reuters

VERSTAPPEN STARTS NEW ERA WITH SPA SPRINT WIN

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS, Belgium: Formula One champion Max Verstappen won a “cat and mouse” Belgian Grand Prix sprint on Saturday in Red Bull’s first race under the leadership of Laurent Mekies following Christian Horner’s dismissal. McLaren’s championship leader Oscar Piastri finished second, after taking a dominant pole position for the 100km race, with the Australian increasing his advantage over teammate Lando Norris to nine points. Norris ended up where he started, in third place on a bright afternoon at the longest and second fastest track on the calendar. Charles Leclerc was fourth for Ferrari with Haas’s Esteban Ocon fifth and Carlos Sainz sixth for Williams. Haas’s Oliver Bearman and Racing Bulls’ Isack Hadjar completed the scoring positions.

Verstappen takes sprint win at Spa

Piastri second to extend championship lead by a point

Norris third for McLaren

First race for Red Bull since Mekies replaced Horner

The win was Verstappen’s first, in either a sprint or grand prix, since Imola in May and it was knife-edge all the way. “I knew of course it was going to be very tough to keep them behind. So it’s just playing like cat and mouse, DRS, battery usage,” he said as the large contingent of Dutch fans celebrated. “The whole race was within seven tenths, so I couldn’t afford to make big mistakes. I had one tiny lockup in the last corner, but apart from that it was, for us, a great result to keep

them behind. “You have to drive over the limit of what’s possible. Tyre management goes out of the window. I did 15 qualifying laps to keep them behind on a track where tyre management is important.”

PIASTRI FRUSTRATED
Piastri had few real chances — close enough to hope but too far to make a move stick. “I tried my best to snake my way through the straights and not give too much of a tow but didn’t have enough straight-line speed and then obviously didn’t have enough speed for the next 15 laps either,” he said. “I wasn’t going to get past anyone unless Oscar got past Max. They drove good races,” said the Briton. “I was hoping for a bit of battling but the Red Bull was too quick in the straight for us to catch up.” — Reuters



Ben Stokes is just the fourth England player to take five wickets and score a hundred in the same Test after Tony Greig, Ian Botham, and Gus Atkinson. — AFP

Gill and Rahul steady India after early wobble

A half century from captain Shubman Gill helped India battle back on day four of the fourth test against England, the touring side reaching 86-2 at tea on Saturday, trailing the hosts by 225 runs. Chris Woakes took two wickets in two balls in the first over to leave India reeling on 0-2 before lunch, after captain Ben Stokes’ first century in two years fired England to 669, their fifth highest total in test history. With 15 minutes to navigate before lunch, India crumbled under the pressure, with Yashasvi Jaiswal caught in the slips by England first-innings centurion Joe Root and Sai Sudharsan following him back next ball. Gill and Rahul survived to return for the afternoon session and steadied the ship, despite England continuing to create chances. Stokes, who took five wickets in the first innings, did not bowl having retired hurt with cramp on Friday when batting. Gill looked in especially good touch in difficult circumstances, moving to his eighth test fifty just before tea. At the time of going to print, Gill was 77 and Rahul 86 not out with total at 172. England lead 2-1 in the series and victory at Old Trafford would seal it. Earlier, England captain Ben Stokes ended his more than two-year wait for a Test hundred . Stokes’ dominant 141 powered England to 669 all out — their fifth-highest total of all time — on the fourth day of the fourth Test. The hosts’ leading bowler this series,



KL Rahul

Stokes is just the fourth England player to take five wickets and score a hundred in the same Test after Tony Greig, Ian Botham — who did it five times — and the currently sidelined Gus Atkinson. England resumed in command at 544-7 after Root had become the second-highest run-scorer in Test history during his majestic 150 on Friday. Stokes, 77 not out overnight after briefly leaving the field with cramp Friday after his

first fifty of the series, delighted the crowd Saturday with some thrilling strokeplay. The left-handed batsman twice cover-drove Mohammed Siraj for superb fours as he went to 88. Stokes charged down the pitch to drive Jasprit Bumrah, the world’s top-ranked Test bowler, for three to go to 99. Bumrah beat Stokes on the outside edge before a leg-glanced four off paceman Bumrah — his ninth boundary in 164 balls faced — saw the England skipper to a century. It was all-rounder Stokes’ first Test hundred in more than two years following a whirlwind 155 against Australia at Lord’s in June 2023. The 34-year-old celebrated his 14th century in 115 Tests by clenching his fist, looking to the sky and making a crooked finger gesture in honour of his late father Ged Stokes before raising his bat to a cheering crowd. With the shackles off, Stokes then straight drove Washington Sundar for six and next ball he reverse swept the off-spinner for four. Stokes then launched Ravindra Jadeja for six but, trying to repeat the stroke, next ball he holed out off the left-arm spinner with England exactly 300 runs ahead at 658-9. Carse added a useful 47 before he was last man out, also caught in the deep off Jadeja. The all-rounder was one of several India bowlers to concede more than 100 runs, albeit Jadeja’s return of 4-143 in 37.1 overs was relatively economical. — AFP

India to face Pakistan in UAE at Asia Cup cricket

NEW DELHI: The United Arab Emirates will host this year’s T20 Asia Cup tournament in September, organisers said on Saturday, ending the uncertainty over its fate amid spiralling tensions between India and Pakistan. The neighbours have not met on either side’s soil in a bilateral series since 2012, and only play each other in international tournaments on neutral grounds as part of a compromise deal. But already-frosty relations took a turn for the worse this year when the two nuclear rivals fought an intense four-day conflict, their worst standoff in decades. More than 70 people were killed in missile, drone and artillery fire on both sides.



The conflict was triggered by an April 22 attack on civilians in Indian-administered Kashmir that New



Delhi accused Pakistan of backing — a charge Islamabad denies. The Asia Cup is played under the

aegis of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), which is currently headed by Pakistan cricket chief Mohsin Naqvi. “I am delighted to confirm the dates for the ACC Men’s Asia Cup 2025 in UAE,” said Naqvi on X. “The prestigious tournament will take place from September 9th to 28th.” Later Naqvi released the group stage fixtures with Afghanistan to take on Hong Kong in the tournament opener on September 9. The much-anticipated India and Pakistan will clash on a Sunday. India and Pakistan have been clubbed in group A with hosts UAE and Oman. The group stage will be followed by a Super Four stage and the final on September 28. The five full members of the

ACC — Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka — earned automatic qualification to the tournament. They are to be joined by Hong Kong, Oman and the UAE — the teams that secured their spots by finishing in the top three of the ACC men’s Premier Cup. The previous edition of the event was in a 50-over format, but this year’s tournament was scheduled as a shorter-format event in preparation for next year’s T20 World Cup in India. India and Pakistan have fought three full-fledged wars since being carved out of the subcontinent’s partition in 1947 and that rivalry is often reflected on the cricket field. — AFP



Kaden Groves celebrates on the podium after winning stage 20. — Reuters

AUSTRALIAN GROVES WINS TOUR DE FRANCE STAGE 20

SLOVENIA'S **TADEJ POGACAR** was left standing on the cusp of a fourth Tour de France title as Alpecin rider Kaden Groves won Saturday's stage 20 after a long-range escape that saw the Australian finish well ahead of the big guns.

Runaway overall race leader Pogacar maintained his lead over Jonas Vingegaard ahead of Sunday's 21st and final stage in Paris. The Team UAE rider has a 4min 24sec advantage heading into what could be a tricky finale, a 132km ride from Mantes-la-Ville to the Champs-Elysees, but featuring three ascents of the cobbled streets of Montmartre.

