

O M A N
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PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR 04:46 AM

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ALDEGUER
WINS
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HM, BELARUS PRESIDENT HOLD OFFICIAL TALKS

Visit a historic opportunity to boost bilateral relations



HIS MAJESTY AND
PRESIDENT LUKASHENKO
HOLD OFFICIAL TALKS

GREAT SATISFACTION
WITH CONSTRUCTIVE
DIALOGUE

START OF A NEW
PHASE IN RELATIONS
WITH OMAN

TWO AGREEMENTS
AND FOUR
MOUS SIGNED

WAIVER OF VISAS
FOR OMANIS
VISITING BELARUS

HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK and President Alexander Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus, on Monday, held an expanded session of official talks in the presence of official delegations from both sides.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik expressed his profound satisfaction with the constructive dialogue and consultations held with the President of the Republic of Belarus, and several members of the Belarusian government during the expanded official talks.

His Majesty affirmed that this visit represents a historic opportunity to commemorate the positive trajectory of relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus, following the President’s visit to Muscat at the end of last year. His Majesty aspired to strengthen these bilateral ties across all domains.

His Majesty stated, “This visit also reaffirms our commitment and direct support for advancing these relations, which have seen growth in economic, commercial and investment fields in recent times. I have been accompanied on this visit by a number of relevant ministers to explore further avenues for cooperation between our two nations.” On his turn, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko announced the start of a new phase



BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT HOSTS OFFICIAL DINNER

In honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, President Alexander Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus, hosted on Monday evening an official dinner at the Independence Palace in the capital city of Minsk. The official dinner was attended by the official delegation accompanying His Majesty. It was also attended by several Belarusian senior officials. **SEE ALSO P2,3 AND 4**

in bilateral relations with the Sultanate of Oman during the official talks with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in Minsk on Monday.

The Belarusian President said, “In December 2024 in Muscat, we agreed to jointly open a new chapter in our relations. A comprehensive road map for cooperation has been prepared to include specific tasks in food security, industry, tourism, transport and logistics, and investments.”

He added that the establishment of the Joint Committee on Cooperation and Investment has provided stability to the interaction and confidence in achieving the set goals. He stated that its high-level curator from the Omani side is HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. “With his personal involvement, and following the guidelines set by the two of us, the governments and business communities have made significant progress in a number of areas,” Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed.

The talks dealt with opportunities for enhancing economic and investment cooperation and exchanging views about ways to serve the joint interests of the peoples of the

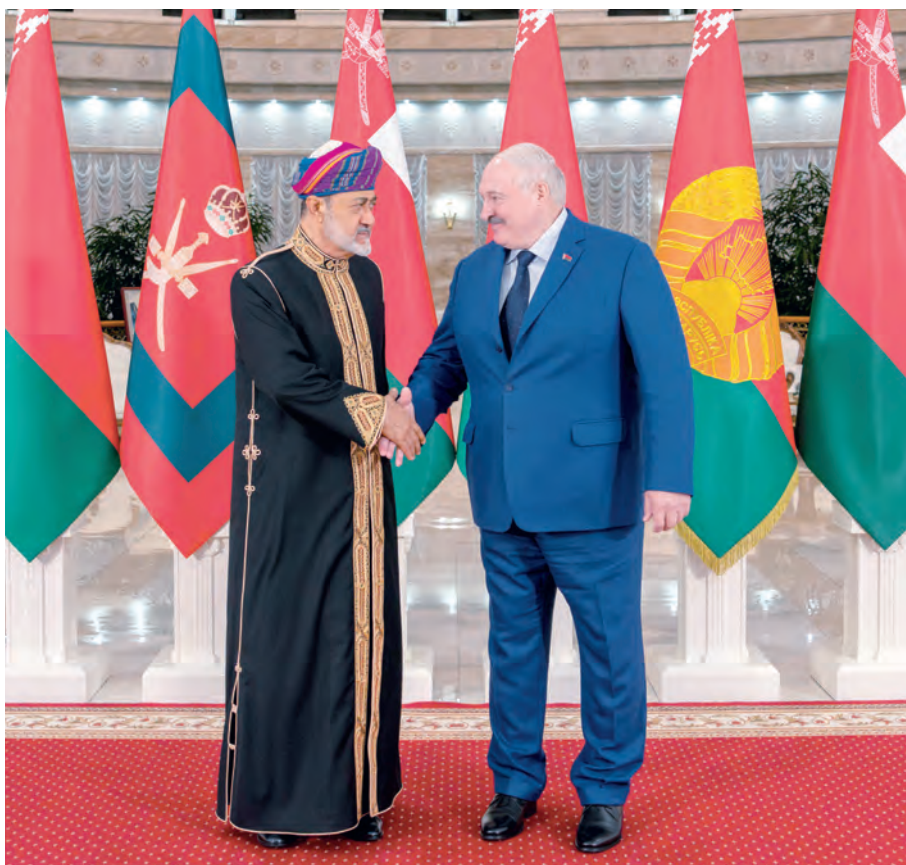
two countries. The session was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Hamood bin Salim al Towaiya, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Russian Federation and non-resident to the Republic of Belarus.

Meanwhile, it was attended from the Belarusian side by Viktor Lukashenko, son of the President and President of the Olympic Committee, Viktor Karankevich, Deputy Prime Minister, Maxim Ryzhenkov, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alexander Khodjaev, Minister of Health, Yuri Gorlov, Minister of Agriculture and Food, Andrei Kuznetsov, Minister of Industry and Dimitri Pantos, Minister of State for Military Industries. — ONA

LEADERS AIM TO DEEPEN TRADE



BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT HOSTS OFFICIAL DINNER



In honour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, President Alexander Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus, hosted on Monday evening an official dinner at the Independence Palace in the capital city of Minsk. The official dinner was attended by the official delegation accompanying His Majesty. It was also attended by several Belarusian senior officials. — ONA

MINSK: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived in Minsk on Monday on a two-day state visit to the Republic of Belarus.

President Alexander Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus led the welcoming party for His Majesty the Sultan upon his arrival at the Independence Palace in Minsk. He wished His Majesty the Sultan and his accompanying delegation a pleasant stay.

President Lukashenko accompanied His Majesty the Sultan to the dais of honour where the Omani Royal Anthem and the Belarusian national anthem were played. Then, His Majesty the Sultan, accompanied by the President, inspected the Guard of Honour, which saluted His Majesty.

After that, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with senior Belarusian officials, while His President Lukashenko shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan.

Upon his arrival earlier at Minsk International Airport, His Majesty the Sultan was received by Viktor Karankevich, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus, Maxim Ryzhenkov, Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs and senior government officials.

The visit is made in response to an invitation received by His Majesty the Sultan from the Belarusian President. It comes within the context of advancing bilateral relations and boosting areas of cooperation and partnership in various economic and investment fields.

On Monday morning, His Majesty the Sultan was seen off at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Judiciary Council, Nasr bin Hamoud al Kindi, Secretary-General of the Royal Court Affairs, Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibanlyah, Minister of Education, Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service, Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman, Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman and Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman. His Majesty the Sultan is accompanied during the visit by a high-ranking official delegation comprising HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of Private Office of His Majesty the Sultan, Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Chairman of Oman Investment Authority, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Hamood bin Salim al Towaiji, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Russian Federation and non-resident to the Republic of Belarus. — ONA

TIES, BRING PEOPLES CLOSER



Oman, Belarus officials sign several agreements, MoUs

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Alexander Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus on Monday graced the signing of two agreements, four memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and one memorandum of cooperation at the Independence Palace in Minsk. The signing ceremony was held as part of His Majesty the Sultan's state visit to the Republic of Belarus.

The first was a draft agreement for the mutual waiver of visas for holders of ordinary passports between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus, while the second agreement was on cooperation on international road transport between the two countries.

As for the MoUs, they were in the judicial field between the Supreme Judiciary Council and the Supreme Court of Belarus, in the field of exchanging scientific and medical expertise and research between the Ministry of Health represented by the University Medical City and Aleksandrov Republican Scientific and Practical Center of Oncology and Medical Radiology and in the fields of agriculture, livestock and fisheries between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food in the



The agreements and MoUs were signed on behalf of the Omani government by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister and Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. — ONA

Republic of Belarus. A draft road map for developing bilateral cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Belarus was also signed.

The two countries also signed a memorandum of cooperation for a timber project, which is an international investment project that focuses on establishing and operating a facility for producing

paper pulp in the Republic of Belarus. This project embodies the strategic objective of the Sultanate of Oman to diversify its global investment portfolio through Oman Investment Authority. The project is expected to lay the foundation for large-scale, long-term investment cooperation between Oman and Belarus and will contribute to the economic development of both

countries. The agreements and MoUs were signed on behalf of the Omani government by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister and Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Meanwhile, they were signed on behalf of the Belarusian government by Maxim Ryzhenkov, Minister of

Foreign Affairs, Valentin Sukalo, Chairman of the Supreme Court, Alexei Alexeevich Lyakhnovich, Minister of Transport and Communications, Aleksander Khadjaev, Minister of Health and Yuri Gorlov, Minister of Agriculture and Food.

Prior to the signing ceremony, the two leaders exchanged commemorative gifts. — ONA



HM BEGINS BELARUS STATE VISIT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik leaving Muscat for Belarus on a two-day state visit. The visit is made in response to an invitation received by His Majesty the Sultan from the Belarusian President. It comes within the context of advancing bilateral relations and boosting areas of cooperation and partnership in various economic and investment fields. — **ONA**



Food self-reliance of Oman at 65.8%

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabiyousef

OMAN'S self-sufficiency rate in the food sector has reached 65.8 per cent, distributed across agriculture, fisheries, livestock, and food and beverage industries by the end of the 10th Five-Year Plan and the First Executive Plan for Oman Vision 2040, according to the National Center for Statistics and Information (NC SI).

Oman's self-sufficiency rate in agricultural products stood at 49.4 per cent, animal products at 87.3 per cent, fish at an impressive 146 per cent, and food and beverage industries at 66.4 per cent.

Speaking to Observer on the sidelines of the Food Security Lab 2025, held on Sunday, Dr Yousef bin Mohammed al Riyami, Director-General of Statistics, NC SI, said that several key food commodities surpassed the 75 per cent self-sufficiency mark.

"These include fish at 146 per cent, cucumbers at 100 per cent, dates 99 per cent, cantaloupe 98 per



Dr Yousef bin Mohammed al Riyami

cent, peppers 96 per cent, milk 96 per cent, eggs 95 per cent, zucchini 88 per cent, tomatoes 82 per cent, carrots 80 per cent and watermelons 77 per cent," he noted.

However, some commodities remain below 75 per cent, including poultry (62%), coconuts (49%), red meat (45%), radish (41%), garlic (37%), lemons (30%), natural honey (27%), mangoes (27%), bananas (24%), onions (16%), potatoes (9%), and wheat (2%).

Dr Al Riyami highlighted that food security challenges stem from multiple factors

— natural, geographical and demographic. "They include high temperatures, limited dam storage, desalinated water capacity and low rainfall, alongside the constraints of cultivated area expansion and the availability of labour in the agricultural sector," he explained.

He added that the food and water sector continues to play a vital role in the national economy. The sector's contribution to GDP in 2024 stood at 3.5 per cent (RO 1.426 million), up from 3.2 per cent (RO 1.314 million) in 2023.

The added value of agriculture and livestock reached RO 604 million (1.5%) in 2024, compared to RO 559 million (1.4%) in 2023. Similarly, the fishing sector contributed RO 469 million (1.1%) in 2024, up from RO 428 million (1%) a year earlier. The food and beverage industries maintained a 0.7 per cent contribution to GDP, with a slight increase in value to RO 353 million in 2024. The water sector's contribution remained steady at 1.1 per cent in both years.

TENDER NOTICE

وزارة الزراعة والسمكية وموارد المياه
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tenders:-

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales Start Date	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Companies that are Eligible to Participate	Tender Document Fee (R.O)
656/2025/MAFWR/HQ-72	Rehabilitation and Maintenance of Existing Fish Market of Sinaw	Thursday 2/10/2025	Wednesday 22/10/2025	Tuesday 11/11/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Second, Third grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
658/2025/MAFWR/HQ-73	Supply of Concentrated Feed for Livestock Research Stations for a period of two and a half years	Thursday 2/10/2025	Wednesday 22/10/2025	Tuesday 11/11/2025	Companies specialized in the field of supplies and registered with the Authority of Projects and Tenders, classified under Excellent, First, Second, Third, and Fourth Grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs
659/2025/MAFWR/HQ-74	Consultancy Services for Provision of Technical Support for Drilling and Aquifers Testing Programme for the Wadi Safwan and Wadi Sumayni Catchment and Construction of Groundwater Modeling at Wadi Safw	Thursday 2/10/2025	Wednesday 22/10/2025	Tuesday 11/11/2025	Specialized companies registered with, Second, Third grades	(25/-) Omani riyals for local companies (10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: [+968 24402244](mailto:etenderhd@pttc.gov.om) or etenderhd@pttc.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the Observer classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.