A fourth title now looms for Pogacar who said after a dominant ride across the peaks and plains of France he felt he's won.

"It's starting to sink in," said the 26-year old, who previously won the sport's most prestigious cycling stage race in 2020, 2021 and 2024. "Tomorrow, all being well, I'll be celebrating with my team," added a weary Pogacar. "This has been another level of hard, all the way. I enjoyed it though and I'm really looking forward to the last day tomorrow."

FIFTH STAGE TILT

Pogacar refused to rule out a tilt at a fifth stage win if he could escape up the climbs to Montmartre.

"We'll see how we feel and how the others act, maybe we'll try something in Montmartre."

The champion-in-waiting was left shaking his head after almost getting taken down in a fall 500m from the line on Saturday as lashing rain made the roads hazardous on the run in to Pontarlier.

This was a third stage win for Alpecin after Jasper Philipsen and Mathieu van der Poel took the two opening wins.

"They gave me a free role in the final days," Groves said after both Philipsen and Van der Poel pulled out.

"I'm going to enjoy this one and celebrate with my team and enjoy the Champs tomorrow."

Just 158 riders crossed the rolling hills at the foot of the Jura and many looked haggard after the fast racing in the Alps.

So along the Swiss border, most of the peloton seemed happy to let an escape get a 7min lead after an exhausting slog that started July 5.

Pogacar has dominated the 2025 Tour winning stages on rolling runs in the north and west at Rouen and the Mur de Bretagne in the first week, then on the mountain slopes of the

Pyrenees on the Hautacam and Peyragudes in week two.

As the Tour entered its end game Pogacar unexpectedly sat tight to protect his lead through the Alps rather go on his trademark all out attacks.

Vingegaard, the 2022 and 2023 Tour champion, had two off days, first on a time trial and secondly at Hautacam, leaving Pogacar to surge into a lead he never looked like surrendering.

Pogacar said he'd be back on the bike by Tuesday.

"I travel home Monday. Tuesday I'll be going out for a ride with friends, stop somewhere for a coffee and start enjoying the summer, I've earned it."

Pogacar will be back in competitive action in September at Kigali, Rwanda, in defence of his world title. — AFP

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POSITIVE GROWTH



Oman Airports has focused on ensuring seamless, high-quality and safe travel.

Passenger numbers rise at Oman airports

MUSCAT: Oman Airports recorded a 2-per cent year-on-year increase in passenger traffic in June 2025, with 1,134,924 travellers passing through Oman's airports, compared to 1,109,745 during the same month last year.

This modest but positive growth is credited to coordinated efforts by Oman Airports and relevant authorities to position the country as an all-year-round tourist destination.

These efforts include consistent upgrades to airport infrastructure, smart technologies and traveller services aimed at improving the overall passenger experience from arrival to departure.

Oman Airports has focused on ensuring seamless, high-quality and safe travel by investing in advanced technologies that reduce processing times and boost efficiency. The onset of the Khareef Dhofar Season, known for its mild climate and natural charm, has also been a key draw for tourists during this period.

Officials see this increase as a sign of the success of promotional campaigns and tourism initiatives. It also underscores the ability of Oman's airports to accommodate growing traffic volumes while maintaining international service standards.

Looking ahead, Oman Airports expects travel activity to maintain momentum throughout the rest of the year. A combination of development projects and tourism events are set to further enhance the passenger experience and establish a fully integrated travel environment tailored to the needs of both visitors and residents. — ONA

Tourism investment in Duqm reaches R0 853m

AL DUQM: Tourism investment in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) reached over R0 853 million by the end of last year, reflecting the growing appeal of the governorate as a tourism destination.

The area now boasts 21 hotels, 10 hotel apartment complexes and a large-scale multi-use tourism development that includes hotels, villas and hotel apartments.

This surge in investment is attributed to rising demand for tourism services, an increasing number of visitors, and a favourable business climate supported by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones and SEZAD.

Official statistics show that 16 tourism projects had been completed by the end of 2023, with 11 currently under construction and five others still in the planning phase.

Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO of SEZAD, highlighted Duqm's unique location on the Arabian Sea, moderate climate throughout the year and a wide range of amenities as key factors attracting tourism interest.

Notable attractions include scenic beaches, the Rock Garden, Duqm Beach Park and a public park in the Sai Commercial District, which has become a new landmark.

Additionally, nearby attractions, such as Bar Al



The area now boasts 21 hotels, 10 hotel apartment complexes and a large-scale multi-use tourism development

Hikman, enhance Duqm's appeal.

Akaak noted that SEZAD, in partnership with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, is actively organising sporting, economic and tourism events to promote investment in the tourism sector. He pointed to the governorate's strategic plan for 2025–2030, which



ENG AHMED BIN
ALI AKAAK
CEO, SEZAD

places tourism development at its core.

The first of two key themes focuses on enhancing quality of life through urban and social development, while the second aims to promote Duqm as a distinctive tourism destination by expanding the variety and quality of visitor experiences.

One of the flagship promotional initiatives is

the “Pass by” campaign, which has been successful in drawing tourists travelling to and from Dhofar. This year, the campaign is set to grow further with a packed calendar of activities designed to meet the expectations of tourists.

Akaak also stressed Duqm's coastal advantage, with attractive beaches at Nafun and Ras Madrakah. SEZAD is encouraging private sector participation to unlock the area's full tourism potential and implement new projects that make use of Duqm's natural assets. — ONA

Oman eyes strategic share of global polysilicon market

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 26

WITH THE Sultanate of Oman just months away from commissioning its \$1.6 billion polysilicon production facility in SOHAR Port and Freezone, Oman is set to rank second only to China as one of the world's largest producers of this strategic commodity — central to the global solar photovoltaic (PV) manufacturing industry.

United Solar Polysilicon, slated for launch before the end of this year, will be the first polysilicon project in the Middle East.

Once fully operational, the plant — designed with an annual production capacity of 100,000 tonnes — will position Oman as the second-largest producer globally, with an estimated 4.4 per cent share of worldwide capacity.

“The project aims to position Oman as a key player in the global photovoltaic (PV) manufacturing supply chain, reducing dependency on China-based production,” said the Oman Investment Authority



Once fully operational, the 100,000 tonnes/year United Solar Polysilicon plant will establish Oman as the second-largest producer of polysilicon globally, with an estimated 4.4% share of global capacity.

(OIA), which has invested \$156 million in the venture through Future Fund Oman (FFO), a platform that supports investments in strategic sectors of the Omani economy.

China remains a polysilicon manufacturing powerhouse, accounting for around 93 per cent

(equivalent to 2 million tonnes per year) of the world's total production capacity of 2.1 million tonnes. A distant second is Germany, with a 2.9-per cent share (65,000 tonnes), followed by the United States and Malaysia, each with 1.5 per cent (34,000 tonnes). In value terms, the global market was estimated at

\$34.3 billion as of end-2023.

According to OIA, the decision to site the polysilicon project in Oman was based on several competitive advantages, foremost among them government support.

“A national negotiation team streamlined discussions, ensuring a smooth process for securing leases, utilities and incentives,” noted Oxford Business Group in an Impact Report on Future Fund Oman.

Other factors influencing the investment decision included: Competitive electricity prices, crucial for maintaining profit margins; Proximity to SOHAR Port and Freezone, enabling efficient import of raw materials and export of finished products; Access to the US market via the Oman–US Free Trade Agreement (FTA), allowing tariff-free exports; and a favourable regulatory environment.

In addition, the project grants Oman a strategic entry into the global solar renewables supply chain. Detailing the

production process, the Impact Report explained: “The solar PV manufacturing process begins with the production of high-purity polysilicon, which is then melted and shaped into cylindrical ingots.

“These ingots are sliced into thin wafers, forming the base for solar cells. The cells undergo various treatments to enhance their efficiency in converting sunlight into electricity.

“Finally, the cells are assembled into modules (solar panels) ready for installation in energy systems. This process is critical to the growth of renewable energy infrastructure worldwide.”

Currently, around 4,000 contractual construction workers are engaged in building the sprawling complex, which spans 160,000 m² within the SOHAR Port and Freezone.

During the operational phase, the plant will employ 1,000 to 2,000 staff, with Omanisation targeted at 70 per cent by 2030 through a combination of training and technology transfer programmes.

ADVERTORIALS

REGIONAL LAUNCH



At the heart of the new QNED evo is LG's Dynamic QNED Colour technology.

LG UNVEILS 100-INCH QNED EVO TV IN OMAN

MUSCAT: LG Electronics (LG) ushered in a new era of cinematic brilliance in Oman with the regional launch of its groundbreaking 100-inch QNED evo TV, hosted at the Sharaf DG outlet in Mall of Oman.

The unveiling was a grand affair attended by Sudhir M, Group CEO, OTE Group; Sandeep Attri, Senior General Manager, OTE; Goli V Rao, Asst GM, OTE; Subir Mokha, Country Head – Oman, Sharaf DG; and Pradeep Dwivedi, Merchandising Manager – Oman, Sharaf DG, alongside media representatives and premium customers.

The new 100-inch QNED evo promises to transform living spaces into stunning entertainment hubs, combining AI-powered technology, cinematic picture quality and intelligent personalisation.

This ultra-large TV is a testament to LG's commitment to elevating home entertainment experiences and delivering innovation tailored to the Gulf market's appetite for luxury, scale and immersive design.

The α8 AI Processor 4K Gen2 further enhances every frame, upscaling content to 4K and delivering a 9.1.2 virtual surround sound experience that adapts to individual preferences through advanced voice recognition and AI assistance.

At the heart of the new QNED evo is LG's Dynamic QNED Colour technology – a Nano-based colour gamut solution achieving 100% colour volume certification, presenting images with incredible richness and vibrancy.

The α8 AI Processor 4K Gen2 further enhances every frame, upscaling content to 4K and delivering a 9.1.2 virtual surround sound experience that adapts to individual preferences through advanced voice recognition and AI assistance.

Slim in profile (49.9mm) with minimalist bezels and support for Dolby Vision, Dolby Atmos, and a 144Hz variable refresh rate, the QNED evo isn't just a TV – it's a luxury lifestyle centrepiece that delivers unmatched performance for viewing and gaming.

Speaking at the launch, OTE representatives emphasised the growing demand in Oman for high-end display solutions that align with modern lifestyles and larger home formats. The evening concluded with an experiential demo for invited guests and VIPs, who were captivated by the realism and grandeur of the 100-inch screen.

Al Maha Petroleum launches GCC's first fully automated B2B fuelling solution

MUSCAT: Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG is proud to announce the official launch of Fuely Autofill, a breakthrough in fuel delivery services and the first fully automated B2B fuelling solution in the GCC region.

Developed with cutting-edge RFID technology, Fuely Autofill revolutionises how businesses manage fleet fuelling by eliminating manual intervention and ensuring absolute precision, safety and transparency. The system works by installing an RFID tag on both

the Fuely vehicle dispenser and the customer's vehicle.

Once in proximity, the tags communicate, and the system automatically dispenses the correct grade and volume of fuel – most commonly diesel – exactly as pre-configured.

This first-of-its-kind solution in the MENA region reflects Al Maha's commitment to innovation, operational excellence and customer-centric digital transformation.

"Fuely Autofill represents a major step forward in fleet management

and fuel logistics. By removing human intervention, we eliminate the risks of error and fraud while offering unmatched convenience and control to our customers," said Ahmed bin Salim al Kindi, Lubricant, Fuel Cards and Retail Sales via Internet Manager at Al Maha Petroleum.

This launch underscores Al Maha's leadership in advancing digital infrastructure within Oman's fuel marketing industry and delivering smarter energy solutions for the future.

OFFERING

best-in-class cargo and passenger space, the Kia Carens and Kia Carnival present a bold take on utility. Designed to deliver optimal functionality for businesses, Kia's MPV range takes a multifaceted approach, enabling smooth and convenient daily operations

The Kia Carnival delivers a fresh perspective on the next generation of vehicles that transcend this traditionally utilitarian segment.

Powered by a dynamic 3.5-litre V6 engine, it delivers 268 horsepower and best-in-class 627 litres of luggage capacity – raising the bar in both utility and performance.

Equipped with multi-seating configurations, including slide-flex 2nd-row seating and 3rd-row AC vents, the Carnival also features a keyless entry system, button start, Bluetooth voice recognition system, integrated display (4" Cluster + 12" Navigation or 12.3" Cluster +

12.3" Navigation), and a wireless smartphone charger.

With best-in-class passenger and cargo room, and seamless connectivity, it ensures utility in every aspect of life.

Make deliveries on time and carry out daily operations effortlessly.

The Kia Carnival is a complete package – it enhances driver confidence with advanced driver assistance system (ADAS) features – the most

comprehensive standard ADAS suite in its segment – and includes advanced features like blind-spot collision avoidance assist, forward collision avoidance assist (FCA 2), and lane following assist (LKA), maximising safety from all angles.

For businesses and families alike, the SUV-inspired design of the 7-seater Kia Carens offers exceptional utility for small and medium-sized businesses.



Kia's MPV range takes a multifaceted approach, enabling smooth and convenient daily operations.

It's a versatile solution for a wide range of enterprises – from corporate travel and tourism operators to small bakery and restaurant owners, taxi services, and corporate fleets by the day – or as an ideal family car for school drop-offs.

It offers spacious interiors, modern connectivity features and advanced safety systems.

Designed with comfort in mind, the Carens is equipped with steering-mounted audio controls, a rear-view camera, smart key with button start, roof-mounted AC vents, and remote engine start – making it one of the most unique MPVs in its segment.

Remarkably spacious, it also includes various practical features that simplify daily tasks, such as fold-flat rear seats that offer more cargo space than one can imagine.

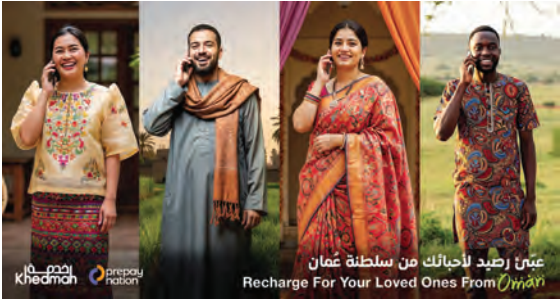
The Kia Carnival and Carens is available for an experience at Kia showrooms near you. Get the best utility vehicles in town to achieve peace of mind and smooth running of your business.

KHEDMAH, PREPAY NATION TO INTRODUCE INTL MOBILE RECHARGE

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance customer experience and expand its digital offerings, Khedmah has launched an international mobile recharge service in collaboration with Prepay Nation, now available through the Khedmah app under the E-Store section.

This new feature aims to meet the needs of a large segment of residents and expatriates in the Sultanate of Oman who wish to stay connected with their families and friends in their home countries.

The new service allows users to recharge mobile phone balances across 16 countries, in collaboration with over 43 international telecom operators. The currently supported countries include Afghanistan, Australia, Benin, Botswana, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Kenya,



The new service allows users to recharge mobile phone balances across 16 countries.