وزارة التنمية الاجتماعية
Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

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

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
497/2025	Supplying a card printer for people with disabilities of the type (Fargo Model 6600), number (5) printers	Companies specialized in supplying communications and information technology devices and accessories registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Monday 27-10-2025 02:00 PM	Sunday 16-11-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
498/2025	Purchase and supply of energy-saving 2-ton split unit air conditioners	Companies specialized in the field of supplying electrical, mechanical and industrial machinery and equipment, spare parts, and registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Monday 27-10-2025 02:00 PM	Sunday 16-11-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
499/2025	Purchase a Security Event Management System (SIEM)	Companies specialized in the field of designing, installing and maintaining information programs and systems / equipping information data centers registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Monday 27-10-2025 02:00 PM	Sunday 16-11-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
502/2025	Supplying tools and means to the sensory effects halls of the Down Syndrome Center in Al-Khoud and the Al-Wafa Centers for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Salalah, Bahla, Al-Suwaiq and Muqaniyat	Companies specialized in the field of Supply of medical tools, office and learning supplies, and medical supplies registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Monday 27-10-2025 02:00 PM	Sunday 16-11-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
503/2025	Supplying tools and equipment to implement home projects to empower (30) girls with intellectual disabilities in the field of sewing, hand weaving and perfume making	Companies specialized in the field Supply of medical tools, office and educational supplies, supply of electrical tools and equipment, supply of textiles, clothing and shoes registered with the Projects, Tenders and Local Content Authority in the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree	Monday 27-10-2025 02:00 PM	Sunday 16-11-2025 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On **Tuesday 07/10/2025**.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

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

www.mosd.gov.om

SHORT TAKES



The two sides reviewed aspects of the bilateral relations between the two countries and discussed ways to enhance joint cooperation. — ONA

OMAN BOOSTS TIES WITH CZECH REPUBLIC, HUNGARY

KUWAIT: Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, met with Radek Rubes, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, on the sidelines of the 29th GCC-EU Ministerial Council Meeting being held in the State of Kuwait.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed aspects of the bilateral relations between the two countries and discussed ways to enhance joint cooperation in various fields that serve mutual interests and strengthen the ties between the Sultanate of Oman and the Czech Republic.

Furthermore, Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, also met with Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary.

During their meeting, they reviewed aspects of the bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Hungary and discussed ways to enhance joint cooperation in the economic and commercial fields. They also exchanged views on a number of regional and international issues of mutual concern. A number of Foreign Ministry officials attended both meetings. — ONA

MEDIA’S ROLE IN SHAPING VALUES HIGHLIGHTED



The fourth edition of ‘The Safe Home’ forum was held in Bahla. — ONA

BAHLA: The office of Awqaf and Religious Affairs in the Wilayat of Bahla, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, on Monday organised the fourth edition of the ‘Al Bait Al Aamen’ (The Safe Home) event, titled ‘The Impact of Media on the Value System.’

The event addressed several key themes related to the relationship between media and religious and social values, the role of educational and legal institutions in protecting the family and community from the negative influences of digital content, in addition to reviewing experiences and initiatives that enhance media responsibility in public discourse.

The event featured the participation of a number of academics, researchers, and specialists in the fields of thought, media and law, along with representatives from relevant government and community entities. The aim was to enrich the discussion on mechanisms for confronting the value challenges posed by modern media.

The ‘Al Bait Al Aamen’ event is one of the awareness initiatives adopted by the Bahla Office of Awqaf and Religious Affairs as part of its programmes aimed at strengthening family values, instilling concepts of conscious citizenship, and building a cohesive society based on established ethical and religious principles.

It is noteworthy that this year’s event marks its fourth edition, following three previous editions that tackled key intellectual and social issues relevant to the reality of the community and family.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Said al Hajri, member of the State Council. — ONA

71% GROWTH IN VEGETATION COVER IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The total development of vegetation cover in the Sultanate of Oman reached 3.38 million trees in 2024, compared to 1.97 million trees in 2023, representing a growth rate of 71 per cent. Furthermore, vegetation cover in the Dhofar Governorate accounted for 4.7 per cent of the governorate’s total land area.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the number of wild animals and birds decreased by 5 per cent, while the number of the Arabian oryx dropped by 25.9 per



In Oman, the total number of nature reserves in Oman reached 32, constituting 5.6 per cent of Oman’s total area.

cent compared to the previous year.

The total number of nature reserves in Oman reached 32, constituting 5.6 per cent of Oman’s total area. The data also showed that the average maximum temperature in the Sultanate of Oman reached 32.9 degrees Celsius in 2024, compared to 32.8 degrees Celsius in 2023, while the minimum temperature remained stable at 25.4 degrees Celsius. The average maximum humidity recorded was 72 per cent, compared to 74 per cent in the previous year. — ONA

Expo highlights vision for ‘Sustainable Cities’

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

UNDER THE auspices of Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, the 5th edition of the Oman Real Estate Development, Housing, and Construction Expo and Conference opened on Sunday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Organised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in cooperation with Expo Muscat, the four-day event runs from October 6–9, bringing together decision-makers, investors, urban planners and experts from multiple sectors to shape the future of sustainable urban living in Oman.

Held under the theme ‘Sustainable Cities for People’, the event underscores Oman’s commitment to creating livable, environmentally conscious cities that balance growth with quality of life. It also aligns with World Urban October, reflecting Oman’s active engagement in global conversations on smart and resilient city planning.

The exhibition serves as a key platform for cooperation between the public and private sectors, featuring 226 exhibition stands representing government entities, real estate developers and construction technology firms. It also highlights efforts to engage youth, entrepreneurs and innovators in reimagining the future of cities through technology, design and community initiatives.

A major highlight of the opening ceremony was the signing of seven strategic development agreements for future cities and urban projects across Oman, including Sultan Haitham City, Al Thuraya City and Al Jabal Al Aali.

Collectively, these projects represent Oman’s forward-looking approach to sustainable planning and urban transformation.

In Sultan Haitham City, contracts worth over RO 15 million were signed for key wastewater infrastructure projects in partnership with Nama Water Services, paving the way for a fully serviced, people-centric city.

At Al Jabal Al Aali, multiple agreements were signed for residential, tourism and healthcare developments, including a health and wellness district on a 600,000-sq-m site with 500 residential units and a five-star medical resort valued at over RO 200 million, developed by Mustir Company.

A landmark announcement was a golf resort project spanning 2.26 million sq m, featuring 2,100 homes, two



The Real Estate Expo and Conference opened under the auspices of Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy

HOUSING MINISTRY UNVEILS UNIFIED BUILDING CODE

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has launched the National Building Requirements and Standards Guide — a unified framework consolidating safety, quality and sustainability standards across Oman’s governorates. The launch, held during the Urban Planning, Home, and Building Exhibition, marks a major milestone in harmonising engineering and construction practices nationwide.

Dr Mohammed bin Ali al Muttawa, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning for Urban Planning, described the new guide as ‘a key turning point in advancing Oman’s construction system and enhancing safety, sustainability and quality of life within the built environment.’

He explained that the guide was developed under the supervision of the Permanent Technical Committee for the Building Requirements

Project, which includes 11 national entities representing government, academic, and service sectors. Among them are the Ministry of Interior; the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; the Environment Authority; Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority; Muscat Municipality; Sultan Qaboos University; the Public Services Regulation Authority; Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry; and Nama Water Services Group.

“The committee worked through a series of specialised workshops and technical teams to review and refine the content, ensuring it aligns with Oman’s needs while adopting international best practices,” said Dr Al Muttawa.

Developed in collaboration with the International Code Council (ICC), the guide encompasses six

specialised manuals covering engineering, environmental and technical fields:

General Building Guide – setting minimum standards for structural safety, fire protection and accessibility.

Existing and Historical Buildings Guide – ensuring the adaptive reuse and preservation of heritage structures.

Energy Efficiency and Sustainability Guide – promoting environmentally responsible construction and operational efficiency.

Mechanical Guide – standardising ventilation, heating and air-conditioning systems for optimal performance.

Water and Sanitary Systems Guide – defining quality and safety standards for plumbing and water networks.

Private Sanitation Guide – outlining sustainable wastewater management practices aligned with global norms.

five-star hotels and an 18-hole championship golf course, representing a RO 400 million investment by Camcorp Investments (UAE).

Eco-tourism projects also took centre stage, including a mountain eco-resort and eco-lodge camps, while local developers signed agreements to build integrated residential communities under the ‘Sorouh’ initiative, fostering community

participation and local investment.

In Al Thuraya City, a 73,000-sq-m mixed-use neighbourhood will be developed by Madin Sustainable Development Company for RO 25 million, alongside a RO 38.2 million infrastructure contract awarded to Target LLC in partnership with Muscat Municipality and other national utilities.

Among the event’s key

milestones was the launch of the Oman Building Code, a comprehensive national reference to unify standards of safety, quality and sustainability across all governorates.

Developed with the national technical committee, the code includes six specialised guides covering energy efficiency, historic buildings, mechanical systems, water networks and sanitation.

TOP ACHIEVEMENT



Mary E Brunkow, Fred Ramsdell and Shimon Sakaguchi are awarded this year’s Nobel Prize in Medicine. — Reuters

IMMUNE SYSTEM
BREAKTHROUGH
WINS NOBEL PRIZE

STOCKHOLM: American scientists Mary Brunkow and Fred Ramsdell and Shimon Sakaguchi from Japan won the 2025 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine on Monday for work shedding light on how the immune system spares healthy cells, creating openings for possible new autoimmune disease and cancer treatments. Their discoveries relate to peripheral immune tolerance, or “how we keep our immune system under control so we can fight all imaginable microbes and still avoid autoimmune disease”, said Marie Wahren-Herlenius, a rheumatology professor at the Karolinska Institute.

Sakaguchi expressed surprise at a press conference in Osaka, western Japan, because he felt any major recognition would have depended on more development advances. “I used to think that some sort of reward may be forthcoming if what we have been doing will advance a little further and it will become more beneficial to people in clinical settings,” he said in a calm voice, cracking a smile now and then.

The press conference was interrupted for Sakaguchi to take a congratulatory phone call from Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who asked him how effective immunotherapy could be for cancer treatment in the future. “I believe the time will come when cancer is no longer a scary disease, but a curable one,” said Sakaguchi.

The winners for medicine are selected by the Nobel Assembly of Sweden’s Karolinska Institute medical university and receive a prize sum of 11 million Swedish crowns (\$1.2 million), as well as a gold medal presented by Sweden’s king. The institute said all three laureates brought to the fore so-called regulatory T cells, which act as the immune system’s security guards that keep immune cells from attacking our own body.

Brunkow is senior programme manager at the Institute for Systems Biology in Seattle, while Ramsdell is scientific adviser at Sonoma Biotherapeutics in San Francisco. Sakaguchi is a professor at Osaka University in Japan.

Jeffrey Bluestone, a decades-long friend of Ramsdell and a co-founder with him of Sonoma Biotherapeutics, said that his associate’s extraordinary contribution was finding a gene, initially in mice, that controlled the development of a small group of regulatory T cells.

“Those cells were the master regulators of the tolerance of the immune system,” said Bluestone. Ramsdell could not be reached by Reuters - or by Bluestone, who suggested he may be on a hiking trip in an area without cell phone reception.

After announcing the winners, the Karolinska Institute’s Thomas Perlmann said specific therapies had yet to win market clearance but more than 200 trials on humans involving regulatory T cells were ongoing.

Among companies in the early race, Ramsdell’s Sonoma Biotherapeutics is partly funded and supported by US drugmaker Regeneron to work on therapies against diseases including inflammatory bowel disease. Also targeting that condition, Quell Therapeutics has partnered with AstraZeneca. — Reuters

SUDANESE
STRUGGLE
TO SURVIVE
IN CITIES
STARVED
UNDER SIEGE

PORT SUDAN: Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese civilians trapped in cities under paramilitary siege are struggling to survive, eating leaves with no aid allowed in more than two years into their country’s war.

“The bombing is constant, we spend most of our time in the shelter we dug in front of our house,” said Omar Adam, who fled with his family the Abu Shouk displacement camp on the city’s outskirts, which paramilitary fighters have overrun.

Since August, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have intensified artillery and drone attacks, in a push to seize Darfur’s last major city still under army control, which they have besieged for 18 months. “We have nothing left. Even ambaz has grown scarce,” he said, referring to an animal feed made from peanut shells which many in El-Fasher have survived on for months.

“Even if we decide to leave, we fear the militias will catch us,

and the journey is too expensive.” Satellite imagery analysed by Yale University’s Humanitarian Research lab shows the RSF has built 68 kilometres of walls around much of the city, leaving only a small exit route where fighters are reportedly extorting civilians for safe passage.

In El Fasher Hospital, one of the last health facilities standing after many were bombed and forced out of service, one doctor has been on duty for three consecutive months. Out of nearly all supplies. — AFP

French govt collapses,
deepening political crisis

FRANCE'S

NEW Prime Minister Sebastian Lecornu and his government resigned on Monday, hours after Lecornu announced his cabinet line-up, making it the shortest-lived administration in modern French history and deepening the country’s political crisis. The unexpected resignation came after allies and foes alike threatened to topple the new government, with Lecornu saying that meant he could not do his job. The announcement drove stocks and the euro sharply lower.

Opposition parties immediately urged President Emmanuel Macron to resign, or call a snap parliamentary election, saying there was no other way out of the crisis. Lecornu, who was Macron's fifth prime minister in two years, stayed in the job for only 27 days. His government lasted just 14 hours, highlighting divisions in the French parliament as the euro zone’s second-largest economy struggles to put its finances in order.

French politics has been increasingly unstable since Macron’s re-election in 2022 for want of any party or grouping holding a parliamentary majority. Macron’s decision to call a snap parliamentary election last year deepened the crisis by producing an even more fragmented parliament. The centrist president could now call new snap elections, resign or try to appoint yet another prime minister - who could be a politician or a technocrat. In past months, Macron, whose mandate runs until May 2027, has repeatedly ruled out



French outgoing PM Sebastian Lecornu delivers a statement at the Hotel Matignon in Paris. — Reuters

The unexpected resignation came after allies and foes alike threatened to topple the new government, with Lecornu saying that meant he could not do his job. The announcement drove stocks and the euro sharply lower

stepping down or calling elections. He is yet to react publicly to Lecornu’s resignation.