Malawi, Nepal, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, the United Arab Emirates and Zimbabwe.

In this context, Zaaïma al Qasimi, Senior Manager - Business Development at Khedmah,

said: "Through this service, we aim to facilitate communication between individuals and their families around the world by offering a secure and fast digital experience. The launch of this service is part of our broader strategy to expand our digital offerings and meet the aspirations of customers both within and beyond Oman."

This service offers several key advantages, including ease of use, the ability to top up mobile recharge anytime and anywhere, and direct technical support through official communication channels – providing users with a seamless and reliable experience.

Khedmah confirmed that this addition marks a significant milestone in its digital transformation journey and reflects its continued commitment to delivering smart solutions that simplify daily life and address users' evolving needs.

Bank Muscat launches new edition of “EAGLEs” programme

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, upholds commitment to developing the skills of national human resources.

In line with its dedication and vision to foster sustainable professional growth and equipping employees with the leadership capabilities needed for navigating future challenges, the bank has launched a new edition of the “EAGLEs” programme, a vital platform that empowers leading employees and aims to create a more connected, resilient and accountable workforce.

The “EAGLEs” programme stands for Engage, Align, Grow, Learn and Evolve. It constitutes a key initiative



The “EAGLEs” programme stands for Engage, Align, Grow, Learn and Evolve.

that underscores the bank's strategic endeavours to invest in its employees and support its broader mission of empowering emerging Omani talent.

The new edition is tailored for

branch managers employed at the bank's retail branches, corporate branches, as well as Meethaq's branches, aiming to recognise their pivotal role in driving operational

excellence, customer satisfaction and team performance. It is worth noting that the current edition will feature a total of 181 participants from branch managers and run into two batches.

To mark the occasion, Bank Muscat held an event for the first batch of the new edition, that was attended by members of the executive management and branch managers across the entire branch network, including conventional, corporate and Meethaq Islamic Banking branches.

All participants will undergo training with the aim to equip them with essential business development tools, enabling them to deliver exceptional banking services and enrich the overall customer

experience.

Ahmed al Balushi, Deputy Chief Executive Officer – Banking at Bank Muscat, delivered a keynote address applauding the vital and impactful role of branch managers in driving business development and delivering top-tier service to customers.

He said: “This programme represents a significant milestone in the bank's journey towards cultivating a culture of excellence, innovation and continuous growth. It also serves as an effective platform for learning and skill-building among Omani banking professionals, enabling them to better serve customers and contribute meaningfully to the bank's long-term success.”

BUSINESS

NEW MILESTONE



44.01 has developed a unique carbon mineralisation technology that captures CO₂ and permanently stores it in peridotite rock deep underground.

Omani climate-tech pioneer ranked among MENA’s top 40 sustainable companies

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 26

WHEN OMANI engineers and scientists at 44.01 first set out to turn carbon dioxide into stone, few imagined their innovation would earn global recognition and help put Oman on the sustainability map. Today, their journey has reached a new milestone: 44.01 has been named one of the Top 40 Most Sustainable Companies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

The ranking, curated by the CSO Network and Sustain Labs Paris, celebrates organisations that are not only reducing their environmental footprint, but also reshaping the future of business in the region.

The firm developed a unique carbon mineralisation technology that captures CO₂ and permanently stores it in peridotite rock deep underground.

Companies were evaluated across six pillars — ranging from clean revenue to employee well-being — through 17 key performance indicators that address MENA-specific challenges like water scarcity, climate resilience and social inclusion. For Oman, 44.01 represents more than just a company;

it is a symbol of how local innovation can tackle global challenges. The firm developed a unique carbon mineralisation technology that captures CO₂ and permanently stores it in peridotite rock deep underground, achieving up to 91% carbon removal efficiency.

This groundbreaking approach has won international acclaim. In 2022, 44.01 received the Earthshot Prize, and earlier this year, it clinched the XPRIZE Carbon Removal Award for its “Air” category — a recognition that places it alongside some of the world’s most promising climate innovators.

What makes 44.01 stand out is its holistic approach to sustainability. The company runs its operations entirely on renewables — using solar panels by day and biodiesel made from recycled cooking oil by night. It also avoids using precious drinking water, relying instead on seawater and treated wastewater. Beyond the technical success, 44.01 is creating jobs for Omani engineers and geologists, particularly those transitioning from the fossil fuel industry.

This achievement comes at a time when Oman is stepping up its sustainability game. The Muscat Stock Exchange introduced Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting guidelines in 2023, with mandatory disclosures set to start in 2025.

The government also unveiled a Sustainable Finance Framework last year, designed to channel investments into clean energy, climate adaptation and economic diversification.

The Top 40 list also includes regional giants like Emirates Group, Masdar, TAQA Group and Red Sea Global. But 44.01’s inclusion is especially meaningful, as it shows that homegrown Omani companies can compete — and lead — on the international stage.

LOCAL BANK PROFITS REACH RO 275.9 MILLION

MUSCAT: Local banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) reported a 7.6-per cent rise in net profits for the first half of 2025, reaching RO 275.9 million, compared to RO 256.3 million during the same period last year. This growth reflects increased economic activity, stronger demand for loans and Islamic financing, and a rise in customer deposits. The banking sector also benefited from improved risk management, reduced default rates, diversification

of revenue streams and enhanced operational efficiency. By the end of March 2025, total credit provided by banks had grown to RO 26.2 billion, up from RO 25.5 billion in December 2024, covering various economic and development sectors as well as personal financing. Banks also recorded gains in market value amounting to RO 438.3 million in H1. Their collective market capitalisation rose to RO 4.708 billion by the end of June,

compared to RO 4.270 billion in December 2024. Bank Muscat maintained its lead in market capitalisation with a value exceeding RO 2.64 billion, followed by Bank Sohar International at RO 933 million. The National Bank of Oman ranked third with RO 487.7 million, followed by BankDhofar at RO 392.1 million, ahlibank at RO 364.1 million, Oman Arab Bank at RO 243.7 million, and Bank Nizwa at RO 223.6 million. — ONA

Digital transformation in govt sees 80% surge

THE National Programme for Government Digital Transformation (Tahawul), covering the period 2021–2025, has achieved an 80-per cent improvement in overall performance since its inception up to the end of May 2025. This includes a notable 19 per cent leap compared to mid-2024 figures, highlighting the success of strategies implemented and advancements in both organisational and digital infrastructure. These gains support Oman’s progress towards a digital government that prioritises efficiency, swift execution and high-quality public services. Government institutions’ average digital transformation readiness has risen to 81 per cent, a 7-per cent increase from June 2024. Meanwhile, digital infrastructure readiness reached 86 per cent.

Furthermore, 96 per cent of targeted and priority services have undergone simplification, including 381 services refined through the Manjam Laboratories. Digitisation efforts have advanced significantly, with 74 per cent of targeted services now digitised.

Between January and May 2025, 48 government entities completed over 11.4 million digital transactions. A total of 33 advisory and support sessions were conducted to advance digital transformation and 4,100 services have been documented in the Digital Directory of Government Services.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, and Chair of the Technical Committee for the Digital Transformation Programme, stated that the results underscore the scale of national



96 per cent of targeted and priority services have undergone simplification.



DR ALI BIN AMER AL SHAITHANI

Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology

digitisation and empower national talent. These efforts are part of Oman’s broader goal

collaboration and the strong commitment of institutions.

He commended the alignment between institutional strategies and the programme’s vision, enabling measured yet confident progress in digital transformation.

Dr Al Shaithani noted that the programme will continue to enhance digital service delivery, upgrade infrastructure, expand service collaboration and the strong commitment of institutions. He commended the alignment between institutional strategies and the programme’s vision, enabling measured yet confident progress in digital transformation.

to shape a future-ready, innovative digital government.

Key achievements include the launch of the unified government services portal, which currently offers 23 services from various institutions. By the end of May, the portal had 35,746 users and processed 3,905 service requests. Notably, a visual library featuring sign language was introduced to support accessibility for users with disabilities.

The OmanNet electronic payment gateway has achieved 100 per cent implementation, helping drive growth in digital payment volumes while reducing fraud risks. The number of transactions completed via the platform reached 14.5 million in Q1 2025.

Additionally, over 17,000 users are now active on the “Wusool” electronic document and records system, which has handled more than 1.5 million documents across 20 government agencies. — ONA

INFLATION IN OMAN EDGES UP TO 0.82%

MUSCAT: Oman’s Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 0.82 per cent in June 2025 compared to June 2024, based on the 2018 base year, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The highest price increases were recorded in the personal goods and miscellaneous services group (up 7.45 per cent), transportation (up 3.12 per cent), and restaurants and hotels (up 1.39 per cent). The health group increased by 0.76 per cent, clothing and footwear by 0.6 per cent and education by 0.07 per cent.

Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels rose marginally by 0.02 per cent.

However, food and non-alcoholic beverages dropped by 0.59 per cent, furniture and household equipment fell by



The highest price increases were recorded in the personal goods and miscellaneous services group.

0.25 per cent, culture and entertainment dipped 0.02 per cent, and tobacco declined by 0.01 per cent. Communication prices

remained unchanged. Within food categories, prices of sugar, jam, honey and sweets rose 3.31 per cent, dairy products increased 1.84 per cent, oils and fats climbed 1.65 per cent, and meat and cereals rose slightly. However, vegetable prices fell by 8.06 per cent, seafood by 3.84 per cent, fruit by 0.45 per cent and non-alcoholic beverages by 0.19 per cent. Among the governorates, Al Dakhiliyah recorded the highest inflation at 1.76 per cent, followed by Al Dhahirah (1.57 per cent), Al Sharqiyah South (1.4 per cent), Musandam (1.34 per cent) and Al Wusta (1.22 per cent). The lowest inflation was in Al Batinah South (0.1 per cent), while Al Sharqiyah North saw a slight decrease of 0.01 per cent. — ONA

MORE CERTAINTY

Investors eye US-Europe trade deal



Investors are hopeful a potential trade deal between the US and European Union could bring more certainty to markets ahead of next Friday’s tariffs deadline. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was set to meet US President Donald Trump on Sunday in Scotland after EU officials and diplomats said they expected to reach a framework deal this weekend. — Reuters

CONTINUED BOOST

China’s fiscal spending up 3 per cent



Official data released by the Chinese Ministry of Finance showed that China’s fiscal spending rose 3.4 per cent year-on-year to nearly 14.13 trillion yuan (about \$1.98 trillion) during the first half of 2025. Financial departments continued to boost spending, with fiscal spending on social security and employment increasing 9.2 per cent year-on-year between January and June. — ONA

JUSTIFIED DECISION

Moody’s upgrades Türkiye’s debt rating



Moody’s has raised Türkiye’s long-term debt rating one notch, from B1 to Ba3, with a stable outlook. Moody’s justified its decision by citing effective economic policies that have helped restore investor confidence in the Turkish lira. It also highlighted the central bank’s commitment to tight monetary policy that “durably eases inflationary pressures” and “reduces economic imbalances.” — AFP

Cracking down on illegal Wi-Fi networks is key for Oman’s future



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The writer is the head of business and politics section at Oman Observer.

THE Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has been active across Muscat and beyond, conducting field inspections and seizing illegal wireless equipment. At first glance, it may sound like routine regulatory exercise.

But in reality, it's a critical step to protect Oman's digital economy and the security of our online lives. Across neighbourhoods, unauthorised wireless networks are being set up — people sharing or selling Internet connections without a licence. It might seem harmless, even helpful.

But in truth, these illegal networks are damaging: they degrade service quality, undermine telecom investments and expose users to cyber threats.

Let's start with the basics. These unlicensed setups interfere with legitimate signals, slowing down speeds for paying customers. That's not just frustrating — it's unfair. Students, families and businesses all rely on stable Internet to get through the day. Unauthorised connections sabotage that.

Worse still, they threaten long-term infrastructure development. Licensed providers depend on subscription revenue to fund upgrades — fibre networks, 5G rollouts and expanded coverage. Illegal reselling eats into that income. If providers can't invest, the whole country is stuck with outdated,

unreliable services.

This comes at a time when Oman's digital economy is expanding rapidly. The telecom sector grew over 15% this year, and there are now more than 8 million mobile subscriptions in a population of 4.5 million.

The national goal is to increase the digital sector's share of GDP from 3% to 10% by 2040. But reaching that target depends on protecting the very infrastructure that supports it.

It's also about fairness. Illegal Wi-Fi often appears in areas where residents are looking for cheaper options. That's understandable. But these shortcuts distort the market, discourage healthy competition and degrade quality for everyone. In trying to save, users end up with slower speeds, higher risks and fewer choices.

Security is another major concern. When users connect to unlicensed networks, they're effectively handing over their data to an unknown operator. Emails, passwords, financial information — all can be compromised. Oman has already seen a rise in cyber scams this year, from phishing to identity theft. Many of these crimes start with illegally accessed data.

Oman currently ranks among the world's top countries in cybersecurity, scoring 97 out of 100 in the Global Cybersecurity Index. But rogue networks create loopholes in that system. They're not just individual risks —

Across neighbourhoods, unauthorised wireless networks are being set up — people sharing or selling Internet connections without a licence. It might seem harmless, even helpful.

they weaken the national digital firewall.

There's also a legal risk. If someone uses your shared connection for illegal activity — hacking, pirated content, or worse — the consequences could fall on you. That's not a theoretical problem; it's a real one.

That's why the TRA's crackdown is necessary. The law clearly prohibits operating telecom services without a licence, with penalties reaching up to RO 50,000 or jail time. But enforcement is only part of the effort.

The TRA is also using detection tools, monitoring traffic patterns with licensed providers, and encouraging the public to report suspicious activity. Importantly, they're positioning this campaign not just as punishment, but as public education. Following the rules isn't just compliance — it's civic responsibility.

At the same time, Oman is addressing the root causes. The national fibre rollout aims to reach 75% of buildings this year. Increased competition is helping to lower prices. And new policies for 2025 will continue modernising the sector.

Oman's digital future depends on trust, rule of law and shared responsibility. Illegal shortcuts damage all three. Internet access for all is a national goal — but it must be achieved securely, legally and fairly. By acting today, Oman is building a safer, more connected future for every citizen.

EU BANK SURGE MASKS DISCRETE CAPITAL SOAP OPERAS

GEORGE HAY AND PIERRE BRIANCON

EUROPE’S BANKS are having a decent 2025. For all the new-year talk about the motoring US economy and the stuttering European Union, bank stocks in the euro zone are up 46 per cent since January – while US lenders have on average risen just 16 per cent.

Yet while the sector seems to have become dull and dependable, there’s still room for stock-specific soap operas.

Lenders across Europe used to trade miles below book value due to a vicious cycle of negative rates and insufficient capital ratios. Second-quarter results from France’s \$106 billion BNP Paribas and \$65 billion Deutsche Bank on Thursday show how rising rates and European rearmament plans have flipped the script.

BNP made a return on tangible equity of 11.6 per cent, while Deutsche managed 10.1 per cent - both ahead of year-end targets. Stripping out the unhelpful effect of the stronger euro, the banks’ fixed income and currency trading operations rose in line with or above the 15 per cent year-on-year jump Wall Street rivals managed.