BFM TV showed footage of Macron walking by the Seine, cutting a lonely figure. In the opposition, many rushed to ask for Macron to call new snap parliamentary elections or quit. “This joke has gone on long enough, the farce must end,” far-right Rassemblement National leader Marine Le Pen said.

Mathilde Panot, of the hard-left France Unbowed, said: “The countdown has begun. Macron must go.” David Lisnard, of the conservative Republicans, was also among those who called on Macron to leave.

The Republicans’ party chief Bruno Retailleau, the outgoing interior minister, whose tweet lashing out at the cabinet line-up on Sunday was key in the latest crisis, was more cautious, saying the ball was in Macron’s camp and he must

speak soon. “If there is a deadlock, then we will have to return to the voting booth. But I think there are other ways before it comes to that,” he said. To explain why he could not go forward and strike compromises with rival parties, Lecornu blamed the “egos” of opposition politicians who rigidly stuck to their manifestos, while those inside his minority coalition were focusing on their own presidential ambitions. Retailleau is thought to be considering a bid for president.

On the streets of Paris, many were shocked at the worsening instability. “I’ve never seen this,” said 79-year old pensioner Gerard Duseteu. “I’m almost ashamed, even, to be French.” Some said fresh elections seemed like the only option. “We cannot continue like this,” said 20-year old political sciences student Marius Loyer.

After weeks of consultations with political parties across the board, Lecornu, a close ally of Macron, had appointed his ministers on Sunday and they had been set to hold their first meeting on Monday afternoon. But the new cabinet line-up had angered opponents and allies alike, who either found it too right-wing or not sufficiently so, raising questions on how long it could last.

Paris’ \$3 trillion CAC 40 dropped by as much as 2 per cent, making it the worst-performing major index in Europe, as banking shares came under heavy fire. It was last down 1.2 per cent. Lecornu’s two predecessors were brought down by parliament over efforts to rein in France’s public spending at a time when ratings agencies and investors are watching closely. — Reuters



ISRAEL DEPORTS 171 GAZA FLOTILLA ACTIVISTS

TEL AVIV: Israel said it deported on Monday 171 more activists who were detained while taking part in an aid flotilla bound for Gaza, including Swedish campaigner Greta Thunberg. The foreign ministry said in a post on X that “171 additional provocateurs from the Sumud flotilla, including Greta Thunberg, were deported today from Israel to Greece and Slovakia”. It added that the deportees were citizens of several countries.

Photos shared with the post showed Thunberg alongside two other women walking through Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion International Airport wearing the grey tracksuits used in Israeli prisons. The 45-vessel flotilla had been aiming to break an Israeli blockade to deliver aid to Gaza. Activists who arrived in Istanbul after being deported from Israel said on Saturday they had been subjected to violence and “treated like animals”. — AFP

DEADLIEST DISASTER

Indonesia school collapse toll rises to 63



The death toll from an Indonesian school collapse rose to 63 on Monday as workers pulled more remains from the rubble of the building that collapsed last week. “We hope we can conclude the recovery today (Monday), and we will return the bodies (to the families),” National Search and Rescue Agency (Basarnas) operations director Yudhi Bramantyo told a press conference on Monday. The collapse was Indonesia’s deadliest disaster so far this year. — AFP

PROVIDING RELIEF

Rescuers scramble to deliver aid in Nepal



Rescuers in Nepal scrambled to deliver emergency aid after days of torrential rain triggered landslides and floods that have killed more than 70 people. “We had to walk long distances through the hills, even fixing ropes to cross the swollen river,” local district police official Laxmi Bhandari said. “Now that the rain has stopped, we are more committed to providing relief and carrying out rescue operations for the village.” — AFP

SNOWFALL IN THE VALLEY

Hundreds escape from Everest blizzard



Hundreds of trekkers stranded by a blizzard near the eastern face of Mount Everest in Tibet have been guided to safety by rescuers, Chinese state media reported, as unusually heavy snow and rainfall pummelled the Himalayas. Some 350 trekkers had reached the small township of Qudang, while contact with the remaining 200-plus trekkers had been made. Hundreds of local villagers and rescue teams had been deployed to help remove snow. — Reuters

Oman-Belarus relations: Rooted in rapport, vision



In a world where diplomacy often revolves around trade exchanges, the Sultanate of Oman continues to follow its own path — one that values the intangible yet powerful force of human connection.

Oman's foreign policy is not just about trade balances or strategic alliances; it is about fostering genuine rapport through people-to-people exchanges, cultural understanding and mutual respect. This philosophy is evident in its enduring relationship with the Republic of Belarus, a bond that has strengthened since its inception in 1992 and is now on the brink of a new chapter.

The state visit of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Belarus this week signifies a crucial moment in bilateral relations. His meeting with President Alexander Lukashenko involved a strategic dialogue to review the progress of agreements made during Lukashenko's visit to Oman in December 2024. The discussions are expected to enhance cooperation across various sectors, with a focus on improving trade and economic ties.

The range of joint investment opportunities between Oman and Belarus is impressive and indicative of a shared vision for sustainable development. From pharmaceutical industries and medical technology to manufacturing, agriculture, and food security, the two nations are exploring synergies that go beyond

traditional trade.

Education and vocational training, renewable energy, information technology, innovation, tourism, healthcare, transport and logistics are all on the agenda — each representing a pillar of future cooperation.

Trade between the two countries already shows a dynamic exchange. Oman imports base metals, electrical machinery, precision instruments and appliances from Belarus, while exporting plant-based products. Belarus, with its strong industrial base in heavy industry, agricultural machinery, and IT, sees Oman as a gateway to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) market of nearly 59 million consumers.

Additionally, Oman's strategic location and advanced port infrastructure provide Belarus with connectivity to emerging markets in Asia and Africa, solidifying the country's role as a logistics and trade hub.

Oman also stands to benefit from Belarus's investment incentives and access to European markets.

This presents an opportunity for Oman to establish technical and economic connections, especially in the fields of artificial intelligence and digital transformation, positioning itself as a regional leader in innovation.

President Lukashenko's visit to Oman in 2024 was a significant milestone in this evolving partnership. His tour of Sohar Port — one of the fastest-growing ports in the region — showcased the port's competitive

advantages, investment incentives and integrated logistics services.

Belarusian stakeholders were introduced to Oman's free zones, dry dock facilities, direct container shipping lines, transshipment services, cold chain logistics and e-commerce solutions.

The visit highlighted Oman's strategic location and its emergence as a global logistics powerhouse, supported by the efforts of Asyad Group to enhance port competitiveness.

On the cultural and tourism front, the launch of charter flights by Belarusian national airline Belavia to Salalah is a significant development. This initiative, stemming from the agreements made in December 2024, allows direct travel between Minsk and Salalah, eliminating the need for connections through other countries.

The impact on tourism is already evident, and with Belavia planning three flights per month, visitor traffic is expected to increase. The visa-free entry for Belarusian citizens for stays up to 14 days further enhances Oman's appeal as a destination.

The significance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's visit to Belarus lies in its role in strengthening bilateral cooperation, expanding strategic partnerships and diversifying Oman's economic ties, particularly with Eastern Europe. This marks the first state visit by His Majesty to Belarus, highlighting Oman's commitment to broadening its international relationships.

‘MY HEART SANK’: SURGING SCAMS ROIL US JOB HUNTERS

BEIYI SEOW AND ANUJ CHOPRA

After a series of interviews, Nicole Becker was ecstatic to receive a job offer from a sportswear brand. But like many Americans navigating a tough job market, she was soon confronted with a sobering reality — the recruiter was a scammer.

From fake job listings to fraudsters posing as real recruiters, employment scams are exploding online — fuelled by a cooling labour market and a boom in generative AI that experts say has made these schemes more sophisticated than ever.

In July, a purported Chinese brand offered Becker — a 37-year-old based in Oregon — a coveted role to lead global communications after an elaborate and legitimate-looking recruitment process that stretched over two weeks.

There were no red flags after an initial online interview with a supposed human resources official was followed by a call with someone calling himself the head of marketing and sales. Then came the offer letter, accompanied by a detailed PowerPoint deck outlining her assigned role, budget, and performance targets for the first six months. Both parties promptly signed the agreement. But a week later, during an onboarding meeting, Becker picked up the first hint that something was amiss. She was told that the company's servers had been destroyed in California's wildfires. As a result, she would have to purchase a laptop and cellphone from a designated retailer herself, with the promise of reimbursement in her first paycheck. “That’s when my heart sank and I was like, ‘oh no, I fell for a fake job,’” Becker said.

Employment-related scams jumped by over 1,000 per cent from May through July, a period when new graduates typically search for jobs, according to the US firm McAfee. Nearly 1 in 3 Americans report receiving job offer scams via text message, highlighting how “these schemes have moved beyond email into our daily conversations,” McAfee said. The firm’s research shows victims lost an average of \$1,471 per scam, with \$12 billion reported lost to fraud last year, a 21 per cent increase compared to the previous year. “We’re seeing a perfect storm of factors — a tight labour market, where more people are urgently competing for fewer opportunities, is creating pressure that scammers exploit,” Lisa Plaggemier, National Cybersecurity Alliance said. — AFP

Can good motives excuse poor leadership choices?

WHEN we talk about leadership, people often point to vision, strategy, or charisma. We celebrate leaders who can rally a team, paint a picture of the future, or inspire action with their words.

But if you strip it down to the core, leadership is not just about what a leader can see or say; it's about justice and fairness. Those two principles shape whether people trust and follow, not only because of what a leader achieves, but also because of how they treat others along the way.

This is where the conversation becomes complicated.

If a leader's intentions are good, does that excuse their mistakes? It's an old moral question, but in the world of leadership, it becomes very real. Imagine a leader who distributes resources unevenly but insists it was unintentional, “I only wanted what was best.” Do the good motives soften the impact of the harm done? Or should the measure of leadership be not just what was meant, but what was lived and experienced by others?

We're inclined to give leaders the benefit of the doubt. When they say, “I meant well”, it resonates with us because intention feels like a window into their character. And yes, intention matters. It reveals values, motivations, and whether a leader truly cares for the people they serve. Leaders who genuinely want to uplift, protect, or empower others usually earn trust, even when their actions miss the mark.

But intention isn't the whole story. Justice demands more than what is hidden in someone's heart. Justice looks at outcomes. Fairness is



DR ASMA AL YAHYAEI

The writer is an assistant professor at SQU

History rarely remembers intentions kindly. It remembers outcomes. It remembers whether people were treated fairly, whether justice was served and whether dignity was preserved

measured by what actually happens, not by what someone hoped would happen. Take the example of a nurse manager who sincerely aims to divide work fairly across a busy hospital ward. Her intention may be pure, but if she consistently ends up overwhelming the same group of staff while others carry less weight, injustice is still present. The fairness that was promised is not the fairness that was delivered. And here's the thing: teams don't live with what a leader meant to do; they live with the consequences of what was actually done. Leaders can say, “Trust me, my motives were good,” but that doesn't erase fatigue, conflict, or inequity felt on the ground. Intention may explain, but it does not but it does not excuse.

That's why fairness becomes the truest test of leadership. It shows itself in everyday life: in how opportunities are shared, in how conflicts are resolved and in how accountability is applied. A leader who leans too heavily on good will without checking results risks slipping into a kind of blind confidence, where they value how they see themselves more than how others experience them. Justice, on the other hand, forces leaders out of themselves. It demands they pay attention to impact, to consequences, to the voices of those affected by their choices.

History offers plenty of cautionary tales. Leaders throughout time have justified questionable choices under the banner of good intentions. Some claimed they were protecting stability, others argued they were defending tradition, and many insisted they were acting for the “greater good.” But history rarely remembers intentions kindly. It

remembers outcomes. It remembers whether people were treated fairly, whether justice was served, and whether dignity was preserved.

This doesn't mean intention is meaningless. In fact, without good intentions, leadership can quickly become manipulative or self-serving. A leader who aims only for personal gain, even if outcomes occasionally look fair, cannot sustain trust. Intention matters because it guides direction. But fairness matters because it delivers reality.

Think of it as a balance between soil and fruit. Intention is the soil; it nourishes, sets the tone and determines what has the chance to grow. But justice is the fruit, the visible, tangible outcome that people can actually experience. No one can eat good soil; they rely on the fruit. And if the fruit is bitter, no one is comforted by the claim that the soil was rich.

So, can good intentions justify poor leadership decisions? The honest answer is no, not on their own. Intention may soften judgement, but it does not replace justice. A leader cannot hide behind what they meant to do and ignore the consequences of what they actually did. At the same time, intention should not be dismissed. Without it, leadership becomes mechanical. With it, leadership gains heart. But only when intention is paired with fairness do we see leadership that truly serves.

In the end, good intentions are the soil, but justice is the fruit. Leaders who truly serve cannot rely on one without the other. Because in the end, history won't measure what they meant to do. It will measure what they actually did.

May Sindbad sail to many lands...



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

The writer is senior editor of Observer

AS A child, spending summer holidays in Oman also meant enjoying half an hour of cartoons on the Sultanate of Oman Television. Drawing and reading books were also part of the hobbies children looked up to those days, and Sindbad the Sailor's adventures were something that I loved to ponder about.

Can you imagine the delight when I had the opportunity to watch this hero in an opera setting?

The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) began the 2025/2026 season with the world premiere of 'Sindbad, The Omani Sailor.' It is the authentic Arab opera of Oman. The production is a collaboration between ROHM and MÜPA Budapest, one of Europe's largest performing arts centres.

Setting the stage for action was the folklore group from Sur, Al Ajyal. The group has enjoyed a national cultural presence since its founding in 1984. Immediately after their performance, the screen changed to the setting of a bustling coast city, and the performers merged into the crowd. From then on, the Hungarian Radio Symphony Orchestra took over.

The story begins at a vibrant port full of people eagerly cheering and welcoming the sailors back home. And I sat wondering, could it be in Suhar?

And then Sindbad appeared - so here he is, I thought to myself. Ragga Eldin played the role of Sindbad, and as he came out of the ship, I was eager to know where the

adventure would take him.

With no time wasted, a stern commissioner arrives to announce that Sindbad must immediately report to the ruler (Reda El Wakil). The story sets Sindbad sailing off to find the ruler's daughter, The Secret of Life, but her older sister, Fairouz (Dima Bawab), who is engaged to Sindbad, also makes her way into the dhow in a disguise only to be captured by the minister, Samaan (Ashraf Sewailam). The manipulative minister was happy that he had sent Sindbad back to the sea and thus separated him from Fairouz. "If you want to be successful, never hit from the front," says the minister, who turns out to be the villain.

And the setting changes to a starlit sky with a crescent moon when Sindbad starts his journey. He eagerly gives charity to a stranger, who in return gifts him 'Samsamah' - the sword - and Sindbad says the Sword of Salvation is in his hands.

Fairouz joins the journey against the wishes of Sindbad but has the Book of Light, which talks about a secret of perfume that brings back the lost one. The manuscript also talks of an island.

Riding off into the sea, the situation is one of despair, but for Sindbad, failure was never a destiny.

Now, to make the plot tough, there is a sorceress (Gala El Hadidi) who was thrown out and wants to take revenge. Teaming up with the minister, she casts a spell to make violent waves rise and drown Sindbad and his sailors.

The Royal Opera House Muscat began the 2025/2026 season with the world premiere of 'Sindbad, The Omani Sailor.' It is the authentic Arab opera of Oman

When Sindbad feels desperate with his ship broken and his sailors feeling hopeless on the cursed island, in comes a mysterious pirate and saves them with his magical flute. "Despair will never reach me," says the pirate (Hany El Shafei). And together they fight the common enemies.

The sets were remarkable, with authentic designs that made one think they were in a real castle in Oman, a port and a wilderness. The missing princess, Haytt, the Secret of Life, was portrayed by Dana al Balushi, and it shows how local talent can benefit from productions made in the country. Just like the Omani folk music, oud was also incorporated into the production, performed by Nibras al Mullahi, a leading Omani oud virtuoso, and not to forget the Omani Opera Choir. A few children also had their debut appearance on the operatic stage.

The costumes were colourful, with the ruler in sober colours, Fairouz in the traditional colours of turquoise and pink, Princess Secret of Life in yellow, Sindbad in a white dishdasha and green bisht (cloak), and the minister in a black dishdasha and maroon bisht.

I was intrigued and wanted to get a closer look to see if Fairouz was actually wearing the traditional five-finger rings of Oman.

The wait for the princess, The Secret of Life, continues with the fragrance, and when the ruler is about to give up, a ship arrives, and she steps out to the joy of her family and the people of the land.

And hope is reborn.

YEAR AFTER NIGERIA FLOODS, SURVIVORS LEFT HIGH AND DRY

ADAMU ALIYU NGULDE

A year after the floodwaters crashed through the northeastern Nigerian city of Maiduguri, the place where Maryam Jidda's house used to stand is still an empty patch of mud.

More than 300,000 residents were displaced and dozens killed when a dam outside the city burst in September 2024, the ageing structure suddenly ripped apart after years of neglect and abnormally heavy rains. The mass displacement added to the pressure Maiduguri was already under - a city where tens of thousands of people were already living in camps or on the streets after fleeing militant groups Boko Haram and IS West Africa Province. Today, many flood victims are little better off than they were a year ago.

Jidda and her nine children now live with a neighbour, crammed into a single room. "When the flood came, everything we owned was destroyed," Jidda, 75, said.

Her family was already destitute when the flood came, after her son, the main breadwinner, died.

She was eking out a living selling kola nuts, but has been unable to raise the capital to restart her business since the disaster. She now lives on the "kindness of neighbours".

Jidda first came to Maiduguri 11 years ago, running from militants, who since 2009 have been waging a war against the state.

She was among the few fortunate who could avoid the displacement camps. Her family purchased a two-bedroom house in the city's densely populated Gwange neighbourhood.

Aisha Ali Adamu, a 45-year-old widow, and her eight children have also been living on handouts from neighbours and local charities since she lost her home in the flood. Her children have been out of school since last year.

"I can't afford school uniforms, books and writing materials for my children. We are struggling to find what to eat," said Adamu, who lost her groundnut oil extracting business to the torrent. Even before the flood, children dropping out or never attending school was a major problem in Borno state, where some 700,000 kids in the state have no access to education. Half of them have been displaced by militant violence, according to official figures. Over the past decade, more than two million people have fled their homes in northeast Nigeria.

Many have sought refuge in Maiduguri as well as neighbouring Niger, Chad and Cameroon.

Although Nigerian officials have been closing displaced persons camps and returning people to their deserted villages, Maiduguri is saturated with those unwilling to leave. A militant attack in September on returned Nigerians in the town of Darul Jamal, near the border, killed at least 63 people, underscoring their fears. — AFP

Trump's remittance tax hits the 'vulnerable'

US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP seems intent on filling America's coffers at the expense of other countries and the world's most vulnerable people. In addition to foreign-aid cuts and steep tariff increases, the administration's One Big Beautiful Bill Act has introduced a new 1 per cent tax on remittances from the United States that are funded by physical instruments such as cash, cheques and money orders. This "tax on the poor", as Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum refers to it, will impose severe economic and social costs on developing countries.

The amount of money sent by migrant workers to family and friends in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) has increased more than 17-fold over the last three decades, reaching \$685 billion in 2024 – more than official development assistance and foreign direct investment combined. Remittances now comprise at least 3 per cent of GDP in more than 77 countries and far exceed the World Bank Group's annual lending to developing countries (\$128 billion) and the International Monetary Fund's total outstanding loans (around \$145 billion).

This immense growth signifies a fundamental shift: remittances are now the most direct and dynamic link between migration and development, serving as both a source of foreign-exchange reserves and as a macroeconomic stabilising force in LMICs. Trump's new 1 per cent tax threatens to undermine these global gains and further increase the opportunity cost of brain drain. The justification for Trump's remittance tax mirrors that for his trade war. Just as America's imports have grown faster than its exports, widening the trade deficit, remittance outflows from the US have increased more rapidly than inflows. For example, while around \$200 billion was transferred out of the US in the form of remittances in 2021, only \$7 billion was sent to the



Remittances now comprise at least 3 per cent of GDP in more than 77 countries.



HIPPOLYTE FOFACK

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US from other countries – a 34-per cent increase in net outflows from 2017. America is now the world's top remittance-sending country, with at least 134 recipient countries in 2021 (the most recent year with reliable bilateral data).

Trump's new tax will have far-reaching consequences. In the US, it is expected to discourage immigration, deter unauthorised employment and reduce net resource outflows. Preliminary estimates suggest that the levy, which applies to all remittance senders regardless of immigration or citizenship status, will generate just under \$10 billion in revenue over the next decade. And those who share Trump's zero-sum thinking – that money sent abroad is money not spent on US goods and services – even argue it could boost domestic consumption and growth.

But the global implications are more worrying. Research has shown that transaction cost is a significant predictor of formal remittance volumes, implying that Trump's tax would reduce these outflows. A decline in remittances, coupled with cuts to international aid, could cause currency depreciation in LMICs, fuelling inflation and

exacerbating macroeconomic instability. These risks would be particularly acute for countries with high debt burdens, leaving them even more exposed to trade or capital shocks.

In the most vulnerable LMICs, remittances also play an important role at the microeconomic level. These funds allow households to smooth consumption, manage economic shocks, and invest in health and education, all of which are crucial for reducing poverty and improving welfare. Evidence from Asian developing economies shows that a one-percentage-point increase in international remittances as a share of GDP can reduce the poverty gap ratio by 22.6 per cent. Similarly, a study of 122 developing countries between 1990 and 2015 found that a 10-per cent increase in per capita remittances lowered malnutrition and child mortality rates.

Not only does Trump's remittance tax threaten to erode these benefits. It also runs counter to the international community's commitment, as part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, to reduce transfer costs of migrant remittances, which averaged 6.4 per cent at the end of 2023, to less than 3 per cent by 2030. The higher fees will steer migrants towards informal channels, such as cryptocurrency and hawala, and may even expand the black market for such services, which carries substantial risks. If there is a silver lining, it is that Trump's new tax has highlighted the dangers for LMICs of relying on remittances to support economic development and finance essential items such as food, education, healthcare, and housing. Although steady remittance inflows have lowered the opportunity cost of brain drain, they do not address its underlying causes.

Achieving this will require LMICs to devise strategies that support growth, increase employment opportunities, close technological gaps and boost productivity.

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SPANISH LEAGUE



Sevilla's first league win over Barcelona since 2015 provisionally lifted them to fourth in the table.

SEVILLA THRASH BARCELONA 4-1

SEVILLE, Spain: Sevilla thrashed Barcelona 4-1 on Sunday, ending the champions' unbeaten start in LaLiga and denying them an opportunity to return to the top of the table.

Sevilla's first league win over Barcelona since 2015 provisionally lifted them to fourth in the table with 13 points from eight matches. Barcelona remained second with 19 points, two below leaders Real Madrid.

"It's one of the happiest days of my life. We deserved to win from start to finish," said Jose Angel Carmona, who scored Sevilla's third goal. Barcelona made a muted start and had no shots on target in the first half an hour, while Sevilla probed early on, looking to unleash Alexis Sanchez with long balls.

Sevilla took the lead in the 13th minute, after Isaac Romero went down while jostling for the ball with Ronald Araujo near Barcelona's six-yard box, and the referee awarded a penalty to Sevilla after taking a look at the VAR replay. Sanchez sent former Arsenal teammate Wojciech Szczesny the wrong way to convert the spot kick.

Szczesny stopped Sevilla from doubling their lead in the 27th minute, saving Romero's shot from inside the box. Romero, however, doubled Sevilla's lead 10 minutes later, as Ruben Vargas sprinted past Barcelona's high defensive line to chase down a through ball near the box, and crossed to the Spanish forward who dispatched a first-time finish.

Marcus Rashford reduced the deficit for Barcelona late in added time before the break, hammering Pedri's lobbed pass into the net from a tight angle with his left foot.

Barcelona pushed forward in the second half, and were handed an opportunity to equalise when Adnan Januzaj brought down Alejandro Balde in the box, but Robert Lewandowski fired wide from the penalty spot in the 76th minute.

The visitors' hopes of salvaging a point ended in the 90th minute when Carmona shot through a defender's legs to find the net and put Sevilla 3-1 ahead. Second-half substitute Akor Adams made it 4-1 five minutes into added time, scoring from Chidera Ejuke's pass.

"We lacked intensity, we couldn't get the ball out of our half, we didn't know what to do with the ball... we were never at our best," Barcelona midfielder Pedri said.

"We need to improve a lot of things so that we can start winning games again after the break."

Sevilla, who have won two games in a row, will continue their league campaign after the international break against Mallorca on October 18, the same day Barcelona host Girona.

— Reuters



The new facilities will significantly enhance Oman's ability to host international events and nurture local talent.

3 new grounds to come up at OCA in Al Amerat

WITH WORLD-CLASS facilities drawing praise from visiting teams, Oman Cricket plans three additional grounds in Al Amerat, signalling a new era of growth and international event hosting for the Sultanate. Oman Cricket (OC) Chairman Pankaj Khimji recently unveiled plans for a sweeping expansion of the Oman Cricket Academy in Al Amerat.

The announcement comes as the Sultanate gears up to host the ICC Men's T20 World Cup East Asia-Pacific (EAP) Qualifier 2025, which begins on October 8, Wednesday, and features nine nations, including hosts Oman. Three teams will qualify for the World Cup to be played in India and Sri Lanka early next year. The new facilities will significantly enhance Oman's ability to host international events and nurture local talent, underlining the country's emergence as one of the fastest-growing cricketing Associate nations in the world.

"We are very privileged and thankful to the ICC for giving us the opportunity to host another major event," said Khimji, as he reviewed preparations for the hosting of the World Cup qualifier. "Oman has developed world-class cricket infrastructure over the years — built with a lot of blood, sweat, and tears, and with immense support from the government and private sector. We are now enjoying the fruits of that effort, but the next phase is about scaling up."

THREE NEW GROUNDS

Khimji revealed that OC has secured land across the road from the current academy complex in Al Amerat to build three new grounds. The first of these — referred to as the 'third ground' — is expected to be completed by the end of next year, with



Oman Cricket chief Pankaj Khimji (L) with Treasurer Alkesh Joshi.

the others to follow in phases under a comprehensive master development plan.

"We are working on a detailed master plan that includes three new turf grounds," Khimji said. "The immediate focus is on the third ground, which we aim to complete by next year. The additional facilities will give us more resources to host bigger and better international tournaments in the years ahead."

The expansion builds on Oman Cricket's reputation for excellence. Since hosting matches during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021, the Al Amerat venue has drawn widespread praise from international teams and officials for its top-tier facilities, immaculate pitches, and hospitality.

"Teams that visit Oman often tell us our grounds and infrastructure are on par with full-member nations," Khimji added. "That's a tremendous compliment and a motivation for us to keep improving."

MOMENTUM BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

While the expansion marks a major

milestone in Oman's cricketing journey, Khimji and his team remain equally focused on the national squad's on-field growth. "Our objective has always been cricket, cricket, cricket," said Alkesh Joshi, OC Treasurer. "We're less focused on commercialisation and more on building a strong, competitive team."

Joshi, who served as team manager during the recent Asia Cup, said the players' strong showing against India in that tournament gave them a huge confidence boost.