The upshot is a stark re-rating: Deutsche shares have jumped from around half of expected tangible book value in January to above 80 per cent. Yet both the German bank and BNP lag \$134 billion Spanish rival Banco Santander’s 1.2 times multiple. One potential driver is the three banks’ different capital situations.

Neither BNP boss Jean-Laurent Bonnafé nor Deutsche Chief Executive Christian Sewing have a solvency headache: the French bank’s 12.5 per cent common equity Tier 1 (CET1) ratio is over 200 basis points above its minimum level as stipulated by the European Central Bank, and Deutsche’s 14.2 per cent ratio is similarly comfortable. But investors in a utility-like sector are laser-focused on share buybacks, and anything that could conceivably diminish them.

By selling her Polish assets in May for 7 billion euros and flagging a 13-per cent CET1 ratio, Santander boss Ana Botín has nixed lingering fears that her bank lacks enough capital for its Latin American-heavy business.

That raises investor confidence that a 10-billion euro buyback programme will be maintained.

In contrast, BNP and Deutsche’s capital outlooks appear fuzzier. A recent ECB interpretation may mean Bonnafé can’t fully use the so-called Danish Compromise capital wheeze to bed down last year’s AXA Investment Managers deal, which could reduce the bank’s CET1 ratio by up to 35 basis points.

Meanwhile, Deutsche’s risk-weighted assets might balloon by over 100 billion euros by 2033 if reforms reducing the flexibility in calculating these RWAs aren’t watered down. — Reuters

Mastering Local Conant: Ultimate strategy guide

LOCAL

Conant is an active and competitive business simulation game where players make real-time

strategic decisions in a localised market.

Understanding supply chains, customers, prices and competitive moves are crucial. For students, business lovers, or professionals sharpening their decision-making skills, conquering Local Conant goes beyond understanding the game — it requires strategic implementation tailored to the ever-changing market landscape.

In this article, I will provide the best approach to mastering Local Conant. We will cover every key element of the game, including market analysis, product development, pricing, marketing, distribution, team coordination, adaptability, and provide practical insights alongside actionable strategies.

UNDERSTANDING THE GAME MECHANICS

Local Conant’s business competition is a portion of a complete system. Completing the system is a portion of Local Conant’s game. Understanding Local Conant is the game itself.

Local Conant simulates a localised business ecosystem where the players compete to gain market share through selling goods or services.

These are the essential elements of Local Conant:

- **Market segmentation:** Demographics alongside brand buying interest and the price they are willing to pay.
- **Supply chain:** Sourcing, Production and logistics.
- **Financial management:** Budgeting to target income and Costing, Pricing and Margin/Profit.
- **Customer behaviour:** Purchase inertia and marketing-triggered action.
- **Competitive strategy:** Your outcomes are determined by the real-time decisions of other players. Get comfortable with the interface, KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), and the various available data dashboards. Mastering these basics



Local Conant is an active and competitive business simulation game where players make real-time strategic decisions in a localised market. Image for illustration only.

helps prevent wasteful errors as well as assists in spotting gaps with high leverage potential.

MARKET RESEARCH AND SEGMENTATION

Any successful Local Conant strategy stands on accurate market analysis. Start with the income level, age range, location and preferences of the target segments.

Use customer surveys, competitor benchmarking and trend forecasting as key analyses.

- **Demographics:** What are the profiles of the customers? What do they cherish?
- **Psychographics:** What are the underlying motivations for their purchases?
- **Market size & growth:** Is the target market large? Is it growing?
- **Competitor positioning:** What products and prices are presented by other market players?

With the segmented customer base, it is easier to tailor the offerings and target them effectively, optimising the product market fit while improving targeting.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND DIFFERENTIATION

Markets are won and lost with great products. Strengthening a unique selling proposition (USP) for the target market is critical.

- **Quality vs cost trade-offs:** Make the right choice for your positioning.
- **Customisation for local needs:**



DR HILAL AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert.

Incorporate regional and cultural expectations.

- **Brand positioning:** To be notable, be remembered for something
- **Lifecycle management:** Innovate before stagnation occurs.

To keep improving, use customer feedback loops to iterate your products. In Local Conant, responsiveness to user data and rapid innovation set companies apart as winners.

PRICING STRATEGY

Pricing strategy must reflect cost structure, perceived value and the competitive landscape.

- **Cost-plus pricing:** Simple, but it can miss market trends
- **Value based pricing:** Aligns with customer expectations.
- **Dynamic pricing:** Adjust based on demand and competition.
- **Penetration vs skimming:** Enter at low expectation with high structure versus going premium?

Always run simulations to test price elasticity. A 5% price alteration can lead to a 15% change in profits. Capturing the market with sustainable schemes while retaining psychological strategies (purchasing at RO 9.99 vs RO 10.00) can be a great boost to long-term profitability.

MARKETING AND PROMOTION

The quality of your products does not matter if no one hears about them. Engage with your audience across multiple platforms, ranging from digital to local partnerships, and also consider influencer marketing.

- **Social media campaigns:** Focused and specific.
- **Content marketing:** Helps cultivate trust and authority.
- **Traditional advertising:** Community radio, promotional flyers and local events.
- **Sales promotions:** Marketing, loyalty incentives and referral bonuses are all discounted.
- Each campaign's ROI should be tracked. Ads should be optimised and conversions maximised through A/B testing.
- Customer personas should be created, and their journey from awareness to loyalty should be mapped. Visibility fuels growth.

BUSINESS

MUSCAT: Oman LNG achieved its highest-ever production output in 2024, alongside maintaining an impressive plant efficiency rate of 98.23 per cent – underscoring its dedication to operational excellence and sustainability.

According to CEO Hamad bin Mohammed al Naamany, the company is entering a new expansion phase, marked by the launch of long-term sales contracts that include supply from both Oman LNG and Qalhat LNG.

These developments are being supported by advanced upgrades and maintenance initiatives aimed at strengthening the company's performance and cost competitiveness in global markets.

The year 2024 also marked a significant shift in Oman LNG's commercial strategy. Long-term contracts now total 10.4 million metric tonnes annually, providing a robust foundation for a flexible and diversified portfolio.

This strategy allows the company to maintain reliable supply commitments while remaining agile in responding to short-term market opportunities, thus enhancing the added value delivered to its partners and reinforcing Oman's contribution to global energy security.

Al Naamany emphasised the

These developments are being supported by advanced upgrades and maintenance initiatives aimed at strengthening the company's performance and cost competitiveness in global markets

OMAN LNG SETS RECORD FOR PRODUCTION AND SAFETY IN 2024



The year 2024 also marked a significant shift in Oman LNG's commercial strategy. Long-term contracts now total 10.4 million metric tonnes annually.

company's role in supporting Oman's carbon neutrality targets by 2050. In 2024, Oman LNG recorded its highest-ever energy efficiency performance and received the "Golden Path" accolade from the United Nations Environment Programme for methane emissions reduction – highlighting its leadership in producing low-carbon LNG.

To support its climate ambitions, the company is investing in cost-effective energy efficiency technologies and long-term emissions management strategies. It is also working closely with local universities on R&D projects, including hydrogen fusion and a pilot methane initiative that could pave the way for new clean energy solutions.

In terms of safety, the company achieved over 27 million work hours without a single lost time injury and recorded no operational safety incidents for more than 3,500 consecutive days. Oman LNG has aligned its safety programmes with the Oman Energy Association (OPAL) to ensure its standards remain among the best in the industry.