"The boys played phenomenal cricket against India, and that performance gave them belief," he said. "If they can compete at that level, they can certainly excel at the Associate level."

Joshi credited the team's improved fitness, agility, and fielding to new additions in the support staff — including strength and conditioning coach Shiva and physiotherapist Dr Ashish.

"You can see the difference on the field," he said. "The players are fitter, more alert, and more disciplined. The approach to fitness and fielding has improved."

Looking at the upcoming World Cup Qualifier Joshi said that "the team hopes to make it to the ICC T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka next year for the fourth time.

Oman is the only associate nation from Asia to have played in three T20I World Cups (2016, 2021 and 2024) and we hope to make it two in a row by qualifying at home this time," Joshi said. "That's something we're incredibly proud of, and we want to build on that legacy."

"There's no pressure, only pride," Joshi said. "Playing at home is an advantage — and an opportunity to show the cricketing world what Oman can deliver, both on and off the field."

Free diving star Al Ghailani emerges second in global rankings

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

With calmness that mirrors the stillness of the sea before a dive, Omani free diver Omar al Ghailani speaks about his lifelong journey beneath the waves a journey that began in childhood when he accompanied his father and grandfather to the sea, fishing and learning its rhythms, "I was raised by the sea," he says with a confident smile.

"The ocean is a part of me, since I was a child, I felt that the depths were calling my name." Today, Al Ghailani stands as the first Arab, Gulf and Omani diver to consistently achieve podium finishes in international free diving championships.

On Saturday, he secured second place in the overall rankings for international free diving, adding

another achievement to his remarkable record of one world record, 13 continental records and 37 national records, along with three third place and three second place finishes at the World Championships.

Behind these triumphs lies a story of sacrifice and passion, Al Ghailani made the life changing decision to resign from his position at Oman Airports to dedicate himself fully to his sport.

"It was not an easy decision, but I believed that free diving is more than a hobby. It's a mission, representing Oman internationally is an honour worth any sacrifice." Al Ghailani's philosophy is simple yet powerful, he competes to win, not just to participate.

"In free diving, every second counts, and every breath matters, I approach every dive as if it's a test of my control, patience and focus, my



Omar al Ghailani hopes to inspire a new generation of Omani divers.

goal is always to stay among the top three."

For him, success in free diving is not only about physical endurance but also mental strength, "Underwater, there's nothing but your heartbeat," he says softly.

"It's a dialogue between your mind and your body between fear and belief. Mental training is even more important than physical conditioning, because inner peace is what allows you to reach new depths."

Now, as he prepares for upcoming competitions, Omar's ambitions go beyond breaking records, hopes to inspire a new generation of Omani divers to follow his path and embrace the deep.

"We are the sons of the sea," the free diving star concludes, it's in our blood, and we will keep diving to carry Oman's flag to every depth of the world."



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BREAKAWAYWIN



Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar celebrates as he wins the the men's Elite Road Race at the European Cycling Championship 2025. — AFP

POGACAR CAPS TOP SEASON WITH EUROPEAN CROWN

GUILHERAND-GRANGES, France: Tadej Pogacar delivered a trademark 75 km breakaway to win the European road race title in France on Sunday, adding the stars jersey to the world title he won a week ago and his fourth Tour de France triumph in July.

Pogacar was unrelenting in his solo rampage, only slowing to cruise across the line 31sec ahead of Remco Evenepoel, who attempted to push Pogacar all the way, while French teenager Paul Seixas was given a rousing welcome for bronze at 3min 41sec.

With Pogacar’s closest rivals Jonas Vingegaard and Evenepoel also lining up here, large crowds cheered the riders through 202 km of narrow, winding roads in the remote Ardeche region, where a familiar scenario unfolded.

Decked out in his world champion’s rainbow jersey, the Slovenian Pogacar broke away from an audacious distance. But Belgium’s Olympic champion Evenepoel dug in for an admirable long-haul chase. Vingegaard had already been dropped on a hill halfway through as a collective Belgian effort at the head of the peloton whittled down the field to a dozen pretenders.

That attack decimated the Slovenian team around Pogacar. “I saw I was losing teammates, it wasn’t the plan to go from there, but it had to be there, it was the hardest hill and that was my advantage there,” Pogacar said after the race. As Pogacar opened a one-minute lead, Evenepoel teamed up with French 19-year old Seixas to lead the resistance, and they were joined by Spain’s Juan Ayuso and Italy’s Christian Scaroni.

As Pogacar’s lead extended, Evenepoel accelerated away in pursuit of the cycling superstar, who signed a reported \$54 million six-year contract last November with Team UAE.

“Second place again,” said Evenepoel, who also came in behind Pogacar at the world title race in Kigali. “It’s always the same at the championships, the others didn’t want to work with me,” he said. “It’s a bit frustrating but they had their team orders, you have to accept it.” — AFP



BK8 Gresini Racing MotoGP's Fermin Aldeguer celebrates after crossing the line to win the MotoGP race. — Reuters

Aldeguer wins in Indonesia as Marquez, Bezzecchi crash

MARQUEZ, BEZZECCHI INVOLVED IN THE CRASH	SECOND YOUNGEST RIDER TO WIN THE RACE	ROOKIE ALDEGUER WINS FIRST INDONESIA GP
NEWLY crowned world champion Marc Marquez and polesitter Marco Bezzecchi crashed out at high speed after colliding in the opening lap as Spanish rookie Fermin Aldeguer won a chaotic Indonesia MotoGP on Sunday. Spanish great Marquez “suffered an injury to his right collarbone” and will fly to Madrid for medical tests, his Ducati team tweeted, with fears he may have a fracture. Ducati-Gresini rider Aldeguer pulled away and cruised to a maiden victory after Bezzecchi ran into the back of Marquez, sending both flying off their bikes. Aldeguer finished more than six seconds ahead of KTM’s Pedro Acosta in second and nearly eight seconds in front of teammate Alex Marquez in third. “I don’t believe it. I am super happy. To be a rookie, we are doing incredible work. We have to continue like this,” said Aldeguer, 20, who secured his first MotoGP win.	Bezzecchi dominated in qualifying on Saturday with a lap record at the Mandalika track, but the Italian had a disastrous start on Sunday in humid conditions on Lombok island. After slipping from pole to seventh behind Marquez, he tried to overtake the seven-time world champion but slammed into the back of him. It sent the pair sliding into the gravel. Both walked away from the collision with Marquez — who has a history of bad injuries — clutching his right shoulder. Ducati team manager Davide Tardozzi said there was evidence of a fracture on Marquez’s right shoulder. Marquez was crowned MotoGP champion last week at Japan’s Motegi and had already set a single-season points record for a MotoGP rider of 545 before Sunday’s race. His points total was boosted by a sixth-place finish in the sprint because Luca Marini was hit with a post-race tyre pressure penalty.	PODIUM BATTLE Despite Aldeguer storming to victory there was a dramatic battle for the podium places between half a dozen riders. Alex Rins’ Yamaha began to falter and he fell out of podium contention as Alex Marquez rose to take third and increase his grip on second place in the overall standings behind his brother. “I was a little bit better every lap. Congrats to my teammate, he had an amazing weekend. For us it is really important to be here on the podium,” said Alex Marquez. Brad Binder finished fourth, followed by Marini, Raul Fernandez and Fabio Quartararo. Second-placed Acosta said he still wanted to improve but was content with a podium place after the frenetic battle with his rivals. “We have to be happy all the time we are on the podium. We have many races where we have a good rhythm and a good potential, maybe not for the win but to be on the podium,” he said. — AFP

India crush Pakistan by 88 runs in Women’s World Cup

COLOMBO: India thumped arch-rivals Pakistan by 88 runs in a Women’s World Cup clash but the game was marred by controversy as players refused to shake hands at Colombo’s R Premadasa Stadium on Sunday.

The two captains avoided the customary handshake at the toss and there was hardly a glance exchanged during play.

Once the formalities were done, both sides made a beeline to their dressing rooms, skipping the traditional post-match greetings, a frosty ending to a heated encounter.

The animosity that brewed during the recent men's Asia Cup in Dubai seemed to spill over to the women's fixture in Colombo.

Even before a ball was bowled, controversy struck when the toss went the wrong way.

Pakistan skipper Fatima Sana's call of “tails” was misheard by match referee Shandre Fritz and announcer Mel Jones as “heads”. When the coin landed heads up, the decision was incorrectly awarded to Fatima, who chose to field.

The drama didn’t stop there. Pakistan’s Muneeba Ali was caught short in bizarre fashion.

After surviving a leg-before appeal, she wandered out of her crease and though she had grounded her bat when the throw came in, it was in the air when the bails were dislodged.

The television umpire ruled her



India's Kranti Goud (C) celebrates with Harmanpreet Kaur (L) and Smriti Mandhana after taking the wicket of Pakistan's Aliya Riaz in Colombo. — AFP

out amid heated protests from the Pakistan camp.

“We are very happy. This was a very important game for us. I am sure people back home are happy too. There are few areas to improve

but, for now, we’ll savour this win,” said Indian skipper Harmanpreet Kaur.

India’s innings was built on a series of useful starts, with Harleen Deol’s composed 46 off 65 balls anchoring the effort.

Wicketkeeper Richa Ghosh provided the late fireworks, blazing an unbeaten 35 off 20 deliveries with three fours and two towering sixes to lift India to a competitive 247.

Pakistan seamer Diana Baig bowled with heart, claiming 4-47 in a spirited spell.

Three of those wickets came in her final burst, though she was denied a five-for after overstepping when Jemimah Rodrigues was caught behind on two.

Pakistan’s chase never got out of first gear. The Indian new-ball attack swung the ball late, nipping out early wickets before the spinners tightened the screws.

Off-spinners Deepti Sharma and Sneh Rana shared five scalps between them while seamer Kranti Goud’s three-wicket burst earned her the player of the match award.

Sidra Amin, batting at number three, stood tall amid the ruins. Her elegant 81 off 106 balls, laced with nine boundaries and a six, was a lone hand in an otherwise sorry tale.

The win sent India to the top of the table in the eight-nation tournament while Pakistan languish in sixth, still searching for their first points. — AFP

BUSINESS

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Oman Housing Bank's stand at Urban October.

OHB APPROVES RO 4.3M IN HOUSING LOANS FOR INTEGRATED NEIGHBOURHOODS

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

Oman Housing Bank (OHB) is accelerating access to affordable homes through tailored financing and closer collaboration with real estate developers, according to Ammar al Nasri, Director — Media and Public Relations.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Urban October event, Al Nasri said that OHB had received, through its Housing Applications Financing Initiative, 189 applications with a combined value exceeding RO 10 million. Approved loans reached RO 4.3 million for properties in integrated cities and residential neighbourhoods.

Al Nasri said the bank offers loans of up to RO 80,000 for homes in integrated neighbourhoods with no waiting period, helping beneficiaries secure suitable housing faster and improving the overall efficiency of the housing-finance system.

To widen choice for buyers, Oman Housing Bank has signed cooperation agreements with nine developers, aiming to deliver a broader mix of housing options within fully serviced, master-planned communities.

Inflows lift Khazaen’s total investments to RO 800m

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, OCT 6

UNDERSCORING its strong investment appeal, Khazaen Economic City — the Sultanate of Oman’s integrated logistics and manufacturing hub in Barka — attracted investments totalling RO 276.5 million during the first six months of 2025, marking one of the fastest rates of inflow since its establishment six years ago.

This brings cumulative investments across the hub to just over RO 800 million, distributed across pharmaceuticals, food logistics and industries, logistics, packaging and light industries.

According to Duqm Economist, the newsletter of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), a total of 19 new agreements were signed during the first half of the year, securing investments of around RO 276.5 million. By comparison, only nine agreements worth RO 5.4 million were concluded during the corresponding period in 2024.

“This represents a 111% increase in the number of agreements and a significant leap in overall investment value”, the newsletter noted in its latest edition. “This accelerated growth



Silal — one of Khazaen’s anchor projects.

“This accelerated growth reflects the rising confidence of both local and international investors in Khazaen’s competitive and attractive investment environment.

reflects the rising confidence of both local and international investors in Khazaen’s competitive and attractive investment environment. The city’s strategic location, integrated infrastructure and investor-friendly facilities across various sectors have further supported this trend”.

The manufacturing segment of Khazaen was the biggest beneficiary, attracting 11 ventures with a total investment of RO 251.47 million in H1 2025. In a distant second was the pharmaceutical sector, which drew four new projects valued at RO 14 million. The food sector saw one new investment worth around RO 1 million.

In a key highlight of its investment promotion activities

this year, a sizable Khazaen delegation travelled to the Indian capital, New Delhi, to showcase opportunities within the hub’s pharma, food and logistics clusters.

Meanwhile, several projects are making notable progress in their development and expansion phases. These include Opal Biopharma (Phase II), Al Zayzafon Factory for Sanitary Materials, Industrial Logistics Complex (Phase II) and the Salalah Mills factory. The Khazaen Central Fruits and Vegetables Market (Silal) is also preparing for a major expansion designed to meet the specific requirements of Silal’s strategic partner, KV Group International, as part of a long-term collaboration.

Oman to open 9,600 new hotel rooms by 2030

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 6

OMAN is set to open 9,600 new hotel rooms between now and 2030, with 2,600 scheduled for completion by the end of 2025, says leading real estate advisory group and property consultant, Cavendish Maxwell. The upcoming keys will boost Oman’s existing inventory of 36,000 rooms by more than 25%, the company said.

Cavendish Maxwell’s latest Oman Hospitality Market Performance insight and analysis reveals that 3-5 star hotel revenues rose to RO 141.2 million (\$367 million) in the first half of 2025, an increase of 18.2% on H1 last year. Room revenues contributed RO 83.7 million (\$217.5 million) — up nearly 22%.

The strong hotel performance has led to 4.8% growth in hospitality sector employment in the country, with 10,800 people now working



The upcoming keys will boost Oman’s existing inventory of 36,000 rooms by more than 25%.

in the industry. 3-5 star hotels welcomed 1.1 million guests between January and June, up 9.2% from 2024.

Khalil al Zadjali, Head of Oman at Cavendish Maxwell, said: “Oman’s hospitality sector is entering a new era, driven by population growth, evolving travel patterns

and strategic government investment. H1 2025 recorded impressive increases in visitors, hotel bookings, revenues, room rates and employment; and we expect this trend to continue in the second half of the year and beyond. “Oman’s population grew by 4.5% last year and 5% in 2023,

with similar increases predicted through the decade. Domestic travel has risen in line with population growth, with Omanis taking longer trips and spending more per visit. While Gulf visitors still account for more than 25% of arrivals into the country, the number of visitors from further afield, including Europe, India and China, is increasing. With tourism expected to contribute 5% to GDP by 2030 — and 10% by 2040 — the sector is set to overtake transport and logistics to become the second most important industry in Oman after hydrocarbons.

“To keep pace, Oman needs to continue to rejuvenate the hotel sector, build new hotels and resorts; and diversify tourism beyond Muscat, creating significant opportunities for investment, development and construction across the country”, added Al Zadjali.

TENDER

PROVISION OF SUPERVISORY CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR DUQM, SADAH, MAHOOT WIND INDEPENDENT POWER PROJECTS

Nama Power and Water Procurement Company (PWP) is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the PWP license.

Tender Description	PWP seeks proposals from eligible and qualified consultants to provide project management and supervisory consultancy services for the Duqm, Sadah, and Mahoot Wind Independent Power Projects (the “Projects”) during their construction, commissioning, and testing.
Tender Number	OPWP/2025/038
Tender Purchase Period	From 6 October 2025 to 20 October 2025
Tender Fee	150 OMR / Free of charges for (SME) with a valid Riyada card
Submission date	20 November 2025 at 12:00 PM Oman Time Zone
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through PWP website (https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx). The payment is done electronically through PWP website. In case of any queries, please send an email to: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.oma.om
Bank Guarantee	A Tender Bond (in the form set out in the tender documents) or a bank certified cheque of not less than 1% of the tender value, to be valid for a period of 120 days from the submission deadline date referred to above. The tender bond or certified cheque shall be enclosed as part of the bid.

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The programme reflects NBO’s ongoing commitment to advancing Oman’s fintech ecosystem.

NBO WRAPS UP ITS FINTECH ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME

MUSCAT: The National Bank of Oman (NBO) has celebrated the successful conclusion of its NBO Hackathon, a flagship initiative under the umbrella of the bank’s Fintech Accelerator Programme.

Held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, at NBO’s Head Office, the event marked the culmination of a 48-hour innovation challenge that brought together 19 teams from across the Sultanate of Oman. Designed to foster innovation, empower young talents and support emerging startups, the programme reflects NBO’s ongoing commitment to advancing Oman’s fintech ecosystem and driving the digital transformation of the financial sector.

The first-place winner, Card Shield, received RO 2,000; Payce took second place, receiving RO 1,000; and Kanzie secured third place, earning RO 500.

At the conclusion of the event, a panel of judges comprising experts from the banking and fintech sectors announced the top three winning teams.

The first-place winner, Card Shield, received RO 2,000; Payce took second place, receiving RO 1,000; and Kanzie secured third place, earning RO 500.

In addition to the cash prizes, the three winning teams will receive a chance to enter the NBO Fintech Accelerator Programme, where they will gain mentorship, funding opportunities and industry exposure to further refine and scale their innovations.

This year’s Hackathon also featured collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, with two teams from the Ministry’s Upgrade Programme taking part in the challenge.

The partnership highlighted the value of cross sector collaboration, as entrepreneurs, developers and innovators came together to create fintech solutions addressing the evolving needs of customers and the banking industry.

Building on the success of last year’s inaugural Fintech Accelerator Programme, NBO announced the launch of its second edition, in collaboration with Al Jabr, reaffirming its commitment to nurturing Oman’s innovation ecosystem.

All five startups that graduated from the previous edition went on to secure investment amounting to \$500,000, enabling them to enter the market, expand their operations and further develop their solutions.

This demonstrates the tangible impact of the initiative in translating ideas into viable enterprises and driving national economic growth.

TARGET LAUNCHES “BUILDING IMPACTFUL NATIONAL AMBITION” PROGRAMME

MUSCAT: Target LLC, one of Oman’s leading contracting and construction companies, has announced the launch of its flagship youth development initiative, BINA — Building Impactful National Ambitions, under the inspiring tagline “From Potential to Empowerment”.

BINA is designed to connect academic learning with real-world industry experience. In collaboration with local universities, the programme



offers fresh Omani graduates and interns of certain construction-related disciplines, an exceptional opportunity to gain on-the-job learning, professional exposure and

holistic experiential development. Participants will work on real-life projects, receive mentorship from industry experts; and develop the confidence and skills needed to thrive in Oman’s dynamic employment market.

By equipping young Omani talent with the right mix of technical knowledge and professional competencies, BINA aims to enhance their employability and prepare them for rewarding careers in the construction sector.

Own the Lexus LX700h SUV with benefits

LEXUS enthusiasts now have the perfect opportunity to own the powerful and luxurious LX700h and enjoy exclusive benefits such as up to 10 years/100,000 km service, free insurance and first-year registration on purchase. The offer is valid across Lexus showrooms in Oman until October 30, 2025.

The LX flagship sports a sophisticated hybrid powertrain, affirming Lexus’ commitment to sustainable innovation without compromise. Beneath its commanding design lies a twin-turbocharged 3.5L V6 engine paired with an advanced hybrid system, producing 457 hp and 650 Nm of torque while achieving an impressive 10.8 km/l efficiency.

This marks a significant milestone being the only LX model previously without a hybrid option.

The LX700h embodies Lexus’ legendary craftsmanship, fusing power with precision. Engineered for both on-road elegance and off-road dominance, the SUV offers unmatched durability and capability. A 10-speed automatic transmission, Multi-Terrain Select and Panoramic View Monitor provide effortless control, while signature Lexus refinement ensures every journey is a sanctuary of

With Lexus Safety System+ 3.0, peace of mind comes standard. Advanced technologies such as Pre-Collision System, Dynamic Radar Cruise Control, Lane Tracing Assist and Auto High Beam safeguard every journey, blending cutting-edge safety with Lexus’ uncompromising philosophy of protection and care.



The LX700h embodies Lexus’ legendary craftsmanship, fusing power with precision.

comfort. Inside, the LX700h reflects the pinnacle of Lexus artistry. Premium leather, ambient lighting and ventilated seats across all rows create an atmosphere of indulgence, while modern conveniences such as wireless charging, USB-C ports throughout, a 10-speaker premium sound system and seamless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto integration elevate connectivity and entertainment. A driver-focused cockpit, complete

with head-up display and smart entry system, ensures every drive is intuitive and commanding.

With Lexus Safety System+ 3.0, peace of mind comes standard. Advanced technologies such as Pre-Collision System, Dynamic Radar Cruise Control, Lane Tracing Assist and Auto High Beam safeguard every journey, blending cutting-edge safety with Lexus’ uncompromising philosophy of protection and care.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATES IN FOOD SECURITY LAB 2025

MUSCAT: Sohar International reaffirmed its dedication to supporting Oman’s national strategic priorities by participating in the launch of the Food Security Lab 2025, a strategic platform aimed at enhancing local and foreign investment in the Sultanate of Oman’s food security sector in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

Organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in collaboration with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and the National Programme for Investment and Export Development “Nazdaher”, the Food Security Lab 2025 provides a national forum to review sector programmes, evaluate



The Lab’s agenda is structured around several key pillars, including investment, sustainability, strategic planning, digital transformation and empowerment.

existing projects and address challenges hindering implementation. The Lab’s agenda is structured around several key pillars, including investment, sustainability, strategic planning, digital transformation and empowerment.

These pillars aim to strengthen Oman’s food security ecosystem, enhance supply chains, foster innovation and create long-term economic value for the Sultanate of Oman.

The Food Security Lab 2025 was inaugurated under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. Representing Sohar International was Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Government and Private Banking Officer.

Bank Muscat organises workshop on AI-driven marketing

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing endeavours to support the entrepreneurship sector, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, organised a workshop titled “AI-Driven Marketing for Businesses” at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in Muscat Governorate.

The workshop was presented by Jess Tang, Founder & CEO of Mavic and former Chief Marketing Officer of Johnson & Johnson; and Mahmoud Bouchlif, Founder & Managing Director of Leantech SG and Mentor of Ignyte by DIFC and was attended by several officials from the Bank as well as a group



This event complements other workshops held previously to empower entrepreneurs and business owners.

of “Najahi” Business Banking customers.

This event complements other workshops held previously to empower entrepreneurs and business owners; and reflects the bank’s commitment to fostering innovation and business growth in Oman.

During the workshop, Jess Tang and Mahmoud Bouchlif shed light on “AI-Driven Marketing for businesses” focusing on various aspects, including how AI can be leveraged to develop efficient marketing strategies and campaigns for entrepreneurs and businesses.

The session explored the use of

modern technologies to analyse data, predict customer behaviour, create automated content. The workshop also provided an opportunity for exchange of ideas and direct interaction with “Najahi” customers.

Practical tools and real-life applications were explored to help participants enhance their marketing efforts and achieve sustainable business growth.

On this occasion, Abdullah bin Hamood al Jufaili, Assistant General Manager — Digital Banking at Bank Muscat, highlighted the Bank’s belief in the vital role of commercial businesses in the national economy.

ADVANCING TOURISM



Port Sultan Qaboos Waterfront, a landmark redevelopment project that will transform Muscat’s historic port into a mixed-use tourism destination

OMRAN SHOWCASES MAJOR TOURISM PROJECTS AT URBAN OCTOBER 2025

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 6

In line with its mandate as the executive arm of the Sultanate of Oman for tourism development, Omran Group is participating in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning’s Urban October event, which opened here on October 6.

This participation underscores Omran Group’s pivotal role as a catalyst for tourism infrastructure and Integrated Tourism Complexes (ITCs), creating destinations that seamlessly combine hospitality, lifestyle and sustainability.

The showcase will also present design models and progress updates on four landmark projects: Madinat Al Irfan, a flagship urban development envisioned by Omran as a catalyst for diversification and sustainable growth. Designed as a vibrant mixed-use destination, it integrates residential, business, hospitality, retail and cultural spaces within a future-ready urban framework. Port Sultan Qaboos Waterfront, a landmark redevelopment project that will transform Muscat’s historic port into an integrated, mixed-use tourism destination.

Four Seasons Resort and Private Residences, Muscat, a luxury beachfront resort on the Al Bustan coast featuring 200 hotel rooms, 100 hotel apartments, five restaurants and premium leisure and sports facilities. This project marks the first entry of the Four Seasons brand into Oman; and, Club Med Musandam Resort, a 215,000 sq m beachfront development in Khasab with 300 rooms and extensive leisure amenities, blending authentic Arabian hospitality with world-class experiences, while representing the first Club Med resort in the Middle East.

RENEWABLE ENERGY OUTPUT HITS 2.4 TWH IN OMAN

MUSCAT: Oman’s renewable energy generation reached 2.4 terawatt-hours (TWh) in 2024, underscoring the country’s steady progress towards a more diversified and sustainable energy mix, according to new data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The figures show that total electricity production rose to 49.1 TWh in 2024, up from 45.0 TWh in 2023. Natural gas remained the dominant source, generating 44.8

TWh, while renewables played an expanding role. Solar power accounted for 2.3 TWh of the total renewable output, with the Ibri 2 Solar Power Plant leading the way at 1.56 TWh. Wind energy contributed 0.1 TWh.

On the hydrocarbons front, Oman’s oil reserves are projected to stabilise at 4.8 billion barrels in 2024. Oil production is expected to reach 363.3 million barrels, with exports of around 308.4 million barrels. Natural gas reserves stood

at 658.5 billion cubic metres, while domestic consumption reached 56.5 billion cubic metres. LNG exports totalled 12 million metric tonnes during the year.

The water sector saw a slight dip in production, totalling 519.7 million cubic metres in 2024, compared with 520.4 million cubic metres the previous year — a marginal decline of 0.1 per cent. Muscat Governorate recorded the highest distributed quantity at 136.9 million cubic metres. — ONA

14m Al Muzn Project launched in Samayil

SAEED ALMASHARFI
MUSCAT, OCT 6

The launch of Al Muzn District, the first fully integrated residential neighbourhood in the Wilayat of Samayil, was announced as part of Oman’s modern urban development efforts. The project comes under the national “Sorouh” initiative for integrated residential neighbourhoods, supervised by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, with the aim of providing sustainable, modern communities that meet citizens’ needs and enhance their quality of life.

With a total investment of RO 14 million, the project is being developed in direct partnership with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, while Signature Properties undertakes the execution and development.

The project comprises 160 housing units, to be delivered in three phases and features three different villa designs to meet the diverse needs of families, supported by comprehensive infrastructure and services including road networks, green spaces; and community and recreational facilities.

Al Muzn places special emphasis on eligible citizen groups, offering additional payment facilities and reduced financial requirements, enabling them to own homes at lower costs and under easier terms. This approach supports families in achieving residential stability within a fully integrated urban environment.



The project is expected to generate significant economic and developmental benefits.

The project is expected to generate significant economic and developmental benefits, including stimulating the real estate sector in Samayil and surrounding areas, creating direct and indirect job opportunities during construction and operation; and boosting commercial and service activities linked to the neighbourhood.