Beyond its operational achievements, Oman LNG remains committed to national development and social responsibility. — ONA

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JOB VACANCY
Furniture company requires for immediate placement:-
1- Outdoor sales, 5 years experience in furniture and wall to wall carpets, Oman driving license.
2- Driver with heavy driving license.
Please send CV to
Email: wm8457577@gmail.com
And mention in subject Job number 1 or 2

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.
Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crococraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA
PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]
Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309
pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

SIT. WANTED

SRI LANKAN Male – (CGMA ACMA+ CPA+BBA) Asst. Finance Manager/ Chief Accountant, 12+ Experience in Oman & GCC, Expert in Finan. Reporting (MIS), VAT, Audit, Cashflow, Budget, AR AP Recon, IFRS, Payroll, Banking. Contact: 78773250. Email: ali.mohamedown@gmail.com

INDIAN male MBA, 20 years experience in Oman & GCC in Project sales/ Dealer market in All construction materials including Cables & Accessories having D/L looking for the post of Sales Manager/Assistant Manager. Contact: 00968 78099493

ACCOUNTS/ Finance: Indian male (MBA Fin) having more than 19 years of experience in Oman accounts & finance looking for suitable placement, NOC available and can join immediately. Contact: 92076716

PLANNING Engineer, PMP. Indian male 11 years experience in Construction Projects. Well versed with Primavera P6 Software, strong communication skills, Interpersonal skills, EDT Claims, Recovery schedules, project control. Having Omani Driving Licence. Contact: 78002582. Email: engineer4planning@gmail.com

INDIAN male (Mechanical Engineering) with 3 years experience in diesel engine works (Gensets/ Engines), 2 years in Machine Maintenance, seeks job. Contact: 78022420

EXPERIENCED accountant with expertise in accounting, administration and documentation. Proficient in Tally and MS Office. Contact: + 968 72806772

LOOKING for part time OR full time Accounts/Finance job. 20yrs experience in Muscat. Upto finalization & Audit. Please contact: 92065499

Urgent Hiring

PLANNING ENGINEER
Requirements: Civil Engineer Graduate (4 years program)
◆ 8 years of experience in the same role.
◆ Experience in planning of pipe laying, road and infrastructure projects.
◆ Building experience will be an added advantage.
◆ Construction preparation of monthly progress reports, Interim Bar Chart Progress Report & statement of resources required to makeup shortfall in the progress meeting. The candidate should be proficient in the use of Primavera Software. (Planning engineer would be stationed at the site).
◆ PMP will be an added advantage.

QUANTITY SURVEYOR
Requirements: QS - BSC in QS
◆ 8 years of experience in the same role.
◆ Experience in contract administration.
◆ Experience in Both Pre and Post Contract QS related works for Building Projects (Experience in Infra will be an Added Advantage).

Send your CV to: muscatproject4@gmail.com

ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction
In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company Perfect Group Company LLC, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1179123, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials 100,000.000 to 20,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

SIT. WANTED

Oman Experienced Indian Male, Admin HR, project coordination, corporate communication experience in Airport project, Hospital, Construction, Media. Quick joining. Contact: 99283938

WAREHOUSE FOR RENT

WAREHOUSE for rent in Misfah. Contact: 79939666, 99888390

FLAT for rent 3BKH 18 Nov Street, Ghubrah. Contact: 92470065, 92408308

STORES for rent 18 Nov St, Ghubrah, 200m, 300m,400m suitable for all commercial use. Contact: 92470065/92408308

ART/LIFE



L I F E S T Y L E

KITESURFING CLINIC SHOWCASES OMAN'S UNTOUCHED WATERS AS A GLOBAL SPORTS HOTSPOT > 20

ENTERTAINMENT

‘Star Wars’ creator George Lucas to hit Comic-Con for first time



COMIC-CON kicks off on Thursday in San Diego, California, with expectations running high among devoted fans keen to catch a glimpse of George Lucas at his first-ever appearance at the convention.

Other expected highlights of the gathering - one of the world's biggest celebrations of pop culture - include the world premiere of the prequel series "Alien: Earth."

Comic-Con began holding events in San Diego in 1970, as a low-key and rather niche huddle, but has now grown to an annual get-together that attracts 130,000 people eager to hear behind-the-scenes tidbits from Hollywood stars and directors unveiling their latest projects.

This year's edition will be marked by the presence of legendary film-maker Lucas, who has never visited the convention before despite Comic-Con culture being deeply rooted in his "Star Wars" and "Indiana Jones" franchises.

In a session on Sunday set to be moderated by Queen Latifah, Lucas will discuss the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art with Mexican director Guillermo del Toro and Oscar-winning artist Doug Chiang, who has shaped the iconic "Star Wars" universe for decades.

The museum, scheduled to open in Los Angeles next year, will be dedicated to illustrated narratives and will house the Lucas archive.

"Nearly five decades ago, Star Wars made one of its earliest public appearances at our convention, along with a booth featuring (comic book artist) Howard Chaykin's now legendary Star Wars poster as a promotional item," said David Glanzner, Chief Communications and Strategy Officer.

"Now, to have Mr Lucas... is a true full-circle moment. His lifelong dedication to visual storytelling and world-building resonates deeply with us and our community."

Marvel Studios will have a smaller presence at the convention this year, skipping its eagerly awaited annual presentation in Hall H.

According to Variety, changes to the premiere of the new "Avengers" instalment complicated logistics for the studio, whose cast is currently filming in Britain.

Despite this notable absence, events at coveted Hall H still promise great excitement for fans of science fiction, a core genre of the convention.

Comic-Con runs from Thursday to Sunday, July 27. — AFP

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



HERITAGE

Hindu devotees burn an effigy of Ghanta Karna, a mythical demon, during celebrations to mark 'Gathemangal' festival in Bhaktapur in Kathmandu. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Mexican singer/songwriter Marco Antonio Solis from Los Bukis speaks at Los Bukis Walk of Fame Star Ceremony. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Pea-chan, from Japanese retailer DOKIDOKI, looks through a rail of Harajuku Kawaii style jackets during the Hyper Japan festival at Olympia, London, Britain. — AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



Cup With A View



Beauty of Remote Places

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. To be selected, follow us on Instagram and every time you upload or share your photos, make sure to tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

Wax lyrical: Taylor Swift gets 13 Madame Tussauds statues



US POP megastar Taylor Swift will be honoured with 13 waxworks of her at Madame Tussauds venues around the globe, the museum said on Wednesday.

In honour of Swift’s lucky number, 13 of the waxwork museum’s 22 branches will each receive a statue of the “Love Story” and “Blank Space” singer, in what it called the “most ambitious project” of its 250-year history.

The statues were inspired by some of the 35-year-old songwriting sensation’s looks from her record-shattering “Eras Tour” from 2023 to 2024.

With 149 shows across the world over nearly two years, the tour raked in \$2 billion, making it the most lucrative in music history to date.

More than 40 artists worked for more than a year on the statues of Swift, one of the most acclaimed artists of her

generation with 14 Grammy Awards.

“This is the most ambitious project in Madame Tussauds’ 250-year history, which only feels right to reflect the stratospheric status of Taylor Swift,” said Danielle Cullen, the museum’s senior figure stylist.

UK-based Swifties are well served, with one waxwork slated for London and another for the northern seaside resort town of Blackpool.

Another 10 will find a permanent home at the branches of Madame Tussauds in Amsterdam, Berlin, Budapest, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Las Vegas, Nashville, New York, Orlando and Sydney.