It will also enhance Samayil’s attractiveness as an investment destination, while reinforcing the role of public-private partnerships in delivering major development projects.

The launch took place during the activities of “October Urbanism 2025”, which opened on Monday, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre with the participation of experts and real estate developers from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The exhibition runs until Thursday, October 9, in cooperation with the Home & Building Show and aims to showcase the latest urban projects and building technologies, exchange expertise and strengthen collaboration opportunities among companies, investors and the wider public.

Global stocks steady even as political upheaval dominates markets

TOKYO/LONDON: Global stocks firmed on Monday after recovering from an earlier rout when the collapse of the French government took markets by surprise, while political developments in Japan lifted Japanese equities but weighed on the yen.

New French Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu resigned on Monday, barely 14 hours after appointing his cabinet.

At 1150 GMT, the pan-European benchmark STOXX 600 was up 0.13 per cent, but France’s CAC 40 was still down 1.2 per cent, having earlier sunk as much as 2.2 per cent. US S&P 500 futures firmed 0.3 per cent ahead of the open, with the cash index

having risen to a record high on Friday.

AI enthusiasm is partly behind the market firmness, with stocks staying near record highs even as a US government shutdown rumbles on. Tech shares in Europe got a small boost after news that AMD has signed an AI chip-supply deal with OpenAI on Monday, and were last up 1.1 per cent.

Market attention stayed on France, with the country’s bank shares hardest hit. BNP Paribas, Societe Generale and Credit Agricole fell between 3.8 per cent and 4.8 per cent.

“The bigger concern for the market is really what comes next, because if Macron decides to appoint another prime minister that’s going



A man walks past a screen displaying the yen-dollar conversion rate, as the Tokyo Stock Exchange started trading after Japan’s governing LDP elected a new leader outside a brokerage in Tokyo. — Reuters

to be the sixth PM in two years,” said Michael Brown, senior research strategist at Pepperstone.

Any newcomer would face the same challenging parliamentary arithmetic and problems when trying to pass the budget, said Brown.

French political instability has ramped up since Emmanuel Macron’s re-election in 2022, with no party or grouping holding a parliamentary majority.

The euro slipped 0.6 per cent to \$1.1678, and sterling was off 0.33 per cent to \$1.3426. In Japan, stocks surged more than 5 per cent to an all-time high while the yen skidded on Monday after fiscal and monetary dove Sanae Takaichi was

elected as leader of the ruling party, putting her on course to become the nation’s first female prime minister.

Meanwhile, gold climbed to a record peak close to \$4,000, while leading cryptocurrency bitcoin rallied to a lifetime high on Sunday, with investors increasingly turning to alternative assets as a store of value as the US government shutdown frayed nerves.

Japan’s Nikkei soared above 48,000 for the first time after Takaichi beat the more moderate Shinjiro Koizumi in the Liberal Democratic Party’s leadership vote on Saturday, stoking expectations for fiscal stimulus.

— Reuters

LNG JUMP

European Union’s US gas use set to soar



Europe will need to import up to 160 additional liquefied natural gas cargoes this winter due to lower storage and a decline in pipeline flows from Russia and Algeria, according to analysts and data, deepening its dependency on US gas.

LNG imports will jump to 820 tankers this year from 660 last year, representing 48% of all EU gas supply, with analysts forecasting need for around 16 billion cubic metres (bcm) this winter. — Reuters

SOFT OUTLOOK

Oil rises after modest OPEC+ output hike



Oil prices rose more than 1% on Monday after OPEC+’s planned production increase for November was more modest than expected, tempering some concerns about supply additions, though a soft outlook for demand is likely to cap near-term gains.

Brent crude futures climbed 89 cents, or 1.4%, to \$65.44 a barrel by 11:07 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$61.74, up 84 cents — also about 1.4%. — Reuters

AWAITED RECOVERY

German unemployment expected to fall



Germany’s unemployment level is expected to fall in the two next years as the long-awaited recovery of Europe’s biggest economy gathers pace, a source said on Monday, citing government forecasts.

The forecasts will be presented by the economy minister on Wednesday. According to the new government projections, unemployment will edge down from 6.3% this year to 6.2% in 2026, before easing to 6.0% in 2027. — Reuters

OPINION

Be aware of Opensooq scams



TARIQ
AL BARWANI

The writer is the founder of Knowledge Oman

HILAL (my son) decided to sell his guitar on Opensooq, one of the widely known and used classified ad websites and mobile apps that allow users, whether buyers or sellers, to buy and sell various services, products and goods that include but are not limited to furniture, cars, electronics and instruments. I found this to be a good idea, especially that it teaches responsibility, communication and how to handle money (or business per se).

But what started as a simple and innocent idea and approach towards buying and selling online via a highly promoted classified ad app in Oman turned into a big life lesson about online safety. My article today sheds light on the scam that Hilal encountered and tips for readers to utilise in order to stay safe as Hilal eventually did.

So what actually happened? Hilal's phone started buzzing with messages within minutes of posting his guitar ad. Several users from the platform showed interest in buying the guitar and they sounded very genuine.

One of them even offered to pay immediately to "secure" the deal. Everything seemed fine and of course there was the usual excitement that comes when you find a quick buyer online. Then one of the buyers sent him a QR code, claiming it was part of Opensooq's payment system. They told him

he needed to scan it and log in to confirm his bank details so they could transfer the money. Excited and trusting, Hilal scanned the code and was directed to a website that looked almost identical to Opensooq's official page. It had the same logo, the same colours and even similar buttons and fonts.

The site asked for his name, phone number, bank details and all things that might seem harmless. But then came the final field: "Enter your CVV number". That is when Hilal paused and immediately called me to ask about the form, "Dad, is it normal that they're asking for the CVV number?" I didn't need to think twice.

"Stop right there", I told him. "That's a scam". For those who don't know, CVV stands for Card Verification Value and it is usually a 3-digit number found behind your credit or debit card. Sharing this allows scammers, hackers and the like to get money out of your bank (by pretending to have verified with you as the bank account user).

If Hilal had entered that number, the scammers could have used his card to withdraw money or make online purchases. What they were doing is a phishing scam, a method where criminals pretend to be legitimate companies or platforms to trick people into giving away personal or financial information. Hilal was lucky to have stopped in time. Many others I know did not know and, as a consequence, got scammed (lost

Online scams are getting smarter, especially on popular platforms like OpenSooq, Dubizzle, etc. Fraudsters know that people using these marketplaces are often in a hurry to buy or sell and that's when they strike. They create fake profiles, copy real website and app designs; and use convincing language to gain your trust.

their money). Online scams are getting smarter, especially on popular platforms like Opensooq, Dubizzle, etc. Fraudsters know that people using these marketplaces are often in a hurry to buy or sell and that's when they strike.

They create fake profiles, copy real website and app designs; and use convincing language to gain your trust. Reviewing Hilal's chat with the scammer is proof in the pudding.

Does this only happen to teenagers or inexperienced users? No, I personally encountered these before but on different platforms. I felt it was necessary that I share this article and advice, especially on the quality of promotion and marketing I see done for this app here locally in Oman.

So what can one do to protect oneself from these scams? Simply, never share your CVV or banking details through links or QR codes, because no official marketplace, including Opensooq, will ever ask for your CVV, OTP, or bank login details to receive payment.

Those are private and should only be used on verified payment gateways when you are the one making the purchase (ie, you are buying, not selling).

Also, always take your time to verify before clicking any link or scanning any QR code and always type the official address manually instead of clicking links (as they may be spoofed and fake).

JAPAN’S LEADER -IN-WAITING IS NO IRON LADY

HUDSON LOCKETT

Sanae Takaichi is one step closer to unleashing her hardline conservative views on Japan. On Saturday, she was elected leader of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, making her the favourite to be voted in as the country's next — and first female — prime minister by parliament in a week or so.

She often likens herself to former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. But anyone expecting Takaichi to adopt the Iron Lady's economic policies will be sorely disappointed.

Thatcher was a fiscal disciplinarian who endorsed high interest rates. Takaichi, by contrast, was the only one of the five leadership candidates advocating a return to political mentor Shinzo Abe's ultra-loose monetary and fiscal policy to combat Japan's rising cost of living.

She has also called the central bank's decisions to raise the cost of borrowing "stupid" — although after her victory she said the "government and Bank of Japan must move in lockstep and cooperate with each other in guiding economic policy".

Markets are taking her earlier statements more seriously: on Monday, the Nikkei 225, the main stock market index, rose as much as 4.7% on the prospect of big stimulus, while the yen fell 1.7% to more than 150 to the US dollar.

Markets are taking her earlier statements more seriously: on Monday, the Nikkei 225, the main stock market index, rose as much as 4.7% on the prospect of big stimulus, while the yen fell 1.7% to more than 150 to the US dollar. Government bond yields also fell on expectations the victory will delay the central bank's next rate rise as it gauges Takaichi's intentions.

Her claim to be the unalloyed heir to Abe's legacy is also questionable. His administration launched substantial pro-immigration reforms to tackle a labour shortage sparked by the country's ageing population. Takaichi, meanwhile, argues for reconsidering "policies that allow in people with completely different cultures and backgrounds". As PM she would also lack the parliamentary majority Thatcher and Abe enjoyed.

That augurs political disorder and policy discord, as the LDP's lurch to the right prompts clashes with old allies and new rivals. The Komeito party, a coalition ally, has already warned that Takaichi's anti-immigrant rhetoric is one of several issues putting their vital alliance in jeopardy.

If her strident politics foster legislative deadlock, Japan's powerful bureaucracy would probably be able to push forward with its existing mandate, leaving a value push and drive to bolster the wealth management industry relatively unmolested. — Reuters

Trade treaties: Key to economic transformation

In the complex world of modern trade, the Sultanate of Oman is not merely seeking partners — it is engineering a new economic architecture.

Our goal, as enshrined in Oman Vision 2040, demands more than incremental change; it calls for a foundational shift that only deep strategic agreements can provide.

This is why our focus has decisively moved towards a comprehensive strategy, leveraging Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) for foundational market access and ultimately, the comprehensive depth of both Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPAs) and Trade and Economic Partnership Agreements (TEPAs).

These sophisticated treaties are not just about lowering tariffs they are mechanisms for integration, linking our logistics hubs, manufacturing zones and skilled workforce directly to the world's fastest-growing markets.

Our location remains Oman's strategic advantage: astride the Strait of Hormuz, with world-class deep-water gateways at Al Duqm, Suhar and Salalah that face both Asia and Africa.

Even the new Hafeet rail link with the UAE will soon tie Suhar into the Gulf's industrial heartland, strengthening the trade arteries that make manufacturing feasible at scale. This infrastructure, however, needs policy fuel. That fuel comes from strategic partnerships that transform our ports from temporary transit points into engines of sustainable economic activity.

We have successfully navigated this path before. The Oman-US FTA, which came into force in 2009, moved virtually all US-origin goods to duty-free status clearly demonstrating how tariff reform combined with transparent rules can attract investment and strengthen local value chains.

But the future is shaped by the next generation of agreements. Unlike traditional FTAs that stick largely to tariffs on goods, CEPAs and TEPAs extend into services, investment, digital trade, technical standards and professional mobility — the real levers of a modern,



Our location remains Oman's strategic advantage: astride the Strait of Hormuz, with world-class deep-water gateways at Al Duqm, Suhar and Salalah that face both Asia and Africa.



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The writer is founder and CEO - Smart Investment Gateway, economists, board adviser & business transformation mentor

diversified economy. For a Gulf economy operating under the GCC's common external tariff — typically 5% on most goods — a comprehensive agreement can phase many lines to zero, while streamlining customs, testing and licensing procedures. That is the fundamental difference between being a temporary corridor and becoming a permanent production hub.

The clearest and most transformative test case now is India. Negotiations for an India-Oman CEPA concluded recently, with the signing anticipated very soon. This is more than a ceremonial flourish; it is a statement of intent and direction. India, with its 1.4 billion consumers and surging manufacturing power, is one of our closest historical partners.

Our commercial base is already strong: bilateral trade reached about \$12.4 billion in FY 2022-23, supported by over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures operating across the Sultanate of Oman. A CEPA will give this robust, active relationship the necessary structure, accelerated pace and long-term road map it deserves.

So, how does a CEPA or TEPA actually change the economic game on the ground? First, by cutting or eliminating tariffs on a large share of goods, it decisively narrows the cost gap that often kills factory-floor decisions. Second, by strategically opening services and investment, it lets capital, engineers and innovative ideas move with fewer frictions — allowing, for example,

a pharmaceutical or equipment maker to co-locate research, testing and assembly in our free zones.

Third, by clarifying rules of origin and facilitating mutual recognition of standards, it gives Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) the certainty they need to supply larger investors. For Oman, there is a powerful double arbitrage: "Make in Oman" for India and the wider region — and "Make in Oman" for the United States, leveraging our standing duty-free access under the US FTA. That is precisely how a treaty becomes a fully-funded factory plan.

We also benefit from a proven regional example. The India-UAE CEPA of 2022 offers a powerful example, coinciding with a sharp lift in trade flows and pushing India-UAE bilateral commerce towards its \$100 billion target. The essential lesson is that paperwork alone does not drive commerce; rather, it is paperwork backed by ports, finance and efficient regulators that builds a high-trust, fast-track trade environment.

Oman is perfectly poised to replicate this success: our ports and industrial zones will become the cost-efficient, rules-reliable bases for companies to serve Asia, Africa and the Americas.

The prize is a larger, more resilient non-oil economy under Oman Vision 2040, focused on logistics, manufacturing and green energy — from metals and green ammonia to pharmaceuticals. To realise this, Omani SMEs must become integral suppliers. Yet, benefits are not automatic; without diligent execution, Oman risks remaining a waypoint rather than a hub.

The true difference maker lies in policy execution and institutional efficiency — from faster customs and one-stop investor facilitation to local-content frameworks that reward Omani participation. This requires aligning our workforce training with investor demand, preparing specialised welders and coders for the exact jobs new hubs will post. The agreements open the door; our institutions must hold it wide.

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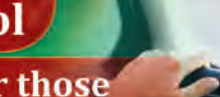
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A close-up of a hand on a black steering wheel. In the background, a white car with a red and white striped awning is visible.

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FASHION

Piccioli sets new Balenciaga beat, with support from Meghan Markle



ITALY'S PIERPAOLO Piccioli stressed that “every heart beats differently” in his first show as chief creative at Balenciaga on Saturday as he set a more classic pulse for the fashion label, with support from Meghan Markle.

The 58-year-old was under huge scrutiny at Paris Fashion Week having replaced the highly rated Georgian designer Demna who left the brand in July having raised its profile and profits over a decade at the helm.

Demna, who counted Katy Perry, Kim Kardashian and Cardi B as well as Gen Z celeb fans, began the task of reviving fellow Kering-owned label Gucci at Milan Fashion Week last week.

Piccioli will be hoping his Spring/Summer 2026 womenswear designs keep Balenciaga relevant among younger buyers, but he also looked to have toned down the flamboyance and code-breaking of the Demna era.

His front-row also looked different, including the Duchess of Sussex Meghan Markle who dressed in an ivory-coloured Balenciaga suit with cape for a rare trip to Europe from her home in California.

“She has long admired his (Piccioli’s) craftsmanship and modern elegance; and tonight was no different”, a spokesman for the Duchess told Hello! magazine.

Other VIPs included recently married Lauren Bezos, wife of Amazon boss Jeff Bezos and “The Devil Wears Prada” star Anne Hathaway.

Piccioli, who made his name at Valentino, took a retro approach to the invitations for Saturday’s show, sending his guests a 1980s-style Walkman cassette player with a recording of a heartbeat.

“The heartbeat is the rhythm we share — the pulse that reminds us we are human”, he wrote in his notes handed to invitees in the headquarters of Kering on Saturday night.

“Even so, every heart beats differently”.

Speaking to reporters, he said it would be “stupid and disrespectful” to overlook the designers before him in the house, while stressing he would leave his own mark.

“I wanted to work, even with the Demna archetype, with my own sensibility, which is of course different”, he said.

Piccioli worked for 25 years at Valentino, at first alongside fellow Italian designer Maria Grazia Chiuri. — AFP

QUICK FEATURES



TRENDS

A model presents a pair of sunglasses and earrings by Lacoste for the Women Ready-to-wear Spring-Summer 2026 collection as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

US actor Meg Ryan arrives to attend The Albies hosted by the Clooney Foundation at the Natural History Museum in London. — AFP



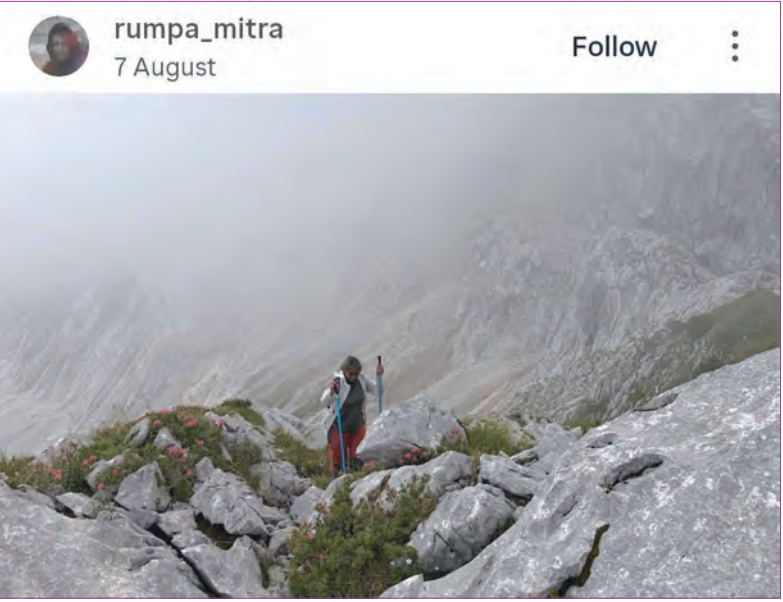
HERITAGE

A girl wearing a traditional costume poses holding grapes during the annual festival in the village of Areni. — AFP

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New museum examines family life of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo



A NEW Frida Kahlo museum reveals a warm and loving side of the famed Mexican artist, giving visitors a look at her private life beyond the pain and rawness of her well-known works.

The Casa Kahlo museum, opened a week ago by Kahlo’s descendants in Mexico City, is imbued with the spirit of a family where women set the tone.

“She’s aunt Frida, daughter Frida, a Frida situated in the intimacy and security of family”, said Adan Garcia Fajardo, director of the new museum.

Located in a building that was once Kahlo’s parents’ home and later her sister Cristina’s home, it hosted lively gatherings of family and friends and was a studio for young painters studying with Kahlo.

The exhibition includes nine original works and countless personal items, as well as photographs taken by Kahlo’s father Guillermo.

“Visiting this museum, you learn more about Frida not as an artist, but as a woman”, 19-year-old student Aranza Vazquez said after her visit. “I feel like it was a place that belonged to her, where she could be herself”.

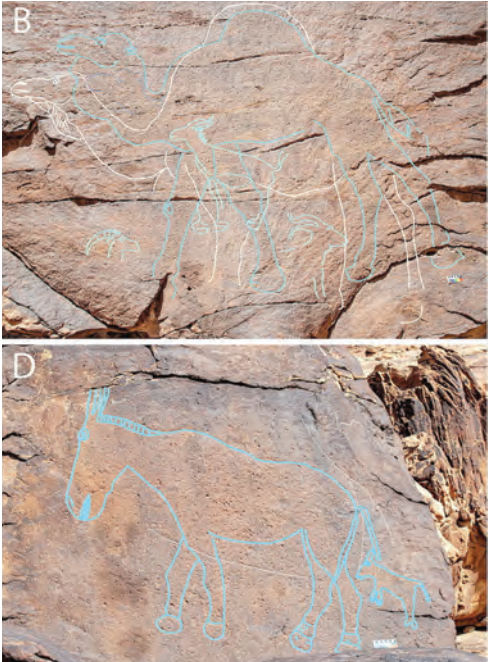
Kahlo’s close relationship with her sister Cristina — whom she called “the other half of my life” — is a major theme of the museum, as the house was a refuge for the painter who suffered from poor health and pain for much of her life.

Here, “Frida felt safe... she came to rest from the world, to distance herself, to listen to music, to create, to write, to draw”, Garcia Fajardo explained.

Unlike Casa Azul, a Kahlo museum located in the home that the artist shared with her husband, Mexican painter Diego Rivera, Casa Kahlo seeks to “dismantle the monopoly” of her history that until now has come from a male perspective, he said. — AFP



Ancient Arabian desert rock art showing camels marked water sources



ABOUT 12,000 years ago, hunter-gatherers who inhabited a swathe of Arabian desert carved life-sized images of camels and other animals on sandstone cliffs and boulders, using rock art to mark the location of water sources in an illustration of how ancient people tackled some of Earth’s most inhospitable environs.

Researchers said the monumental rock art was found south of the Nefud desert of northern Saudi Arabia at locales spanning a distance of about 20 miles (30 km) in mountainous terrain.

About 60 rock art panels bear more than 130 images of animals — primarily camels, but also ibex, gazelles, wild donkeys and an aurochs, a bovine thought to be the wild ancestor of modern domestic cattle. Some of the camel engravings were more than 7 feet (2 metres) tall and 8-1/2 feet (2.6 metres) long.

While many of the images were situated on boulders within easy reach of the ground, some were crafted on towering cliffs including one that was about 128 feet (39 metres) off the ground and was engraved with 19 camels and three donkeys.

“The engravers would have had to stand on a ledge directly in front of the cliff”, said archaeologist and rock art researcher Maria Guagnin of the University of Sydney and the Max Planck Institute of Geoanthropology in Germany, lead author of the study published in the journal Nature Communications.

“It would have been extremely dangerous to make these engravings as the ledge is very narrow and

slopes downwards. Standing on this ledge, the engravers would also not have been able to see the whole image they were creating. But they had the skill to still produce a naturalistic representation”, Guagnin added.

The researchers said the rock art marked the location of transient water sources on the harsh desert landscape.

“These ancient communities survived in the desert by moving between seasonal lakes and they marked these water sources and the paths leading to them, with monumental rock art”, Guagnin said.

The researchers used a technique called luminescence dating on simple stone tools they discovered that were used to make the rock art in order to determine that the engravings were made between 12,800 and 11,400 years ago.

“The findings show that communities were able to become fully established in desert environments much earlier than previously thought”, Guagnin said. “They must have known the landscape incredibly well”.

“Most of the camels show male camels in rut, identifiable by the straining neck muscles as they make a rumbling noise during the mating season — which is normally during the wet season. So the rock art links to the rainy season and marks locations where water pools”, Guagnin added.

There also is evidence that these people added to the rock art for two to three millennia, Guagnin said.

The researchers do not know if the art originally was colourfully decorated with paint.

“The engravings are exposed to the elements and if they were once painted the pigment would have washed off long ago”, Guagnin said.

During the height of the last Ice Age some 20,000 to 25,000 years ago, Arabia was so arid that there was no known human habitation. But about 15,000 years ago a period of higher rainfall began, forming some wetlands and ponds in a desert environment that was getting a bit greener. The rock art reveals the timing of the hunter-gatherers who subsequently inhabited the region, the researchers said.

“This story resonates today in that these people show remarkable abilities to expand, cope and survive in marginal landscapes”, said anthropologist and study co-author Michael Petraglia, director of the Australian Research Centre for Human Evolution at Griffith University. Some artefacts recovered in the excavations resemble those found in the broader region, suggesting a degree of interaction between these hunter-gatherers and other peoples. But the monumental rock art is unlike anything else known in the broader region.

“These communities had contact with neighbouring groups in the Levant over 400 km (250 miles) away, but they also had their own identity”, Guagnin said. “They clearly marked water sources with rock art, but we can’t be sure if that marks access rights, or perhaps also expresses a wish for the water to return in the next season. Perhaps there were multiple reasons. From the sheer effort that was required, we can tell this rock art was very important to them”. — Reuters

FEATURES



Later, she became captivated by pottery, mastering the art of painting on its surfaces. To Bushra, art isn't merely a craft; it's a language that infuses objects with personality and soul, forging meaningful connections with viewers.

A significant milestone in her career was her participation in the Oman Across Ages Museum exhibition, where she showcased her brand, Avocado. She describes this experience as "truly unique", since every piece was entirely hand-painted — without any printing or replication — allowing the artistry to shine in its purest form. The event not only elevated her profile but also provided a platform to immerse herself in Oman's vibrant artistic community and network

According to Bushra, such official support is crucial for aspiring artists. "They help young people understand the realities of freelancing and show how to turn their talents into sustainable livelihoods", she explains.

Despite her diverse portfolio, Bushra affirms she has cultivated a distinctive style. "Every piece I create is infused with genuine emotion — they're not just fleeting artworks. Many clients say they can recognise my style even without my signature". This personal touch has given her work an unmistakable identity, reflecting her very essence.

Looking to the future, Bushra hopes to spread the message that painting is more than just colours and



with other ambitious entrepreneurs.

The response from the audience was overwhelmingly positive. Both locals and tourists expressed admiration as they studied her intricate designs with keen eyes. One of the standout pieces was an artwork inspired by vintage postage stamps adorned with Omani butterflies, which became the centrepiece of her display. The praise and encouragement she received served as a reminder of the power of authentic craftsmanship.

Her development as an artist has been further supported by various workshops and programmes organised by national institutions. These include the Pottery and Creative Crafts programme by the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises, the "Tamkeen 2" initiative by the Youth Centre — where she was recognised among the top five independent projects — and the 'Banat Oman' programme by Jabr Company. She emphasises that these initiatives have equipped her with vital skills for managing her enterprise, discovering her true artistic calling and connecting with like-minded creatives exchanging invaluable experiences.

lines — it is a living art form. She aspires for the name Avocado to gain wider recognition, as she continues to showcase her entirely handcrafted works in upcoming exhibitions.

The story behind her brand name is as inspiring as her work. During a period of dieting, she noticed how many salads contained avocado. She fell in love with its taste, its shape and even decided to grow her own tree. Watching it flourish became a symbol of resilience and patience — qualities she attributes to her artistic journey. The avocado, she says, embodies her perseverance and determination.

With unwavering passion, Bushra bint Saif al Kindiyah continues to craft her artistic narrative, demonstrating that creativity knows no bounds when driven by love and perseverance. Her story is a testament to how Omani art can reach a global stage — rooted in sincerity, nurtured by skill, and painted with a brush full of life.

TRANSFORMING
FABRICS AND
POTTERY INTO
VIBRANT,
HAND-PAINTED
WORKS OF ART

ARWA AL HASHIMI

HER JOURNEY begins with a love for textures and colours — from the soft fabrics of fashion design to the sturdy surfaces of pottery.

Bushra bint Saif al Kindiyah has carved her unique path by transforming everyday objects like fabrics and pottery into striking works of art — veritable living canvases that breathe life into her creative vision.

A graduate of Fashion Design from the Scientific College of Design, Bushra dared to venture beyond her classroom, embracing diverse mediums in her quest to express her artistic identity.

"I started by painting on fabric", she recounts, her voice tinged with enthusiasm. The natural progression led her to explore face painting for children, a playful venture that sharpened her skills and ignited her passion.