The thirteenth statue, which will travel around the remaining museums, will begin its worldwide walkabout with a residency at Madame Tussauds Shanghai. — AFP



Who makes laundry smell nice? Meet the professional ‘noses’



IN THE laboratories of German fragrance and flavours giant Symrise, a citrus scent clings to the lab coats of trainees - “noses” who are learning the art of making things smell good.

These busy heroes of the world of smells and aromas shape the connection millions of consumers have with everyday items.

While at high-end perfume labels, olfactory artists create scents for luxury body sprays, Symrise’s experts work on everyday products. Smell, a powerful sense that can trigger emotions and memories, and aroma often decide which food or beverage, cleaning or personal hygiene product ends up in the shopping cart.

At Symrise’s headquarters in Holzminden, a quiet town south of Hanover, each day at the company’s in-house perfumery school begins the same way: sniffing out scents from dozens of tiny bottles while blindfolded.

“It’s just like tuning a musical instrument before you play,” said Alicia De Benito Cassado, a 32-year-old former professional pianist from Spain. Her career switch into scent development was a natural step: she made her own perfumes as a teenager to match the poetry and music that she wrote.

“For me, not everything has to smell good,” she said. “The horror of smell also helps us discover ourselves.” But commercial clients demand something different, De Benito Cassado added. “In the end, we need to create scents that are

strong, beautiful, powerful - and affordable.”

- PROFESSIONAL SNIFFERS -

Being a “nose” is a full-time job and comes with a three-year training programme. The smell of a fabric softener can be composed of 80 compounds, far more than in a premium body perfume, and the best noses can make out over 1,000 different odours while blindfolded.

Shangyun Lyu, 31, came from China to study at the school and says that a professional sniffer can get by with knowing about 500 scents.

Being able to break down odours into their chemical components is key.

“As a kid, I just smelled jasmine or gardenia as flowers,” he said. “Now, I recognise the chemicals: it’s a blend of many elements.” Students weigh ingredients down to the milligramme, mix, smell and start over, often by replicating existing smells to understand their structure and then innovate from there.

“When developing perfume, it is very important that several people smell it,” said 56-year-old master perfumer Marc vom Ende, head of the school.

“We all perceive smell differently.”

- ‘NOSE HAS THE FINAL SAY’ -

Pleasant smells cannot come at any cost, and the rules of the game change over time.

Lilial, a chemical once prized for its floral and sweet Lily-of-the-Valley notes, has been banned in the European Union since 2022 over fears it can cause skin irritation.

Fragrances applied directly to the body have stricter regulations than detergents, said 27-year-old South African trainee Attiya Setai.

“We’re more restricted in raw materials and must replace banned ingredients with new compliant ones,” she said.

Tastes also vary across global markets, with Shangyun pointing to the example of Chinese shampoos that sell well with a young clientele there but would struggle in Europe.

“Something old-fashioned in one country can be new elsewhere,” he said. Cost also enters the equation. Symrise extracts aromatic compounds from wood resin, a by-product of the paper industry, in a move “that makes both economic and environmental sense”, said vom Ende. It is hard to be a nose.

About 500 perfumers work in the industry and 80 of them at Symrise, which has a workforce of 13,000. The company markets about 30,000 products to clients ranging from confectioners to pet food manufacturers and sunscreen makers. Symrise’s competitors include DSM-Firmenich, headquartered in both Switzerland and the Netherlands, as well as Givaudan, another Swiss firm.

Artificial intelligence increasingly plays a role, with computer programmes predicting which fragrances will hit the mark.

Still, the machines cannot - yet - smell, even if they can understand speech and read text.

“We’re supported by AI,” vom Ende said. “But the nose has the final say”. —AFP

FEATURES



KITESURFING CLINIC SHOWCASES OMAN'S UNTOUCHED WATERS AS A GLOBAL SPORTS HOTSPOT

BY NAJAH AL RIYAMI

AGAINST the shimmering salt flats and turquoise waters of Oman's iconic Bar Al Hikman, world champion kitesurfer Lorenzo Casati has returned for a prestigious coaching clinic, hosted by Khareef Kiteboarding. Building on last year's triumphant debut, this year's event has brought together 16 advanced riders from across the globe for a week of intensive training in one of the region's most breathtaking and secluded kiteboarding destinations.

Participants hail from Germany, the United States, Colombia, Kuwait, South Africa, Austria, the United Kingdom, and Oman, and are benefitting from Casati's expert coaching across three challenging disciplines: strapless directional, freestyle, and big air. Renowned for his explosive style and tactical mastery, the Red Bull King of the Air champion is not only sharpening techniques but also inspiring a new generation of riders. Oman's windswept shores are rapidly establishing themselves as a premier international kitesurfing hotspot.



A GROWING GLOBAL PASSION

Kitesurfing, also known as kiteboarding, is an exhilarating water sport that blends surfing, wakeboarding, and paragliding. Since its emergence in the late 20th century, it has grown exponentially in popularity, celebrated for its versatility and adrenaline rush. Riders harness the power of large controllable kites to glide across the water, perform jumps, tricks, and high-speed maneuvers, appealing to thrill-seekers worldwide.

The Middle East has swiftly become a notable hub for kitesurfing, thanks to its favourable wind conditions, warm climate, and diverse coastlines. Countries like the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia have invested heavily in developing dedicated spots, hosting international competitions and training clinics that attract global riders. Recognising its potential to boost tourism and diversify leisure offerings, these nations are embracing the sport's meteoric rise.

WHY OMAN STANDS OUT

Oman, with its expansive coastline, consistent seasonal winds, and pristine natural landscapes, has become an increasingly popular destination for kitesurfers. Remote beaches such as Bar Al Hikman provide ideal conditions — shallow lagoons, open sea access, and untouched scenery — making it perfect for both beginners and advanced athletes. Its reliable summer wind supports high-performance riding, attracting enthusiasts eager to explore new horizons away from crowded tourist spots.

The country's recent surge in popularity is driven by initiatives like this clinic and the involvement of world-class athletes like Casati. Local organisations, such as Khareef Kiteboarding, are actively positioning Oman as a rising star on the global kitesurfing map, offering world-class training in some of the most stunning, untouched coastal locations. Experts see Oman as a prime spot for high-performance coaching amidst stunning natural beauty, further bolstered by the adventurous spirit of the sport.

"Returning here for the second year in a row was fantastic," Casati reflected. "The vibe is incredible—great people, perfect wind conditions, and a real sense of progress. Bar Al Hikman is a place you've got to experience—it's unique but totally unforgettable!"

Johanna Mueller, co-founder of Khareef Kiteboarding, praised the success of this year's clinic: "We saw impressive progression—riders moving from basic jumps to double front rolls, board offs, and kite loops. The consistent wind and calm, flat water created



ideal conditions, and the atmosphere was truly special. Getting away from digital screens allowed everyone to connect, share stories, canoe, BBQ, and just enjoy some genuine fun. We're eager to host more clinics in Oman and help grow the sport further."

Thanks to its shallow lagoons, open sea access, and peaceful isolation, Bar Al Hikman has earned a reputation as a kitesurfers' paradise. Its dependable summer winds provide the perfect environment for skill development and high-performance riding—drawing both local and international enthusiasts eager to ride its pristine waters.

Kitesurfing in Oman has experienced remarkable growth in recent years. From the monsoon winds of the south to hidden gems along the northern coasts, the country is rapidly establishing itself as a must-visit destination for the sport. Events like this coaching clinic, combined with the presence of world-class athletes like Casati, are helping Oman carve out a fresh reputation as a global kiting hub.

As the kites dance over the waters of Bar Al Hikman, it's clear that Oman's reputation as a premier destination for kiteboarding is on the rise—not just for the athletes, but for the country itself.